Storytelling as a strategy to uncover organisational culture

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether storytelling can be used as a strategy to uncover organisational culture. This investigation was prompted by a debate between scholars on whether a quantitative or qualitative approach should be adopted to assess culture. Based on Schein’s (2009) perspective on culture assessment a qualitative approach was adopted. Schein suggests that culture is unique and therefore cannot be assessed using a survey as surveys have predefined constructs that may not uncover certain critical cultural elements.

The research methodology was informed by the interpretivism paradigm. Conducted in a Consulting Firm semi-structured interviews were conducted with six senior members in order to gather their stories. For the data analysis and interpretation, thematic analysis was the chosen technique. Here themes were first extracted according to common stories, archetypes and behaviours identified. These were then interpreted for shared underlying assumptions which were uncovered when common behaviours observed could not be explained by espoused values or other artifacts.

The interpretation of results uncovered six core underlying assumptions and five secondary underlying assumptions. The core underlying assumptions operate at the deepest level of the organisations unconscious and are “Sales Orientated,” “Dominance,” “Client First,” “Innovation,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” and “Individualism.” Secondary underlying assumptions are enablers of the core underlying assumptions and are “Work Centricity,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Technology Consulting Identity” and “Global versus Local Skill.” The outcomes of the interpretation revealed patterns of underlying assumptions that drive organisational behaviour.

To conclude, this study has managed to reveal important elements of the Consulting Firms culture and therefore is in support of a qualitative approach to assess culture. There are limitations of the study; most noticeably the limited number of participant’s interviewed. It is therefore recommended that future culture assessments consider storytelling as a strategy to uncover culture but that an increased number of participants are utilised.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Organisational culture has become an increasingly popular topic over the last half century (Bagraim, 2001; Denison & Mishra, 1995). It is understood to be vital to various aspects of organisational success such as strategy execution, job performance, employee engagement, quality and service delivery (Beech, 2000; Goldsmith & Clutterbuck, 1984; Denison, 1990; Rashid & Anatharan, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Furthermore studies have shown strong relationships between sustained economic performance and organisational culture (Beech, 2000; Goldsmith & Clutterbuck, 1984; Denison, 1990; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Rashid & Anatharan, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Due to its economic and academic value, the study of organisational culture has thus become salient across several social sciences fields.

Although most academics recognise the value of knowledge pertaining to organisational culture, there is much contention amongst scholars as to what constitute culture and how culture can be measured. In particular, there are two primary schools of thought on how to uncover organisational culture. The first school of thought proposes that culture be understood using quantitative methods and the second proposes the use of qualitative methods. It is this controversy of how one most accurately and holistically measures culture that is of interest to this study.

Considering the above, I explore the topic of studying culture in a Global Technology and Management Consulting Firm. Through this research I aim to achieve four objectives. Firstly, I aim to develop a qualitative method to the measurement of culture and propose storytelling as the heuristic. The second objective is to uncover the Consulting Firms organisational culture so that they may better understand cultural factors that influence behaviour and decision making. Thirdly, I am to contribute to the South African body of knowledge on organisational culture. Finally, I aim to contribute to furthering the understanding of organisational culture in consulting companies and high technology companies such as this Consulting Firm.
It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study could add to the current body of knowledge about the factors that constitutes to an organisations culture, especially in consultancies and high technology companies. Furthermore this research will aid in addressing the contention about the most appropriate way to uncovering culture by presenting a qualitative approach. This may assist culture practitioners to enhance their measurement practices allowing for more holistic and enriched findings of organisational culture.

The Consulting Firm was chosen as the subject of this study because it views itself as having a strong organisational culture. Being a consultant within the Consulting Firm, I can attest to the strong cultural forces that drive behaviour and decision making within the organisation. I use storytelling as the heuristic to uncover the Consulting Firm’s culture. I analyse individual stories against the Consulting Firms espoused values and the chosen definition of culture. The culture definition chosen for this research is Schein’s (2009) definition which aligns to the chosen qualitative approach. I conclude this research by comparing the findings of this study to other culture studies. I do this so that I may identify similarities and differences in the findings. The similarities in the findings highlight aspects of culture that are common across consulting and technology companies. More importantly though, the differences validate the uniqueness of the Consulting Firms organisational culture.

1.2. DEFINING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

There has been much controversy amongst scholars about what constitutes culture and how it should be measured. Central to the debate are two primary opposing views on organisational culture which stem from the work of Hofstede (1980) and Schein (2009). From Hofstede’s stance, culture is a tangible aspect of an organisation that can be understood through quantitative techniques. Hofstede’s suggests that culture constructs can be universally defined and can be quantified. In his “Culture Consequences: International Difference in Work related values” he defines five dimensions to discover cultural differences. These dimensions are: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Feminism and Long-term Orientation. These dimensions are measured through a survey questionnaire developed
by Hofstede. Alternatively, Schein argues that organisational culture is unique to different organisations and therefore no universal laws for culture can be defined. Schein argues that organisational culture cannot be understood through quantitative techniques such as surveys but should rather utilise qualitative techniques that takes cognisance of the context in which the culture resides. Schein (p 79) points out that the problem with surveys are that “You don’t know what to ask, what questions to put on the survey, because you don’t know at the outset what issues or dimensions are the important ones in your corporate culture and subcultures in relation to the problem you are trying to solve.” In this statement he is highlighting that organisation culture is unique and that to understand culture you need to understand the issues culture is trying to solve. These two conflicting views highlight a key issue about the most appropriate approach to the study of organisational culture. The research question aims at addressing this issue and is therefore defined as, “can storytelling uncover organisational culture?” The question was posed in support of Schein’s perspective of organisational culture analysis.

Before attempting to answer the key research question, a clear definition of organisational culture needs to be provided. Since Schein’s definition of culture was chosen the definition, this shall be the definition described. According to Schein (1992; p12) organisational culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.” In this definition of organisational culture, Schein highlights several critical components of culture. Firstly, Schein (2009) defines culture as a group phenomenon suggesting that culture is not comprised of individual beliefs but rather shared beliefs. Secondly Schein’s definition suggests that culture is made of a set of beliefs that are entrenched on the unconscious level and are difficult to change (Miller, 2009). The third critical component is Schein’s suggestion that culture is maintained as part of a socialising process and is passed on through teachings and interactions between old and new members. The final critical component Schein highlights is that culture is a learned experience. In his book Surviving Corporate Culture, Schein (2009) states that culture is
formed due to joint learned experience and is a residue of success. Here the joint
learned experience is how to adapt in order to survive the external environment and
how to deal with issues of internal integration.

In addition to Schein’s (1985) definition of organisational culture, Schein, Miller,
(2009) developed a model that arranges his definition of culture into three levels. These
levels provide insight into how culture operates and can be understood. The three levels
Schein (2009) defines are the artefact level, espoused values level and shared tacit
assumptions level. According to Schein (2009), the easiest level to observe is the first
level, namely, artefacts. Artefacts are observable through language, behaviour, images,
documents and materials (Schein; Hawkins, 1997). Artefacts are clear and have an
immediate emotional impact.

The second level, as set out by Schein (2009; 1985) considers espoused values
and beliefs of the organisation. These are the strategies, goals and philosophies of the
organisation (Schein; Blair, 2006). They represent the values the organisation professes
to follow. According to Schein espoused values also often highlight areas where the
organisation is particularly ineffective. Although espoused values are easy to observe,
they are more difficult to decipher and often requires that an insider explains to an
outsider what they mean.

The third level defined by Schein (2009; 1992) is the shared tacit assumptions
level. Shared tacit assumptions are defined as the values and beliefs that have been
jointly created by members of an organisation over time (Schein; Peter & Waterman,
1982). According to Schein, founders of organisations impose their espoused values
and beliefs on to the people whom they hire. If the founder’s espoused values and
beliefs are congruent to what is experienced in the organisation and this leads to
success, then these values and beliefs gradually become shared and taken for granted
(Schein). This is when the values and beliefs become tacit assumptions about the way
the organisation works and the organisations culture begins to develop. According to
Schein, these are found in the unconscious and determine how groups perceive
situations and behave (Schein, 1985). They reside in the unconscious as they have
been reinforced as the organisation deals with external adaptation and internal
integration issues. Alternatively, if the founder’s espoused values are not aligned to what is experienced in the organisation then the organisations culture never develops.

Since the underlying assumptions become deeply entrenched in the unconscious they are often difficult to articulate (Schein 2009; Miller, 2009). Schein defined six areas where basic underlying assumptions matter and can be observed. These are assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, time, space, human nature, human activity and human relations. According to Miller, these assumptions deal with how people view the world and reveal the paradigm that determines culture.

Schein (2009) emphasises the importance of understanding the pattern of the different underlying assumptions in order to understand culture. Furthermore he suggests that culture is the complex patterns of assumptions, espoused values and artefacts and that all three levels are interconnected (Miller, 2009). Unless the interconnectedness of all three levels and the patterns in basic assumptions are understood, we cannot claim that the organisation’s culture is understood.

1.3. MEASURING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

According to Schein (2009; 1985), most conventional theorists acknowledge the existence of all three levels but only manage to measure culture at the artefact and espoused values level. This is usually the focus of systems theorists or modernist researchers, where culture is seen as being comprised of a set of universal laws that can be measured through quantitative analysis (Mabey & Mallaroy, 1995; Meek, 1992, as cited in Beech, 2000). According to Hawkins (1997) and Schein (1985) it is the paradigm within which systems theorists operate and the associated method of understanding organisational culture which does not allow them to penetrate the shared tacit assumptions level. Their mechanistic thinking about creating universal laws for culture causes them to adopt quantitative approaches such as surveys. Schein regards this as problematic since culture for each organisation is unique and therefore survey questionnaires, which are built on predefined constructs, may omit crucial factors of an organisation’s culture. Measuring culture through surveys do not reveal shared assumptions. Shared assumptions can only be understood if people’s collective experiences and their interpretations thereof are understood. Furthermore, only
measuring culture at the artefacts and espoused values level bring challenges with deciphering the artefacts and espoused values and do not provide insight into the shared experiences. Schein (2009) concludes by stating that if deeper basic underlying assumptions are to be understood, a qualitative approach for uncovering culture needs to be adopted. This diverges from the conventional measurement of culture to the deeper understanding of culture. Even Hofstede, who advocate universal laws for culture, moved away from assessing culture across countries and only using quantitative measures, to recognising the value in using both a qualitative and quantitative approach (Maul, Brown & Cliffe, 2001). Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1991) conducted a culture study across ten different organisations, where they utilised both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Their focus was still however on finding commonalities and using quantitative analysis to validate the commonalities. Schein suggests that culture is unique to an organisation and it is the uniqueness of an organisations culture that should be uncovered. It is this perspective on understanding culture that prompted the investigation into whether storytelling can uncover culture.

1.4. STORYTELLING: A HEURISTIC TO UNCOVER CULTURE

Storytelling is defined as a description of a sequence of actions and experiences that an individual or group goes through (Boje, Luhman & Baack, 1999). Furthermore storytelling within organisations is any oral or written performance that involves two or more people interpreting past events that occurred in the organisation (Boje, 1991). Boje goes further to define storytelling organisations as being characterised by the use of storytelling as a system that allows members to make sense of the organisation, assimilate institutional knowledge, and convey culture. Through the processes of storytelling characters are defined, plots are formed, and scripts actioned (Boje).

Most academics are in agreement that stories play an important role in the development and maintenance of culture (McLellan, 2006; Hyde, 2008; Blair, 2006; Randall & Martin, 2003; Gabriel, 2000; Boje 1991; Myrsiades, 1987). According to Czarniawska (2004), stories convey, maintain and develop an organisation’s culture. Stories reveal the unconscious codes of behaviour and draws attention to the social structures (Hyde, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004). They act as social maps and help
individuals understand how work is done (Wilkins, 1984). They carry cultural, social and personal meaning and help groups make sense of organisational realities (Hyde, 2008; McLellan, 2006; Czarniawska, 2004). In relation to Schein’s (2009) definition of culture, storytelling can act as symbolic artefacts that transmit desired values and shared tacit assumptions (Randall & Martin, 2003; Gabriel, 2000; Boje, 1991; Linde, 2001; Myrsiades, 1987).

Storytelling as symbolic artefacts refers to the reconstruction of organisation events (Boje, 1991; Gabriel, 2000). According to Wilkins (1984) stories are common symbols that account for concrete events which can act as examples of shared believes and purposes. These symbols transmit desired values by highlighting desired behaviours and what kinds of decisions have been acceptable (Blair, 2006; Myrsiades, 1987). The most important function storytelling fulfils is to transmit shared tacit assumptions. According to Linde (2001) tacit assumptions are commonly and easily transferred through stories. Randall and Martin (2003), Gabriel (2000), Boje and Myrsiades (1987) concur with this, stating that tacit assumptions are conveyed through discourse. Furthermore storytelling forces individuals to engage in level seven symbol processing and level eight multi-brain processing thereby encouraging individuals to reveal tacit assumption and beliefs about organisational practices (Boje).

Stories provide a bridge between tacit and explicit knowledge (Linde, 2001). Stories thus become useful when there is no explicit knowledge to make decisions (Boje, 1991). Linde defines two kinds of tacit social knowledge, group and individual. Group tacit social knowledge comprises knowledge that is held by a group or institution. This knowledge is implicit and manifests itself as work practices, the way teams and groups work, how decisions are made, and how communication flows. Individual tacit social knowledge involves an individual's implicit knowledge about a group, what it means to be a member of a group, and what behaviour is acceptable in the group (Linde). Considering the above, storytelling appears to be the preferred sense-making heuristic which can carry the shared tacit assumptions of an organisation (Boje). Based on the functions that storytelling fulfils in organisations, this research aims to answer the question, “can storytelling be used to uncover organisational culture.”
1.5. DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

In conclusion: the introduction provides the rationale for this research. It highlights the contention around how culture is measured. Two distinct schools of thought that give rise to this controversy were presented. The first views culture as an objective concept that can be understood through quantitative means while the second views culture as subjective that can be understood through qualitative means. It is the purpose of the study to contribute to clearing up this controversy. The chosen approach to do this is to uncover culture using a qualitative approach. This is based on Schein’s (2009) definition of organisational culture which is the accepted definition for this research. Schein defines organisational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions held by a group that was developed through joint learned experiences as the organisation dealt with issues of external adaptation and internal integration. The qualitative method chosen to uncover culture is storytelling as it is believed that stories commonly carry the desired values and tacit assumptions about how to behave. This research therefore aims to understand, “can storytelling uncover organisational culture.” By addressing this question it is anticipated that this research will contribute to how culture is measured in the future. Furthermore, this research may contribute to understanding what constitutes culture.

In the chapters to follow, I explain my methodology in detail and the strategies employed to ensure quality and trustworthiness of the research. I provide a summary of key theme’s discovered in the stories. I then analyse and interpret the themes in order to understand the Consulting Firm’s culture. Finally, I provide an overview of key literature findings against which I compare the research findings of this study. It is important to note that I do not offer a detailed literature study up front. According to Boote and Beile (2005), the purpose of a literature review is to provide the theoretical basis for research. It provides the context for the research, justification for the research and helps to direct the research topic. As this is a qualitative study the research study will guide the literature review in support of the research findings. I conclude this research by summarising the research, its findings, limitations and by providing recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The research methodology chosen is a qualitative research approach that makes use of storytelling as the heuristic to uncover organisational culture. In this section I expand on research approach and methodology and explain the rationale for this. I discuss my research philosophy (ontological and epistemological stance) and how my philosophical assumptions contributed to the chosen research methodology. Next I describe my research process in detail, starting with the type of qualitative research I conducted. Here I demonstrate the relationship between my chosen research philosophy and type of qualitative research. I then describe the setting the research was conducted in and the participants that partook in the study. Furthermore I describe how I gained access to the research site and highlight my role as a researcher in relationship to the site. Stating my research role in relation to the site is a critical reflection as my role as a researcher may influence the way data is collected and analysed. Once clear on my research role, I then lead into describing my data collection method and method of analysis and link this back to my philosophical stance. I conclude this chapter by discussing the ethical considerations for the study and the strategies employed to enhance the quality of the research. Here I describe how I ensured that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. Furthermore I describe the various approaches I used to ensure that research results were trustworthy and accurately represented the case being studied.

2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

2.2.1 INTERPRETIVISM AND STORYTELLING

Adopting a qualitative approach to research required a significant paradigm shift for me as I was predominantly trained in quantitative approaches to research. Considering this, I describe in this section the paradigm that the research was
conducted in and how this relates to storytelling. I discuss its ontology and epistemology and why it is best suited for the study of organisational culture. According to Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), ontology is concerned with how reality is defined and epistemology is concerned with how knowledge can be known and evaluated. Once the chosen paradigm is discussed, I would then like to briefly discuss the popular quantitative method which is often typical of the modernism paradigm in relation to the chosen paradigm for this qualitative study. I discuss modernism from a quantitative perspective as Schein believed that adopting a quantitative methodological approach to the study of culture has several shortcomings and that a qualitative approach should rather be adopted. This will aid in understanding why storytelling was the chosen method to uncover culture. I do not however provide an overview of qualitative methodological approaches here as it is covered in detail in the qualitative research section of this chapter.

The paradigm chosen for this research is the symbolic interpretivism paradigm. It assumes that people make meaning out of their interpretations of symbolic acts and processes within a specific context. It is believed here that reality is constructed and reconstructed that people make meaning through their subjective and symbolic interpretations of their context (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The ontology of culture viewed from the symbolic interpretivism perspective believes organisational culture and understanding organisation culture is dependent on individual or group subjective reality (Hatch & Cunliffe). This means that organisational culture may constitute many different meanings, and understanding culture will depend on whose perspective it is viewed from. Epistemologically, symbolic interpretivism assumes that all knowledge about culture is relative depending on the point of view of the individuals involved (Hatch & Cunliffe). Culture is viewed as a subjective experience that is organised in a way that makes action possible. Furthermore, symbolic interpretivism assumes that culture is socially constructed (Heracleous, 2006). The implication of this is that culture has multiple interpretations that can shift and change overtime (Hatch & Cunliffe). In the symbolic interpretive paradigm culture is constructed and reconstructed through symbolic interactions. Here understanding is accomplished and communicated through symbols which are retained in scripts. The scripts form the basis for action that further
facilitates the construction of meaning. When the schema is developed they are used as interpretive tools to make meaning of the world. According to this perspective culture is a system or schema of shared cognitions, knowledge and beliefs (Heracleous, 2006). Considering the above the symbolic interpretivism paradigm presents a suitable framework for the study of culture as it focuses on the interpretations of the collective. This is congruent with Schein’s (2009) notion of organisation culture, where he suggests that to understand culture the collective experiences and interpretations thereof needs to be understood to uncover the deeper underlying assumptions that is culture.

According to Schein (2009), the use of quantitative approaches, which is typical of the modernist paradigm, does not present a suitable methodology to the study of culture. Modernism assumes that meaning is made out of being objective and finding universal laws to explain phenomena. Modernism favours creating generic categories which can be applied to phenomena in order to make meaning out of the phenomena (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). From an ontological perspective, modernism views culture as a tangible variable that can be measured. Epistemologically modernism views culture comprises of several factors that can be measured by assigning a value to the factors with the most common method of collecting data for this approach being a survey. The outcome of a modernist study, as it relates to culture, would be to create universal laws, methods or models to assessing and understanding organisational culture (Hatch & Cunliffe). The objective stance that the modernism paradigm suggests is contradictory to the subject stance Schein proposes to the study of culture. Schein (p.86) rejects the use of culture questionnaires comprised of predefined factors stating that, ”Culture cannot be assess by means of surveys or questionnaires because one does not know what to ask and cannot judge the reliability and validity of the responses.”

Comparing the symbolic interpretivism paradigm and quantitative approaches that are typical modernism paradigm to Schein’s (2009) perspective on organisational culture reinforces the suitability of adopting the interpretivism paradigm for the study of culture. Furthermore symbolic interpretivism is congruent with storytelling, as stories act as symbolic artefacts that transmit values and shared tacit assumptions and symbolic interpretivism believes that socially constructed ideas are retained in scripts (Randall & Martin, 2003). Finally, similarly to the symbolic interpretivism paradigm, storytelling is a
collective social process in which discourses change over time (Boje, 1991). Boje states that employees act towards their organisation based on their interpretation of their environment, the other, the organisation and themselves. Here the individual constructs and transforms stories told in the organisation and in doing so conveys the shared values and beliefs of the organisation.

Having outlined the study's theoretical and philosophical underpinnings I next discuss qualitative research after which I describe the key steps I employed in the study. Here I describe the research design, setting, participants, access, my researcher role, data analysis and research report writing.

2.2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a multifaceted field that cross cuts disciplines, fields and subject matters. It privileges no single methodological practices over another and is based on the premise that meaning cannot be judged as truthful nor can a set of criteria be used to define generic scientific laws (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It assumes that human behaviour can only be understood if the researcher understands the meaning a participant gives to his/her world. It involves studying things in their natural setting and attempting to interpret the meaning people give to phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln). This therefore demands that the researcher is located in the world of the participant or phenomena and collects a variety of empirical materials that describe the routine and problematic moment in the individuals lives.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. The first is that it is interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist and critical sensitivity. The second is that it adopts a positivist, postpositivistic, humanistic and naturalistic conception of human experience. These tensions and differing paradigms are brought about by the historical context in which qualitative research has been developed. Denzin and Lincoln defined eight historical genre's which they refer to as 'moments' where these varying paradigms are found. These 'moments' overlap ad simultaneously exist in the present.

The first moment was the traditional period which began in the early 1900 and continued on to world war two. The focus of this moment was the capturing of objective
accounts. This was similar to the positivists scientist approach to writing and was concerned with validity, reliability and objectiveness of interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Holt, 2003). The second ‘moment’ is modernism which extended from the post-war to 1970. The modernism moment was concerned with making qualitative research as rigorous as possible. Here modernism qualitative researchers looked for causal narratives through the use of open ended interviewing and analysis of the interviews in a standardised statistical form. Modernism moment was concerned with internal and external validity and searched for probabilities or frequency with which conclusions could be applied.

