Knowledge Sharing Across Global-Local Boundaries
Tacit Knowledge or/and Cultural Categorization

Zølner, Mette

Document Version
Final published version

Publication date:
2014

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Citation for published version (APA):
Zølner, M. (2014). *Knowledge Sharing Across Global-Local Boundaries: Tacit Knowledge or/and Cultural Categorization*. Paper presented at The 14th European Academy of Management Conference (EURAM) 2014, Valencia, Spain.

Link to publication in CBS Research Portal

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Abstract:

The paper explores how locals span boundaries between corporate and local levels. The aim is to better comprehend potentialities and challenges when MNCs draws on locals' culture specific knowledge. The study is based on an in-depth, interpretive case study of boundary spanning by local actors in the period of post-acquisition when their organization is being integrated into the acquiring MNC. The paper contributes to the literature on boundary spanning in three ways: First, by illustrating that boundary spanning is performed by numerous organizational actors in a variety of positions in MNCs, inclusively by locals in subsidiaries. Second, by showing that boundary spanning is 'situated' in the sense that its result depends on the kind of knowledge to be transmitted and the attitude of the receivers. A third contribution is methodological. The study illustrates that combining bottom-up grounded approach with pattern matching is a way to shed light on the tacit local knowledge that organizational actors cannot articulate and that an exclusively inductive research is not likely to unveil.

1. Introduction

Operating across the globe is an opportunity for multinational companies (MNCs) to gain competitiveness through standardizing and sharing best practices. However, standardization also presents challenges: one is whether such corporate procedures and practices function as intended when implemented at local organizational levels (Brannen, 1994; d'Iribarne 2012); another challenge is whether standardization enables or constrains leveraging locally embedded knowledge (Brannen & Doz, 2012). Both challenges relate to knowledge sharing and creation across boundaries and raise the question of which organizational actors are skilled to successfully span global and local boundaries, whether these consist of organizational, national or any other cultures?

Extant literature points to expatriate managers (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011; Caprar, 2011) and global managers as boundary spanners. Their professional experience from several cultural

contexts is assumed to provide them with a cultural generic knowledge and global mindsets that are valuable when exercising an intermediary position between corporate and local levels (Bird et al., 2010; Mendenhall, 2006). With a similar line of argumentation, scholars also point to biculturals/mulitculturals due their capacity to switch among culture specific cognitive schemes (Brannen & Thomas, 2010). This is likely to instill a tacit culture generic knowledge that constitutes potential resources for boundary spanning.

In contrast, few scholars investigate the role of host country nationals in knowledge sharing and creation across boundaries, this despite the fact that MNCs draw extensively on this category of employees as sources of culture specific knowledge. Moreover, International Management literature addresses the question of host country nationals primarily with an etic perspective, that is, as a group of employees objectively defined by its nationality, ethnicity or the language spoken (Caprar, 2011; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011). Host country nationals are, thus, conceived of as a uniform group who per definition possesses locally embedded knowledge that headquarters, expatriate managers or global managers may tap into when needed. Their culture specific knowledge is assumed to constitute a given and available resource that expatriate and global managers can draw upon if required. As an implication the question of the kind of culture specific knowledge that host country nationals possess and their capacity to communicate this knowledge tends not to be addressed. This is regrettable for at least three reasons. One is that locally embedded knowledge - be it organizational or national – is likely to consist of tacit knowledge partly, that is non-articulated knowledge that is therefore difficult to transfer. While scholars from within knowledge sharing and transference contends that transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge might give raise to knowledge creation, they also illustrate the challenges involved (Nonaka, 1994). This suggests that leveraging host country nationals' local knowledge is not evident. A second reason is that, despite common national origin, host country nationals are not a uniform group who possesses the same experiences, skills and competences. Just like expatriate, global or bicultural managers they are social actors whose local knowledge and capacity to articulate this knowledge are likely to differ. In other words, host country nationals are prone to be more or less efficient in articulating tacit local knowledge. A third reason is that as host country nationals are social actors operating in complex and fragmented organizational contexts, their will to articulate local knowledge, their capacity to

share the knowledge, and the way they do so are likely to be influenced by internal power and interest struggles that are at play in most organizations.

Therefore, in this paper, rather than 'host country nationals', we will prefer the term 'locals' when referring to employees that work in a subsidiary. This choice reflects the emic perspective that we will apply to explore how locals draw on their knowledge and experience when spanning boundaries within MNCs. While national cultures might, indeed, constitute boundaries, national and cultural origins are not considered determining the outcome of cross cultural collaboration. Cultures will be defined as legitimate meaning categories/schemata/frames that social actors draw upon, creatively and ingeniously, when negotiating meaning in a given situational context. In this perspective on intercultural encounters (Brannen & Salk 2000; d'Iribarne, 2009), legitimate meaning categories constitute factors, that might, indeed, contribute in enabling or constraining the outcome of boundary spanning, but without determining it.

The paper will explore how locals span boundaries between corporate and local levels; that is, when they make sense of global standardization procedures to employees in the subsidiary on the one hand, and, on the other, when they communicate local understandings and procedures to managers at corporate level. Focus will be on the frames/schematas/meanings categories that locals draw upon and on whether these constitute explicit or tacit knowledge. The aim is to better comprehend potentialities and challenges when locals engage in boundary spanning. In other words, the paper will raise the following questions:

- When spanning global and local boundaries how do different categories of local actors draw on explicit and local tacit knowledge (organizational and national)?
- How can we comprehend potentialities and challenges when locals engage in boundary spanning?

To explore these questions empirically, the paper is based on an in-depth, interpretive case study of boundary spanning by local actors in the period of post-acquisition when their organization is being integrated into the acquiring MNC. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, the MNC is referred to as "the Group" and the acquired company will be referred to as "the Subsidiary". Initially, the case focused on studying the formally defined boundary spanning performed by local actors when transmitting the Group's corporate values to the Subsidiary.

However, as fieldwork evolved, it appeared that the implementation of corporate procedures constituted an on-going boundary spanning in the daily process of integration. This led to distinguishing between different sorts of boundary spanning and to explore the kind of knowledge that local actors drew upon to build bridges between the global and local levels. Therefore, the paper delves into how locals perform global-local boundary spanning of two different kinds: boundary spanning as a formally defined task consisting of communicating and implementing corporate values in the subsidiary; and, boundary spanning as the on-going collaboration with corporate level on implementing standardized procedures.

We will argue that locals play important parts in knowledge sharing and creation across global and local boundaries and that, therefore, there is a need to shed light on potentials and challenges when drawing on locals' culture specific knowledge, be it embedded in the Subsidiary or its organizational environment. The paper contributes to the literature on boundary spanning in three ways: First, by illustrating that boundary spanning is not a role exclusively related to key formal positions as it is performed by numerous organizational actors in a variety of positions in MNCs, inclusively by locals in subsidiaries. To fully comprehend their boundary spanning potentiality, we need to conceive host country nationals as creative social actors that implicitly or explicitly draw on several kinds of local knowledge in complex organizational contexts in which interests and identities are at play. Secondly, the paper contributes by illustrating that boundary spanning is 'situated' in the sense that it depends on the situation in which organizational actors that perform boundary spanning. Thirdly, the paper contributes at a methodological level by illustrating that combining bottom-up grounded approach with pattern matching is a way to shed light on the tacit local knowledge that organizational actors cannot articulate and that an exclusively inductive research is not likely to unveil.

This paper is structured in the following way. First, it gives a brief overview of literature. Second, it introduces the case study and describes the research design and methods. Third, it presents the empirical material according to several analytical angles: i.e. explicit - tacit. Fourth, it provides a discussion of results in relation to extant literature, and, fifth and finally, a conclusion.

