

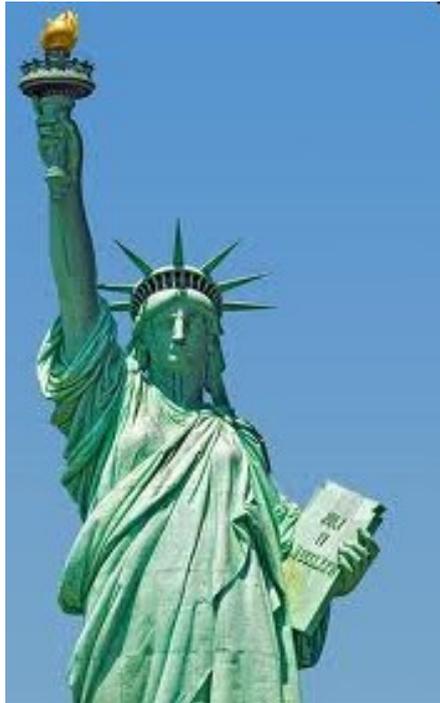
FEIEA ACADEMY 2010

Culture and the interpretation of values messages in multinational organisations: from complex theories to simple practices

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- Why culture?
- Research purpose
- Key findings and how they link to other research
- Implications for practice
- Q&As

Why culture?



Why culture?



- “..... a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols [...] by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”

Clifford Geertz, “The Interpretation of Cultures”

- “..... those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged”

Edward Hall, “Beyond Culture”

- “....the coherent, learned, shared view of a group of people about life's concerns that ranks what is important, furnishes attitudes about what things are appropriate and dictates behaviour”

Linda Beamer and Iris Varner, “Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace”

Dear Friend

I am writing this letter after a long, but exhilarating day on the campaign trail. In just the past ten days, Senator Al Gore and I have covered more than 1,000 miles, 9 states, and over 100 communities. []

I wish you could ride with me for just 24 hours on the campaign trail. Then you 'd feel the excitement, sense the enthusiasm and witness the willingness of people all across America to work hard for Democrats to change America 's course.....

Letter from then-candidate Bill Clinton

Dear Mr [name]

Lots of polls in the news tell us how people feel about some of the things which have been done in the past, but few tell us exactly what the individual citizen wants done in the future. I hope you will find a few minutes to fill out the attached questionnaire. When I have the results of all the people surveyed, I will be discussing your views with Prime Minister Kim Campbell because I believe it is crucial for me to share this information with the new leader of our Government.....

Canadian election campaign letter signed by a political aid

....and the impact of such practices

**We don't hire Turks,
Greeks, Poles, Indians,
Ethiopians, Vietnamese,
Chinese or Peruvians.**

Nor Swedes, South Koreans or Norwegians. We hire individuals. We don't care what your surname is. Because ambition and determination have nothing to do with your nationality. McDonald's is one of the most integrated companies in Sweden, with as many as ninety-five nationalities working for us. Join us at mcdonalds.se



“Understanding professional communication in a global economy represents a formidable challenge, insofar as it implies a wholesale re-conceptualisation of our discipline. Once we recognise that conceptions of professional communication reflect practices in specific cultural contexts, we can no longer complacently promote insights derived from a single culture as universal, as we have tended to do with US-based models of professional communication”