The third ‘moment’ is the blurring genre's moment which ranged from 1970 to 1986. Here qualitative researchers had a much broader choice of paradigms, methods and strategies that they could draw on. The focus of this ‘moment’ was on applied qualitative research and various strategies and reporting formats were being employed. Geertz (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) argued that old functional, positivist, behavioural, totalist approach to human disciplines were giving way to more plurastic, interpretive and open ended perspectives. Furthermore Geertz suggested that all writings are interpretations of interpretation and that the observer has no privileged voice in those interpretations. Interpretations were central to this genre and the main concern here was the author's presence in the text. The fourth ‘moment’ which occurred in the 1980 was characterised by a crisis of representation. Writing in this era was a lot more reflexive and called into question issues of race, class and gender. Issues of validity reliability and objectivity also resurfaced. These issues were now dealt with by the researchers becoming more self-aware in writing. The result was that the field worker was making claims to the moral and scientific authority. This allowed the realist and experimental ethnographic text to function as sources of validation of an empirical science.

The fifth ‘moment’ is known as the triple crises. The triple crisis confronts qualitative research with the crisis of representation, legitimation and praxis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The crisis of representation argues that qualitative research is created in social text written by the researcher and recognises that the link between what is experience and what is captured in text is problematic. The legitimate crisis resurfaces
the problems with evaluating and interpreting qualitative research and suggests that criteria such as generalisability, validity and reliability are called into question. The third crisis, praxis, calls into question about whether it is possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text. This led to a period of experimental ethnographic writing. Writers started to explore new ways of writing and struggled with how to present the “Other.” Writers were making use of tales and grand narratives were being replaced with local and small scale theories.

The sixth ‘moment’ was a period of post experimental inquiry whereby ethnographic alternatives were being published in experimental forms of qualitative writing. The seventh ‘moment’ is characterised by great conflict and tension as methodologies were called into question again. Finally, the eighth ‘moment’ is the future. Here qualitative researchers are confronted with methodologies such as “bush science” and evidence based social movements (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Considering the above, this research can be found predominantly in the blurring genre’s ‘moment,’ however have aspects of the modernism ‘moment.’ From the modernism ‘moment’ perspective this research attempts to adopt a rigorous as possible research approach with a strong focus on categorisation and finding causal relationships amongst theme’s identified. From the blurring genre’s perspective this research is interpretive and recognises that it is not completely objective as I share my own reflections. I am open about my position in the text and reflect on my experience and thoughts in the text.

Now that we have a better idea of what qualitative research implies and where the study fits in, we can turn to the key decisions taken during its execution. It is important to take cognisance of the fact that in executing a qualitative study one needs to make adjustments to what was proposed during the planning phase. In the ensuing discussion I laid more emphasis on how I conducted the research.

2.2.3 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Qualitative research does not follow a linear process in the same way that quantitative research does. It comprises a series of overlapping activities and a number
of reiterations as texts are refined. For the purposes of this discussion, I have stated the research process activities separately as this aid in the understanding of the process.

2.2.3.1 PARTICIPANTS, SETTING AND ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

- Design
  In this section I outline the research design where I describe the type of qualitative research to be conducted, where the research was conducted, who were the participants and my role in the research process.

  When designing the research, one of the first considerations for the research methodology was to decide on the type of qualitative research to be conducted. I needed to ensure that the type of qualitative research conducted was congruent with my ontological and epistemological design. For the purposes of this research, I chose to use a case study as the focus of my research. Case study research is defined by its focus of research being on the case (Stake, 2005). Case studies concentrate on the experiential knowledge of the case and pay close attention to contexts. It requires extensive examining of how phenomena are enacted. According to Stake, cases form part of a larger functioning system and therefore it is important to understand other cases related to the phenomena. This holds true for the study of organisational culture within the subjective interpretivism framework, where interest is in several versions of the case from several different participants. Furthermore, since case studies are context bound it aligns to Schein’s (2009) notion that culture is context specific.

  According to Stake (2005) it is important to understand what type of case study the researcher will be engaging in. Stake defines three types of case studies namely, intrinsic, collective and instrumental. Intrinsic case studies are chosen when the case is the focus of the research and is to be understood. Collective case studies are chosen when a number of case studies are studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon. Instrumental case studies are employed when a case is used to provide insight into a phenomenon. Here the case is of secondary importance but rather facilitates the process of gaining greater insights into a phenomena.
Instrumental case studies are the chosen case study type for this research since storytelling will be used to gain insights into the phenomena of culture. According to Stake (2005) storytelling cases may produce unexpected results and insights. This is congruent to Linde’s (2001) notion that tacit assumptions are uncovered when results produced are unexpected and unspoken. It is for these reasons that the instrumental case study was the chosen type of case study and that storytelling will be utilised as the instrument to gather case information.

Once case study research was chosen as the type of research to be conducted, I needed to choose the site for the case. According to Esterberg (2002) there are several considerations for selecting a site. These include the appropriateness of the site, boundaries and risks of the site. The site I selected was a global Consulting Firm.

- **Research setting**

  The Consulting Firm is an American based consultancy that focuses on management consulting, technology consulting and outsourcing. It operates on every continent and has a satellite office in South Africa. It operates as a global organisation and its American origins have a significant influence on the value and practices of the South African satellite office. The Consulting Firm was chosen as the site to be studied as it is an organisation that claims to have a strong organisational identity and culture that is driven by its leadership. Furthermore, the Consulting Firm claims to have a strongly embedded set of core values that is established globally. The Consulting Firm has defined six core values which govern the way in which it operates. For the purposes of this research, the Consulting Firms core values have been renamed in order to maintain the Consulting Firms anonymity. This is in accordance to good ethical practices for research. The core values that have been defined are “Client Focus,” “Global Focus,” “People Focus,” “Competent People,” “Ethical Focus,” and “Ownership Focus.” The Consulting Firm claims that the organisations behaviour and decisions are driven by their six core values and that these are brought to life by the organisations leadership. This was therefore an ideal site as it seems to have a strongly entrenched culture. Furthermore the research presented an opportunity to uncover cultural factors of the organisation that may not be explicitly stated or espoused in its values. According
to Schein (2009) founders of organisations espouse certain values and assumptions and these may not be consistent with what is enacted at the lower levels. It is therefore important to source data from different levels of the organisation. With such strongly entrenched espoused values by the leadership, this site presented the opportunity to both confirm those values as well as to uncover further values and shared tacit assumptions that are not made explicit.

- **Selecting research participants**

  After deciding on a site, I needed to make decisions regarding the research participants. According to Blanche and Durrheim (2002), sampling involves decisions about which people, settings, behaviours or social processes are to be observed. Blanche and Durrheim go further stating that the main purpose of sampling is to achieve a representative sample of the population where the researcher aims to draw conclusions. For the purpose of this research purposeful sampling, specifically critical cases sampling, was adopted.

  I chose to interview six executives that had been at the organisation for longer than three years. I needed to ensure that the participants had sufficient experience in the organisation in order to re-tell the anecdotal organisational stories and career stories that would give me insight into the Consulting Firm’s culture. Four of the participants were Senior Executives and two of the participants were Senior Managers. I could therefore obtain stories from the individuals that espouse the organisational value, the Senior Executives, as well as those that are not part of the grand narratives.

  **The first participant** interviewed was an Indian male Senior Executive that worked within the Financial Services industry. This Senior Executive had been at the organisation for between 8-10 years. He joined the organisation straight out of university and his career was characterised by fast movement and early promotion through the organisation. During his career he focused predominantly on large technology implementations within the banking sector.

  **The second participant** was a white male Senior Executive that had been at the organisation for over 20 years. This Senior Executive was a partner at this Consulting Firm before it became a listed company. During his career he focused predominantly on
large technology implementation within the energy and resources sector and his current focus is on sales.

**The third participant** that was interviewed is a white female Senior Manager with 3-5 years experience in the Consulting Firm. She joined the organisation as an experienced hire and her career was characterised by fast movement and early promotion through the organisation. During her career she predominately focused on human capital development type work across multiple industries and is now focused on human capital development sales.

**The fourth participant** interviewed is a white male Senior Executive that had been for over 10 years in the Consulting Firm. The Senior Executive was an associated partner before the Consulting Firm became listed and was then moved to Senior Manager. This Senior Executive was then recently promoted from Senior Manager to Senior Executive. During his career at the Consulting Firm, he focused on human capital development type work and is no longer with the organisation.

**The fifth participant** that was interviewed is a white female Senior Manager that has been with the organisation for over 7 years. She joined the organisation straight out of university and moved through the organisation with speed, being promoted early at every level. During her career she focused predominantly on large technology implementations within the banking sector, and her current focus is on project managing a large technology implementation.

**The sixth participant** that was interviewed is a white male Senior Executive that has been with the organisation for over 15 years. This Senior Executive is originally from Europe and recently transferred to the South African practice. During his career at the Consulting Firm he focused on large technology implementation work. He was asked to relocate to the South African office to rescue a project that had been in a challenging situation. He is currently focused on technology sales in the South African practice.

In this Consulting Firm, Senior Executives lead the organisation and Senior Managers are responsible for execution. This sample allows for slightly different views of the organisation to be presented. This sampling strategy is therefore congruent with symbolic interpretivism.
• **Access**

Once the site and participants were selected, I needed to gain access to the site. Since I am an employee of the Consulting Firm, entry into the site was fairly simple. I had been at the organisation for just under four years and had developed good relationships with those that had the authority to grant me permission into the site. After an initial meeting with Human Resources and signing a confidentiality agreement, I was granted permission to the site and could begin my research.

• **Research role**

Before beginning the research, I needed to be clear on the role I was going to play as the researcher (Esterberg, 2002). Gold (1958) defines four typologies for the researcher; the complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and the complete observer. Being an employee of the Consulting Firm, I assumed the participant as observer role. According to Gold, this role is typically used in interviews and is more formal than the complete participant. This role involves the researcher being close to the case but does not participate in the case and still remains as an observer.

Considering that I am an insider there were two key considerations that I needed to take cognisance when conducting the research. The first consideration is my history with the organisation, and my own interpretations of the stories and experiences. Symbolic interpretivism assumes that there is no singular truth or fact, only interpretations thereof (Heracleous, 2006). I therefore needed to be conscious of how my own experiences and stories at the Consulting Firm will shape which data I choose to analyse, how I analyse the data and how I interpret the data.

The second key consideration is the power relation that exists between myself and the participants I am interviewing. The participants that I interviewed are my seniors and some of them I have reported into in the past. I was therefore challenged to control my own anxieties around interviewing my seniors. Furthermore, in the interviews the participants were cognisant of the fact that they are my seniors, and therefore I was challenged to get the participants to reveal the stories in an honest manner.
Due to my role as a researcher in relation to the site, I also needed to ensure that I limit the influence my own experience and assumptions may have on the research findings and interpretations. To achieve this, I used reflexivity as a strategy to ensure that my history at the site does not contaminate my findings. Throughout the research I was cognisant of my own thoughts and experiences. I expand on this further when I discuss strategies to enhance research quality.

- **Data collection**

  Once I was clear on the site and who the participants were, I needed to decide how data will be collected and analysed. According to Clandinin (2007) an interview presents a good opportunity for the creation of narratives. I therefore chose to collect data through interviews. The premise here was that the spontaneous answers provided in interviews would form narratives (Clandinin). Availability of executives was scarce and therefore it took me two months and several cancellations before I managed to schedule my first interview. Before the interviews I planned how I would conduct the interview and how information would be recorded.

  I made use of semi-structured interviews for to collect data. According to Blanche and Durrheim (2002) semi-structure interviews has a general framework for themes that need to be explored but allows for flexibility for new themes or questions to be brought up. The interview contained three open-ended questions. The first question was “Tell me about your experience in the Consulting Firm? The second question was, “What do you appreciate about the Consulting Firm?” The third question asked was, “What would you like to experience more off that currently exists in the Consulting Firm?”

  These questions were designed to solicit stories about joint learnt experience on how to survive the external environment and how to integrate internally. Probing questions were asked, if a topic of interest arose, but for most parts I allowed participants to express themselves freely. The focus of the questions was on the appreciative as this would provide insight into organisational successes. The reason for this is that Schein (2009) suggests that culture is a residue of success. My objective was to uncover the Consulting Firm’s organisational culture by collect anecdotal stories.
of the Consulting Firm that relate to the organisational identity and career descriptions (Clandinin, 2007).

With dictophone in hand I entered the interviews to collect the anecdotal organisational stories and career stories. According to Blanche and Durrheim (2002), it is important that the researcher builds rapport with the participants. For me, this was easy since I had a good collegial relationship with the participants. The challenge here was to build confidence in them that the information would remain confidential and that anonymity would be maintained. Furthermore I needed to build personal credibility with the participants.

I achieved confidentiality and anonymity by signing a confidentiality agreement with the Consulting Firm. I discuss issues of confidentiality and anonymity under the research ethics section. My strategy to building credibility was to allow the participant to do all the talking. As the hour long interview went on, participants would relax and be more open about their stories. During the interview, I would make notes on body language, tone and attitude to the story being told. Once all six interviews were completed, I transcribed the information into manuscripts, edited the manuscripts for accuracy and numbered them for context. The manuscripts averaged on four pages per interview.

- Data analysis

Once the data collection was complete, I needed to analyse and make sense of the data. To do this I used a technique called thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns in data. Furthermore it provides a method for the interpretation of data. Braun and Clarke outline a six step process to conducting thematic analysis.

The first step is to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke suggest that when becoming familiar with the data that it is not just about reading and re-reading the data, but it is about actively engaging with the data. My approach to becoming immersed in the data was to transcribe the data. Transcribing the data requires that only required information is transcribed but that the true original nature of meaning is not altered (Braun & Clarke; Blanche and Durrheim, 2002). I chose
to transcribe the interviews verbatim so that I may completely immerse myself in the data.

The second step suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) is to code the data. Data coding is the process of identifying and highlighting features in the data (Braun & Clarke). These features are identified as codes as they are interesting in relation to the research question. Coding data is essentially when I first began to analyse patterns of themes in the data. According to Braun and Clarke there are three key considerations for coding and analysing themes.

The first was to decide what will constitute a theme. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is an important pattern in the data in relation to the research question. Furthermore, it must represent some level of meaning within the data set. A theme is therefore not always represented by the number of participants that mention an aspect of the organisation (Braun & Clarke).

In the context of this research, themes were identified if the stories revealed an aspect of the Consulting Firm’s organisational culture. I therefore needed to identify what constitutes a story and thereafter whether or not the elements of the story related to organisational culture. Carter (1983) defines a story as a telling of events that have three basic elements. The first is a predicament, conflict or struggle situation. The second is a protagonist who engages the situation with a purpose. The third is the sequence of events that is aimed at resolving the predicament. This is known as the plot. Once stories were identified, they needed to be analysed in order to identify themes that relate to organisational culture. Using Schein’s (2009) definition of organisational culture, a theme was identified if the stories revealed shared underlying assumptions or beliefs about the Consulting Firm. Schein provides a framework for understanding shared underlying assumptions by identifying the manifestations of shared underlying assumptions. According to Schein, shared underlying assumptions are created from joint learning experiences and are usually the residual of success. Schein suggests that these joint learning experiences are highlighted in areas where culture makes a significant difference to organisational functioning. He defines three areas where the content of an organisations culture makes a significant difference. The first culture content he describes is what he terms, “Surviving in the external
environment.” Surviving the external environment is premised on the idea that culture assumptions are not only about the internal workings of the organisation but also include how the organisation views itself in relation to its environment (Schein, 2009). Surviving the external environment suggests that organisation develop assumptions about how to grow and survive. Organisations have underlying assumptions about how they view themselves in relation to their environment which include their beliefs about how they need to organise themselves in order to succeed and to detect error (Schein). On this premise, stories uncovered in the interviews were analysed as to whether they reveal themes about how the Consulting Firm views itself in relation to other organisation, how they have organised themselves to succeed and how they detect error.

The second culture content that Schein (2009) defines is what he terms, “Internal integration issues.” Here the focus is on understanding language and jargon, how relationships are defined and how the organisation views reward and status. According to Schein the most common manifestation of organisation culture is a common language and way of thinking. He therefore emphasises that when understanding organisational culture, that the language and norms of the organisation are closely studied. The second critical component to understanding internal integration issues is to understand how relationships are defined. Schein suggests that a culture study should aim to reveal the assumptions about relationships and the degree of intimacy that is considered appropriate. It should consider how open the organisation is about performance, whether or not personal challenges can be discussed and whether or not it is acceptable to challenge leadership. The final internal integration issue that should be evaluated is the reward and status systems that reside in the organisation. Here the focus should be on uncovering what is considered both formal and informal reward. Representations of status and signals of success should be understood (Schein). Based on the premise of the second culture content, stories will be analysed for themes that reveal assumptions about organisation norms, how relationships are defined and how reward and status is expressed.

The final culture content that Schein (2009) defines is what he refers to as, “Deeper assumptions.” Schein suggests that organisational culture is ultimately
embedded in the national culture in which it operates in and that deeper assumptions are reflected through the assumptions and beliefs of its founders and leaders. He suggests that in order to understand these deeper assumptions a more abstract approach is required. According to Schein (2009), these deeper assumptions can be viewed through artefacts, however deeper questions should be asked about what is driving behaviour. Here one should observe where artefacts, behaviours and values do not match. Schein proposes that these observations should focus on deeper underlying assumptions about reality, space, time, truth, human nature and human relationships. Deeper assumptions about reality and truth assume that we are socialised into beliefs about what is real and true (Schein). This influences the ways in which individuals and organisations make decisions and what gives an opinion credibility. Deeper assumption about space and time reveal organisational norms and symbolic meanings. They often communicate expected behaviours for effective functioning within the organisation. Space and time can provide operative underlying assumptions about communication, status, expected work ethic and respect for time. Deeper assumptions about human nature reveal the underlying motives of human functioning in organisations. Human nature assumptions can reveal whether organisations believe employees are motivated by incentives and controls or whether they are motivated by the work they do. This underlying assumption will influence how employees are rewarded and managed. Deeper assumptions about human nature can also reveal whether human nature is fixed or can be changed. Again this can reveal how flexible management believes employees are and can influence strategic decisions about employees. The final deeper underlying assumption that Schein references are assumptions about human relationships. Here Schein suggests that culture studies explore the extent to which companies emphasise individualism or community. Organisations that emphasise individualism will tend towards providing individuals with freedom and autonomy, whereas those that tend towards community expect loyalty and commitment. The assumptions about individualism versus community will drive rewards, incentives and controls. Based on the above premises, stories will be analysed for themes that reveal assumptions about organisation reality, space, time, truth, human nature and human relationships. According to Schein, in order to reveal these assumptions, culture studies
must compare artefacts and espoused values and investigate whether these match with the observed behaviours. These differences will reveal how culture works operationally. The stories will therefore be compared to the Consulting Firm’s artefacts and espoused values. Where the behaviours observed in the stories do not match the artefacts and especially the espoused values, deeper questions were asked about the shared underlying assumptions driving the behaviours.

The second consideration for coding and analysing themes was whether semantic or latent themes will be identified. Semantic thematic analysis involves the identification of explicit theme’s or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on the patterns identified, there is an attempt to understand meanings and implications of the patterns. This is often done in relation to the literature (Braun & Clarke). Latent analysis considers deeper levels of meaning which goes beyond what is explicitly stated. It aims to identify underlying assumptions and motives behind the data that is presented. It involves interpreting data whiles conducting the analysis. The analysis is therefore not just a description of the data but consideration is given to the underlying assumptions the data is revealing (Braun & Clarke). For the purposes of this research, I analysed data through a latent analysis lens.

The final consideration for coding and analysing themes was whether the thematic analysis is inductive or is theoretically bound. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive thematic analysis involves a detailed description of the data where themes are strongly linked to the data. Here analysis is data driven and is not linked to previous theoretical underpinnings. Furthermore, inductive data analysis is not necessarily strongly linked to the research question and allows for the data to guide the researcher’s area of focus (Braun & Clarke). Alternatively, theoretical thematic analysis is guided by the research theoretical interest. It involves encoding for a specific research question and requires the researcher to provide a more detailed account of certain aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke). For the purposes of this research, I chose to adopt a thematic theoretical approach, as the definition of culture adopted needed to guide the analysis of data.

Step three of thematic analysis involves searching for theme’s (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once data has been coded, the data needs to be grouped into themes. Here
codes are analysed and may be combined to form themes. Apart from the sorting of codes into themes, the analysis gave rise to sub-themes. This leads into step four which involves the reviewing of the themes identified.

Here I needed to ensure that themes identified are really themes. Patton (1990) suggests that themes need to be homogenous internally whereby the data within the themes relate to the theme. He goes further to state that themes should at the same time be externally heterogeneous whereby themes are mutually exclusive of each other. To review the theme’s I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) two levels of review. The first level involves reviewing the data extracts in relation to a theme. Here I reviewed the data extracts for each theme, to ensure that it represents a pattern, is coherent and relates to the theme. The second level of analysis is to ensure that individual themes are not repeated in relation to the entire data set. Here I reviewed the themes in relation to the entire data set to assess that themes are not repeated or demonstrate too much of an overlap. I also reviewed the data for additional themes. The reviewing of themes involved several iterations of themes.

The fifth step in thematic analysis involves the defining and naming of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke, it is important to identify the essence of the themes and then decide what data will represent the theme. Here I organised the data in a coherent way so that the theme tells the common story. I also identified sub-themes which aided in a deeper understanding of the themes. Furthermore, I ensured that themes identified and the stories they told relate to the overall story that the data tells. A critical component of the fifth step is to name the themes. According to Braun and Clarke, names need to be concise and need to reflect what the theme is about. For me, the naming of themes was an iterative process. As themes evolved, so did the naming of the themes.