2. Boundary spanning in global organizations

From within the literature on International Management, scholars point to expatriate managers and global managers as primary boundary spanners (Thomas, 1994; Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011; Caprar, 2011:631). Focus is on the role that this group of managers plays as intermediary between the global-local and between national cultures. One perspective is how to define the criteria for selecting expatriate and global managers and how to develop their skills and competences through training or/and international assignments. Another is on the difficulties and costs of the socializing host-country nationals into the behaviors, values, beliefs and social knowledge that are required to perform their new roles in a MNC (Schein 1968; Van Maanen and Schein 1979, from Caprar 2011:610).

These perspectives build on the assumption that cultural compositions within an organization and its national origin determine the outcome of a cultural interaction and that social actors are expected to act according to the nationally bounded meaning categories in which he/she has been socialized during childhood and through the educational system. In this perspective, boundary spanning between national cultures are predicted through measuring the cultural distance between predefined cultural dimensions within national cultures that an MNC reaches. The bigger the difference between the measurements of cultural dimensions, the more challenging a boundary spanning is expected to be. The assumption is, thus, that national origins determine the boundary of spanning that expatriate and global managers are to perform.

The paradox is, however, that while expatriate and global managers are considered as creatively and ingeniously sensemakers that draw on patterns of legitimate meaning categories in different contexts in the interest of headquarters, host-country nationals are deprived from agency. Host country nationals are seen as merely reflecting their national culture that they articulate and transmit in one way irrespectively of their individual background, position and situation. Thus, host country nationals appear primarily in the role as 'statist' (Caprar 2011:610). The implication is a risk to oversee the diversity of local actors, their specific local knowledge and their capacity to articulate and communicate such knowledge.

Another perspective on host-country nationals emerges from the within literature adopting a negotiated perspective on culture (Brannen and Salk, 2000). Several theoretical and empirical studies which illustrate that rather than being determined by the cultural composition of the organizations, cultural interactions are dynamic and influenced by contingent contextual factors

(Brannen, 2009: Nakata, 2009; Primecz et al. 2011). In other words, cultural encounters are not determined by an objectively defined cultural distance, but results from unanticipated ways in which social actors make sense and negotiate their sensemaking across boundaries in a specific organizational context (Salk and Brannen, 2000). From this argument follows that it does not suffice to take into account the distance between cultures; we must also consider the organizational context in which an intercultural encounter takes place, that is, organizational contexts; identities of the social actors involved and the interests at stake in given situation of intercultural encounters. Literature with a critical management perspective further adds the need to take into account distribution of power among social actors in a given situation of negotiating culture. Cultural categorization and stereotyping might occur among social actors that feel dominated by the 'other' cultural group in a given intercultural encounter (Primecz et al. 2011).

Hence, drawing on insights from the negotiated and critical perspective on cultures encourages studying boundary spanning as social interactions between groups of organizational actors that, creatively and ingeniously, make sense of local knowledge while articulating and communicating it in a given situation with a certain distribution of power. In other words, understanding boundary spanning requires considering the situation in which it takes place (Yagi & Kleinberg 2011). Also, when locals feel dominated, articulating local cultural knowledge might lead to cultural categorization and identity construction, rather than to building cultural bridges across global-local entities.

However, even in situations of no feelings of domination, articulating locally embedded tacit knowledge is far from evident. Knowledge transfer literature distinguishes between explicit knowledge that is articulable, independent of the context and impersonal, on the one hand, and on the other hand, tacit knowledge that is individual and embedded in experiences within a specific context and some of which remains unverbalized (Polanyi, 1966). While some locally embedded knowledge is explicit, a good part is likely to be tacit. Tacit knowledge might constitute both context-specific knowledge in relation to skills, techniques, and know-how and deeply held beliefs, paradigms, schemata or mental models that serve to making sense of the world and influence perceptions of what are legitimate values and behaviors. Leveraging this tacit knowledge for sharing across contexts requires that it is made explicit. While the process of transferring knowledge include potentials for creating new knowledge, in particular when it is

from tacit-to-explicit and explicit-to-tacit, scholars also point out the challenges in doing so (Nonaka 1991). One is time, another is the capacity to articulate tacit knowledge.

Hence, drawing on literature on knowledge transfer and creation contribute by qualifying different kinds of knowledge involved in boundary spanning. The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge allows us to consider locals' capacity to communicate depending on the kind of knowledge, and in particularly of the tacit local knowledge that is most time consuming to leverage for global companies and that locals are likely to possess. Implementing global procedures in subsidiaries implies that explicit knowledge - impersonal, context independent knowledge - is being internalized and made part of individual working routines in a specific context – that is, turning it into tacit knowledge. Transferring from explicit to implicit knowledge is likely to stimulate learning and increase employee commitment as it helps the receiver in seeing things in a different light. In contrast, when communicating local knowledge - be it organizational specific knowledge or knowledge embedded in the organizational environment - to headquarters, locals both draw on explicit as well as tacit knowledge in relation to deeply held schemata embedded in the local organizational environment of a subsidiary or in the subsidiary' organizational history.

In the following study, we will draw upon the above mentioned literature. We will conceive of boundary spanning as a 'negotiation' in a specific situation in which locals act as intermediary between local and corporate levels; either by communicating and adapting global procedures at local level, or by providing local knowledge to corporate level when collaborating on measures of standardization. We will distinguish between explicitly articulated knowledge and tacit knowledge that emerge when narrating their strategies and understandings.

3. Methods and research design

The study is designed as a qualitative single case study, as this allows for unraveling and understanding the world from the perspective of the social actors, that is, from within the context in which locals make sense of the integration in the global organization (Ghauri, 2004; Primecz et al., 2011; Stake, 2008; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004) and engage in boundary spanning. Initially, the case study focused on the boundary spanning role performed by local actors in the

transmission of the Group's corporate values to the Subunit. However, as fieldwork evolved it appeared that the implementation of corporate procedures constituted an on-going boundary spanning in the daily process of integration. This led to distinguishing between two kinds of boundary spanning and to delving into how locals perform global-local boundary spanning in divers situations: boundary spanning as a formally defined task consisting of transferring and implementing corporate values in the subsidiary; and, boundary spanning as the on-going collaboration with corporate level on implementing standardized procedures. The article and its question represent, thus, the actual research process in a reverse way (Suddaby, 2006).

3.1 The case study:

The exploratory analysis will be based on a case study of boundary spanning within a MNC of Danish origin between the corporate level (Group) and a subsidiary that has been recently acquired in France (Subsidiary). Both the Subsidiary and the Group are in the food industry, manufacturing a product that historically is anchored in local contexts and that currently is confronting processes of globalizations, in terms of acquisitions and integration of value chains. In their respective national contexts, both the Subsidiary and the Group enjoy a high level of prestige due to century long company histories, strong national product brands and employees identifying strongly with the companies. However, while the Subsidiary can be described as a national brand at the time of the field work, the Group can be defined as a global brand encompassing several local brands across the world.

When the fieldwork was conducted in 2012-13, the Subsidiary employed around 600 employees at two locations. One location is in the French province with production facilities, research and development and corporate staff functions, and, the other is in the suburbs of Paris with sales and marketing. While its products had a major share of the French market, its share was stagnating to the benefit of international brands. The Subsidiary had lost its century long independence in the 1980s, when a French MNC acquired it, and subsequently, a British company bought it in the 1990s. […] (interviews in Subsidiary). Finally, the Subsidiary was purchased by the Group in 2008. The announcement of the acquisition was favorably received by the Subsidiary's employees due the Group's international image and reputation within the industrial sector (interviews in Subsidiary). At the time of the fieldwork, the integration with the Group had, indeed, led to increasing the production volumes for the Subsidiary, thereby inducing hope

among production workers for future occupation. However, subsequent to the acquisition, cost reductions, standardization of procedures, and global integration of certain functions (i.e. Supply chain) had entailed lay-offs at the production site and turned English proficiency into a crucial competence in a number of staff functions.