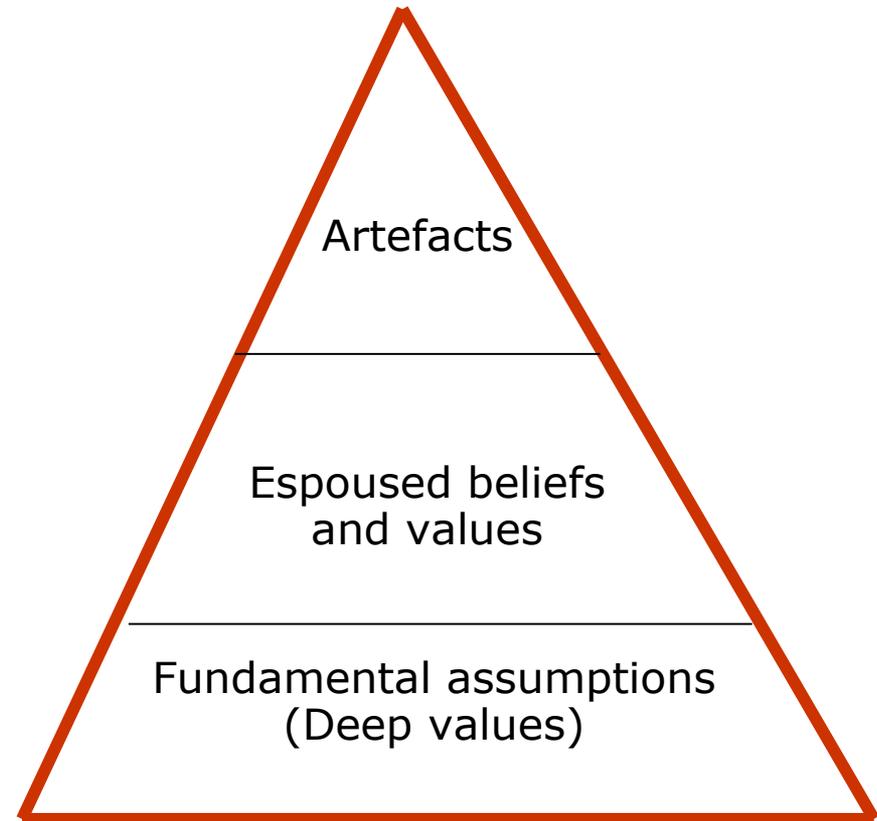
Carl Lovitt, “Exploring the Rhetoric of International Professional Communication”

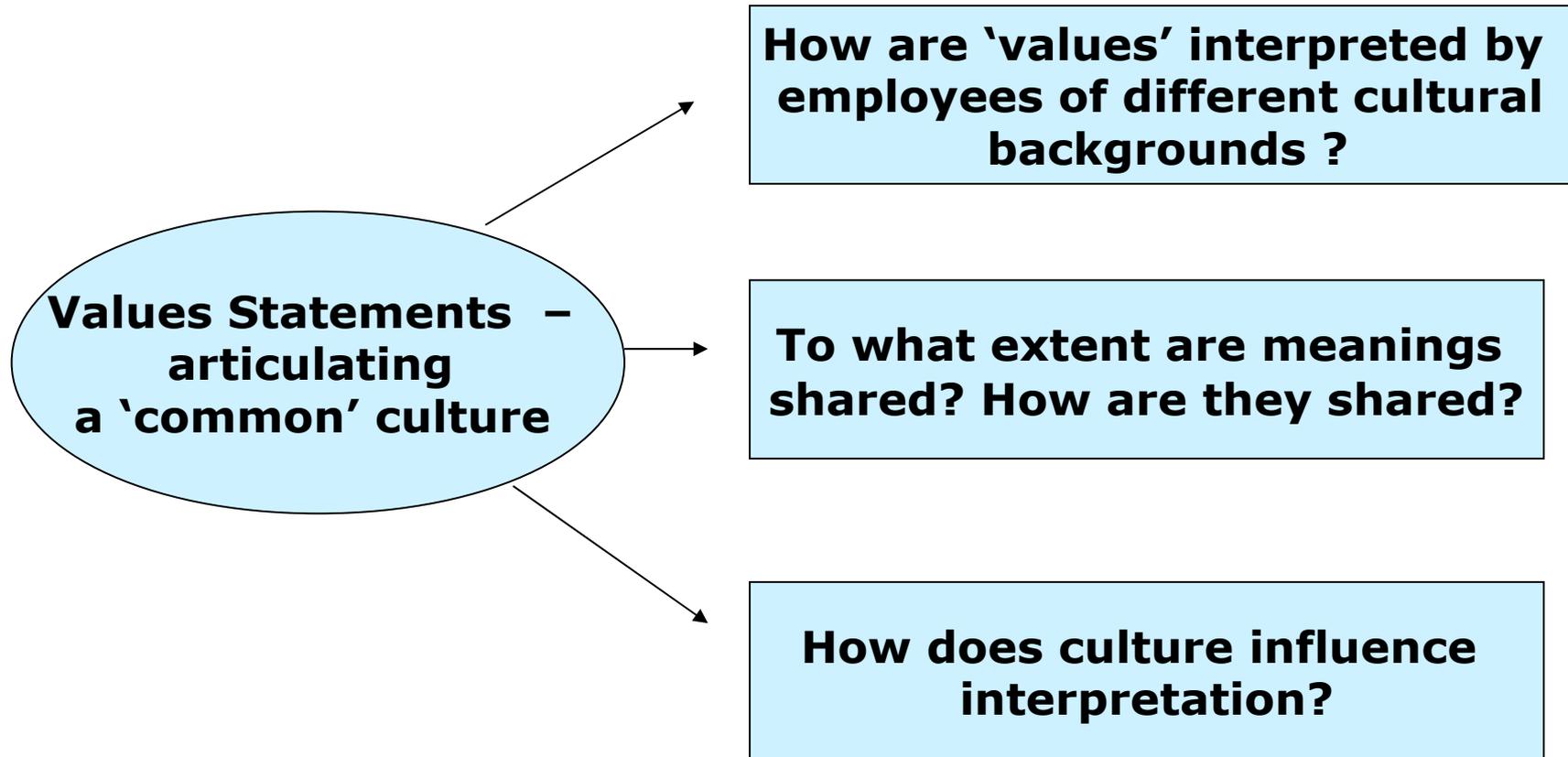
“If you are a multicultural/multinational company, do not over-agonise over the cultural differences. We feel that our values of *customer satisfaction, achievement, continuous learning and respect for the individual* are common to our workforce of 119 nationalities in 54 countries”