The final step in thematic analysis is to determine how data will be presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The write up needs to demonstrate analytic insights with vivid examples to substantiate the analysis. Braun and Clarke propose two options for presenting data. The first is through thick descriptions whereby the majority of the data is presented. The second, which is the option chosen for this research, is to provide a more detailed analysis of identified themes within the data. Detailed accounts of the
identified themes as they relate to the Consulting Firms culture are provided instead of a more overall description of the interviews. This allowed for more detailed analysis of the themes as they related to the Consulting Firm culture.

- **Representation of the data/report writing**

  Apart from deciding on how much detail should be presented, I also needed to decide how the data will be represented. It has become practice in qualitative research to differentiate between writing styles or ‘tales’ (Sparks, 2002). Sparks defined four styles of writing. I used a combination of these styles in my research. I will briefly discuss each of these as it relates to this research.

  The scientific tale is defined by Sparks (2002) as traditional style scientific writing. Here the style is to present findings objectively and to allow the data to convey the key messages. Typical scientific style writing involves a statement of the problem and conceptual framework to investigating the problem. It defines research questions, methods of investigation, data analysis, conclusions and discussions. I used elements of the scientific tale when I present the data in Chapter 3, especially when I present the categorise data in tables. Furthermore, in the introduction I present the aim of the research and the conceptual framework to investigate the aim of the research. This is in line with the scientific tales.

  The second style mentioned here is the realist tale and this refers to researchers excluding themselves from the text. Here the author is absent from the text, only the words, actions and thoughts of the participants are visible in the text. The study is neutral and the author’s presence is limited to mentioning the location, length, research strategies and entrance procedures (Sparks, 2002). Elements of realist tale style writing can be found in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 when I present the data, interpret the data and present quotes from the participants in the text. Here the research participants are speaking and are central to the discussion.

  The third style used in this research is the confessional tale. Confessional tales follow a personalised style that tells the story from the field workers perspective (Sparks, 2002). According Sparks, confessional tales are personal and anecdotal. Confessional tales style writing can be found in Chapter 4 when I analyse and interpret
the data. Here my perspective is expressed and I reflect on how my experience at the Consulting Firm influenced the analysis and interpretations. Furthermore, in this Chapter I confess my position in relation to the context of the site and the research participants.

Similarly to the confessional tales the fourth style, autoethnography, places the researcher within the social context. Here the text is usually written in the first person and the researcher expresses his or her emotion, self-consciousness and historical attachment to the social structure and culture. The researcher positions him or herself as a major character in the text (Schurink, 2005). Autoethnography characteristics can be found in Chapter 1 as well as in this Chapter when I state my position in relation to the research site and research participants.

For the purposes of consistency, I represented and discussed the research findings in a realist tale style. I structured that data according to common plots, archetypes and behaviours observed (Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Common plots provide the general sequence of events of common stories. Archetypes are examples of the typical characters in the stories that display common behaviours. Amongst the archetypes that were identified, protagonists and antagonists were identified. A protagonist is the main character in the story and is the archetype that employees would most identify with. Identifying protagonists in the stories allowed me to identify hero’s, people or characters the participants looked up to and in this way discover the type of attributes that is seen as favourable in the Consulting Firm. Antagonists on the other hand, are the opponent to the protagonists. By identifying Antagonists I was able to understand the challenges that face employees in the Consulting Firm and how the employees dealt with these challenges. For each of the themes identified the above structure was applied.

In closing it is important to reiterate that the preceding steps did not follow a linear chronological order but was circular. Next, I discuss two focal concerns which are related to my ontological and epistemological position and informed the design and execution of the research; namely: research ethics and quality research.
2.3 FOCAL CONCERNS

2.3.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative research can be intrusive and therefore designing and executing an ethical research study is crucial to the research process (Stake, 2005). Organisational and individual stories in particular can be embarrassing or may expose the storyteller to risk. Furthermore, stories access deeper levels of mental processing of the organisation and of the individual and therefore can be an invasion of privacy. According to Schurink (2009), under these conditions the researcher may face ethical dilemmas which require proper conduct. Here confidentiality and anonymity is central to ethical considerations. Schurink goes further to state that ethically responsible research depends on the integrity of the researcher. The researcher's moral code is the strongest defence against unethical research, and the researcher needs to reflect on the research actions. Maintaining integrity and ethics of this research is therefore dependent on my moral compass and my own reflections when faced with ethical considerations.

Schurink (2009) does however suggest that due to the complexity of ethics in research that a practical approach should be adopted to the protection of ethics. Mason (1996) concurs suggesting that qualitative researchers should set out to construct a research design that follow's ethical practices. Ethics was therefore considered in the research design and strategies to ensure the quality and the integrity of the research was employed. The strategies employed for this research are based on Blanche and Durrheim (2002) recommended three ethical principles.

The first is that of anonymity, whereby the individuals autonomy must be respected. To ensure anonymity, participants participated voluntarily and under informed consent. At the start of the interviews participant were informed of the purpose of the research, the research process and how the results will be treated. Furthermore all respondents were informed of their anonymity, and that any sensitive information will be kept confidential. In the research, no information that could provide insight into the identity of the participant is revealed.

The second principle is that the research should be beneficial either to the participants or to the field of study (Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). In this sense, the
organisation will gain a better understanding of its own organisational culture. Furthermore the research will present alternative methods to uncovering culture which may further the study and practice of organisational culture.

The third principle that Blanche and Durrheim (2002) recommends is that of nonmaleficence. Nonmalefiance requires the researcher to ensure that no harm should come to participants through the research process. This means that the data collected needs to be reflected accurately and interpretations should not seek to harm anyone involved in the research process.

Considering research ethics in the design of the research will ensure that ethics is maintained throughout the research process. The above strategies employed ensure the research is transparent, accurate and is not harmful to any of the parties involved.

2.3.2 STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH

A requirement for sound research is the accuracy and quality of the research. There are however several competing views on how to ensure accurate and quality research. The most common competing views are between quantitative and qualitative researchers and are rooted in the competing epistemological and ontological views. Quantitative researchers believe that research accuracy and quality is ensured through statistical methods such as validity and reliability and by remaining objective (Schurink, 2009; Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Quantitative researchers follow the assumption that truth is found in the ability of the research to be able to generalise to populations. Qualitative researchers operate under a different set of epistemological and ontological assumptions, which moves away from objectivity. Qualitative researchers aim to ensure accuracy and quality of the research by understanding the researcher’s subjective meanings and interpretations (Schurink). There is however competing views even amongst qualitative researchers on how to ensure accuracy and quality of the research. I will not explore all these views, but will rather provide a description and explanation of how I chose to ensure research quality and accuracy.

According Schurink (2009), it is important to take decisions regarding strategies to ensure quality in the design phase. I had already therefore set-up my research in such a way as to ensure quality before I began the research. It is important to note that
although the research design is set to ensure quality, research quality lies with the integrity of the researcher and that integrity has to be applied from research inception to the delivery of the report. For the purpose of simplicity, I chose to adopt Lincoln and Guba (1985) four criteria for quality.

The first criterion Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest is that of credibility. According to Schurink (2009), credibility is the most important criterion that a qualitative researcher should aim to achieve. Schurink defines credibility as a match between the researchers view and the researcher’s representation of it. Furthermore, credibility involves ensuring that the research is valid by ensuring that the parameters of the research are clearly defined (De Vos., Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005). Lincoln and Guba’s second criterion for quality is transferability. Transferability is defined as the ability for other researchers to make comparisons to their own research (Schurink, 2005; Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). The third criterion is dependability. Dependability refers to whether the research process is logical, well documented and can be audited (Schurink). Dependability is also referred to by (Seale, 1999) as replicable. According to Seale, the research design and methodology needs to be well documented. Furthermore, Seale argues that reflexivity can assist in replicability. Lincoln and Guba’s final criterion is confirmability. Confirmability is concerned with whether enough evidence is provided to substantiate findings and interpretations. In my research I aimed to satisfy Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria through the use of several strategies.

Although no universal strategy exists for ensuring quality, Schurink (2009) does provide two broad practical strategies that satisfy all of Lincoln and Guba’s criterion. These two strategies were used as the primary strategies to ensure quality and were supplemented with other strategies that would enhance the quality of the research. The first strategy proposed by Schurink is to provide an audit trail. An audit trail describes the interaction between the researcher and the research participants. The purpose is to understand what and how information was uncovered, with the premise being that interpretation can be better validated. According to Etherington (2004), the researchers’ position in relation to the research site and participants influence the researchers’ interpretations. By documenting aspects about the researcher’s relationship with the research participants and by documenting the process, a traceable audit is created that
will allow readers to be better informed about conclusions drawn (Schurink, 2009). In order for me to create a traceable audit, I first clearly documented my research design and approach. Secondly, I am explicit about my relationship with the site and the research participants. Finally, I took note of my own personal views and thoughts in the interview and in my interpretations. This was done through a process of reflexivity, which is the second strategy proposed by Schurink.

According to Etherington (2006) reflexivity is the ability of a researcher to notice their own responses to the world. The premise for reflexivity is based on the assumption that research findings do not naturally emerge but are rather influenced by key decisions and reflections (Schurink, 2009). Under this premise, researchers need to interpret their own interpretations and be critical about their own findings. Schurink goes further and states that qualitative researchers need to ask difficult questions about the reasoning process through which answers are arrived at. To do this, researchers therefore need to reflect on the end to end research process. Researchers need to reflect on what happened, who was involved, what influenced certain decisions and the theoretical underpinnings that influenced decisions in the research process. Reflexivity therefore requires that I describe how the process of doing the research shapes the outcomes of the research (Schurink). I chose to adopt Schurink’s framework for reflexivity which comprises of methodological reflexivity, epistemological commitments and disciplinary maps.

Reflexivity on methodology reveals how the research procedures impact findings (Schurink, 2009). According to Schurink reflexivity on methodology should provide the reader with confidence in the results and should render the research process transparent. Adopting Schurink’s reflexivity of methodology approach I clearly documented the research methodology, detailed my role in producing results and revealed the rational for methodological decisions. The second component is ontological and epistemological reflexivity. Ontology is concerned with how reality is defined and epistemology is concerned with how knowledge can be known (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Reflexivity of ontology and epistemology is therefore concerned with revealing underlying assumptions about what can be known and how it can be known (Schurink, 2009). I therefore clearly stated my ontological and epistemological stance
and how these assumptions drove the research process. Related to the ontological and epistemological reflexivity are disciplinary maps. According to Schurink (2009) the researcher should reflect on the disciplinary assumptions that drive the outcomes of the research. I therefore reflect on my own theoretical and disciplinary assumptions throughout the research process.

To enhance the quality of the research I supplemented the internal audit strategy and reflexivity strategy with triangulation and peer briefing. According to Blanche and Durrheim (2002) triangulation involves the use of multiple perspectives to check the accuracy of interpretations. In the study I made use of interviews, my personal observations and artefacts for the data triangulation. The interviews were used as the basis for analysis with the artefacts and observations acting as objects to confirm findings from the interviews. Peer briefing on the other hand involves getting a peer or supervisor to oversee the findings of the research (Blanche & Durrheim). In the case of this research my supervisor acted as the peer brief. My research supervisor monitored and reviewed the research process, the research design and the analysis and interpretation of the data. The research process and research design was defined in conjunction with my supervisor. Here he provided me with guidance and readings on ethically sound qualitative research design and practice. As the research process and design was executed, my supervisor provided me with on-going advice as to how to maintain the integrity of the design. An example of this is when my supervisor advised me on the type of questions to ask the participants as well as how to conduct the interviews. This ensured that the interviews would elicit the appropriate responses. The analysis and interpretation of data was worked through with my supervisor through one-on-one sessions and electronic mail. Here the process and rational of my analysis and interpretation was tested by my supervisor in order to maintain the integrity of the research. I captured the rational of the analysis and interpretation as well as my own perceptions during analysis and interpretation in the Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this research. This was conducted as part of my reflexivity process during analysis and interpretation phase of the research.

Operating within the symbolic interpretivist's paradigm is a significant paradigm shift from the modernist approach I had been trained in. I therefore needed to provide
myself with a framework that will aid in my staying true to my ontological, epistemological, methodological and theoretical assumptions. Schatzman and Strauss's (1973) model provides a framework for note taking which I borrowed in my interviews and my analysis. The framework comprised of observational notes, methodological notes and theoretical notes. I also made use of personal notes which was a fourth element that Richardson (2004) later added. This note taking elements assisted me to stay true to my ontological, epistemological, methodological and theoretical assumptions.

For the interviews, I prepared an interview guideline where I documented my methodology for my own reference which included process to be followed, information to prepare participants, questions to be asked and probing questions. In the interview guideline, I created a section where I could take down notes. Here I captured two kinds of notes, the first was observational notes and the second were personal notes. According to Schatzman and Strauss’s observational notes document what happened, what was heard and what was experienced in the interview. Personal notes on the other hand are key reflections about the research at hand (Richardson, 2004).

During the interview process I kept observational notes and personal notes. I also made personal notes during the analysis of the data. Finally I used theoretical notes during my analysis so that I could reflect on my observations and analysis.

To summarise, to enhance the quality of the research I use the audit trail strategy and reflexivity strategies as my primary methods for ensure quality. The audit trail strategy requires the research methodology, process and assumptions to be clearly documented. The reflexivity strategy requires that I reflect on the research methodology, paradigm and disciplinary assumptions. These strategies were strengthened by the use of the triangulation and peer briefing strategy. For triangulation I used the interviews, observations and artefacts gathered on the site as evidence. For the peer briefing I used my research supervisor to peer review the research process and outcomes.

As previously mentioned, the quality and ethical strength of qualitative research relies on the conduct of the researcher (Schurink, 2009). This of course exposes the research to human error. The present study was no exception. I therefore describe what I regard as the most notable shortcomings; however I do this in Chapter 5.
2.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion; this section describes the research methodology followed. I describe the symbolic interpretivist paradigm as the chosen paradigm for this research and how this contributed to choosing a qualitative research methodology. I described the relationship between symbolic interpretivism, qualitative research and storytelling. Furthermore I discussed why symbolic interpretivism and qualitative research was chosen by relating it to Schein’s perspective of culture and how this diverges from the more traditional quantitative approaches.

Once clear on my philosophical stance and methodology, I described the research process. Although not a linear process, the research process involves selection of the research design, setting and participants. Furthermore, it involves gaining access to the site, understanding my role as the researcher, the data collection method and analysis technique. The site selected for the research was a Global Consulting Firm where I interviewed six Executives from the Consulting Firm. I describe the intimate relationship I have with the site and how this influenced the lens through which I analysed and interpreted the data. I collected data from the participants through the use of interviews and analysed data using thematic data analysis technique. An important component to the research process is understanding the style that the research report is written in. Four styles or ‘tales’ were identified, the scientific tale, realist tale, confessional tale and autoethnography. Furthermore, I described how the data is to be presented which was to describe common stories, archetypes and behaviours.

The final section to the Chapter is to discuss the ethical consideration and strategies to enhance the quality of research. In the ethical considerations section, I described how I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Furthermore I described how I ensured that no harm would come to the participants as well as the benefits of the research. In the strategies to enhance the quality of research I described how I used Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria for quality as the criteria for quality. I then described the strategies used for quality which include reflexivity, triangulation, peer briefing and internal audit strategies. Furthermore I used observational notes and
personal notes to guide me through the research processes to ensure that I stayed true to the research philosophical assumptions.
CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS-‘THEMES AND STORIES’

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section I provide an explanation of the recurring themes that were identified through the interviews. The themes that were identified were based on features in the data that relate to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were therefore identified if they were stories that related to organisational culture. Six interviews were conducted with Executives from the Consulting Firm. Of the six interviews, the participants were asked three questions (as described above) and to retell their anecdotes. From the interviews six common stories relating to Schein’s definition of organisation culture was identified. The six common stories are referred to here as themes. For the purposes of analysis and interpretation the plots were described which summarise the common stories told in the interviews. Furthermore, for each of the themes archetypes were created which highlighted the observable behaviours being performed by the various individuals in the story. The archetypes provide insight into the observable behaviours which are used to analyse and interpret the data in order to uncover underlying assumptions. The six themes that were identified are “Work Ethic,” “Client Centricity,” “Investing in People,” “Operating Globally,” “Innovation,” and “Revenue Focus.” For each of the themes, sub-themes were identified. Each of the themes and sub-themes are described below. The themes are described according to their plots, archetypes and how each story relates to Schein’s (2009) definition of organisational culture.

3.1 WORK ETHIC

I think we work harder than most. I think this is a big thing. We work harder to be better. We really focus on being competent, on being good at what we do. Obviously the people differentiate the Consulting Firm; that is what we are (Liezel)
The first theme that was identified is referred to "Work Ethic". Stories about “Work Ethic” describe the attitude the Consulting Firm’s employees adopt at work. All participants made reference to the hard working and self motivated nature of the employees in the Consulting Firm. The reason “Work Ethic” was identified as a theme that uncovers organisation culture is because it describes learnt behaviours about how the Consulting Firm deals with issues of internal integration. It highlights the shared assumption about the attitude that is expected from the Consulting Firm employees when confronted with challenges. Schein (2009) refers to this as the deeper assumptions about human nature.

The “Work Ethic” theme is characterised by consultants being assigned to a challenging role that either requires long hours or requires them to operate in a role that is new to them. The consultants work overtime and employ strategies to cope with their new role. The “Work Ethic” theme has two sub-themes which are “Thrown into the Deep End,” and “Dedicated Delivery.” Each of the sub-theme plots and archetypes are described in detail below as they provide more insight on the stories about “Work Ethic” theme.

3.1.1 THROWN INTO THE DEEP END

The “Thrown into the deep end” sub-theme is characterised by consultants being assigned to a role that they either have no or limited experience in. Furthermore the consultants usually do not have the necessary training in the role. The stories describe their challenges with being thrown into the deep end, how they felt about it and the strategies they employed to cope with being thrown into the deep end. Below I summarise these stories and their key characteristics.

3.1.1.1 THROWN INTO THE DEEP END PLOT

The participant’s anecdotes begin with being given an opportunity to perform a role that they either have limited experience in or are not skilled in. Although always eager to expand their knowledge, skill and experience base, the consultants do have reservations about their ability to perform the role. They become both anxious and excited about the role. After their moments of anxiety about their new role, they seem to address the challenge that they are faced with head on. The consultant takes ownership
for the work that needs to be done and begin to employ strategies that will help them cope with the role. The strategies adopted include researching and studying leading practice on the topic, going on formal in-house training, developing a systematic and structured approach to solving the problem and asking a colleague or superior to support them in their new role.

They are then positioned to the client as experts and are expected to deliver. The consultants have autonomy in the way they work and ask for assistance when needed. They work extended hours and embark on a steep learning curve in order to deliver the project on time and to quality. The story ends with them delivering the project and being rewarded with the opportunity to progress their career as an outcome of delivering in a role that is challenging.

3.1.1.2 THROWN INTO THE DEEP END ARCHETYPES

In the stories about being thrown into the deep end, there are three archetypes that are described. The protagonist is the “Learned Consultant” that is thrown into the deep end and is given the career opportunity, however is not skilled in the work. The “Learned Consultant” demonstrates behaviours of being individually accountable for the work, working long hours and engaging in strategies to learn and adapt quickly in order to deliver. The second archetype in this story is the “Advising Coach” which provides the Consultant with support. The support usually comes in the form of subject matter expertise and acts as the “Learned Consultant” advisor. The third archetype is the “Mentoring Manager” that provides the “Learned Consultant” with the career opportunity. The “Mentoring Manager” is not explicitly mentioned but the outcomes of the “Mentoring Manager” provide insight into his or her decisions. It can be inferred that the “Mentoring Manager” demonstrates behaviours of accepting challenging work where the Consulting Firm does not have the resources to complete the work. Secondly, the “Mentoring Manager” assigns a consultant to deliver the work, even though the consultant may have limited skill in the subject matter.
3.1.2 DEDICATED DELIVERY

The “Dedicated Delivery” sub-theme is characterised by consultants being assigned to a role where the timelines for delivery and the complexity of the project is very challenging. The stories describe how the consultants reacted to the challenging project environment and how they managed to deliver under these conditions. The story is closely linked to the “Thrown into the Deep End” theme. It is however differentiated on the basis that the “Thrown into the Deep End” theme focuses on the consultant being out of their depth and the “Dedicated Delivery” theme is about knowing what to do, but having challenges and challenging timelines on the project. The stories about “Thrown into the Deep End” and “Dedicated Delivery” are sometimes part of the same narrative. Below I summarise the “Dedicated Delivery” stories and their key characteristics.

3.1.2.1 DEDICATED TO DELIVERY PLOT

The participant’s anecdotes begin by being assigned to a difficult project where client demands are high. The client expectations of delivery are very high, however the complexity of the environment and the timelines make achieving the client’s expectations challenging. The result is that the consultants are required to work hard in order to deliver. Here there are two different directions the plots usually take. The first is that even though the consultants are working late, the timelines for delivery are so unrealistic that they still run the risk of not delivering on time. The client becomes agitated and begins to become increasingly difficult, creating an even more challenging environment. The consultants then bring in additional resources to assist in the delivery of work. The assistance takes the form of having both local and international resources assigned to the project. Here success is often dependent on asking for assistance early.

The second path that the story takes is that the consultants deliver early and instead of handing the work over to the client, they take the additional time to ensure that the work is of superior quality even if this means working additional hours. The two stories converge with the delivery of the project. The success of delivery is often attributed to team work, good people and employees owning the work they do.
3.1.2.2 DEDICATED TO DELIVERY ARCHETYPES

In the stories about being dedicated to delivery, there are three archetypes that are described. The protagonists are the “Learned Consultants” that are assigned to a challenging project and that are expected to deliver. The “Learned Consultants” demonstrates behaviours of having a strong work ethic that sees them constantly working overtime and taking accountability for the work that they perform. The second archetype is the “Advising Coach” which provide the “Learned Consultants” with support. The support usually comes in the form of subject matter expertise and acts as the “Learned Consultants” advisor. The final archetype is the antagonist and is called the “Backseat Driver Client.” In these stories the client’s expectation are seen as very demanding. The “Backseat Driver Client” takes an active role in the project and will sometimes override what the “Learned Consultant” advises. As the threat of non-delivery increases so the “Backseat Driver Client” becomes increasingly agitated. Although the client is the antagonist the “Learned Consultants” continue to show a dedication to delivery.