The Group employs approximately 45,000 people in more than 40 countries, and although the large majority is located outside Denmark, the Group remains headquartered in Copenhagen. Its corporate boards and management teams remain predominantly Danish. Since the 1990s, the Group has expanded considerably, acquiring a leading position within its sector at a global level through international acquisitions. In 2008, the purchase of the French Subsidiary was part of a larger acquisition involving several companies, some of these on new emerging markets in Asia and Russia that the Group had given priority in a period of European market stagnation. While the globalization strategy of the Group in the early 2000s could be described as multidomestic, its strategy appeared increasingly as hybrid around 2010 (i.e. standardization of back-office functions, sharing best tools and practices, while respecting local cultures and national differences, retaining local brands (Luo & Shenkar, 2006)).

The rapid expansion from a national to a global company raised the need to define a "joined way of talking about us" (company presentation). That is, 'who are we' and 'how do we work together'. This led to Group initiatives of defining a set of corporate values that were to be disseminated throughout the transnational organization with the aim of nurturing a shared culture and way of behaving across the global organization. The Group envisioned these values as a common frame for how each subsidiary could specify the values when communicating and implementing them locally (Company presentation). The corporate values were elaborated by a committee, consisting of representatives from several subsidiaries and then transferred throughout the MNC by local departments of communication and human resource. This was likewise the dissemination strategy followed in the Subsidiary. Accordingly, Human Resource Management and Communication were attributed a formally defined boundary spanning role that consisted in translating, communicating and implementing the corporate values locally within a well-defined period. Retrospectively, interviewees evaluated this boundary spanning as a success as the corporate values had become a reflex and provided a language that eased internal communication and nurtured a common understanding of why things were done in certain ways.

However, during fieldwork, a different kind of boundary spanning also emerged in relation to the Subsidiary's collaboration with headquarters on the local implementation of global standardized procedures. Unlike the transference of the corporate values, this boundary spanning may be qualified as informal as it from the outset was not being assigned as a task and it is ongoing running over an undefined period of time and the outcome was still uncertain when the fieldwork was undertaken. Yet, the locals involved expressed the feelings that the boundary spanning was conflicting and challenging.

It follows that the case study offers the opportunity to explore how locals span boundaries in the processes of integrating the Subsidiary into the Group. That is, boundary spanning at levels: 1) between a subsidiary with a long history and strong culture and then acquiring global group; 2) between organizational environments and their legitimate meaning categories that are likely to be embedded in the organizational environments of respectively the Subsidiary, France, and the headquarters of the Group, Denmark. Furthermore, the case study allows comparing boundary spanning in two different situations: boundary spanning as a formally defined and specific task that is perceived as having a successful outcome; and boundary spanning that is not defined as such but is taking place informally as an undefined task in the on-going daily work and that is experienced as conflicting.

The focus will be on which kinds of knowledge that locals mobilize when making sense of Group values and procedures. Do they present their knowledge as organizationally or nationally specific? Does it materialize as tacit or explicit knowledge?

3.2 Empirical material

The bulk of the empirical material is comprised of qualitative individual interviews with a view to acquiring insight into the interviewees' subjective meaning constructions as well as their position in the organizational hierarchy. Managers at the corporate level as well as local employees and managers in the Subsidiary were interviewed. At the headquarters level, the analysis draws on six interviews conducted within the framework of a collective research project on cultural intelligence as a strategic resource that was conducted in 2008-2012 (Reference suppressed). These interviews provide insight into the corporate strategy and its implementation. The interview language was Danish or English, depending on the national origin of the interviewees.

In the Subsidiary, data was collected in several rounds of fieldwork in the period from January 2012 to February 2013. This allowed for following up upon the first findings when returning to the field. The data collection process was inspired by a grounded theory approach. One piece of data was constantly compared with one another, and emerging categories were tested against interviews and observations in accordance with the so-called "constant comparative method" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 137; Suddaby, 2006). A first round of interviews targeted employees in the Human Resources and Communications departments. As they had the responsibility for transferring and implementing the corporate values in the Subsidiary, this data offers insight into how locals perform a formally defined boundary spanning. A second and third round of interviews comprised two categories: 1) blue-collar workers in the production area; 2) white-collar workers in the marketing and sales department. This data shed light on how employees received the corporate values and in addition, and quite importantly for the scope of this paper, interviews with white-collar workers pointed to an informal and ongoing boundary spanning in relation to the Subsidiaries integration into Group projects and procedures.

Thirty-two employees in the Subsidiary's Production, Packaging, Maintenance, Sales, Marketing Communication and Human Resources departments were interviewed, some of which had managerial responsibilities and some of which did not. The interviewees were selected by the Subsidiary according to the criteria defined by the author (job function, worksite, department, seniority, age). All interviews were open-ended to allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own words while being encouraged to provide as many concrete examples as possible. On average, interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. They were recorded and subsequently transcribed in the language used in the interview. All interviews at the Subsidiary were conducted in French, its only official language. Using their French native language contributed to instilling an atmosphere of trust between interviewees and interviewer and encouraged the former to elaborate on explanations by sharing small anecdotes (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004). Moreover, English proficiency among the employees was insufficient (for example interviews with Human Resources and Communication explained that deficient English proficiency was one reason for why corporate values were translated into French). Even in Sales and Marketing, where English language was becoming a criterion for doing career, Human Resources found that it was challenging to recruit employees with sufficient English language skills for collaborating with headquarters and other subsidiaries (Interview).

When contact was established with the Group, the point of departure for the fieldwork was the corporate initiative to define and implement one set of values in all of the Group's companies across the world. Although this remained the point of departure for interaction with the case company, interviews started out with the interviewee's age, seniority, job function and professional experience and only addressed the corporate values explicitly at the end of the interview process (see Appendix 2). When evoking headquarters in follow up questions, the interviewer used the name of the Group refraining from referring to its national origin or the location of its headquarters.

Data also includes informal conversations and observations during lunch and coffee breaks at the Subsidiary. This data provides insight into concerns the interviewees did not think about or wanted to express during interviews. Examples are anxiety in relation to the future of the Subsidiary, stress in relation to the implementation of new procedures, critic of the local management, and comments on the role of trade unions. Moreover, observations gave insight into the Subsidiary culture of 'conviviality' that all interviewees evoked when describing the characteristics of the Subsidiary.

Finally, the analysis draw on company documents, such as booklets on the corporate values, web pages, intranet, employees and their background, as well as public presentations of the Group and Subsidiary strategies, in either Danish, English or French. Booklets on the corporate values are analyzed as the concrete result of the formally defined boundary spanning – transferring and communicating the corporate values.

3.3 Analysis

Initially, transcripts of each interview and notes from observations were analyzed individually. Inter-textual comparisons were then made to identify similarities and dissimilarities in the interviewees' sense making within and among the categories of locals. Technically, this was carried out in a simple manner, using color codes combined with notes in Word documents to highlight text excerpts representing themes and subthemes that appeared to be particularly salient. At first, the coding was very open, but it gradually became more selective. First, the statements were assigned a category. Subsequently, these categories were reduced to a more limited number as subthemes were grouped around more comprehensive thematic categories.