Communication Director, Global Telecoms Firm

Why values statements?

- ❑ Cultural artefacts
- ❑ Culturally laden - about beliefs and behaviours
- ❑ Assumptions of universal message/universal meaning
- ❑ Aim of producing 'shared meaning'





GlobalTelCo

- Telecoms
- Global footprint
- 100,000+ employees
- 20+ billion Euro turnover
- Emerging from change
- UK/French/German comparisons

EuroCo

- High tech engineering
- Global footprint
- 50,000+ employees
- 40+ billion Euro turnover
- In the process of change
- UK/French/German comparisons

- ❑ Values messages produce multiple *and* shared meanings

- ❑ Interpretation of values messages in multinationals is NOT primarily influenced by national cultural characteristics

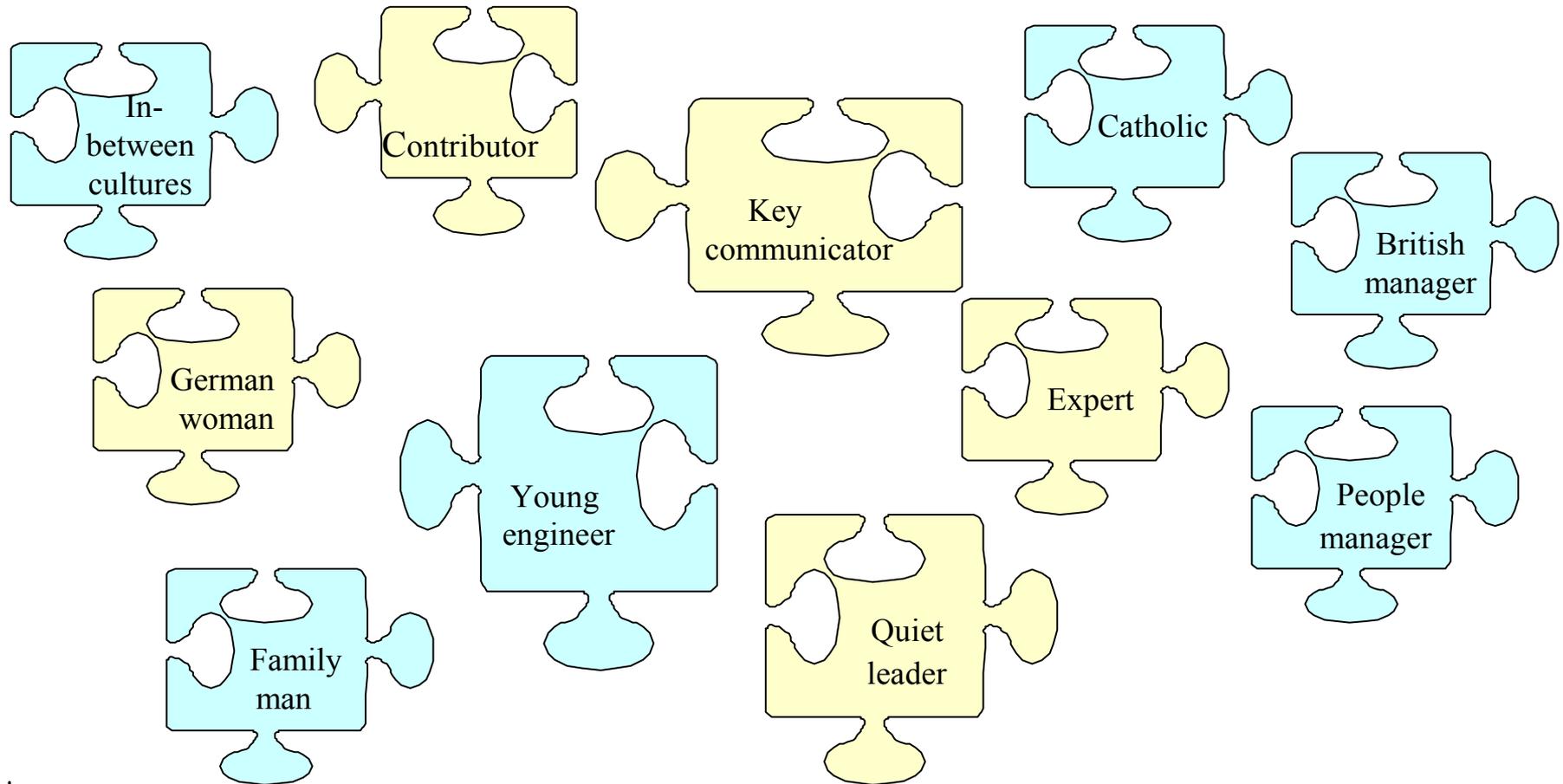
- ❑ Two main cultural influences:
 - ❑ Organizational cultural frames and discourses
 - ❑ Individual cultural identities