3.1.3 SUMMARY

Stories about “Work Ethic” describe the attitude the Consulting Firm’s employees adopt towards their work. The stories describe consultants being assigned to a very challenging role and showing a strong work ethic to overcome the challenges in order to deliver as expected by the client. The stories about “Work Ethic” have two sub-themes, “Thrown into the Deep End,” and “Dedicated Delivery.” The “Thrown into the Deep End” and “Dedicated Delivery” both focus on delivering under very challenging conditions. There are six key behaviours that the Consulting Firm performs that have been identified across the stories. The first behaviour is the decision to accept challenging work where the Consulting Firm does not have the resources to complete the work. The second behaviour is to assign a consultant to deliver the work, even though the consultant is not skilled in the subject matter. The third behaviour is to make the consultant individually accountable to deliver the work. The fourth behaviour observed is long hours worked by the consultant to deliver. The fifth behaviour observed is for the consultant to engage in strategies to learn and adapt quickly in order to deliver the work.
The sixth behaviour observed is to provide global support to the consultant. The behaviours are illustrated in the table below.

### Table 1: Work Ethic Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mentoring Manager | • Accepting challenging work where the Consulting Firm does not have the resources to complete the work.  
                   | • Assigning a consultant to deliver the work, even though the consultant is not skilled in the subject matter. |
| Learned Consultant| • Individually accountable for the work,  
                   | • Working long hours and overtime  
                   | • Engaging in strategies to learn and adapt quickly in order to deliver. |
| Advising Coach    | • Provide global support to the consultants.                                                      |

The “Work Ethic” theme relates to Schein's (2009) culture definition of deeper underlying assumptions about human nature as the sub-theme uncovers the shared assumptions about what is the appropriate work attitude and behaviour. Shared assumptions about appropriate work attitude and behaviour include hard-work, initiative, stewardship, resilience dedication to learn and dedication to delivery.

### 3.2 CLIENT CENTRIC

*What made us successful was a good client relationship…. (Luis).*
The second theme that was identified is referred to as “Client Centric”. Stories about the “Client Centric” theme describe the Consulting Firm as having a strong focus on its client. The narratives reveal a strong interdependency between client success and the organisations success. The stories are therefore centered on putting the client first. Five out of the six participants made reference to the emphasis the Consulting Firm places on being Client Centric. The reason “Client Centricity” was identified as a theme that uncovers the Consulting Firms organisation culture is because it relates to Schein’s (2009) external adaptation that make the Consulting Firm successful. The “Client Centricity” theme describes the shared assumption that employees of the Consulting Firm should put the client first and that this is closely linked to the success of the Consulting Firm. The stories reveal the hard-work and sacrifice the Consulting Firms employees make in order to meet client needs.

The “Client Centricity” theme has two sub-themes that describe stories related to putting the client first. These sub-themes are, “Serving the Client,” and “Partnering with the Client.” I describe the sub-theme plots and archetypes as they provide more insight into the “Client Centricity” theme.

3.2.1 SERVING THE CLIENT

The “Serving the Client” sub-theme is characterised by putting the client first and doing anything to ensure that employees deliver to the client. The stories describe how putting the client first influences the way work is delivered to the client and how client needs are primarily at the centre of their decision-making. The “Serving the client” theme although characterised by the Consulting Firm doing anything to ensure that the client is satisfied, does not always ensure a good outcome for the Consulting Firm. Below I summarise the “Serving the Client” stories and their key characteristics.

3.2.1.1 SERVING THE CLIENT PLOT

The stories begin by the client having a requirement or demand. The degree of the client’s requirements varies, with some of the needs requiring a degree of sacrifice from the consultants. The Consulting Firm manager then agrees to the clients request with little thought of the implications and the consultants are required to deliver according to the agreement. It is with pride that the manager accepts the opportunity to serve the
client. The request is often very difficult to achieve, and even though the consultants are working extensive over time delivery begins to suffer. Delivery suffers often because the level of effort or complexity is not understood.

Additional assistance is then required, and often global resources are brought in to assist. This is done at a high cost to the Consulting Firm. The stories are then concluded with the project being delivered but not always to the benefit of the Consulting Firm.

3.2.1.2 SERVING THE CLIENT ARCHETYPES

In the stories about serving the client, there are four archetypes that are described. The protagonists are the “Learned Consultants” that have to deliver on what has promised by the “Thoughtless Manager.” The “Learned Consultants” demonstrates behaviours of having to work extensive overtime and under very difficult conditions. The antagonist in this story is the “Thoughtless Manager” who agrees to the client’s needs. The “Thoughtless Manager” demonstrates behaviours of having a “yes” mentality that agrees to anything to please the client. The third archetype is the “Demanding Client” who is always in need of assistance on very short notice. The client in this story is positioned as being neutral, however being in need of the Consulting Firms help. The final archetypes are the additional resources that are brought in to support the team of consultants that need to deliver the project. Often the resources that are brought in are from the Consulting Firms global organisation and are referred to in this study as “Global Hero’s.” Global Hero’s are discussed in more detail later in the study.

3.2.2 PARTNERING WITH THE CLIENT

The “Partnering with the client” sub-theme is characterised by building strong and long relationships with the client. The stories related to “Partnering with the Client” describe what good client partnerships are and how these partnerships are developed. The stories describe how the Consulting Firm adopts the clients business as their own. Below I summarise the “Partnering with the Client” stories and their key characteristics.
3.2.2.1 PARTNERING WITH THE CLIENT PLOT

The stories begin by the client having a requirement for the Consulting Firm to deliver work that is going to improve their business. The type of work that is asked for in this partnership is usually technology work and was spoken of as company or industry changing. The partnership is characterised by open and honest communication about what is achievable. In the stories this is conveyed by the Consulting Firm establishing with the client the necessary controls and procedures to ensure that there is a clear understanding of what needs to be delivered and how it will be delivered. A clear criterion that is object is established. A feature of this story is about bringing the best people onto the project to deliver. This is the best people from both the client and from the Consulting Firm. From the point of the Consulting Firm, the best people are from both the local and global practice. Globally the Consulting Firm prides itself on its ability to mobilise people very quickly and deploy people on the project. Apart from bringing in global resources to assist on this project, there is also always support available from global subject matter experts. The support from global subject matter experts is part of what the Consulting Firm views as making the project work successful.

3.2.2.2 PARTNERING WITH THE CLIENT ARCHETYPES

In the stories about partnering with the client, there are four archetypes that are described. The protagonists are the “Trusted Friend” which are the managers that build the long term and quality relationships with the client. The “Trusted Friend” demonstrate behaviours of being open, honest, organised and experienced in their fields of expertise. Furthermore the “Trusted Friend” is bold enough to be honest with the client on the current situation and what is achievable. The “Trusted Friend” interest is not in just doing what the client says to please the client, but rather to treat the client business as his/her own. The “Trusted Friend” therefore advises the client according to how he would like to be advised if it was his/her own business. Furthermore the “Trusted Friend” spends a long time at the client building long-term client relationships. The supporting actor in this story is the “Trusting Client”. The “Trusting Client” in this story is reasonable and is seen as a partner. The “Trusting Client” is interested in bringing the best people from the client’s side onto the project. The third archetypes are the team of consultants that need to deliver the work which as referred to as the “Learned
Consultant.” The team of consultants are characterised by having a mixed team of both local and international consultants, working hard and integrating well with the client. The final archetype in this story is the global subject matter experts, referred to as the “Global Hero’s.” The “Global Hero’s” theme will be discussed in more detail later in the results section.

3.2.3 SUMMARY

The “Client Centric” theme is centered on the Consulting Firm putting the client first. There are two stories core to this theme, which as the “Serving the Client” theme and the “Partnering with the Client” theme. Although both theme’s put the client at the center of the Consulting Firms business, “Serving the Client” is about doing anything the client asks whereas “Partnering with the Client” is about building long term quality relationships and treating the clients business as the Consulting Firms own. Being client focused is directly linked to the Consulting Firms revenue, however serving the client seems to have a negative outcome for both the client and the Consulting Firm. “Partnering with the Client” seems to have more positive outcomes for both the Client and Consulting Firm. Five key behaviours were identified for the “Client Centric” theme. The first is that client needs are put first and that anything is done to please the client. The second is to be open and honest with the client. The third is to put procedures in place in order to control the relationship with the client. The fourth behaviour is to work at the client for a long time in order to build a long-term relationship. The fifth behaviour is that of the “global hero” providing guidance and advice. The behaviours can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Client Centric Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trusted Friend</td>
<td>• Being open, honest,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Working for a long-time at the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned Consultant</td>
<td>• Working long hours and overtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtless Manager</td>
<td>• ‘Client is put first and will do anything for the client.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Hero</td>
<td>• Providing advice and support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Client Centric” theme relates to Schein’s (2009) culture definition of external adaptation as the sub-theme uncovers the shared assumptions about what makes the Consulting Firm successful. It is assumed in the Consulting Firm that being “Client Centric” will lead to the Consulting Firms success. This can be to either “Serve the Client” or to “Partner with the Client.”

### 3.3 INVESTING IN PEOPLE

*That was really nice, the opportunity to grow people, young people. To see Mike as a Senior Manager, he was just a consultant when I started working with him. Liezel Young was also just a consultant and is now a Senior Manager. That was really great. And that again was a large programme. That was really great (Mike).*

The “Investing in People” theme was the most prominent theme uncovered from the data. All the participants made reference to the value the Consulting Firm places on its people and that it views its people as being the “raw material of the organisation.” This was further affirmed by participants when they were asked what they appreciate about the Consulting Firm, and responded by saying that it is the people they appreciate. The Consulting Firm’s people were referred to by some participants as being “differentiators,” “extraordinary,” “raw material,” and “trustworthy.” The stories about “Investing in People” are centred on the development of its people by providing them with career opportunities and by progressing their careers. The reason “Investing in People” was identified as a theme that uncovers the Consulting Firms organisation culture is because it relates to Schein’s (2009) deeper assumptions about human nature in terms of whether or not there is an underlying belief about whether people can be developed. Furthermore career progression relates to Schein’s internal integration issues about how status and reward are allocated.
The “Investing in People” theme has three sub-themes that describe stories related to investing in people. These sub-themes are “Career Opportunity,” “Developing People,” and “Career Progression.” I describe the sub-theme plots and archetypes in more detail below.

3.3.1 CAREER OPPORTUNITY

The “Career Opportunity” sub-theme is characterised by consultants being provided the opportunity to take on a variety of different roles or that requires the consultant to take on a role that is more senior to their current level. The stories describe what is viewed as a career opportunity and how these career opportunities are allocated and performed. Below I summarise the “Career Opportunity” stories and their key characteristics.

3.3.1.1 CAREER OPPORTUNITY PLOT

The stories about career opportunity begin with the participant’s early career stages at the Consulting Firm. Early in their careers they are given the opportunity to work across different clients and across different roles. As their careers progress and they become more senior in the organisation, their careers are characterised by working at the same client, industry or role. The nature of the role variety shifts from moving between clients to moving within clients. The length of stay at the client allows the consultant to foster a stronger relationship with the client as well as to take on more senior roles with the client. This positions the consultant to increase sales at the client as well as to develop and progress their career.

3.3.1.2 CAREER OPPORTUNITY ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Career Opportunity”, there is only one main archetype, the “High-flying Consultant.” Here the “High-Flying Consultant” demonstrates behaviours of being able to adapt, learn quickly and work hard to deliver. Furthermore, the “High-Flying Consultant” begins to focus on client relationships as they progress their careers.
3.3.2 CAREER PROGRESSION

The “Career Progression” sub-theme is characterised by consultants being fast tracked through their career by skipping career levels in the Consulting Firm. The stories describe how employees career progress through the Consulting Firm and what is considered success. The “Career Progression” sub-theme is closely linked to the “Thrown into the Deep End” sub-theme, as the outcome of delivery when thrown into the deep end is that the consultant progresses his or her career. Below I summarise the “Career Progression” stories and their key characteristics.

3.3.2.1 CAREER PROGRESSION PLOT

The stories about career progression begin with the consultant being assigned to a role that is more senior than their current level. The consultant is then required to learn quickly on the job and work hard in order to deliver. Furthermore the consultant is required to take ownership of his/her new role and work fairly independently. The consultant faces this challenge with determination and enthusiasm. Once the consultant has become comfortable in his/her role, he/she is then challenged with a new challenging role. As the consultant performs, a manager takes note of this performance and identifies the consultant as a potential candidate for “fast tracking.” The consultant is then assisted by the manager to build the necessary support network to be promoted early. The consultant takes pride in the early promotion.

3.3.2.2 CAREER PROGRESSION ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Career Progression”, there are two archetypes. The protagonist is the “High-flying Consultant” who demonstrates behaviours of being hard-working, dedicated, resilient and is a fast learner. The “High-flying Consultant” stays focused on delivering his or her job and has little in the politics of the organisation. The “Mentoring Manager” demonstrates behaviours of guiding the consultant through his/her career, advising the “High-flying Consultant” on how to progress his or her career. The “Mentoring Manager” has deep knowledge about the politics in the organisation and takes an interest in the consultant’s career. The “Mentoring Manager” becomes a mentor to the consultant.
3.3.3 DEVELOPING PEOPLE

The “Developing People” sub-theme is characterised by the Consulting Firm taking a strong interest in the personal and technical growth of its people. The stories are centered on people development from the perspective of on-the-job development and describe what is seen as development in the Consulting Firm. Furthermore the stories describe how employees are developed. Linked to the “Developing People” theme is the “Work Ethic” and “Career Opportunity” theme as it is the combination of a strong work ethic and the career opportunity that enables the consultants to develop. Below I summarise the “Develop People” stories and their key characteristics.

3.3.3.1 DEVELOPING PEOPLE PLOT

The stories about people development begin with the consultant being assigned to a challenging role that is not core to their competency set or that is more senior than their current role. They then have to work hard at learning about the role and the work that needs to be delivered. Several strategies are employed to learning, these include researching and studying the subject matter, going on formal training at the Consulting Firms school and on-the-job coaching. Coaching is the most prominent form of development in the stories. The coaching comes from both local and global subject matter experts. The subject matter experts see it as their responsibility to assist others.

From a formal training perspective, consultants are sent to a training center in America for training. A key feature about the training centre is that it is a central location where similar people meet. The outcome of the development is that the consultant delivers according to the expectations of the client.

3.3.3.2 DEVELOPING PEOPLE ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Developing People”, there are two archetypes. The protagonist is the “Learned Consultant” who demonstrates behaviours of being hard-working and a fast learning. The “Learned Consultant” is resilient under challenging condition and works hard to learn about his/her new role. The second archetype is the “Coaching Manager.” The “Coaching Manager” demonstrates behaviours of being a subject matter expert that is always willing to help a consultant in need.
3.3.4 SUMMARY

The “Investing in People” theme is centered on the Consulting Firm taking action to develop their people and invest in their people’s career. There are three stories that are core to this theme which are “Career Opportunity,” “Career Progression,” and “Developing People.” “Career Opportunity” is closely linked to “Career Progression” as the consultant progressing his or her career is an outcome of being given the “Career Opportunity.” Furthermore the “Career Opportunity” is usually a challenging role and requires development and therefore the “Career Opportunity” and “Developing People” sub-themes are closely linked. Six key behaviours were identified for this theme. The first behaviour observed is to provide employees with career opportunities through variety in their job and by providing them with a more senior role than what they currently are operating at. The second behaviour highlighted is related to how individuals progress their careers. The behaviour observed is that employees need to network internally in order to build sufficient support to obtain promotion. The third behaviour highlighted is working hard to progress career. The fourth behaviour highlighted is how people are developed. The behaviour observed is that people are primarily developed through informal on the job development such as coaching. The fifth behaviour highlighted is to focus on building strong client relationship as career progresses. The sixth behaviour highlighted is to always provide subject matter expertise and assistance.

Table 3: Investing in People Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring Manager</td>
<td>• Provide the consultant with challenging work and a more senior role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-flying Consultant</td>
<td>• Works hard to progress career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Networks internally to build sufficient support for promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Manager</td>
<td>• Change focus to building long-term relationships with the client.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Expert</td>
<td>• Subject Matter Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Always willing to help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Investing in People” theme relates to Schein’s (2009) culture definition of internal integration issues and deeper underlying assumptions about human nature. From an internal integration issue, it is a shared assumption that the consultant progressing his/her career is reward for strong performance. From a deeper underlying assumption about human nature perspective, the shared assumption is that employees can be developed and can take on roles that are not part of their competency set.

### 3.4 OPERATING GLOBALLY

…we mobilised globally, where we had a lot of global people coming here taking over the day to day operations and this led to the partial success of getting out the first release live…The support was just excellent. Especially some of the global guys are there for a reason, they can take the big picture and crystalise what the real issues are (Luis)

The fourth theme identified is referred to as “Operating Globally”. Stories about “Operating Globally” are centered on the Consulting Firms ability to leverage its global organisation in order to improve the quality and timing of delivery. The Consulting Firm leverages its global organisation by sharing information globally which include research and experience. Furthermore, the Consulting Firm demonstrates the ability to team globally and provide subject matter expertise from around the globe. The Consulting Firms ability to mobilise globally, share knowledge globally and team globally is seen as a differentiating factor to other consulting organisation and is seen as key to the Consulting Firms success. Five out of the six participants made reference to the Consulting Firms ability to operate as a global organisation. The reason “Operating
Globally” was identified as a theme is because it is congruent to Schein’s (2009) external adaption culture definition which proposes that part of an organisations culture is how the organisation views itself in relation to other organisation and what it sees as being critical to its success. It highlights the learnt experience that being able to operate globally will lead to the Consulting Firms success.

The “Operating Globally” theme has two sub-themes that describe stories related to being able to leverage a global organisation. These sub-themes are, “Global Collaboration,” and the “Global Hero.” I describe the sub-theme plots and archetypes in detail below.

3.4.1 GLOBAL COLLABORATION

The “Global Collaboration” sub-theme is centered on an individual’s or teams ability to access the Consulting Firm’s global organisation. The stories are characterised by a virtual global organisation that provides knowledge, experience and expertise to the local organisation. The stories describe why and how the “global network” and “global subject matter expertise” are accessed and why knowledge developed in one country is shared with another. Being able to collaborate globally is seen as being a differentiating factor for the Consulting Firm and is viewed as the Consulting Firm being at its best.

3.4.1.1 GLOBAL COLLABORATION PLOTS

The stories begin with an opportunity to deliver on a challenging project that will bring a strong revenue stream in for the Consulting Firm. Furthermore, the work is complex and there is often very little experience in the local Consulting Firms practice to deliver the work. When this need arises the local Consulting Firm reaches out to global in order to mobilise a team that can deliver this project. This is usually done on large scale technology projects. The project is then usually delivered by a mix team of local and international consultants. The ability to collaborate globally is seen as being critical to the success of the work the Consulting Firm does.

Another story related to collaborating globally but with a different plot, is the sharing of global information. Here the story begins with a consultant developing a product on project that is viewed as being valuable to the Consulting Firms knowledge.
The consultant is then given a platform off of which he or she can share their knowledge with the global community. The consultant shares his or her knowledge with little expectation of reward.

3.4.1.2 GLOBAL COLLABORATION ARCHETYPES

In the stories about global collaboration there were three archetypes that are described. The first archetype is the “Global Hero” that are deployed to the project. The “Global Hero” demonstrates behaviours of sharing knowledge globally and advising local employees. Typical characteristics of this archetype include having experience and knowledge in the subject matter. The second archetype is the “Aspirational Client” that wants to embark on this large scale change. The “Aspirational Client” is characterised by having high demands and requirements. The third archetype is the “Innovative Consultant” who has an idea and wants to share it with the global community. The “Innovative Consultant” is characterised by having a dedication to quality and innovation and wants to share his or her knowledge with the global organisation.

3.4.2 GLOBAL HERO

The “Global Hero” sub-theme is centered on a global subject matter expert that is called on to assist with a very challenging project. The stories describe why the “Global Hero” is needed and how the “Global Hero” comes to rescue a project delivered by the local Consulting Firm. Below I summarise the “Global Hero” stories and their key characteristics.

3.4.2.1 GLOBAL HERO PLOTS

The stories begin by the client having a challenging need that result in a challenging project. The project is difficult both from a timeline and complexity perspective and is usually a technology project. The project begins to fall behind schedule and things begin to go wrong on the project. The client begins to become displeased with the Consulting Firms performance. The Consulting Firm then reacts and takes remedial action to resolve the problem. They make contact with the Consulting Firms “global network” to identify an individual that has the expertise to deliver on the challenging project. The individual is referred to here as the “Global Hero” and is usually
a senior member of the Consulting Firm. The “Global Hero” is then deployed to the project to guide the project to success. The “Global Hero” takes a leadership role on the projects and re-focuses the project on what needs to be delivered by understanding the key issues. The “Global Hero” then provides his or her experience and guidance to the individual or team. The stories conclude with a successful outcome for the individual, team and the client, with the “Global Hero” returning home.

The “Global Hero” features in another common story, where the “Global Hero” is just required to provide subject matter input and support. The story begins with the consultant needing support on a project. An individual is identified from the “global network” who is able to support the consultant. The “Global Hero” goes over and above the call of duty to assist the consultant with little or no expectation of personal gain. The story concludes with the “Global Hero” assisting the consultant.