To start out with, the analysis was based on the four phases of the fieldwork with different categories of locals in the Subsidiary; 1) HR and Communication 2) and 3) the production site and 4) Sales and marketing. Within each category of interviewees emerged specific subthemes, however, the constant comparison method led to defining two overall thematic categories. The analysis of the first fieldwork at the production site (May 2012) gave rise to several thematic categories (i.e., professional skills and expertise, autonomy, being listened to, conviviality, proximity, solidarity). In the subsequent rounds of fieldwork and in the analysis of all empirical material particular attention was paid to these thematic categories. Examples illustrating these categories were compiled into tables/figures to visualize similarities and dissimilarities among categories of interviewees. This led to identifying 'professional pride' as one comprehensive thematic category emerging in all interviews and 'living the values' as a second category. According to a pattern matching logic, these findings was related to extant literature on the logic of honor as culturally embedded in French professional cultures (d'Iribarne, 1989). The two comprehensive thematic categories were also presented and discussed with scholars in the field of intercultural management (REFERENCE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENT suppressed).

Yet, prevailing subthemes within each phase of the field-work were likewise explored. The visualization of empirical examples of thematic categories also illustrated dissimilarities between groups of interviewees depending on whether or not they used national or local organizational references when talking about the integration process in the Group. These dissimilarities were explored in terms of the interviewees' background and their role/position in the Subsidiary and in relation to the global level. This led to distinguishing two different kinds of boundary spanning situations, defined in terms of the occasional/explicit boundary spanning and the on-going/daily/implicit boundary spanning.

4. **Formally defined boundary spanning**

With the aim of nurturing a 'joined way of talking about us' the Group communicated its corporate values in early 2009. In line with its strategy for all of its subsidiaries, the Subsidiary's Human Resources and Communication departments were responsible for the communication and the implementation of the corporate values (see above). Thus, the managers in these two

departments formally were granted the task to render the corporate way comprehensible and to integrate the Subsidiary into the corporation's culture. In other words, their task consisted in spanning what can be defined as the global – local boundary, that is, between the headquarters' defined corporate values and the Subsidiary' understandings, cognitive and normative values. And as the Group's headquarters is located in Copenhagen and the Subsidiary in France, this corporate-local boundary spanning also cross different legitimate meaning categories embedded in the respective institutional contexts.

With regard to the internal dissemination in the Subsidiary, Communication and Human Resources followed the plan proposed by the Group to a certain degree; that is, to let leaders and managers cascade the values down through the organizational hierarchy through the means of seminars and brochures (Interviewees in Human Resources and Communication). However, while seminars with games were considered appropriate for the white-collar employees in, for example, Sales and Marketing, this kind of communication was considered alienating for employees on the production side (interview with manager in Communication). Moreover, due to shift work schedule in Production, team leaders transmitted the values in small groups of two to three (Interviewees, Production unit). This face-to-face transmission made it possible to concretize each value in relation to the employees' specific work functions. That is, for example, to explain the term 'client' for the production workers who had difficulty relating their job function to this category, Human Resources specifically defined the 'clients' for each group of employees as being the production unit to which they delivered either a product or a service (Interviewee 8). Moreover, a formal Human Resources document (*référentiel comportemental*) was elaborated, that defined two or three behaviors illustrating how each value were to be lived in the daily work. This document were also to guide annual appraisal discussions with the aim to focus not only on 'what' but also on 'how' employees achieve results (document, sent by Human Resources).

Interviewees expressed the feeling that the translation and communication of the values had been successful. For example, in Human Resources, some interviewees found that the values had become a "common language" that facilitated understanding of why things were done in a specific way ("Ca a permis de mettre de la cohérence entre ce qu'on faisait et le pourquoi on le faisait" [i] (Interviewee 9), and hereby facilitated communication:

C'est fort et pratique aussi parce qu'on n'a pas besoin d'en dire beaucoup. On utilise ces quelques phrases, et tout de suite les gens derrière, ils voient ce que ça veut dire. Ça donne du sens pour eux (Interviewee 8).

The medical doctor at the production site added that the values helped employees by providing some consistency in the midst of all the changes and therefore, she urged not to change the values too quickly as it would create confusion. Also employees endorsed the values in general, using expressions such as: 'it is natural', 'it has become a reflex', or as a reminder of the historical values that used to be those of the Subsidiary.

4.a. Local meaning categories

When narrating their strategy for disseminating the corporate values in the Subsidiary, all interviewees in the Communication and Human Resources departments referred to the local organizational culture and the Subsidiary's strategy plan. For example they explain to have used the corporate values as an instrument for supporting its three year strategy for the turnaround of the Subsidiary subsequent to its acquisition in 2008. This comes clearly to the fore in the following quotation:

[…] la première chose c'est que [the corporate values] on ne les a pas mis en application. C'est-à-dire que, nous, en 2008, on a défini une stratégie d'entreprise sur trois ans […], on voulait avoir une entreprise efficace, 'efficient', et puis, on voulait avoir une entreprise engagée notamment socialement, dans la communauté. […] Et il est évident que pour faire ça, […] on avait besoin de faire un turnaround. Ce turnaround devait s'appuyer sur [some values]. [The corporate values] étaient exactement les [valeurs] qu'on voulait avoir dans l'entreprise […], ça devait être la culture […] (Interviewee 10)

Some describe this turn-around as changing from a product-driven culture to consumer-oriented culture, while others expressed a similar vision by using the words from a losing to winning culture.

Réussir le *turnaround* de l'entreprise [nécessitait] de passer d'une entreprise qui était très *product-driven* vers une entreprise qui est *consumer-oriented*. Ce changement culturel

nécessitait effectivement d'arriver à mettre en place des comportements orientés [marque, clients et produit]. (Interviewee 10)

[…] quand pendant 10 ans, on voit son leadership [sur le marché s'effriter], il y a un moment où on est dans la *losing* culture […] Là, le fait de dire que c'est pas normal d'accepter […] il faut qu'on soit plus dans le *winning spirit*. […] C'était là aussi où on était le plus éloigné quand on a lancé les [corporate values]. (Interviewee 7)

However, whether one or the other expression is preferred, the interviewee present the corporate values as an instrument for nurturing the establishment of a different organizational 'culture' considered required for succeeding the Subsidiary's company strategy. Yet, interviewees' accounts likewise illustrate that the communication was not without failures, for example in relation to one of the corporate value – "We would like to win". This value was not only considered to have a particular strategic interest, but also to be the one from which the Subsidiary was mostly remote. Therefore, the local management team attempted to reinforce the culture of winning still further by associating winning market shares with 'fighting a battle'. Nevertheless, they ended up by abandoning the war metaphor as it did not work. A failure that is considered to illustrate that the major culture gap to be overcome between the Group and the Subsidiary was in terms of the 'winning' and 'losing' culture or the 'result' and 'product' oriented culture. This comes clearly to the fore in the following quote:

[…] en 2010, toujours pour décliner les [corporate values] et pour faire un lien avec la stratégie de l'entreprise, on a dit que sur l'année 2010, qu'il faillait avoir un esprit guerrier. Esprit guerrier, c'était en parti pour pousser l'esprit de vouloir gagner. Esprit guerrier, ça n'a pas pris. À la fois le thème et les mots étaient trop forts pour cette entreprise. C'est le signe, que sur le 'nous voulons gagner', sur ce mot d'ordre là, cette valeur-là, c'est là il y a un écart, c'est là où il faut continuer de travailler, c'est là où aujourd'hui dans la culture, on est le plus éloigné […]. (Interviewee 7)