Cultural identities are complex and dynamic



Examples of cultural identities in the data



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Cultural identity directly linked to values interpretation

Identities	Themes	Imagery/ metaphor	Stories	Values interpretation
<p>German</p>	<p>Us vs Them</p> <p>UK-centric</p>	<p>A war of cultures</p> <p>Centre 'at the top of the hill' - edicts, programmes 'rolling down the hill' to the rest of business</p> <p>Organization as 'chain' – subsidiary is the 'last link'</p> <p>Relationship as power struggle – images of physical and emotional violence</p> <p>Sharp/smooth language</p>	<p><i>Just recently one of my people he tried to set up something which has to do with a share plan. It was so difficult [...] And there were several things where we said, you have to change the text which deals with communication in Germany, this is against the law. And they did it again and again. And later there was an email: 'we really appreciate your emotional involvement'. This was a slap in the face</i></p> <p><i>But what I started doing....to smooth down, the sharpness of my language in their ears, I say 'I know that you will hate me for saying the following, but please have in mind that I am German, for example...[] or after I've said something and I see in their faces 'oh, what has she said!' and then I can say, 'I know this was very blunt, but I am German, I can't help it!' and then you make some humour around yourself...this helps very much.</i></p>	<p>Straightforward</p> <p><i>If you compare a German person in general, of course, and an English person, the Germans are much more open. English call it rough and call it blunt. We call it honest.</i></p> <p>Trustworthy</p> <p><i>Then there is a major issue, and this is what happens all the time; people feel helpless, they want to fulfil....you know how Germans are, they always fulfil what they promise. This is very cultural, you know. Germans have one thing, they are probably more entrepreneurial than others We are very trustworthy. We are trying to be very reliable.</i></p>

Examples of cultural identity influences

In-
between
cultures

Germa
woman

Family
man

Young
engineer

Quiet
leader

People
manager

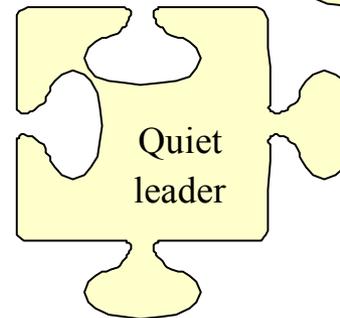
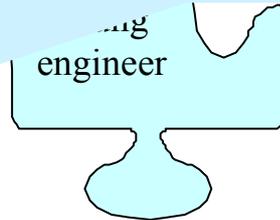
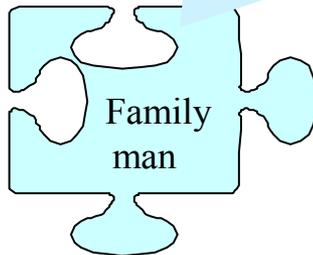
"I just think very few are natural born leaders or people who can motivate people in that sense []. Some people may not be that bothered about being inspiring, maybe they are just happy to do their job. Do I need to be thinking of new ways to do things? Do I need to be pushing boundaries all the time? No, I'm just happy doing my job."