3.4.2.2 GLOBAL HERO ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Global Hero” there were three main archetypes that are described. The protagonist is the “Global Hero” and is characterised by a very senior individual that is willing to assist at very short notice and does so with no intention of personal gain. The “Global Hero” demonstrates behaviours of assisting others because it is expected and is the right thing to do. Furthermore the “Global Hero” takes charge and leads the project in order to save the project. The “Global Hero” is experienced, knowledgeable and skilled in a particular field of expertise. The second archetype is the “Learned Consultant” that is need of support. The “Learned Consultant” reaches out to his/her global network for support. The third archetype is the “Untrusting Manager” who sources the global hero as he does not believe that there is anyone local who can complete the work.

3.4.3 SUMMARY

The “Operating Globally” theme is centered on the Consulting Firm ability to operate as a global organisation. Two sub-themes are prevalent in this theme with the first being “Global Collaboration.” “Global Collaboration” refers to the Consulting Firms ability to team and share information globally. The second sub-theme is the “Global Hero” refers to an international subject matter expert that is brought into to assist the
local organisation to deliver on a challenging project. Four key behaviours were identified in this theme. The first behaviour observed is the sharing of knowledge with the global organisation. The second behaviour observed is to provide advice from global employees to local employees on projects with no expectation of reward. The third behaviour observed is the sourcing of global employees to deal with a troubled project. The fourth behaviour observed are global employees taking charge and lead the project.

Table 4: Operating Globally Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Hero</td>
<td>• Sharing knowledge globally and advising employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assisting others with no expectation of reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Takes leads of a project to save the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrusting Manager</td>
<td>• Sources the global hero as he does not believe that there is anyone local who can complete the work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Operating Globally” was identified as a theme as it is congruent to Schein’s (2009) external adaption culture definition which proposes that part of an organisations culture is how the organisation views itself in relation to other organisation and what it sees as being critical to its success. Here the Consulting Firm views itself as being a global organisation.

3.5 INNOVATION

It is the Consulting Firm on its best day when you let us do what we do best, when you let us think things through, when you lets us be creative. I
think the one thing that the Consulting Firm as an organisation always strike me is that there is never any problem too big. There is never anything that we cannot do. If we really wanted to, we would be putting people on the moon. So that kind of visionary thinking, when you are allowed to do that, that’s when we are at our best (Joe).

The fifth theme identified is referred to as “Innovation”. Stories about “Innovation” are centered on the Consulting Firms philosophy about the work they do. The stories describe the Consulting Firm as an innovative organisation that innovates both internally and for their client. Internal innovation is characterised by the Consulting Firms ability to adapt or reinvent themselves in order to pre-empt or shape market conditions and meet their client’s demands. The Consulting Firm organises itself internally and shapes its products to meet the needs of their clients. Innovation in client is characterised by the Consulting Firms ability to assist their clients to innovate and stay abreast of market conditions by developing new concepts, technologies and models to improve their clients performance. Both their internal and external innovation is centered on meeting their clients’ needs. “Innovation” is closely linked to the “Client Centricity” and “Operating Globally” theme as the Consulting Firms innovations are targeted at meeting their clients’ needs and most innovation are derived from the Consulting Firms ability to leverage its global organisation. All the participants made reference to innovation in their stories about the Consulting Firm. The reason “Innovation” was chosen as a theme is because it is congruent to Schein’s (2009) external adaption culture definition which proposes that part of an organisations culture is how they organise themselves internally to succeed. It highlights the learnt belief that a differentiator for the Consulting Firm is its ability to be innovative.

The “Innovation” has two sub-themes that describe stories about being innovative. These sub-themes are, “Client Innovation” and “Internal Re-invention.” I describe the sub-theme plots and archetypes in detail below.

3.5.1 CLIENT INNOVATION

The “Client Innovation” sub-theme is centered on the Consulting Firms ability to bring innovative solutions to their clients. The stories describe how the projects are a
world or country first and how they not only transform the client but also industries. Furthermore the stories describe how the Consulting Firms ability to bring innovative solutions is enhanced by their ability to leverage off of their global organisation. “Client Innovation” is therefore closely link to the “Operating Globally” theme. Below I summarise the “Client Innovation” stories and their key characteristics.

3.5.1.1 CLIENT INNOVATION PLOTS

The stories begin with an opportunity to deliver on a challenging project for the client that will transform the clients operations. The work that the client needs completed is a first, whether it be a country or world first. Due to the solution being a first, the Consulting Firm mobilises its best people from across the world in order to deliver to the client. The project team is a mix of culture and nations and is made up of several experts. Furthermore the Consulting Firm ensures that it establishes strong relationships with the client that is open and honest. The project leader then focuses on ensuring that the correct management is in place, people are up-skilled and all the processes are in place to ensure that the focus is on delivery. Although the project does have its challenges the outcome is successful delivery of an innovative solution. The success of the project is attributed to having good people on the project, good client relationships and being able to leverage the global network.

3.5.1.2 CLIENT INNOVATION ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Client Innovation” there were four primary archetypes that are described. The first archetype is the “Global Heroes” that are deployed to the project. In the stories about innovation these “Global Heroes” demonstrate behaviours of being strong managers, that build strong relationships with the client. The “Global Heroes” have the ability to see the big picture and have a sense of the real issues. Critical to the success of the project is the “Global Heros” ability to up-skill the “Local Consultants.” The second archetype is the “Aspirational Client” that wants to embark on this innovative change. In the context of these stories the “Aspirational Client” is seen as a trusted partner that the Consulting Firm works with to deliver the project. The third archetype is the “Learned Consultants” which needs support and needs to be up-skilled in the work that needs to be done. The fourth archetype is the “Sales Manager” who
sells the project work. The “Sales Manager” sources a global team and deploys the team to the local project.

3.5.2 INTERNAL RE-INVENTION

The “Internal Re-invention” sub-theme is centered on the Consulting Firms ability to constantly re-invent itself. The “Internal Re-invention” sub-theme is characterised by structural re-invention and product re-invention. Both types of re-invention are either to pre-empt market conditions or to meet the needs of the client. The “Internal Re-invention” subtheme is therefore closely linked to the “Client Centricity” theme. The stories describe how the Consulting Firm re-invents itself internally. Below I summarise the “Internal Re-invention” stories and their key characteristics.

3.5.2.1 INTERNAL RE-INVENTION PLOTS

The stories begin with a change in the market condition and in the Consulting Firms clients' needs. The Consulting Firm then begins to restructure internally. The restructuring happens at a global level and then is implemented in the local offices. The restructuring happens according to the expertise that the Consulting Firm clients need. Soon after the restructure, the Consulting Firm begins to adapt its products and sales according to their clients' needs. The restructuring happens with speed and is successful and is driven by strong leadership.

3.5.2.2 INTERNAL RE-INVENTION ARCHETYPES

In the stories about “Internal Re-invention” there is only one archetype mentioned, which is the Consulting Firms leadership team referred to as the “Fearless Leader”. In the stories the “Fearless Leader” is seen as innovative, adaptive and is a leader of change. Furthermore the success of the re-invention is often attributed to the speed at which the leadership team manages the change.

3.5.3 SUMMARY

The “Innovation” theme is centered on the Consulting Firm constant drive to innovate. The stories uncover two types of innovation, the first is to assist the client to innovate referred to as “Client Innovation” and the second is the Consulting Firms re-
inventing itself which is referred to as “Internal Re-invention.” Both sub-themes focus on innovation to meet the clients need and both sub-themes refer to leveraging the Consulting Firms global organisation to innovate. The “Innovation” theme is therefore linked to the “Client Centric” theme and “Operating Globally” theme. Six key behaviours were observed in the story. The first behaviour observed is the decision to sell a technology solution. The second behaviour observed is to source and deploy a global team. The third behaviour observed was for the “Global Hero” to take charge and lead the project. The fourth behaviour observed is to build long-term relationships with the client. The fifth behaviour observed is to make the decision to change the Consulting Firms organisation and products to meet the needs of the client. The sixth behaviour identified is the consultant being coached in order to deliver.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Hero</td>
<td>• Takes charge and takes the lead&lt;br&gt;• Build strong relationships with the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned Consultant</td>
<td>• Gets up-skilled and coached in order to deliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>• Sells difficult technology work&lt;br&gt;• Sources the global team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearless leader</td>
<td>• Initiates internal change and is innovative and adaptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to Schein’s (2009) culture definition, “Innovation” is congruent to external adaptation as it highlights the shared assumptions about how the Consulting Firm needs to organise itself in order to succeed.


3.6 REVENUE FOCUS

We have always recovered, as soon as you focus on sales and building the business (Sibisiso).

The sixth theme identified is referred to as “Revenue Focus”. “Revenue Focus” refers to the Consulting Firms focus on generating revenue and growing the business. The “Revenue Focus” theme is closely linked to the “Client Centricity” theme. The stories describe how a successful outcome for the client translates to a positive outcome for the Consulting Firms revenue. Furthermore the stories describe how this way of thinking impacts decision-making. Two sub-theme highlights this point, the first being “Sales Driven” which is centered on how the Consulting Firm rewards. The second sub-theme is “Profits versus People" which refers to the trade-offs the Consulting Firm needs to make between its people and profits. All the participants made reference to the Consulting Firms focus on revenue and growth in sales.

“Revenue Focus” was chosen as theme as it is congruent to Schein’s (2009) internal integration issues about what is rewarded. Furthermore it highlights the belief that to survive the external environment that the Consulting Firm needs to be focusing on generating sales and revenue. To highlight these themes I describe the sub-theme plots and archetypes in detail below.

3.6.1 PROFITS VERSUS PEOPLE

The “Profits versus People” sub-theme is centered on the tension the Consulting Firm has between doing what is right for its people against what is right for profits. The stories about “Profits versus People” describe when and how this tension is performed and what the outcome is. Below I summarise the “Profit versus People” stories and their key characteristics.

3.6.1.1 PROFIT VERSUS PEOPLE PLOTS

The stories involve the client having a requirement that needs to be fulfilled by the Consulting Firm. The Senior Executive struggles to find a consultant who can perform
the job. The Consulting Firm is faced with the reality that if they are unable to staff the project, the Consulting Firm runs the risk of losing the job. The Senior Executive eventually assigns a consultant to the project even though the work is not aligned the consultant’s career aspiration or the consultants’ skills set. The consultant finds himself or herself in a position where they do the role even though they are unhappy in the role. The consultant seeks the support of a global colleague in order to advise them on-the-job. The consultant is forced to stay in their role, sometimes at the clients request. The outcome of the story is that the consultant is unhappy but the client is satisfied with delivery. The consultant contemplates leaving the organisation but does not.

3.6.1.2 PROFIT VERSUS PEOPLE ARCHETYPES

In stories about “Sales Driven” theme’s there are three archetypes. The protagonist in this story is the “Helpless Consultant”. The “Helpless Consultant” is unhappy with work but is still dedicated to delivery and to satisfying the client. The “Helpless Consultant” is in threat of leaving the Consulting Firm as a result of being unhappy in their role. The antagonist in this story is the “Scrooge Executive” which assigns the “Helpless Consultant” to the role. The “Scrooge Executive” behaviour is to choose the sale and client satisfaction over the consultants career aspirations. The final archetype is the “Needy Client,” which is characterised by needing urgent assistance with project work.

3.6.2 SALES DRIVEN

The “Sales Driven” sub-theme is centered on driving sales at the Consulting Firms clients. The “Sales Driven” sub-theme is characterised by the Consulting Firm being very conscious about maximizing profits. Sales are also the focus for rewards in the Consulting Firm as highlighted in the participants stories. In the below plots and archetypes I explore this.

3.6.2.1 SALES DRIVEN PLOTS

The stories about being sales driven is characterised by the importance the Consulting Firm places on sales. The stories focus on the outcome of large scale transformation projects that were a success. They describe these projects in detail and
that one of the successful outcomes of these projects is that they generated significant revenue for the Consulting Firm. The generation of revenue is seen as a key measure of success. Alternatively, when the Consulting Firm is going through a difficult the reaction is to re-focus on driving sales in existing clients.

3.6.2.2 SALES DRIVEN ARCHETYPES

In stories about “Sales Driven” theme’s there is one primary archetype which is the “Sales Executive.” The “Sales Executive” is working at the client and has long-term relationships with the client. The “Sales Executive” primary focus is on selling work and generating revenue for the Consulting Firm.

3.6.3 SUMMARY

The “Revenue Focus” theme is centered on the Consulting Firm constant drive to maximize revenue. There are two sub-themes related to “Revenue Focus,” these include “People versus Profit” and “Sales Driven.” In both sub-theme’s revenue is put first. The “Revenue Focus” theme is closely linked to the “Client Centricity” theme as client satisfaction is directly linked to revenue growth and this is the prominent metric mentioned in the stories. Three key behaviours were observed in this theme. The first behaviour observed is characterised by choosing a sale over the employee’s career aspiration. The second behaviour identified the effort to drive sales. The third key behaviour is to work for a long time at the client in order to build a long-term relationship.

**Table 6: Revenue Focus Behaviours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales Executive</td>
<td>• Choose sale and client satisfaction over employee satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Works at the client for a long period and builds long-term client relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regards to Schein’s (2009) culture definition “Revenue Focus” aligns to the internal integration issues as the stories highlights what is rewarded in the Consulting Firm.

3.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND THEMES

The results section aimed to identify common stories that highlight common behaviours that when analysed provide insight into deeper underlying assumptions. The stories act as artefacts that provide insight into the observable behaviours in the Consulting Firm. Common stories were collated and themed based on the six interviews conducted. From the six interviews six themes were identified that relate to the organisational culture with Schein’s definition of organisational culture being the foundation for the identification of culture themes. The six themes that were identified are “Work Ethic,” “Client Centricity,” “Investing in People,” ”Operating Globally,” “Innovation,” and “Revenue Focus.”

The first theme identified, “Work Ethic,” refers to stories that provide insight into the shared assumptions about the expected attitude towards work. The stories are characterised by hard-work, resilience, and dedication to quality and delivery. The second theme identified, “Client Centricity,” refers to stories that provide insight in the shared assumption about how the Consulting Firm treats the client. The stories are characterised by putting the client first. Similar to the third theme identified, “Revenue Focus,” refers to stories about the assumptions that drive decision making in the Consulting Firm. Key characteristics of “Revenue Focus” is the impact rewarding for revenue has on decision making. The fourth theme identified, “Operating Globally,” refers to the shared assumptions about what makes the organisation successful. Characteristics of this theme include the sharing of knowledge globally and the leveraging of the experience and expertise in the global organisation. The fifth theme identified, “Innovation,” refers to the shared assumptions about the type of work is done. Key characteristics of these stories is being able to help client innovate and being able
to innovate internally. The sixth theme identified, “Investing in People,” refer to the assumptions about how the Consulting Firm develops its people. Key characteristics of these stories are to provide employees with the opportunity to develop on the job and to progress their careers quickly. All the themes are closely linked and show an interdependency.

Apart from the six themes that were identified based on the stories told, sixteen archetypes were identified in the stories. The first archetype identified is the “Learned Consultant.” The “Learned Consultant” is placed in challenging roles that they have limited experience and knowledge of and is positioned to clients as being an expert. The “Learned Consultant” demonstrates bravery, resilience, ownership, fast learning and dedication. The second archetype identified is the “High-flying Consultant” which is an archetype that is characterised by progressing through his or her career with speed. The third archetype is the “Innovative Consultant.” The “Innovative Consultant” is characterised by developing an idea. The idea is of high quality and is therefore shared with the global organisation. The fourth archetype is the “Helpless Consultant” which is characterised by an employee who is assigned to a role that they are unhappy with. Although unhappy the “Helpless Consultant” is still dedicated to delivery and to satisfy the client. The fifth archetype is the “Global Hero” which is characterised by an international consultant that is deployed to a local project in order to rescue the project. The “Global Hero” is experienced and knowledgeable in a particular subject matter. The sixth archetype identified is the ‘Advising Coach” which is characterised by providing the “Helpless Consultant” with support in the form of subject matter expertise. The seventh archetype identified is the “Mentoring Manager.” The “Mentoring Manager” is characterised by guiding employees through their career. The eighth archetype is the “Coaching Manager” which is a local subject matter expert that provides consultants with advice. The ninth archetype is the “Thoughtless Manager.” The “Thoughtless Manager” is a manager that has “yes” mentality and agrees to all requests from the client. The tenth archetype identified is the “Scrooge Executive” which wants to sell work to clients, sometimes at the cost of the employees. The eleventh archetype identified is the “Fearless Leader” which drives organisational change in the Consulting Firm with speed. The twelfth archetype identified is the “Trusted Friend” who builds long
term and quality relationships with the client. The “Trusted Friend” is open and honest with the client and treats the clients business as his or her own. The thirteenth archetype identified is the “Backseat Driver Client” that takes an active role in projects that the Consulting Firm delivers. The “Backseat Driver Client” sometimes overrides the consultants and tries to take control over the project. The fourteenth archetype is the “Demanding Client” who has project demands that he expects the Consulting Firm to deliver on. The fifteenth archetype identified is the “Trusting Client” which trusts the Consulting Firm to bring the right solution and deliver the solution. The last archetype identified is the “Aspirational Client” which has big aspirations for their own business and who asked the Consulting Firm partner with them to achieve their aspirations.

The themes and archetypes identified provide insight into the behaviours of the Consulting Firm, and when analysed, the shared underlying assumptions of the Consulting Firm. The shared assumptions are highlighted and explored in the analysis, sense-making and interpretation section.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS, SENSE-MAKING AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The results presented the themes that are intended to provide insights into the Consulting Firms common behaviours. In this section, I aim to explore whether storytelling can uncover culture by analysing and interpreting the common stories that were identified as a theme. The analysis of the results aims to uncover deeper underlying assumptions in the Consulting Firm by analysing the motives that drive behaviour. Scheins (2009) definition of organisation culture was used as the foundation for this study. It is therefore Scheins perspective on how to uncover deeper underlying assumptions that will be used in this analysis. Schein suggest that to uncover deeper underlying assumptions one must examine culture at an abstract level. He argues that to do this one must investigate where artefacts and values do not align and ask deeper questions about what is driving the behaviour that is being observed. It is assumed that if it is not the espoused values or certain artefacts, such as performance measures, that is driving the behaviour then it is a deep shared belief that is taken for granted. Schein states that espoused values in fact can reflect areas where the organisation is particular ineffective. Furthermore, culture can be observed at three levels which are the artefact level, espoused value level and shared underlying assumptions level.

Considering the above, I aim to understand how the Consulting Firms organisational culture is expressed at each of the levels. Furthermore I aim to explore how all three levels interact with each other in order to understand the motives behind the manifested behaviours described in the stories. To achieve this, I first explore the values that the stories uncover and demonstrate how these values align to the espoused values of the Consulting Firm. I then describe the deeper underlying assumptions of the Consulting Firm. I do this by comparing the observed behaviours described in the stories to the Consulting Firms espoused values and performance metrics and where there is no alignment between any of these artefacts, make inferences about the deeper underlying assumptions that are acting as motives for the
observed behaviours. I use the stories as artefacts, the Consulting Firms espoused values and the uncovered deeper underlying assumptions to build a model that illustrate how all three levels interact with each other.

4.1 DISCOVER THE CONSULTING FIRMS VALUE

The stories uncovered several values of the Consulting Firm that aligned to the Consulting Firms espoused values. These values were derived from the common stories that describe behaviours that led to success. According to Schein (2009, 1985) culture is a residue of success and these successes can become the organisation values as defined by its founding members. The values uncovered from the stories were compared to that of the Consulting Firms espoused values. The uncovered values were found to match the Consulting Firms espoused values thereby demonstrating that the Consulting Firm has managed to operationalise its espoused values.

The Consulting Firm has defined six values with each value having behavioural descriptions. I have summarised the values below, but have changed their names in order to maintain the Consulting Firm anonymity. The first value defined is that of delivering value to client which I will call here “Client Focus.” This value is described as helping clients to transform the business, build long-term relationships with the client, delivering quality and innovation and acting in the best interest of the client. The second value defined is that of working as an integrated global organisation which I refer to here as “Global Focus.” Global Focus describes behaviours of collaborating globally, building global relationship, sharing knowledge globally and matching the right person to the right role across boundaries. The third value defined is that of treating employees with respect and is referred to here as “People Focus.” This value is described as valuing diversity, being inclusive, respecting individuals, recognising performance and trusting individuals. The fourth value defined is that of acquiring and developing the best people which is referred to here as “Competent People.” This value describes investing in people to grow their careers, developing specialised skill and challenging people. The fifth value defined is that of operating as an ethical organisation which is referred to here as “Ethical Focus.” This value describes honesty, building trusting relationships with clients and delivering on promises. The final value that the Consulting Firm defined is
that of everyone behaving as if the Consulting Firm was their own business and is referred to here as “Ownership Focus.” This value describes behaviours of investing in assets, helping everyone to understand how they contribute to the organisations success, adopting an entrepreneurial attitude and building the brand of the Consulting Firm.

According to the Consulting Firms leadership, the organisation lives these values and this is confirmed by my findings from the stories. Using Schein’s (2009) definition of how values are defined, six values of the Consulting Firm were uncovered from the stories and were uncovered based on the shared experience that led to the Consulting Firms success. The six values are “Partnering with the Client,” “Teaming and Sharing Knowledge Globally,” “Best People,” “Developing People,” “Innovation” and “Organising internal to meet client needs.” The six values that were uncovered align to only three espoused values of the Consulting Firm. These espoused values are “Client Focus,” “Global Focus” and “Competent People.” The remaining two espoused values of the Consulting Firm “Ethic Focus” and “Ownership Focus” were not reflected in the uncovered values. I discuss below in more detail how the six values relate to the three espoused values.