The above illustrates that when interviewees in Communication and Human Resources narrate their communication strategy, they refer to a 'subsidiary culture' that they articulate and reflect upon in relation to experiences successes and failures. In addition, interviews demonstrate that, though the aim was a culture change, their communication or the corporate values emphasized

continuity rather than change. That is, they presented the corporate values as representing a part of the Subsidiary's existent culture and identity:

> […] Le point de départ, c'était de dire, ce n'est pas une révolution. Ces [valeurs]-là, c'est des choses qui dans l'ensemble existent déjà [in the Subsidiary], c'est quelque chose qui existent déjà dans notre ADN. Ce n'est pas [the Group] qui arrive et dit qu'il faut être comme ça, et vous allez complètement changer, ce que vous êtes. Le point de départ, c'était déjà de comprendre ca et de voir comment on allait l'expliquer et le faire comprendre à l'interne de façon à ce que ça passe facilement. (Interviewee 11)

This strategy is illustrated in the way in which the Communication and the Human Resources translated the corporate values from English into French. While each of the corporate values was translated almost directly – with a few exceptions (see below on "empower") – the explanations of each of the values draw on the Subsidiary strategy from 2008. This is symbolically illustrated by inserting firm specific and identity loaded words from the Subsidiary explicitly formulated strategy (such as consumers that are 'fan' and 'addicted') as well as the word "conviviality", which almost all employees evoked when describing the Subsidiary culture (Interviewee 11, and confirmed by all the interviews conducted, May 2012-January 2013). Moreover, in folders and posters, the French language version of the corporate values are set against a red background – the color of the Subsidiary while including the original drawings from the corporate version in English. Finally, in line with the Subsidiary strategy, the result-oriented value figures as number one. This choice can be read as the intention to emphasize the need to change from a product-oriented culture towards a consumer/result-oriented culture in order to gain market share on a stagnating market.

So far, we have seen that Human Resources and Communication strategized the corporate values as an instrument for an organizational culture change that supports the Subsidiary's turn-around. When so doing, they refer explicitly and symbolically to the Subsidiary's three-year strategy plan and that they strategically mobilize their knowledge on organizational history and culture. This suggests that a conscious and interest driven use of local organizational knowledge. Moreover, in the process of communicating and reflecting upon failure and successes, their knowledge on the organizational culture becoming more articulated (Interviewee 11). In other words, communicating the explicit corporate values locally appears to nurture an articulation of tacit

knowledge, namely the Subsidiary's strong product-oriented culture. What is puzzling, however, is that, though the headquarters-subsidiary relationship undeniably involved crossing geographical, cultural and linguistic borders, the interviewees barely referred to the Subsidiary's embeddedness in the local organizational environment. This raises the question whether a tacit knowledge on the organizational environment can be distinguished.

4b. Boundary spanning between organizational environments: drawing on tacit knowledge

When narrating their translation and communication of the corporate values retrospectively, interviewees in Communication and Human Resources Management only occasionally evoke the Subsidiaries embeddedness in a French institutional context. One of these rare instances is when an interviewee explains that the corporate values had been translated into French language to comply with national legislation. However, she only comments on specific translation choices when explicitly asked about apparent discrepancies between the English and the French version of the corporate values. For example, when asked why the English word "empowerment" was not included in the French version, she reflected on the associations of the word in the French institutional context in the following way:

> C'est un mot [empowerment] que je comprends très bien en Anglais, mais suivant le contexte je ne le traduirai pas de la même façon. […] On ne va pas dire 'je vous donne le pouvoir de' parce que 'le pouvoir de', c'est fort comme mot. Si 'j'ai le pouvoir', c'est que 'je dirige', 'je suis en haut de la pyramide', 'je suis le dirigeant'. C'est peut-être la notion de pouvoir qui est derrière. En anglais, il y a le 'pouvoir', qui est l'électricité, 'power', et le pouvoir de diriger. En français, il y a que le pouvoir de 'je dirige'. (Interviewee 11)

This quote illustrates that that interviewees in Communication and Human Resources did indeed consider the Subsidiary version of the corporate values in relation to legitimate meaning categories embedded in the organizational environments, though they did not put their consideration into words when narrating their strategy retrospectively. This finding led us to compare the thematic categories that emerge in our coding with legitimate meaning categories that management literature identifies as characterizing a French institutional context.

Extant literature contends that a prevailing meaning category in French professional cultures is 'to be worthy of one's profession' (*logique de l'honneur*). That is, organizational actors are likely to invest pride/honor in exercising their profession skilfully and competently and to appreciate possibilities of showing that they are worthy of their profession. When managing a team, a way to encourage team members' engagement is therefore to appeal to their professional pride by listening to their professional knowledge (d'Iribarne, 1989).

In this perspective, it is interesting to observe that in the French language version of the pamphlet with the corporate values, Communication and Human Resources chose to insert '*métier'* (profession) in the explanatory text of one of the corporate values, the one stating that "our customers and consumers are at the heart of all decisions". The English version simply asserts that detailed insight into customers and clients' needs and preferences is a way to improve their experience of the product. In contrast, in the French version, this statement is preceded by a phrase specifying that: "Dans notre métier, le patron c'est le consommateur et le client est roi." Hereby, the text forward 'profession' as an explanation rather than just relying on consumers and customers' needs as in the English original version. This can be read as Human Resources and Communication implicitly builds on the logic of honor with a view to facilitating the desired change of the company culture from a product-based culture to a result-based culture. In other words, they appear to appeal to the employees' professional pride as a way to legitimizing the need to focus on gaining market-share and to pleasing customers. Responding to customers and consumers preferences is presented as being a 'profession' in itself.

[Insert table 1]

Elements of the logic of honor also appear when the receivers of the corporate values narrate their daily work and their experiences. Interviewees in production, sales and marketing almost unanimously declare that what they appreciate most in the Subsidiary is the possibility of doing their job well. They give different examples depending of their profession and employ various expressions (i.e. " faire le meilleur produit", "faire au mieux son travail", "implication à 100 pourcent", "j'aime mon métier", "progresser en s'améliorant" and "souci d'amélioration"). Moreover, they tend to describe the Subsidiary as a professionally demanding environment that encourages continuous improvement of competences and even offers training that is specifically related to their job function or provides opportunities for learning new professions. Finally,

numerous interviewees are pleased about enjoying some degree of "autonomy" that allows them to make decisions drawing on own skills and knowledge. They see autonomy as a recognition of their professional merit and feel pride when their knowledge is recognized by colleagues and leaders (Interviewee C). For example, they narrate their pride when being solicited by colleagues, listened to at a meeting and/or given other opportunities for demonstrating their professional knowledge and skills (Interviewee U). Many interviewees used the word "passion" when describing their own work ("Je suis un passioné") (Interviewee I) or that of colleagues ("Il est quelqu'un de passionné" (informal talks), "Il n'y a que des passionnés chez moi" (Interviewe R) or "Il y a beaucoup de passionés ici" (informal talks), in the sense of one who is engaged in doing his/her profession as well as possible and with responsibility. In contrast, they describe their stress if they have failed (Interviewee M). .

Another example of the logic of honor can be seen in employees' accounts of the acquisition of the Subsidiary by the Group. All interviews describe the Group as 'belonging to the same profession' and in particular in opposition to the previous owner who is presented as having had exclusively "financial interests". This comes clearly to the fore in the following quote:

> Ce qui était bien, c'est qu'il [Groupe] était du métier. On sortait d'une expérience qui était financière […] Tout le monde était traumatisé ici. Le rachat […] était un ''Ouf !'' de soulagement. Ah oui, on va retrouver un [name of the profession]. (Interviewee 10)

Moreover, the Group's investment in innovation is presented as an expression of its professionalism and wish to continuously improve its product. The global reach of the Group inspires confidence, as it is likely to be able to offer conditions that make it possible to keep doing one's job well. It is also the perspective that interviewees adopt when describing the aim of sharing best practices among subsidiaries in the Group: sharing best practices is an opportunity for the Subsidiary to learn but also recognition that the Subsidiary has an expertise to share.

The above examples indicate that despite their different backgrounds, job functions and positions within the Subsidiary, interviewees tend to evoke professional excellence (logic of honor) and to appreciate work conditions that make this possible. This suggests that both for the boundary spanners (in Communication and Human resource departments) and for the local receivers,

professional excellence constitute a tacit knowledge that remains unarticulated when they narrate respectively communication strategy and their understandings of the corporate values.

Closely related to the logic of honor, we can also distinguish other examples of how tacit legitimate local meaning categories subtly contribute in shaping the way in which the corporate values were communicated and received. One is the second thematic category that emerged when coding the interviews: a cautious balance between 'communicating' and 'living' the values. Interviewees in Communication and Human Resource management consistently emphasis the importance of 'living the values'. Indeed, this can be read merely as an expression of the corporate intention of inducing certain behaviors through sharing values. However, literature on the characteristics of CSR and business ethics in a French institutional context suggests that business does not per definition withhold legitimacy with regard to transferring values to employees (Ballet and Bry, 2001 ; Reference suppressed). d'Iribarne further demonstrates that there is a widespread skepticism regarding the use of corporate values among employees in French companies in comparison to companies in other cultural contexts. D'Iribarne relates this particularity to the honor of acting professionally (2002), since defined corporate values and behaviors potentially restrict one's professional autonomy.

This provides us with a different frame for understanding the cautiousness that interviewees in Human Resources and in Communication express in relation to the communication of the values. One expression of their cautiousness relates to the amount of communication. For examples, one interviewee stated the importance of not overdoing internal communication. Indeed, pamphlets and posters were distributed to all sections, and a small video and articles were accessible on the Intranet and in the internal newsletter when the communication was rolled out in early 2009. Yet, for any further communication, the interviewee explained that there had to be an 'obvious reason' for referring to the values in internal communication, otherwise employees risked feeling a communication overload (Interviewee 11). Secondly, communication emphasized 'actual behaviors', or as the interviewees expressed it, on showing to "make the values live":

> Ce qu'on voulait réussir, c'est que les comportements gagnant ne soient pas justes des affiches sur les murs, mais que ce soit quelques choses que les collaborateurs vivent vraiment […] (Interviewee 7)

Another interviewee further uttered that living the values was considered a crucial point within the Subsidiary, in order to avoid a discrepancy between the values put forward and the behavior:

> […] une valeur est réelle et concrète si elle induit un comportement. Si je dis, 'moi, je crois dans la qualité', mais que dans mon comportement je ne suis pas soigné, mal coiffé, je ne suis pas propre, je laisse trainer des choses, que je donne des signes à l'inverse de la valeur que j'affiche. Ça, c'est terrible. C'est très important d'avoir cette cohérence entre la valeur et ce qui se passe réellement, les comportements dans l'entreprise. (Interviewee 10)

Living the values is also underscored by a HR person in the production, but here the argument is a need in relation to the kind of employees:

> […] il faut trouver la réalité derrière tout ça, si non, ça ne sert à rien. […] Et on est aussi ici dans un milieu où les gens entendent peu les discours, mais voient ce qui est concret. Quand nous après, on le met dans le concret, ça avance. C'est ancré. […] (Interviewee 8)

Finally, caution came to the fore when granting access to studying the values. While the Group was very open, the contact persons in the Subsidiary postponed the fieldwork with the excuse that it was not the 'right' moment to address this question to employees. Moreover, on several occasions when the author conducted fieldwork at the production site, contact persons also evoked the sensibility of the theme of corporate values and used as a reason for refusing access to doing observations in fabrication or packaging. This appeared puzzling, in particularly, since the same interviewees otherwise expressed confidence in the well-functioning of the values (see above 4).

Nevertheless, interviews from Production, Sales and Marketing indicate that the communication actually managed to circumvent some of the expected skepticism. When talking about the values, one interviewee even used the expression that 'they were in the genes as they were lived' ("ils sont dans les gènes, tellement c'est vécu et integer") which suggests that an important reason for employees' endorsement is the feeling that the values have been so integrated in their daily work that they "are lived" and not merely communicated on posters. Moreover, many interviewees explicitly stated that they did not know the values by heart, while emphasizing, however, that

they applied them. They provided ample examples of wariness when talking about the values. If they spontaneously evoked a value when narrating a work experience, they persistently did so with a smile. A slight irony was also said to be applied when colleagues referred directly to the values in their daily work. Thus, for example, having obtained a good result together, they could say, "Là, on a bien travaillé ensemble" but, as expressed by one interviewee, always with a smile in order to demonstrate detachment in relation to the values (i.e. Interviewee 3, Interviewee C). In a similar line, employees are said to mobilize the values slightly ironic when criticizing management for not 'living the values' as illustrated by the following description by:

> À l'inverse aussi quand quelque chose ne va pas, les gens nous le disent aussi: 'Oui, enfin hein ?' 'Et où sont les clients ?' […] 'Vous trouvez là qu'on travaille en équipe ?' 'C'est bien beau d'afficher votre machin, mais on ne fait pas de travail en équipe' (Interviewee 8).

However, our data likewise illustrates that getting the communication right also depends on the categories of employees. One example is the distribution of prizes. As part of the communication strategy and the emphasis on living the values, Human Resources and Communication distributed prizes at the annual Christmas party to teams of employees that through their behavior had illustrated one of the corporate values particularly well. Whether they had received a prize or not, interviewees at the production site considered receiving a prize as a sign of "recognition" and an "honor", as illustrated by the following remark:

> […] J'ai un diplôme [fièrement en le montrant] on était en compétition pour le premier prix d'un module - 'l'engagement et la responsabilité' de l'équipe dans le processus de l'implantation de nouvelles machines. Les gens se sont vraiment fortement impliqués. L'implication était totale. Toute l'équipe l'a reçu. […] C'est super reconnaissant pour une équipe […] les gens se sentaient valorisaient. (Interviewee H)

In contrast, one interviewee from Marketing commented that she and her colleagues would be unwilling to be photographed and put on the Intranet if they won a prize, and another even pointed out that "it was not in French culture to be first 'in class". In our empirical material, this is the only example in which the French organizational context is explicitly evoked when commenting on the reception or the communication of the corporate values. Below we will see,

however, that this kind of 'cultural categorization' is more current in the informal and on-going boundary spanning.

5. Informal on-going boundary spanning

Many interviewees express that the presence of the Group is being increasingly felt in the Subsidiary in 2012-2013. This reflects most likely that the integrative processes aiming at making the Subsidiary part of the global structures is moving forward. However, interviews also demonstrate that the integration process has different implications for employees depending on their job functions and the department they work in. While interviewees on production site expressed the feeling that the Group was increasingly present, they did not necessarily relate new initiatives to the Group. One example is implementation of LEAN implying that increased performance criteria had to be reached with fewer people. Shop floor workers expressed feelings stress due to increase pace and more loneliness at the machines. One further added that in addition to the increased pace, there was the stress of not performing well (Interviewee K). Team leaders and managers likewise felt an increased work pressure and stress in that they had less time to ensuring the proximity and moral support that team members expected (Interviewee H). Yet, fieldwork at the production site also revealed that in this category of interviewees (in average around 50-55 years old with about 30-40 years of seniority in the Subsidiary) only one referred explicitly to the Group, that otherwise remained an abstract phenomenon, not explicitly related to the initiatives being implemented.