The first value identified, “Partnering with the Client,” is defined as the value the Consulting Firm places on building long-term relationships with the client. It is characterised by being open and honest with the client and doing what is in the best interest of the client. Furthermore, it is believed that being on a long-term project with the client fosters stronger relationships as the consultants become entrenched in the issues that the client is facing. The “Partnering with the Client” value uncovered is congruent with the Consulting Firms espoused value “Client Focus.” Both values place importance on being client centric and serving the client. The second value identified, “Teaming and Sharing Knowledge Globally,” is defined as the Consulting Firm valuing its ability to team globally. Here two primary characteristics are highlighted. The first is that sharing knowledge globally and providing global insights is a key differentiator for the organisation. The second characteristic is to team globally, whereby the Consulting Firm views being able to leverage a global team is key to its success. The “Teaming and Sharing Knowledge Globally” value uncovered is congruent with the Consulting
Firms espoused value “Global Focus.” Both values focus on how operating globally differentiates the Consulting Firm. The third value identified “Best People” is defined as the Consulting Firm belief that it hires the most competent people. The stories reveal that the Consulting Firm believes that its employees are fast learners prompting them to assign its employees to challenging roles. The “Best People” value uncovered from the story is congruent with the “Competent People” espoused value. Both values share characteristics of believing that the Consulting Firm has talented employees and that its employees must be challenged. The fourth value identified, “Developing People,” is defined by the importance the Consulting Firm places on the development of its people. The stories reveal that the Consulting Firm views coaching and providing challenging roles as an effective means to develop its people. The employee’s development is seen as critical to quality delivery. The “Developing People” value uncovered is also congruent with the “Competent People” espoused value. The values both place emphasis on the importance of developing employees through coaching and providing challenging roles. The fifth value identified, “Innovation,” is defined as the Consulting Firms proposition to bring innovation to its clients. The stories reveal that that Consulting Firm views itself as an organisation that transforms clients and helps them become high performing organisation. This is congruent to the Consulting Firms espoused value “Client Focus.” The “Client Focus” espoused value states that it values bringing innovation to clients. The final value identified “Organising internally to meet client needs” is defined as the Consulting Firms belief that in order to stay relevant it needs to organise itself according to the needs of the client. The Consulting Firm aims to pre-empt client needs and structure itself to meet the clients needs. This is congruent with the Consulting Firms value of valuing innovation and anticipating client needs which is affirmed in the “Client Focus” espoused value.

Table 7: Uncovered Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Espoused Value</th>
<th>Uncovered Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client Focus</td>
<td>Partnering with the client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
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<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising internally to meet client needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Focus</td>
<td>Teaming and Sharing Knowledge Globally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent People</td>
<td>Best People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical focus</td>
<td>No value were uncovered that linked to Ethical Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership Focus</td>
<td>No value were uncovered that linked to Ownership Focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarise, the stories reveal behaviours that the Consulting Firm rewards and that has led to the success of the organisation. From these behaviours organisational values are uncovered. These organisational values appear to be strongly aligned to the espoused values of the Consulting Firm. It can therefore be inferred that the Consulting Firm has managed to operationalise its values and this is reflected in the behaviour of its people. Although storytelling has managed to uncover the espoused values of the Consulting Firm, the analysis needs to go deeper to uncover the taken for granted underlying assumptions that drive behaviour in the Consulting Firm.

### 4.2 UNCOVERING DEEPER UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Deeper underlying assumptions are difficult to decipher through only observing artefacts and values (Schein, 2009). According to Schein, deeper underlying assumptions are uncovered when artefacts and values do not align. Stories act as symbolic artefacts and therefore, I compared the stories to the Consulting Firms espoused values to understand what the deeper underlying assumptions are that drive the Consulting Firms behaviour. When highlighting the deep underlying assumptions of an organisation, the pattern of how they fit together needs to be explored (Schein).
Exploring the pattern of underlying assumptions reveal the unconscious cognitive models of the organisation which can be understood through stories (McLellan, 2006). The analysis revealed eleven underlying assumptions that reside within the Consulting Firm. It appears that at the core of the Consulting Firms culture are six underlying assumptions that seem to drive decision-making in the organisation. Operating with the core underlying assumptions are five secondary underlying assumptions which are assumed to support the core assumptions. It does appear that the core underlying assumptions cannot be subverted by secondary underlying assumptions when actions or decisions need to be made.

4.3 CORE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Core underlying assumptions are assumptions where most decision and actions seem to stem from. Core underlying assumptions indentified include “Sales Orientation,” “Client First,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” “Innovation,” “Dominance” and “Individualism.” Based on the stories, these underlying assumptions seem to be deeply entrenched in the American origins of the Consulting Firm, which as an insider, I have deep knowledge of. According to Schein (2009) and Smircich (1983) culture is developed through the founding members and is deeply rooted in the national origins of the organisation. National origins, which in the Consulting Firms case are American origins, were therefore a significant consideration for analysis. The corporate and capitalist values that the American head office is rooted in have had a significant influence on the values and practices of the South African satellite office. These are explored as they relate to the stories and the espoused values.

4.3.1 SALES ORIENTATION

The underlying assumption “Sales Orientation” is characterised by the Consulting Firm having a strong focus on sales. Here the assumption is that decision-making and behaviours need to align to the maximizing of revenue and profits for the Consulting Firm. This is one of the most prominent underlying assumptions as it features in most stories. It appears to be the motive for decision-making, is a criterion of success and is the focus in difficult times. As Sibisiso puts it, “We have always recovered, as soon as
you focus on sales and building the business. It seems to happen very easy, but we keep on forgetting the raw material that we need to build this business.”

Essentially, “Sales Orientation” for the Consulting Firm act as the basis for the Consulting Firms strategy and is a measurement of success or failure. With such a significant focus on sales in the organisation, nothing is however mentioned in the espoused values about driving sales. This disconnect is where the inference of this underlying assumption derives from. The stories highlight the Consulting Firms employees focus on sales and this is further reinforced by the performance metrics of Senior Executives that focuses on sales. It is however not an espoused value. Mike best illustrates this by saying, “they are measure on, sales, revenue and Cl. People developer is just not a priority for them. And so we are not measuring on people’s leadership ability.”

This disconnect between the symbolic artefacts, stories and performance measures, and the espoused values reveal the deep underlying assumption that the Consulting Firm is a “Sales Orientated” organisation. This underlying assumption drives decision-making and is seen as key to the organisations success. This underlying assumption is congruent with Schein’s (2009, 1986) external adaptation definition of culture which suggests that culture is impart a function of the organisation belief in how it should respond or influence its external environment. Furthermore Schein also suggests that organisations have deep underlying assumptions about its strategy and how it deals with problems. Denison and Mishra (1995) concurs with this in their theoretical model of culture traits where a key dimension of the model is on the organisations mission. Here mission is defined as the degree to which the organisation is direction and externally focused. The focus on sales as a measure for success or response to adversity reflects Schein’s and Denison and Mishra’s culture constructs. It also reflects the Consulting Firms national roots in America’s capitalist society where the making of money is a key characteristic of their culture. It seems as though its American capitalist origins still have an influence on the South African organisation.
4.3.2 CLIENT FIRST

The second core underlying assumption identified is “Client First.” This underlying assumption is characterised by being client centric and doing anything that the client asks. The assumption is that if a client has a request, employees are expected to meet that request, no matter the time of day or personal expense. Mike best illustrates this when he says, “Till today, if a client phones me up, and says Mike I need this thing to be done, I will do it. Because for me, the client is so important…”

“Client First” is seen as key to furthering sales with the client and is therefore also, along with “Sales Orientation”, seen as key to the Consulting Firms success. This focus on the client is highlighted in the Consulting Firms espoused value “Client Focus.” The espoused value, however, does not reference that the client must be put first. The “Client Focus” espoused value focuses on delivering value to the client and not serving the client. The stories however describe behaviours of doing anything for the client. This behaviour is therefore not congruent to the intentions of the “Client Focus” espoused value. Furthermore, the behaviours where individual needs are put second to clients needs contradict the “People Focus” espoused value which focuses on respecting employees and their needs. It is on this basis that it is inferred that the underlying motive driving the behaviour to put client requests first, is the assumption that putting the client first will lead to sales and hence organisational and individual success.

Similar to the “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption, the “Client First” underlying assumption aligns to Schein’s (2009, 1986) external adaptation definition. Schein suggest that organisations have underlying assumption about the way in which they need adapt in order to survive in their context. For the Consulting Firm, adapting and responding to client needs is seen as key to their success and survival. Similarly, Clarke and Mount (2005) found that a key component of an organisation interaction with its external environment is its service orientation culture.

4.3.3 DOMINANCE

The third underlying assumption identified is referred to here as “Dominance.” This underlying assumption is characterised by the Consulting Firms belief that it can achieve anything it sets out to do. It therefore show’s dominant type of behaviours such
as embarking on highly challenging and innovative initiatives which are either a first or is client and industry changing. In the words of Joe, “There is never anything that we cannot do. If we really wanted to we would be putting people on the moon. So that kind of visionary thinking, when you are allowed to do that, that’s when we are at our best.”

This dominant belief that the Consulting Firm holds about itself and its people is not mentioned in any of the espoused values. It however does demonstrate this self-belief in its ambitious initiatives that it embarks on, its ability to change rapidly internally and in its employee’s adaptability when they are faced with challenging or unfamiliar situations. These behaviours seem to be consistent whether it is successful or unsuccessful and are not espoused or measured by the Consulting Firm. It is therefore inferred that the dominant type of decision making and behaviours are shared and taken for granted and is therefore an underlying assumptions.

This dominant approach and self-belief may stem from the Consulting Firms founding roots in America, which follows dominant capitalist culture. A study conducted by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv and Sanders (1990) found that the founders values have an influence over organisational culture. Schein (2009) shares the same view, suggesting that the values of the founders, if successful, become the values of the organisation. The Consulting Firms American head office capitalist and dominant values have had an influence on what the South African satellite office values. These capitalist and dominant roots may explain why the organisation has managed to grow rapidly.

This underlying assumption is congruent with Scheins (2009) culture definition of deeper underlying assumptions about relationships to the environment which suggests that organisation culture encompasses how the organisations view itself in relation to its environment. In the case of the Consulting Firm, it views itself as dominant. Similar to this finding, Hofstede et al. (1990) found that organisational culture can reflect how dominant, big or small, an organisation views itself being. Hofstede et al. refer to this as power distance and it is inferred that the Consulting Firm has a dominant power distance.
1.2.1.1 INNOVATION

The fourth underlying assumption that is viewed as being core to the Consulting Firms culture is “Innovation.” “Innovation” in this context is defined here as assumptions about how to transform clients. The stories and espoused values often make reference to the Consulting Firm being innovative, valuing innovation and bringing innovation to clients. Upon closer inspection, innovation is assumed to be brought about through technology and large scale change. Furthermore, this was seen by the participants as delivering significant value for the client and for the Consulting Firm. It is also believed that these types of projects are better for employee development and their careers. As Luis states, “If I look back, one of the biggest moments was the go-live of one of the larger programmes I had been working on. Which was getting an electronic trading system for the German cash market. That was just amazing, it was something that changed the industry. It was really stepped changed, because you took a market from floor trading to electronic based supported. To a fully electronic, the change that it induced was breath taking and the way we did it was breath taking.”

Innovation is an espoused value for the Consulting Firm and is contained in the “Client Focus” espoused value definition which states that the Consulting Firm must aim to bring innovation to its clients. What defines innovation is never mentioned. Furthermore, innovation is also a performance metric, but is not defined as to what innovation is. The answer lies in the shared experiences of the interviewees whose stories reveal that innovation is understood to be large scale transformation using technology. This is seen as a key differentiator for the Consulting Firm and is seen as leading to the organisations success. It is the observed behaviours and decision on innovation that is not stated in the espoused values that gives rise to the inferences about this underlying assumption. Furthermore, it is seen as leading to success, and as Schein (2009) states, culture is a residue of success.

The underlying assumption “Innovation” is congruent with Schein’s (2009) external adaption culture definition of how an organisation differentiates itself from its competitors. In the Consulting Firms case, technology that brings about transformational change is viewed as innovation and this is seen as a differentiator for the organisation. This is reflected in the type of work that is sold, the type of work that is seen as being a
significant revenue stream and the type of work that was referenced in most of the stories. Furthermore McLellan (2006) found in a culture study conducted on Dell, a technology company, that innovation is a key characteristic of their culture. It appears that innovation seems to be a key survival culture characteristic of technology companies.

4.3.4 ADAPTATION AND NIMBLENESS

The fifth underlying assumption that is viewed as being core to the Consulting Firms culture is “Adaptation and Nimbleness.” “Adaptation and Nimbleness” is defined as the Consulting Firm’s assumptions about its ability to change. Here the stories make reference to the Consulting Firms ability to change rapidly by responding or pre-empting environmental conditions. As Mike puts it, “I think we respond very well. We are a very agile organisation. It is reflected in our operating model, we are constantly changing.”

This underlying assumption was inferred as no espoused value or performance metric is acting as a motive for the organisation to manifest behaviours of adaptation and nimbleness. The “Client Focus” value does espouse changing to the client’s needs but not at the individual and organisational level that the stories describe. “Adaptation and nimbleness” aligns to Schein (2009) external adaption and Denison and Mishra’s (1995) adaptability culture constructs which suggests that the organisations culture will develop as it learns to cope with issues of adaptability.

4.3.5 INDIVIDUALISM

The final core underlying assumption that has been identified is “Individualistic” assumptions. This assumption is characterised by autonomy, competitiveness, and individualistic thinking. Here employees are held individually accountable for delivery and are measured individually. Furthermore they are expected to work with autonomy and to manage their own career. As Liezel puts it, “And again I was thrown right in the deep end, figure it out, not much guidance, just go forth and do. And then I was lucky enough to be sort of identified as a candidate to fast tracked.”

The Consulting Firms espoused values support both teaming and individual thinking. The stories however demonstrate “individualism “underlying assumptions. Although a lot of the work requires teaming, it is not teams that are held accountable but
rather individuals. This is further backed by the fact that the reward system promotes individualistic thinking as reward is ranked amongst colleagues. This leads to the conclusion that it is the individualistic thinking that matters rather than teaming. Although teaming does occur, it is still individuals that are held accountable for different parts of the project. This individualistic thinking may derive from the Consulting Firms American origins that have a highly individualistic culture. It is also congruent with Schein’s (2009) culture definition about deeper assumptions about human relations and Hofstede et al (1990) culture dimensions which argue that organisations can have groupist or individualist assumptions. The Consulting Firms seems to have individualists assumptions.

In summary, six of the eleven underlying assumptions that were uncovered were found to be core to the Consulting Firm. They were found to be core in that they are the primary motive for decision making and behaviour in the organisation. The six core underlying assumptions that were uncovered are “Sales Orientation,” “Client First,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” “Innovation,” “Dominance” and “Individualism.” These six core underlying assumptions were found to align closely Schein’s (2009) external adaptation culture definitions as well as his definitions of underlying assumptions. In the following section I explore the remaining five underlying assumptions, defined as the secondary underlying assumptions.

### 4.4 SECONDARY UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Secondary underlying assumptions are assumptions that are seen as enablers of the core underlying assumptions. They influence decision-making and behaviours, but it appears that the Consulting Firm will default to the core underlying assumptions if they threaten the core underlying assumptions. The secondary underlying assumptions indentified are “Work Centric,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Global versus Local Skills,” and “Technology Consulting Identity.” The secondary underlying assumptions are also entrenched in the national culture of the founding Consulting Firm and reflect the successes of the Consulting Firm. These are explored as they relate to the stories and the espoused values.
4.4.1 WORK CENTRIC

The first secondary underlying assumption identified is "Work Centric." This assumption is characterised by believing that employees will put their careers and delivery first. Here it is assumed that employees will do anything to deliver, even at the expense of their own personal time. A key aspect to this underlying assumption is the prioritisation of doing work for the Consulting Firm over personal time. Liezel best articulates this underlying assumption by saying, “I think we work harder than most. I think this is a big thing. We work harder to be better. We really focus on being competent, on being good at what we do. Obviously the people differentiates the Consulting Firm, that is what we are.”

The manifestations of this underlying assumption can be observed in the stories about “Work Ethic” and “Client Centric.” This assumption is however not highlighted in the Consulting Firms espoused values. Furthermore the underlying assumption contradicts the key characteristic of the “People Focus” espoused value which states that the Consulting Firm must respect individuals. The manifestation of the “Work Centric” underlying assumption does not always align to respecting individuals, especially individuals personal time. It is on this basis that the “Work Centric” underlying was inferred as there were motives other than the espoused values that were driving the “Work Ethic” behaviours identified in the stories. It appears that there is a self-motivation and hard working underlying assumption that drive employees to work hard. This underlying assumption is congruent with Schein’s (2009) deeper underlying assumptions about human nature which suggests that individuals will have assumptions about how they should work. Furthermore, he suggests that management will have assumptions about how self-motivated employees are. The stories about “Work Ethic” reveal underlying assumptions that individuals in the Consulting Firm are self-motivated and need little to be driven to work hard. This also aligns to Bitici, Mendibil, Nudurupati, Garengo and Turner (2006) “achievement culture” which they uncovered in their research on culture and performance management. Their “achievement culture” suggests that work is performed out of the satisfaction in excellence and personal commitment. Similarly, Hofstede et al. (1990) discovered work centrality as a key cultural characteristic in their study of culture and organisational effectiveness.
Interestingly, Bitici et al. (2006) found that “achievement culture” are also characterised by a consultative and coaching approach to management. This aligns to the Consulting Firms underlying assumption “Global versus Local Skills,” whereby the manifestations of this underlying assumption is coaching and support from global experts. This is discussed in more detail under the “Global versus Local Skills” underlying assumption.

4.4.2 ROLE VARIETY

Closely linked to the “Work Centric” shared underlying assumption, is the underlying assumption called “Role Variety.” Here it is believed a consultant can fulfill any project role as they will work hard to learn about the job and they will have the necessary support to deliver. The underlying assumption is manifested by assigning consultant to roles that is not core to their competency set and that is highly challenging. As Joe states, “The variety that the Consulting Firm gets involved in, is a lot more than any other consulting firms…”

Although the espoused value “Competent People” do make mention about challenging people, it does not explain why decisions are made to allocate employees to roles that are not part of their competency. It is based on this that it is inferred that there is a basic shared assumption that exists that consultants can learn any role despite its specialized skill. This shared underlying assumption is congruent with Schein’s (2009) deeper assumptions about human nature. Here it relates to Schein’s human nature underlying assumption in terms of the shared assumptions that organisations have about whether or not employees can be developed. The “Role Variety” shared underlying assumption assumes individuals can be developed, especially on the job, and can therefore perform any job. Furthermore this underlying assumption is opposite to Bitici et al. (2006) role culture, which focuses on expertise and work performance based on contractual obligation. Here Bitici et al. focuses on the utilisation of expert employees instead of developing employees to perform work. The Consulting Firms culture seems to be opposite to this, with the shared underlying assumption that employees can be given job variety as they will develop and grow in the job.
4.4.3 OPINION BASED REWARD

The third secondary shared underlying assumption is “Opinion Based Reward.” This shared underlying assumption highlights some of the less obvious boundaries that exist in the organisation as well as how reward and status are allocated. It is inferred that performance and career decisions are made based on the employees network and support within the organisation. As Liezel states, “Even that whole year that I was unassigned, I got promoted to manager early, and it was a consequence of having followed Mike’s plan, making sure that all the right people that needed to support my promotion, were exposed to me, and working on those areas that he had identified and working on those. This was a little bit eye opening for me, because I was a little naïve. I used to think that if you put your head down you would get rewarded. And that sort of changed things, because it doesn’t work like that.”

The behaviours highlighted in the stories reveal that these decisions are often based on a coaching relationship and a network of support. This however contradicts the espoused value of “People Focus,” which suggests that performance, reward and career decisions are based on objective and fair criteria. It is on this basis that it is inferred that the underlying assumption motivating this behaviour is that these decisions are based on the opinion of the employee’s network and whether the employee is part of the in-group or out-group. This assumption is congruent with Schein’s (2009) culture definition of issues of internal integration. Schein suggests that assumption about in and out groups as well as how rewards are allocated are indicative of an organisation culture. Similar to Schein, Denison and Mishra (1995) found that organisation culture is developed as organisations learn to cope with issues of internal integration and reemphasis group boundaries. The stories highlight both Schein’s and Denison and Mishra’s issues with internal integration.

4.4.4 GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL SKILLS

The fourth secondary underlying assumption that is identified is “Global versus Local Skills.” Here the assumption is that for complex projects and initiatives, people from the Consulting Firms global organisation are more knowledgeable, experienced
and skilled than in the local organisation. This assumption can be observed by the reliance that the local Consulting Firm has on their global organisation.

The Consulting Firm does have an espoused value that has a global focus referred to in this study as “Global Focus.” The espoused value “Global Focus” however focuses on sharing global insights and bringing in global talent. The stories however highlight behaviours where, when the organisation is in difficulty, global employees are brought in to help or to take charge of the problem. This reliant behaviour does not align to the collaborative and sharing nature that the “Global Focus” value espouses. Luis’s statement, who is an employee from the global organisation, best describes this, “I think one thing that if you need help you need to call early… we mobilised globally, where we had a lot of global people coming here taking over the day to day operations and this led to the partial success of getting out the first release live.”

This underlying assumption has had led to positive outcomes for the organisation, and hence it has become entrenched in the organisation. It appears to be a way for the organisation to adapt internally in order to deal with challenging situations. Schein (2009) refers to two culture definitions here. The first is underlying assumptions about how the organisation adapts to its external environment and how it differentiates itself. The second is underlying assumptions about the boundaries that exist in the organisation. The underlying assumption about “Global versus Local Skills” is congruent with both of Schein’s definitions. It aligns in terms of how the organisation reacts to challenges and in terms of the global versus local boundaries that exist. Furthermore, the underlying assumption also aligns to Bitici et al. (2006) “achievement culture,” which focuses on an expert and consultative approach to management. The global individuals can be seen as experts providing coaching to the local practice.

4.4.5 TECHNOLOGY CONSULTING IDENTITY

The final shared underlying assumption highlights the identity of the Consulting Firm and is called here “Technology Consulting Identity.” Here it is assumed that the organisation is a technology consulting firm. The stories predominantly focus on the sale of technology work or the performance of technology work. One of Sibisiso’s proudest moments illustrate this when he says, “usual challenges of the biggest SAP
implementation that have ever been implemented certainly in this country and probably the Southern Hemisphere.”