In contrast, interviewees in the Human Resources, Communication, Sales and Marketing evoked the Group repeatedly and referred to ongoing integrative processes as initiated at corporate level. This is not surprising as this group of interviewees were in job functions in which increased integration implied that they were in regular or occasional direct contact with headquarters. They participate in working groups at Group level, they increasingly receive documents in English, and they transfer practices and knowledge between the Subsidiary and the Group in their daily work, as expressed by the HR person in Sales and Marketing:

> […] on est vraiment dans un processus où on cherche à s'intégrer de plus en plus dans le groupe […] Ca veut dire il y a des groupes de travail internationaux, il y a des

déploiements [….] des compétences Groupe, des réunions de travail en permanence. Alors, il faut des gens qui travaillent en anglais et qui vont chercher de bonnes pratiques ailleurs et s'ouvrir et chercher de bonnes idées ailleurs et qui vont être capables également de faire la bonne promotion de ce qu'on fait bien chez nous pour partager avec les autres pays. (Interviewee 9)

An interview in Marketing describes her function in similar terms while adding that she sees herself as a 'translator' between the corporate and the local levels. In other words, it is an ongoing boundary spanning that is not formally defined as such but which constitutes an implicit part of the daily work.

Global procedures are explicit knowledge that is transparent and easy to communicate and the implementation is about integrating these global procedures on local level, likewise more or less verbalized. The local boundary spanning consists in explaining local particularities to corporate levels so that a local integration of global procedures becomes feasible. This implies articulating organizational procedures and market related knowledge in order to convince corporate level about how to implement.

Interviewees in Human Resource, Communication, Sales and Marketing are all *cadres* (white collars) with some managerial responsibility. Most had a master degree from a French business school and some degree of proficiency in English. Yet, a couple of them had a master degree from outside France, and one could be characterized as bicultural, being of French nationality, married to a Danes, 10 years of living experience in Copenhagen, and professional experience from the Group (Interviewees). In average, they are in their mid-thirties or early forties and have around 5-10 years of seniority (5-10 years). While Human Resources and Communication are located in the province at the production site, Sales and Marketing are in Paris as this location makes it easier to attract candidates with the desired profile. For most of these employees, belonging to an international Group was attractive as it potentially opened international career opportunities, or as: "Il y a une vraie fierté de faire partie du [Groupe] qui est mondiale" (Interviewee 9). For a couple of them, however, requirement of increased English proficiency appeared as an obstacle for continuing in their present function (HR, interviewees).

Moreover, they operate in a situation with high pressure for results. Markets are stagnating in Western Europe in general and in France. One interviewee comments that the bad results had caused some skepticism at corporate level to competences at local level. In the following, we explore how these employees mobilize cultural categories when talking about the difficulties in interacting with the Group.

When narrating their daily work, some interviewees merely commented on the lack of time (Interviewee 5, Interviewee 4). The turnaround of the Subsidiary was said to have led to the flattening of the hierarchy, implying that middle managers and team leaders also had to be involved in work tasks, such as concluding sales agreements. As a consequence, they had less time for managerial functions. In addition, the standardization of managerial procedures (i.e., appraisal interviews, feedback on appraisals) resulted in less time to do more, with implications on the quality of management:

> […] on est dans l'esprit du Groupe mais moins dans le statutaire aussi bien qu'on souhaite. Pour tout couvrir, il vaut mieux faire moins pour le faire bien et sincèrement. (Interviewee 4)

This indicates a feeling that less time makes it difficult to perform well. Moreover, some of the tools brought along by the standardization are said to fit badly, and there is no time to redevelop tools that already work well in the French context but that do not correspond with the standardization (Interviewee 5). Time pressure and standardization seem to instill doubt about the Group's professional competency. Thus, just as the acquisition by the Group was positively received due to its professional reputation, integration progress led those who interact directly with the Group to question its competence.

Their comments also indicate a feeling of being little listened to. One interviewee said that 'we can express our opinion, but we don't know whether they listen to us' ("On peut s'exprimer, mais on ne sait pas si on nous écoute," (Interviewee 2), while another used the unflattering expression "steam roller" when describing the Group (Interviewee 1). The bicultural interviewee, with professional experience from headquarters elaborate on this by saying that 'there is little flexibility, though this could make things easier' ("Il y a peu de souplesse sur la forme. Et pourtant, ça pourrait aider à faire passer les choses en douceur " Interviewee 3). While these

comments can be read as simple conflicts due to time and work pressure, they can also be seen as examples of how the global integration process can collide with the locally embedded professional pride that we elaborated upon above: working conditions that increasingly makes it difficult to show that one is worthy ones profession and the feeling that of not being listened to.

Yet, while national categories were seldom evoked by the interviewees in general, they emerged frequently in this group of interviewees when narrating the global integrative process. Accordingly, whereas interviewees in Communication and Human Resources hardly referred to the French organizational context explicitly when talking about the transference of the corporate values, they did so when narrating the collaboration with the Group in the daily work. This is exemplified quite illustratively in the following quotation in which the head of communication describes the headquarter-subsidiary relationship using 'French' as a cultural category:

> Le Français est d'accord pour prendre le *process* mais quand celui qui 'amène' le *process* est champion du monde, il faut qu'il soit expert. Et s'il n'est pas expert (et il va faire l'expert), alors ça se passe […] mal. Or, il se trouve que nous, on a beaucoup d'experts […] Parfois, ça a cristallisé des oppositions […] et je pense que ça a amené une dégradation de l'image du Groupe. (Interviewee 10)

This example illustrates a cultural categorization of the Subsidiary as 'being' French and illustrates that the expectation of being led by professionally competent leaders is associated with being 'French' in opposition to the Danish. Hence, the same interviewee continues on the following lines when describing the implication of the Subsidiary in corporate decision making processes:

> Le Français […] a besoin de discuter et de se confronter. Après, ça n'a aucune importance. Un Danois, c'est que '*I want to avoid the* conflict'. Ça, c'est un truc qu'on a découvert dans l'entreprise […] Et derrière ça, pour éviter les conflits, les Danois mettent en place des *process*. Parce que mettre en place des *process* de fonctionnement, ça permet d'éviter la discussion. Mais comme le Danois est quand même à la fois ironique et têtu, ils disent 'oui-oui' et font comme ils l'entendent; et là, les Français éprouvent le sentiment de se faire avoir. (Interviewee 10)

National cultural categorization also comes to the fore in relation to the Subsidiary culture. While all interviewees presented 'conviviality' as characterizing the Subsidiary culture, in the direct encounter with headquarters, "conviviality" is described as a particular French way of working together in opposition to Anglo-Saxon organizational culture:

> […] il y a un côté humain qui est très fort […] il y a un lien immatériel qui est difficile à apercevoir, je pense, pour quelqu'un qui vient de l'extérieur mais, sincèrement, les dernières personnes que j'ai pues intégrer dans mon équipe ont toutes dit que manifestement il y a un esprit qui est différent. […] Cet état d'esprit n'est pas forcement l'état d'esprit qu'on retrouve dans le Groupe [au niveau mondial] qui est un Groupe anglo-saxon où la relation est beaucoup plus froide. (Interviewee 4)

Whether the Group is categorized as Danish or Anglo-Saxon seems to depend on the experience of the locals. While the interviewee with deficient English proficiency categorized the Group as Anglo-saxon, employees who have worked in Anglo-Saxon companies find the Group's way to be quite particular, and thus categorization it as Danish. The bicultural interviewee comments that though this categorization is regrettable, it is quite widespread in informal talks when employees in Sales and Marketing discuss their experiences of interacting with corporate levels (Interviewee 3)

The above illustrates that, in this informal boundary spanning, cultural categorization emerged in a situation that locals experienced as conflicting. What triggers the cultural categorization appears to be the locals' feeling that their knowledge and experience is not being listened to and respected by those who are in power, that is, headquarters. This cultural categorization articulate differences that to a certain degree appears in line with professionally related honor – time for showing one's worth of profession and possibility for expressing one's professional knowledge and being listened to. Yet, in this articulation the 'why' and 'how' of the local knowledge does come to the fore. Thus, rather than knowledge creation, the articulation appears as a first step of local identity building around national categories in opposition to the corporate level.