Although the organisation has a services structure (Human Resources, Finance and Marketing) that supports the organisation, the stories never make reference to this. Furthermore, no espoused value make reference to the Consulting Firm being a technology consulting company and even though it offers a wide variety of consulting services, the main consulting service spoken of in the stories is technology consulting. This could be attributed to the organisation’s origins in technology which has led to the overall growth and success of the Consulting Firm. The Consulting Firms identity as a technology firm and the boundaries highlighted, aligns to Schein’s (2009) definition of internal integration. Schein suggest that the way in which an organisation defines its identity compared to its external environment as well as the boundaries that exist within the organisation is a significant component of an organisation’s culture.

In summary, five of the eleven underlying assumptions that were uncovered were found to be secondary to the Consulting Firm. They were found to be secondary in that they are viewed as key enablers for the core underlying assumptions. The five secondary underlying assumptions that were uncovered are “Work Centric,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Global versus Local Skills,” and “Technology Consulting Identity.” These five secondary underlying assumptions were found to align closely Schein’s (2009) external adaptation, internal integration and deeper underlying assumptions culture definitions.

4.5 ORGANISATION COGNITIVE PATTERNS

Although the Consulting Firms underlying assumptions have been identified, Schein (2009) suggest that researchers of organisations culture understand the patterns of how the underlying assumptions interact need to be understood (Schein). Furthermore, Schein states that culture is the sum total of all underlying assumptions. Understanding the patterns that reside between the underlying assumptions provides insight into the cognitive models that employees apply to situations and therefore aids in the process of understanding the Consulting Firms culture. In this section, I therefore provide an explanation of how the underlying assumptions operate. Furthermore, I
provide insight into how the underlying assumptions relate to the Consulting Firms espoused values and how this acts as motives for the behaviours observed. In this way I attempt obtain a holistic view of the Consulting Firms culture.

The Consulting Firms underlying assumptions, espoused values and observed behaviours were found to be inclusive of Schein’s three culture areas. Three levels of culture were uncovered for the Consulting Firm. At the deepest unconscious level are the core underlying assumptions which are “Sales Orientation,” “Client First,” “Dominance,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” “Individualism” and “Innovation.” These underlying assumptions are core to the Consulting Firm and underpin all other organisation behavior, decisions and assumptions. Operating at a level above the core underlying assumptions are secondary underlying assumptions which were identified as “Work Centricity,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Global versus Local Skill,” and “Technology Consulting Identity.” Secondary underlying assumptions are viewed as key enablers of the core underlying assumptions. Furthermore, core underlying assumptions cannot be overridden by secondary underlying assumptions and are core to all behaviour and espoused values defined.

Operating above the deeper underlying assumptions and at a conscious level are the Consulting Firms espoused values. The Consulting Firm has six espoused values which have been renamed to “Client Focus,” “Global Focus,” “People Focus,” “Competent People,” “Ethical Focus,” “Ownership Focus.” As highlighted in the previous section, the espoused values relate to some of the underlying assumptions as espoused values often reflect the areas where the organisation does things well or bad (Schein, 2009). These links of how all three levels interact with each other are explained below.
The “Client Focus” espoused value is linked to the “Client First,” and “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption. “Client First” underlying assumption and “Client Focus” espoused value both view the client as being important to the Consulting Firms success. The “Client Focus” espoused value espouses delivering value and building relationships where as the “Client First” assumption assumes that putting the client first is the most important work practice. Furthermore, putting the client first will lead to sales and is therefore linked to the “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption. It appears that at the core of the espoused value “Client Focus” is the assumption that putting the client first will lead to sales in the future. Behaviours observed that relate to the client seems to therefore be predominantly motivated by the opportunity to make sales.

The “Global Focus” espoused value is linked to “Global versus local skills” shared underlying assumption as the shared underlying assumption was inferred as a result of
the observed behaviour not aligning to the espoused value. The “Global Focus” value espouses leveraging global insights and the sharing of knowledge to deliver to clients. Underlying this value, however, is the shared assumption “Global versus Local Skills.” Whereas the espoused value espouses a level equality and collaboration between the global and local organisations, the behaviours illustrated demonstrate a reliance on the global organisation and a belief that the global organisation is more competent than the local organisation. It is this contradiction that highlights the shared underlying assumption “Global versus local skills.”

Similarly to the “Global Focus” espoused value, there are assumptions underlying the “People Focus,” espoused value which was highlighted when the behaviours exhibited did not align to the “People Focus” espoused value. These underlying assumptions include “Work Centricity” and “Role Variety.” The “Work Centricity” underlying assumption is linked to the “People Focus” espoused value in that they are in contradiction. The “People Focus” espouse value espouses work/life balance and respecting individuals time where as the behaviours observed in the stories demonstrate a focus on work over leisure time. This gave rise to the inference that the motive behind this behaviour, if not espoused or measured, is that employees are often expected to work long hours and have a natural inclination to be highly driven hard workers. This concept is also closely linked to the underlying assumption “Role Variety.

Behaviours that give rise to this underlying assumption are that employees will often be assigned to roles that do not match their skill set. The result being that the role is not aligned to their career interests and that the consultant is required to work hard and in many cases work overtime in order to up skill themselves sufficiently to fulfill the role. This underlying assumption is therefore linked to the espoused value “People Focus” as a result of the underlying contradiction.

Apart from the “Role Variety” underlying assumption being linked to the “People Focus” espoused value, it is also linked to the “Competent People” espoused value. Similar to the “People Focus” espoused value, there is also a contradiction in terms of what is espoused and what is performed, giving rise to the “Role Variety” underlying assumption. The “Competent People” value espouses specialisation of skill, however the stories reveal that individuals can be assigned to any role. Furthermore, the role
variety offered is seen as exciting by the employees. It is this misalignment that contributed to the inference of the “Role Variety” shared underlying assumption. Another shared underlying assumption that is linked to the “Competent People” espoused value is “Global versus local skill.” Again, the behaviors observed demonstrate that although this value espouses having attracted and developed best people, there is still an underlying assumption that global employees are more knowledgeable, experienced and skilled than the local employees.

Linked to both the “Competent People” and “People Focus” espoused value is the “Individualism” underlying assumption. Both values espouse a collaborative and teaming environment. Although the stories demonstrate teaming, they show even stronger individualistic thinking such as autonomy, individual reward and individual accountability. It is therefore inferred that driving this behaviour is individualistic shared underlying assumptions.
The links between the underlying assumptions and the espoused values begin to highlight organisational cognitive models. To obtain a complete view of the patterns that exist, shared underlying assumptions and espoused values need to be linked to observed behaviours highlighted in the common stories. Five common stories were identified and I explore how the underlying assumption or espoused values acted as motives for the behaviours observed in the stories.
The first common story identified is “Work Ethic” which comprises of two sub-themes, namely “Thrown into the deep end” and “Dedicated to delivery.” This common story highlights six key behaviours. The first behaviour is the decision to accept challenging work where the Consulting Firm does not have the resources to complete the work. The second behaviour is to assign a consultant to deliver the work, even though the consultant is not skilled in the subject matter. The third behaviour is to make the consultant individually accountable to deliver the work. The fourth behaviour observed is long hours worked by the consultant to deliver. The fifth behaviour observed is for the consultant to engage in strategies to learn and adapt quickly in order to deliver the work. The sixth behaviour observed is to provide global support to the consultant. The key underlying assumptions that are linked to the behaviours observed in the “Work Ethic” theme include “Sales Orientation,” “Work Centricty,” “Role Variety,” and “Individualism.” Furthermore, the behaviours observed in this theme can also be attributed to the “Client Focus” and “People Focus” espoused values. The first and second behaviour observed, the decision to accept the work and assign the consultant with limited experience to the work, appears to be driven by the shared underlying assumption “Sales Orientation.” Not accepting the work would have mostly likely led to a loss in the sale. The third and fifth behaviours observed, learning quickly, being dedicated to delivery and working long hours appears to be driven by the underlying assumption of “Work Centrality” and “Role Variety.” It is the “Work Centrality” underlying assumption that creates the expectation that employees will work long hours to deliver as non-delivery is not an option. Attributing to this behaviour, is the shared underlying assumption “Role Variety” as in these stories consultants are assigned to roles that is not core to their competency and they are expected to work hard in order to learn what needs to be delivered. The “Individualism” assumptions also appears to contribute to the expectation on the consultant, as the consultant is now accountable for delivering the work that is not a core competency.

From an espoused values perspective, the stories do focus on delivering value for the client and transforming the client which is aligned to the “Client Focus” espoused value. Furthermore, the consultants in the stories do receive support from a global
subject matter expert and is assigned to a challenging role. This behaviour aligns to the “People Focus” espoused value.

The second common story identified is “Client Centricity” and this story comprises of two sub-theme’s, namely “Serving the client” and “Partnering with the client.” The “Client Centricity” common story highlights five distinct behaviours. The first is that client needs are put first and that anything is done to please the client. The second is to be open and honest with the client. The third is to put procedures in place in order to control the relationship with the client. The fourth behaviour is to work at the client for a long time in order to build a long-term relationship. The fifth behaviour is to obtain global advise and support in order to deliver to the client. The key underlying assumptions that are linked to the behaviours observed in the stories about “Client Centricity” include “Service Orientated,” “Client First” and “Global versus Local Skills.” Furthermore, the behaviours observed in this story can also be attributed to the “Client Focus,” “Ethic Focus” and “Global Focus” espoused values.

The first behaviour observed can be attributed to the “Sale Orientation” and “Client First” shared underlying assumptions. The decision to do anything for the client is motivated by the shared underlying assumption that this will lead to improved client satisfaction and therefore additional sales. Both these underlying assumption are core to the Consulting Firm and therefore this type of behaviour is mostly likely deeply entrenched in the organisation. The only value identified that relate to this behaviour the “Client Focus” espoused value. The second behaviour observed can be attributed to the “Client First” underlying assumption. Here it is inferred that the decision to build long-term relationships with the client is motivated by the assumption that the best way to serve the client is to deeply understand the clients issues. To do this, it is believed that the consultants need to be working at the client for a prolonged period of time. The second behaviours as well as third and fourth behaviours appear to be attributed to the espoused values “Client Focus” and Ethics Focus.” These values espouse having an open and honest relationship with the client and building the trust of the client. The fifth behaviour observed is linked to the “Global versus Local Skill” underlying assumptions and “Global Focus” espoused value. Here it is inferred that global employees are more skilled than local and therefore should be called on for help.
The third common story identified is “Investing in People” which comprises of three sub-theme’s, namely “Career Opportunity,” “Developing People” and “Career Progression.” The common story “Investing in People” highlights five key behaviours. The first behaviour observed is to provide employees with career opportunities through variety in their job and by providing them with a more senior role than what they currently are operating at. It is important to consider context here, and note that these behaviours are performed in the context where there is the potential loss of a sale if a role is not filled with a consultant. The consultant is therefore afforded this opportunity as a result of no-one else being available to perform the role. The second behaviour observed relates to how individuals progress their careers through the organisation. The behaviour observed is that employees need to network internally in order to build sufficient support to obtain promotion. The third behaviour observed describes hard working behaviours to progress careers. The fourth behaviour observed is an increased focus on the client as individuals progress their careers. The final behaviour observed as it relates to the “Investing in People” stories is about how individuals get developed. This behaviour highlights that people are primarily developed through informal on the job development such as coaching. The key underlying assumptions that are linked to the behaviours observed in the stories about “Investing in People” include “Service Orientated,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Client First” and “Work Centricity.” Furthermore, the behaviours observed in this story can also be attributed to the “Client Focus,” “People Focus” and “Competent People” espoused values.

The first behaviour which relates to career opportunities can be attributed to the underlying assumptions “Role Variety,” “Work Centricity” and “Sales Orientation.” These underlying assumptions act as motives for this behaviour. The espouse values reflected in this story include “Competent People” and “People Focus.” The decision to provide employees with job variety and challenging roles appears to be motivated by the underlying assumption that consultants can learn any role, “Role Variety” and are self motivate to work hard, “Work Centricity.” There is a trust that exists that dictates that a consultant will not disappoint Consulting Firm if he/she is given the opportunity. Underpinning these underlying assumptions is the “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption. It appears that a key motive for assigning individuals to a challenging role
is the protection of a sale because if the project is not staffed then the sale will be loss. The values linked to this behaviour is the “Competent People” and “People Focus” values that espouse that employees should be challenged and that the Consulting Firm is committed to employees career growth.

The second behaviour which relates to career progression and how individuals progress their careers can be attributed to the “Opinion Based Reward” underlying assumption. It is assumed that reward decisions are based on the opinions of the management team. The espoused value contributing to this behaviour is “People Focus” as this value espouses the protection and support of employees careers.

Linked to the second behaviour is the third behaviour which suggests that to progress career requires hard work. The underlying assumptions related to hard work is “Work Centricity” and the espoused value is “Competent People.” Here it is assumed that employees will be rewarded for hard work. It is important to note that reward is still however opinion based and therefore it is the combination of hard work and networking that will lead to reward and progression through the Consulting Firm. Along with progression through the organisation is the fourth behaviour observed which is the consultants change in focus to being on the client as the consultant progress his/her career. This is related to the “Client First” underlying assumption and “Client Focus” espoused value. It is assumed that the more senior the consultant becomes in the Consulting Firm the greater the focus on client satisfaction and putting the client first.

The fifth behaviour highlighted is how people are developed and more specifically that people get developed informally on the job. There were no underlying assumption identified that are directly linked to developing people, because all assumptions about developing people are explicit in the espoused values “Competent People” and “People Focus.” These value espouse coaching, taking an interest in others development and a formal commitment from the organisation to develop people. It can however be inferred from the context that people development is linked to the “Client First” and “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption. People development usually occurs as a result of individuals not having the skills to perform the current job they are in. In order to bring the best to the client and in order to maintain the sale, these individuals need to be
developed. Hence, underlying this behaviour is the “Client First” and “Sales Orientation” underlying assumption.

The fourth common story identified is “Operating Globally” which comprises of two sub-theme’s, namely “Global Collaboration” and “Global Hero.” Here there are four key behaviors highlighted. The first behaviour observed is the sharing of knowledge with the global organisation. The second behaviour observed is to provide advice from global employees to local employees on projects. The third behaviour observed is the sourcing of global employees to deal with a troubled project. The fourth behaviour observed are global employees taking charge and lead the project. The key underlying assumptions that are linked to the behaviours observed in the stories about “Operating Global” include “Global versus Local Skills,” “Service Orientated,” “Client First” and “Work Centricity.” Furthermore, the behaviours observed in this story can also be attributed to the “Global Focus” espoused values.

For all four behaviours the underlying assumption that is highlighted is “Global versus Local skill.” All behaviours seem to be operating under the shared underlying assumption that employees from the Consulting Firms global organisation are more competent than from the local organisation. In the same instance, the value “Global Focus” espouses and motivates for the global collaboration and teaming. The combination of the “Global versus Local skill” underlying assumption and “Global Focus” espoused values act as a motive for all four behaviours.

The second, third and fourth behaviours are also motivated by the underlying assumptions “Sales Orientation,” “Client First” and “Work Centricity.” The “Sales Orientation” and “Client First” underlying assumptions are the deepest underlying assumptions as it is assumed that performing the second, third and fourth behaviours will lead to increased sales and client satisfaction. The “Work Centricity” underlying assumption operates as secondary assumption in this context as working hard is assumed to contribute to the success of the two core assumptions.

The fifth common story identified is “Innovation” which comprises of two sub-theme’s, namely “Client Innovation” and “Re-invention.” Here there are six distinct behaviours that are highlighted. The first behaviour observed is the drive to sell technology solutions. The second behaviour observed is to deploy a global team to
assist on projects. The third behaviour observed was for the “Global Hero” to advise, guide and lead projects. The fourth behaviour observed is to build long-term trusting relationships with the client. The fifth behaviour observed, although not directly link to previous behaviours, is to change the Consulting Firms organisation internally and to develop new products to meet the needs of the client. The sixth behaviour identified is the consultant being coached in order to deliver. The key underlying assumptions that are linked to the behaviours observed in the stories about “Innovation” include “Service Orientated,” “Client First,” “Technology Consulting Identity,” Dominance” and “Adaptability and Nimbleness.” Furthermore, the behaviours observed in this story can also be attributed to the “Client Focus,” and “Global Focus” espoused values.

For all six behaviours “Sales Orientation,” and “Client First” underlying assumptions act as motives for the behaviours observed. The “Sales Orientation” assumption in this context provides the motive behind why the organisation innovates in clients and changes itself to meet client needs. It is assumed that changing the organisation in this way will ensure that the organisation continues to make sales and remains relevant to the client. This is closely linked to the “Client First” assumption, as putting the client first here drive the behavior of innovating within the client and within the Consulting Firm with the outcome being increased sales.

Apart from underlying assumptions being common to all six behaviours, there are also underlying assumption and values specific to each behaviour. The first four behaviours has specific underlying assumptions including “Innovation,” “Technology Consulting Identity” and “Dominance.” Upon closer investigation of what innovation in a client meant, it appears that all innovation is large scale transformation. It is also believed that large scale transformation is driven through technology. Furthermore the Consulting Firm exhibits dominant behaviours taking on projects that are a first and that are very challenging. The value that aligns to this story is “Global Focus”, as “Global Focus” espouses that the Consulting Firm must bring innovative solutions to clients leveraging the Consulting Firms global network.

The last two behaviours relate to the “Adaptability and Nimbleness” and “Dominance” shared underlying assumptions. In the context of the aforementioned behaviours, this acts as a motive for why the Consulting Firm changes its organisation,
capabilities and products in order to meet the client’s needs. The dominant beliefs motivate the Consulting Firm to pursue ambitious objectives. Working in conjunction with this is the “Client Focus” value which espouses that the organisation must innovate to meet the client’s needs. The interaction between the underlying assumption and espoused value results in driving the second stories behaviour.

The final common story identified is “Revenue Focus” which comprises of two sub-theme’s, namely People versus Profit and Sales Driven. The two sub-themes demonstrate similar behaviours in terms of view sales as critical to the organisation. The first behaviour observed is characterised by choosing a sale over the employee’s career aspiration. The second behaviour identified the effort to drive sales. Here the core underlying assumption is “Sales Orientation.” This shared underlying assumption places sales as being most important to the organisation and therefore any decision or behaviour would be aligned to maximizing sales for the organisation. Linked to this is “Dominant” underlying assumption whereby the type of work sold is often a first and is ambitious. The third key behaviour is to work at the client for a prolonged period and build long-term client relationships. Here the shared underlying assumption “Client First” and espoused value “Client Focus” acts as a motive for this behaviour. It is assumed here that putting the client first will lead to future sales. “Sales Orientation” is therefore still the key underlying assumption for the “Revenue Focus” common story with the recognition that putting the client first will aid in this.
In summary, there are patterns, relationships and interdependencies that exist between the underlying assumptions, espoused values and artefacts. Only once these patterns are understood does one gain an understanding of the organisation's culture (Schein, 2009). The analysis revealed that the underlying assumptions could be prioritised according to core and secondary underlying assumption. Core underlying assumptions operate at the deepest unconscious level and are “Sales Orientation,”
“Client First” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” “Dominance,” “Innovation” and “Individualism.” Secondary underlying assumptions operate above core underlying assumption and are “Work Centric,” Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Global versus Local skills” and “Technology Consulting Identity.” These underlying assumptions operate with the Consulting Firms six espoused values to act as motives behind the behaviour that is manifested in the stories.

4.6 COMPARATIVE LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Comparing the findings and interpretations from this study to other studies further validates the notion that storytelling can uncover culture. Furthermore, it supports the notion that organisational culture is unique to the organisation that it operates within. There has been much contention around how organisation culture can be understood and whether it is unique to context or universal. From the modernists perspective the thought leader in culture studies is Hofstede which supports the universal law perspective. Hofstede (1980) defined culture as a process of collective programming. Hofstede defined culture as having four main elements which included symbols, heroes, rituals and values. Values are seen as the core of an organisations culture and operated at the unconscious level (Hofstede et al, 1990). Hofstede et al. did attempt to use qualitative and quantitative means to understand culture, however still limited their interpretation to predominantly quantitative analysis and cross context comparison. Similar to Hofstede et al. Maul, Brown and Cliffe (2001) also suggested that culture is made up of universal laws that can be measured using quantitative analysis and developed a model for organisational culture PCOC (Personal, Customer Orientation, Organisational and Culture issues). Clarke and Mount (2005) had this same view, arguing that organisational culture is a value system that is taken for granted and that can be measured through quantitative means. Also adopting a quantitative approach, however in a South African context was Van Heerden and Roodt (2007). They aimed at creating an integrated culture model for high performance cultures and to develop a measuring instrument to measure high performance cultures. They adopted a quantitative approach and sought out to measure 12 theoretical dimensions. Although
they state that they did achieve what they aimed to, by stating, in their discussion section, that future research should investigate whether it is possible to compare high performing cultures they acknowledge the possibility that organisational culture can be unique and specific to its context.

Most culture researchers do acknowledge the uniqueness and context specific nature of an organisation's culture. Most culture researchers therefore choose to adopt a qualitative approach with the aim of making meaning and interpreting the case (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Arguably the most prominent researcher in culture, Schein (2009), states that culture is unique and can only be understood using qualitative techniques. In Schein's definition, culture is a pattern of shared underlying assumptions that are taken for granted. Similarly Linde (2001) argues that tacit knowledge be understood through qualitative means such as narratives. Levi-Strauss (as cited in (1983), argues that culture displays the workings of the unconscious infrastructure. Geertz (1973) proposes a symbolic interpretivists approach which is rooted in qualitative research. For Geertz culture is understood by interpreting the symbols of the society or organisation being studied. According to Linde, stories can act as symbolic artefacts. More recently researchers such as Hyde (2008), McLellan (2006), Gabriel (2000) and Czarniawska (1997) have highlighted the importance of stories in understanding culture. McLellan argues that stories are social maps and help show patterns and connection within a social system. Hyde suggests that stories are an explanation to organisational life, and give meaning to performances in organisation. Gabriel suggests that stories reveal unconscious codes of behaviour and generate emotion and feeling. Finally Czarniawska argue that stories symbolise what an organisation is and does. The purpose of stories in the organisation context, as described above, relate to Schein's definition of organisational culture. They suggest that stories can uncover shared knowledge, meaning, patterns in social systems and unconscious codes of behaviour, all of which relate to the concept of organisational culture.

Stories have been the subject of many studies seeking to understand how individuals, groups and organisations convey or make meaning out of situations or events. Forster, Cebis, Majteles, Mathur, Morgan, Preuss, Tiwari and Wilkinson (1999) studied the role of storytelling in leadership. In their research they review how leaders of
highly successful companies used stories to convey the bigger picture. They found that storytelling is an integral managerial skill as it helps leaders to communicate what is important and how things should be achieved. Beech (2000), in his article “Narrative styles of managers and workers: A tale of star-crossed lovers,” analysed the stories of managers and workers to understand the underlying narrative that helped employees make meaning out of events. He found six common narratives which were, “lessons learnt by actors,” “Integration and differentiation,” “causal attribution,” “efficacy of actors,” and “temporal orientation.” He found that these were the common stories told in order to help individuals navigate the organisation. Similarly, Boje (1991) studied how stories are performed by people in order in order to make sense of events, introduce change and gain political advantage in conversation. Here he focused on the timing and the way in which stories were told. He found this to be as much of a critical component of storytelling as the content of the story. Later, Boje (1995) studied Walt Disney as a storytelling organisation in which he investigated the interplay of the pre-modern, modern and post-modern stories. His analysis of the multiple stories revealed a darker side to the more widely known Disney land legend. More recently a South African study conducted by Maree, Roux and Marias (2006), “Beneath the surface of conscious patterns: using narrative to characterise the culture of innovation at a leading R&D organisation,” used narratives to define the culture of innovation at a research and development company. From the narratives they managed to defined archetypes, anecdotes, themes and values that characterise a culture of innovative. The archetypes and anecdotes revealed aspects pertaining to the innovation environment, myths and fables and working relationships as it relates to innovation at this research and development organisation.

The above studies aim to use stories to understand the meaning individuals, groups or organisations give to situations as well as how individuals convey this meaning. It aims to understand the assumptions individuals make about events. Considering the definition of culture proposed in this study, these studies are closely linked to the study of organisational culture.

The review of the literature highlights similarities and differences between the findings of this study and other organisational studies. The similarities add to the validity
of whether storytelling can uncover culture, and the differences highlight the uniqueness of each organisation's culture.

The finding of this study stays true to Schein's (2009) definition and attributes of culture. Schein viewed culture as the underlying assumptions that reflect how the organisation deals with issues of external adaptation, internal integration and deeper underlying assumptions about human nature, relationships, space, time, reality and truth. This study was found to uncover underlying assumptions that are aligned to all these culture dimensions. From an external adaptation perspective, underlying assumptions uncovered that align to this include “Sales Orientated,” “Dominance,” “Client First,” “Innovation,” and “Adaptability and Nimbleness.” From an internal integration perspective, underlying assumptions uncovered include “Global versus Local Skill” and “Technology Consulting Identity.” Finally, from a deeper underlying assumptions perspective, underlying assumptions uncovered included “Individualism,” “Work Centricity,” and “Role Variety.”

Apart from these broad definitions of culture, this study also aligned closely to the findings of other culture studies. The findings from a South African study conducted by Maree et al. (2006), “Beneath the surface of conscious patterns: using narrative to characterise the culture of innovation at a leading R&D organisation,” had several similarities to this study. Both studies uncovered similar archetypes which seem to be common amongst innovative organisations. The first similar archetype is the “coaching manager” archetype from this research and the “inspiring coach” archetype from Maree et al. research. Both archetypes focus on building a supportive and coaching relationship with staff. The second similar archetype is the “learned consultant” from this research and the “clumsy puppy” from Maree et al. research. Both archetypes focus on learning and trying new things. The third similar archetype is the “high-flying consultant” from this research and the “bright-eyed bushy-tailed researcher” from Maree et al. study. Both archetypes start to work towards managerial tasks and are delivery focus. Apart from having similarities in the archetypes that were uncovered, there were also similarities in what seem to define the two cultures. These included the importance both organisation place on networking, revenue and delivery excellence.
Perhaps a study that is most closely aligned to this research is Kelly’s (1985) study, “Storytelling in high tech organisations: A medium for sharing culture.” It also aimed at understanding culture of high technology companies, such as the Consulting Firm, by collecting organisational stories. There are several similarities and differences between the findings of Kelly’s study and this study. The findings that were similar to this study’s findings were titled “Is the boss human?,” “How will the organisation deal with obstacles?,” and “Can an honest and diligent worker succeed?” “Is the boss human?” is similar to the “Work Centricity” underlying assumption as both highlight the importance of persistent, hardworking and creative. The “How will the organisation deal with obstacles?” highlighted the importance of innovation, re-organisation and fast turnaround times as a traits that high technology organisations exhibited when responding to change. These traits are similar to the “Innovation” and “Adaptability and Nimbleness” underlying assumptions that were discovered in this study. Finally, the “Can the honest diligent worker succeeds?” trait highlighted a hard working attitude which closely aligned to the “Work Centricity” underlying assumptions.

Other studies had findings similar to this study, Denison and Mishra (1995), for example, found stability and flexibility to be a key culture trait of several organisations. This trait is similar to the “Adaptability and Nimbleness” underlying assumption which found that the Consulting Firm to value their ability to be nimble and adaptable when reacting to obstacles. Clarke and Mounts (2005) Service Orientated culture is similar to the “Client First” underlying assumption. Here both focus on client centricity as a key aspect to their organisations culture. The “Work Centricity” shared underlying assumption aligned to Hofstede et al. (1990) “Work Centrality” value and Bitici et al. (2006) “Achievement Culture Dimension.” Here the culture definitions focus on employees being self-motivated to work. Closely aligned to this is Peter and Waterman’s (1982), “action orientation” culture trait they found in a technology company. Here they found that technology companies tend to have individuals focused on delivery and getting things done. The “Innovation” underlying assumption aligned to McLellan’s (2006) “Product and Innovation” culture defined in her study on Dell and IBM. Both Dell and the Consulting Firm focus on innovation, which could be expected for technology companies. Similarly Kanter (1983) found that high technology
companies are highly innovative. Finally the “Dominance” underlying assumptions is similar to McLellans (2006) “High Growth” culture. Both suggest that the organisation culture being studied focuses on taking a dominant growth stance.

Apart from the similarities discovered in the various studies there were also significant differences found. These differences highlight the unique aspects of the Consulting Firms culture. This presents further support for Schein’s (1999) suggestion that culture is unique to the organisation in which it is being studied. Kelly (1985), for example, found that “breaking the rules” in a high technology company was welcomed and celebrated. This was not found to be a theme in the Consulting Firm, and in fact, when rule breaking was mentioned, it was viewed as being unwelcome in the Consulting Firm. Furthermore in none of the other studies on culture was “Sale Orientation,” “Individualism,” “Global versus Local,” “Role Variety” and “Opinion Based Reward” mentioned as an aspect of organisational culture. This highlights the fact that these are unique aspects of the Consulting Firms culture.

This brief overview of the literature has demonstrated that the culture dimensions uncovered from storytelling can be found in the finding of other research, thereby confirming storytelling as a viable strategy to uncover culture. This comparative literature overview also confirms the uniqueness of an organisation’s culture as although there were similarities between the findings of the various studies, there were also significant differences. Furthermore, culture uniqueness is not only about identifying unique constructs but more important how they operate. The patterns between the findings from other research could not clearly articulate how culture dimensions work together in the organisations and what the collective cognitive models were. Utilising storytelling in the study allowed me to observe the unconscious maps that exist and demonstrate the uniqueness of the Consulting Firms organisational culture.

4.7 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS, SENSE-MAKING AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis, sense-making and interpretation section aimed at uncovering the Consulting Firms culture. It sought out to understand the common underlying
assumptions in the organisation, and link these to the espoused values and observable behaviours from the stories. The uncovering of underlying assumptions were based on the experiences told in the stories, and therefore the limited number of stories told may be limiting on whether all underlying assumptions were uncovered. The stories revealed a total of eleven underlying assumptions, of which six were considered core and five secondary.

The core underlying assumptions are underlying assumptions that operate at the deepest level of the organisations unconscious. These are “Sales Orientated,” “Dominance,” “Client First,” “Innovation,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” and “Individualism.” Secondary underlying assumptions operate above the core underlying assumptions and appear to support the core underlying assumptions. The secondary underlying assumptions uncovered were “Work Centricity,” “Role Variety,” “Opinion Based Reward,” “Technology Consulting Identity” and “Global versus Local Skill.” These are seen as enablers of the core underlying assumptions.

The underlying assumptions were found to be linked to the espoused values of the Consulting Firm which are “Client Focus,” “Global Focus,” “Competent People,” “Ethical Focus” and “Ownership Focus.” Furthermore the common stories that illustrated the behaviours that gave insight into the Consulting Firms underlying assumptions include “Work Ethic,” “Client Centricity,” “Investing in People,” “Operating Globally,” “Innovation” and “Revenue Focus.”. Underlying assumptions were identified when the behaviours observed in the story did not match the espoused values of the organisation As Schein (2009) states, underlying assumptions reflect the areas where the organisation is particularly ineffective. It is the position here that the motivating factor for these common behaviours is the underlying assumptions that operate within the organisation. There were also observed behaviours from the stories that aligned to the espoused values, demonstrating that the espoused values have been operationalised. These were not considered as underlying assumptions as these behaviours were made explicit in the espoused values and therefore are not taken for granted.

The patterns between the underlying assumptions, espoused values and observed behaviours from the stories provide insight into the Consulting Firms cognitive models and organisational culture. It is therefore the position of this study that the storytelling
has at minimum in part uncovered the Consulting Firms organisation culture. It is recognised that with the limitation on the stories gathered that an aspect of the organisations culture could have been overlooked. The collection of more stories would further reinforce the findings from this study.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This retrospective study aimed to uncover a global Consulting Firms organisational culture using storytelling. In the same way that therapists uses stories past experiences of their patients to understand their patients belief system, it is the position of this study that understanding the collective stories of an organisation can provide insight into the organisations beliefs system, or as Schein (2009) puts it basic underlying assumptions. The study used storytelling as a strategy to understand organisational culture.

Schein’s definition for organisational culture was the foundation for this study. According to Schein (2009), organisational culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.” Based on this definition there were a few consideration for the study. The first is that culture as a group phenomenon and therefore it is shared beliefs that the research should aim to understand. The second critical component is that culture is made of a set of beliefs that are entrenched on the unconscious level and are difficult to change (Miller, 2009). The third critical component is that culture is maintained through socialisation and teaching. The final critical component is that culture is a learned experience. Furthermore, Schein (Miller) suggests that organisational culture can be observed at three levels, the artefacts level, espoused values level and underlying assumptions level. According to Schein artefacts are the easiest to observe but most difficult to decipher. Espoused values do not necessarily provide insight into an organisations culture but rather reflect the areas where the organisation is ineffective. Schein states that in order to understand the deeper underlying assumptions, the researcher should ask deeper questions about what is motivating the observed behaviour. The key question therefore that needed to be addressed is how does one
understand shared beliefs and underlying assumptions that operate on the unconscious level?

To address the question, I needed to consider the epistemological and ontological views on how organisational culture can be understood. There are two opposing views on how organisational culture can be understood. The first view is that organisational culture is a variable that can be measured and that comprises of a set of universal laws (Mabey & Mallaroy, 1995; Meek, 1992, as cited in Beech, 2000). This view is known as the modernist paradigm on organisational culture. From an ontological perspective culture is viewed as a tangible variable that can be measured. From an epistemological perspective culture comprises of several factors that can be measured by assigning a value to the factors with the most common method of collecting data for this approach being a survey. The outcome of a modernism study, as it relates to culture, would be to create universal laws, methods or models to assessing and understanding organisational culture (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Schein (1985) and Hawkins (1997) suggest that practitioners operating in this paradigm usually only manage to uncover artefacts and espoused values. They fail to penetrate the shared tacit assumptions level. The reason for this is that culture is unique much in the same way individuals are unique (Schein, 2009; Rossi & O'Higgins, 1983). Schein views this as problematic as the predefined constructs found in a survey questionnaire may omit crucial factors of an organisations culture. Culture can thus not be holistically understood using quantitative methods. Schein and other researchers such as Rossi and O'Higgins and Boje (1991) propose that qualitative methods should be adopted to the study of organisational culture.

To understand underlying assumptions the joint learnt experiences that shape an organisation culture need to be understood. According to Schein (2009) culture is a residual of success, and therefore to understand an organisations culture the joint learnt experience that led to success or failures need to be understood. It is on this basis that I chose to use storytelling as the means to uncover culture. My research was embedded in the symbolic interpretivists paradigm which suggests, from an ontological perspective, that organisation culture is dependent on individual or group subjective reality (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). This means that organisational culture may constitute
many different meanings, and understanding culture will depend on whose perspective it is viewed from. Epistemologically, symbolic interpretivism assumes that all knowledge about culture is relative depending on the point of view of the individuals involved (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Culture is viewed as a subjective experience that is organised in a way that makes action possible and is socially constructed (Heracleous, 2006). Furthermore symbolic interpretivism is congruent with storytelling, as stories act as symbolic artefacts that transmit values and shared tacit assumptions and symbolic interpretivism believes that socially constructed ideas are retained in scripts (Randall & Martin, 2003). Finally, similarly to the symbolic interpretivism paradigm, storytelling making is a collective social process in which discourses change over time (Boje, 1991).

To explore whether storytelling can uncover organisation culture, a global Consulting Firm that specialises in Management Consulting, Technology Consulting and Outsourcing was used as the site for the study. Six interviews were held with six participants of which four were Senior Executives in the company and two were Senior Managers. From the six interviews, six themes or common stories were uncovered. The six themes that were identified are “Work Ethic,” “Client Centricity,” “Investing in People,” “Operating Globally,” “Innovation,” and “Revenue Focus.” For each of the themes that were identified, there were sub-themes identified.

The first theme identified, “Work Ethic” describe behaviours of hard work, long hours, fast learning, personal adaptation and coaching. The second theme identified “Client Centricity,” describe behaviours of putting the client first, building long-term relationships with the client and delivering value to the client. The third theme identified is “Investing in People” describes behaviours of giving people career opportunity, progressing employees careers and developing people. The fourth theme identified “Operating Globally” describes behaviours of sharing knowledge globally, getting help from the global organisation and delivering in teams globally. The fifth theme identified ‘Innovation” describes behaviours of selling technology work, transforming clients and transforming internally to meet clients needs. The last theme identified “Revenue Focus” describes behaviours of putting sales first and choosing sales of individual employees career aspiration.
The behaviours identified from the themes provided a platform to determine what the shared motives are behind the behaviours. To do this I considered the values of the organisation, as these not only represented what is espoused but also what is measured. It was understood that where the espoused values did not match the observed behaviours, that an alternative force is acting as the motive for the observed behaviour (Schein, 2009). This motive is the shared underlying assumptions of the organisation. From the finding there were eleven underlying assumptions that were uncovered. Of the eleven underlying assumption, six were found to be core underlying assumptions and five secondary underlying assumptions. Core underlying assumptions were assumed to operate at the deepest unconscious level, and acted as the underlying motive for all behaviour observed. Secondary underlying assumptions operated above core underlying assumptions and acted as a motivating enabler for the core underlying assumptions. Core underlying assumptions are “Sales Orientated,” “Dominance,” “Client First,” “Innovation,” “Adaptability and Nimbleness,” and “Individualism.” The secondary underlying assumptions uncovered were “Work Centricity,” “Role Variety,” “Technology Consulting Identity,” “Opinion Based Reward” and “Global versus Local Skill.” These patterns of underlying assumptions and their relationship to the espoused values and observed behaviours are viewed as the sum total of the Consulting Firms organisational culture.

To further validate the findings, I compared the findings and definitions of organisational culture to popular modernists and interpretivists research and definitions. This comparison revealed that this study aligned to the findings and definitions of other popular culture researchers and theorists. It especially aligned to Schein, which was expected since Schein’s definition of culture was used as the basis for this research. Interestingly though, was that there were dimensions of culture found in this study, that was not reference in any of the other studies researched. This therefore attests to the uniqueness of the Consulting Firms culture. Furthermore, other findings did not provide an adequate explanation and complexities how patterns of behaviour observed relate to the dimensions of culture that they uncovered. It was therefore concluded that through storytelling not only can the dimensions of culture be uncovered but more importantly how the dimension relate to each other and to the manifested behaviours.
5.2 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations as well as opportunities for further study that is associated with this research. The most common concern with qualitative research is its generalisability. It is often called into question whether the findings of qualitative research can be applied to the broader population. It is however not the intention of this research to generalise the findings to a broader population. The ontological assumptions of this research are that organisational culture is unique to the context and organisation within which it occurs. The aim is therefore not to define a common set of constructs for organisational culture but rather to explore whether storytelling can uncover this Consulting Firms organisational culture. Having said that, the first limitation of the study is whether storytelling can be used in other organisations to uncover organisational culture.

The second limitation related to the research is the number of participants that were interviewed. I only managed to interview six Executives from the Consulting Firm. Interviewing more executives and other more junior members of the organisation may have revealed other themes and may have presented more of the power plays that reside within the organisation. I managed to overcome this limitation through cross referencing findings with other artefacts in the organisation such as performance metrics and the Consulting Firms espoused values. Furthermore, the themes found in the research we consistently mentioned in the stories which further validated the findings. Finally, I reflected on my own experience in the organisation as a mechanism to sense check the findings from the stories.

The third limitation on the research study was my role as the researcher in relation to the site. Being part of the organisation had both its advantages and its limitations. One of the limitations was that the participants that I was interviewing were all my seniors. They may have therefore been reluctant to share information with me that perhaps an outsider or a more senior person may have obtained. I overcame this limitation by signing confidentiality agreements and by getting the Human Resources department to endorse the process.

The fourth limitation is that I am an insider to the organisation. Being an insider my own preconceived notions and judgments about the organisations culture may influence
how the data is analysed and how it is interpreted. It was therefore critical that I reflect on these preconceived notions and judgements.

The fifth limitation identified, was that there was limited information to verify the findings and interpretations of the study. I was limited to artefacts and it would have strengthened the research if there was a culture survey to compare the results. The few artefacts I did use were however carefully selected in terms of the role they play in reinforcing organisational culture. I made use of artefacts such as performance measures and the organisations values.

The final limitation identified, is that the Consulting Firm is not typically a storytelling organisation. There were therefore no common organisation wide stories, myths or fables that were identified and collected. The research was therefore limited to the collection of anecdotal organisation stories and career stories. Having common organisation wide stories, myths and fables would have enriched the analysis and interpretation thereof. Although there were no common organisations stories, the individual stories had consistent themes and therefore individuals anecdotes served the purpose of the research. The research was not compromised due to there being no organisational wide stories. Organisational wide stories would have however enhanced the research.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above limitations there are several recommendations for future study. It is recommended that future culture studies make use of storytelling to measure culture, and that results from other studies are compared to this study to assess whether there are any similarities. It is also recommended that when using storytelling as the heuristic to uncover culture that a more in-depth investigation into the organisational artefacts and founders values is required. Furthermore, it is suggested that culture studies do not only use qualitative methods to measure culture, but that this is supplemented with quantitative methods. The hybrid approach of qualitative and quantitative methods will better serve the study of organisational culture. The final recommendation is that a larger sample set and more diverse sample set of stories are
collected in future studies in order to increase the strength and the quality of the research.

There are also two key recommendations for the Consulting Firms based on the findings of this study. The first is that the Consulting Firm evaluates areas where its behaviours do not align to its espoused values, especially where this has the potential to adversely affect the Consulting Firm and its employees. The Consulting Firm should consider remedies for behaviours where employees are put second to the client and revenue as this could lead to high attrition rates and low engagement levels. One remedy could be the realignment of the leadership performance scorecard as well as realigning leaders so that careful consideration is given to how employees are treated. Apart from employees being put second to the client, the Consulting Firm should also look to address organisational boundaries that lead to inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. This includes boundaries such as the South African organisation’s reliance on the global organisation as well as the Consulting Firm favouring people in technology consulting over its other business areas. Here the Consulting Firm should address leadership perceptions, attitudes and behaviours through mechanisms such as coaching, mentoring and leadership development interventions.

The second key recommendation is that the Consulting Firm could seek to change the cultural elements that lead to inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. Furthermore the Consulting Firm should surface and highlight the positive elements of its culture. One way in which the Consulting Firm can do this is by becoming a storytelling organisation. The Consulting Firm could leverage storytelling in order to highlight the key positive aspects of their culture that lead to success. It is recommended here that the practice of storytelling needs to start with the leadership team and then filter through the organisation. This can be achieved through coaching and mentoring of the leadership team in order to create storytelling leaders. Furthermore, to support the leaders stories other mediums such as film, media and printed material could be used to supplement the stories told by leadership.

Both recommendations alluded to the need realign aspects of the Consulting Firms culture. Furthermore, this needs to implemented at the leadership level first and
cascaded through the organisation. It is suggested that storytelling can be used as an enabling mechanism for this shift.

It is my conclusion that storytelling can uncover culture and can provide an explanation for the unconscious social maps that reside within an organisation. Much in the same way that a therapist understands an individual’s experiences to understand their cognitive maps and belief systems, storytelling allows one to understand organisational experiences that develop the organisation cognitive maps and shared underlying assumptions. This is known as culture.
REFERENCES