6. Discussion

In this paper we have explored two different situations of boundary spanning performed by locals as intermediary between corporate and local levels.

One boundary spanning is the formally defined task of transmitting and implementing the corporate values in the Subsidiary. In this process, locals transmit explicit corporate knowledge into to explicit and implicit knowledge in the Subsidiary. The English written version of the corporate values is translated into French and appears as a synthesis between the corporate values and the extant strategy and organizational culture in the Subsidiary. Moreover, our interviews in Production also suggests that, thanks to a face-to-face communication by local managers that explain corporate values in relation to specific work situation, there is some degree of internalization, turning the values into tacit knowledge

The other boundary spanning is informally defined and on-going as part of locals' involvement in the integration process into the global procedures. These procedures are articulated in documents, power-points etc., and the role of locals is to communicate local context particularities with a view to find the best way to implement global procedures locally. It consists of synthesizing between global standardized procedures and local context particularities making the integration of global procedures feasible at local level. Explaining local particularities to corporate level involves also articulating tacit knowledge - organizational procedures and market related knowledge – in order to convince corporate level. What our analysis illustrates is frustration among interviewees, expressing the feelings that headquarters lacks interest and receptivity to local knowledge and respects for local competence and professionalism.

It follows that the two situations of boundary spanning and their results diverge. While the former appear successful, the latter indicate signs of overt cultural categorizations, in the sense that interviewees attribute experienced differences and challenges to the national culture origin of the respectively the Subsidiary and the Group. 'Danes' impose standardized processes to avoid discussion and at the expense of quality, whereas 'French' cherish the opportunity to argue their case for the sake of quality. Also 'conviviality' is defined as being French in opposition to an Anglo-Saxon ways, even though 'conviviality' in other situations is seen as constituting an integral part of the Subsidiary's organizational culture and even as component of a product culture that it shares with the acquiring MNC.

However, despite these dissimilarities, our analysis illustrates that in both situations of boundary spanning locals draws on tacit knowledge locally embedded in the Subsidiary and its organizational environment. The two comprehensive thematic categories ('doing one's job well' and 'living the values') which emerged in our coding of data, match patterns of French institutional characteristics. Moreover, while the boundary spanning leads to articulating some tacit knowledge on Subsidiary culture – the strength of the product-culture – other knowledge remains tacit. Our data and analysis cannot unveil whether local are incapable of articulating this knowledge or whether they refrain from doing so out of strategic interests. For example, that the experience of interacting with headquarters has taught them that evoking 'national' or 'regional' interests' are not convincing. However, what our analysis does suggest is that local consider, indeed, strategic interests in boundary spanning from corporate to local levels (i.e. the translation and communication of the corporate values in relation to the Subsidiary's strategy for making a turn-over).

These findings contribute to literature, first, by illustrating that boundary spanning is not a role exclusive related to key formal positions as it is performed by numerous organizational actors in a variety of positions in MNCs, inclusively by locals in subsidiaries. To fully understand their boundary spanning, we need to conceive as locals as creative and ingenious social actors that implicitly or explicitly draw on several kinds of local knowledge in complex organizational contexts in which interests and identities are at play.

Secondly, the paper contributes by illustrating that boundary spanning is 'situated' in the sense that it depends on the situation of boundary spanning. Employees in Human Resources and Communications were involved in both the formally defined and the informal and ongoing collaboration with headquarters on global procedures. Yet, while the former can be described as successful the latter indicates signs of development towards cultural categorization rather cultural bridge building. This suggests that it does suffice to take into account boundary spanners background and competences we need to consider boundary spanning as situationally dependent. Locals are likely to tend draw on knowledge categories as well as to communicate these strategically. Moreover, our analysis confirms that cultural categorizations tends to be mobilized by those who have to adapt to decisions made somewhere else or/and who feel a threat (Primecz et al., 2011). However, our data further suggests that direct interaction with the 'powerful'

decision makers may nurture cultural categorization as it is only the interviewees in Human Resources, Communication, Sales and Marketing that explicitly evoke French cultural specificities in contrast to Danish or Anglo-Saxon. Interviewees in the production who do not interact directly with corporate level, refrain from cultural categorization.

Thirdly, the paper contributes at a methodological level by illustrating that combining bottom-up grounded approach with pattern matching is a way to shed light on the tacit local knowledge that organizational actors are not articulate and that an exclusively inductive research is not likely to unveil. It also points to the limits of analyzing organizations as instance of sense-making (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010). While this process oriented approach contributes with rich insights into the contingency of sensemaking in organizations as an ongoing, never-ending process, the implication is that tacit knowledge, embedded in local organization context or environment, is not captured.

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Table 1

Group (left out in French translation)	Subsidiary (added in French translation
3. **Our customers and consumers are at the heart of every decision we make** We put ourselves in the shoes of our consumers and customers and have a detailed insight into their needs and preferences. We base our strategies and plans on this insight and continuously evaluate the ways we work to improve their experience of our brands, our services and our people.	1. **Nous mettons le client et le consommateur au cœur de toutes nos décisions** Dans notre métier, le patron c'est le consommateur et le client est roi : nous sommes en permanence à leur écoute et nous définissons notre stratégie en fonction de leurs besoins. Nous travaillons continuellement pour améliorer leur expérience de nos marques et de nos services. Notre objectif : rendre nos consommateurs fans et nos clients akros.

Exhibits 1-2

1. List of interviewees [to be inserted]

2. Interview guide for open-ended interviews: [translation to be provided]

A. HR/Communication:

- Pourriez-vous décrire la mise en application [the corporate values in the Subsidiary] ? Quelle stratégie et quelles activités (ateliers, prix, newsletter, journal interne, intranet etc.) ?
- Quel était/est votre rôle dans ce processus?
- Qui étaient/sont les acteurs principaux dans le processus [in the Subsidiary]?
- Selon vous, quels étaient/sont les défis principaux [in the Subsidiary]?
- Quel était/est [the corporate value] le plus facile à communiquer ? Pourquoi ?
- Quel était/est [the corporate value] le plus difficile à communiquer ? Pourquoi ?

B. Production, Sales and Marketing:

- Votre fonction? Depuis quand? Avant? Pourquoi cette entreprise ? Contacts avec d'autres unités ?
- Identification/culture :
  - Ce que vous appréciez le plus en travaillant chez [Subsidiary]?

- o Caractéristiques de l'entreprise ? Comment la décrire en externe ?
- o Avez-vous entendu parler des [le nom des valeurs d'entreprise] Ou ? et Comment ?
- o Pour vous, quel est le sens de [chaque valeurs]? Exemples ?

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[i] All quotes are put in the original language as illustrations of the data and due to lacking time for translation. Translations will be provided at a later stage. Yet, as all quotes are explained in the analysis, the paper can be read without fully understanding the French quotes.