British manager interpreting the value 'Inspiring'

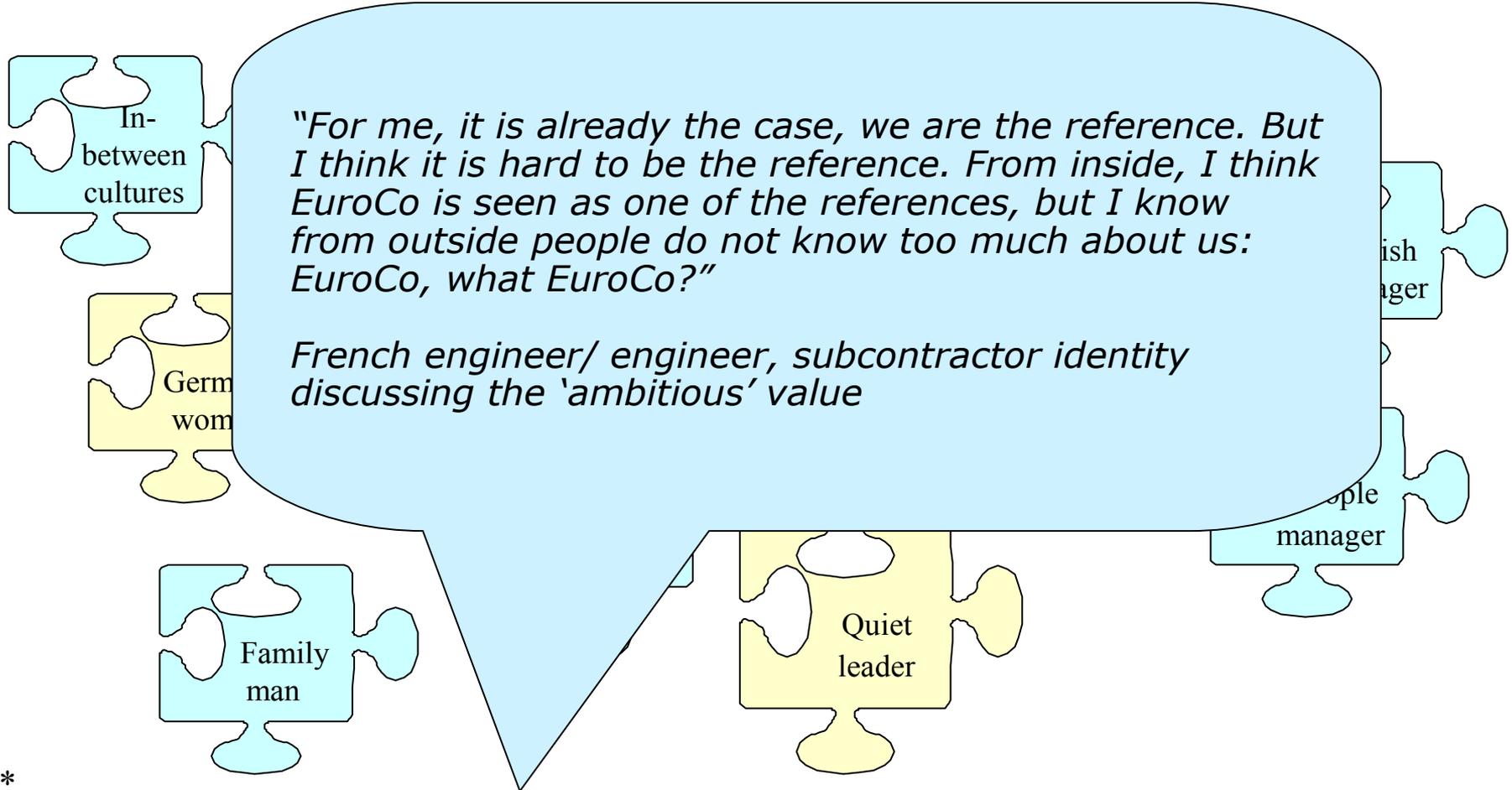
Examples of cultural identity influences

"There used to be a lot of compassion. My father used to work here and he's only just finished; he had cancer last year and he was on long term sick for a while. Now EuroCo policy when you are on long term sick is the human resources rep to visit you once a month and that's written down, but he didn't see anyone for 4 or 5 months. You know the compassion had gone and it's not just in my father's case, it's in a lot of cases"

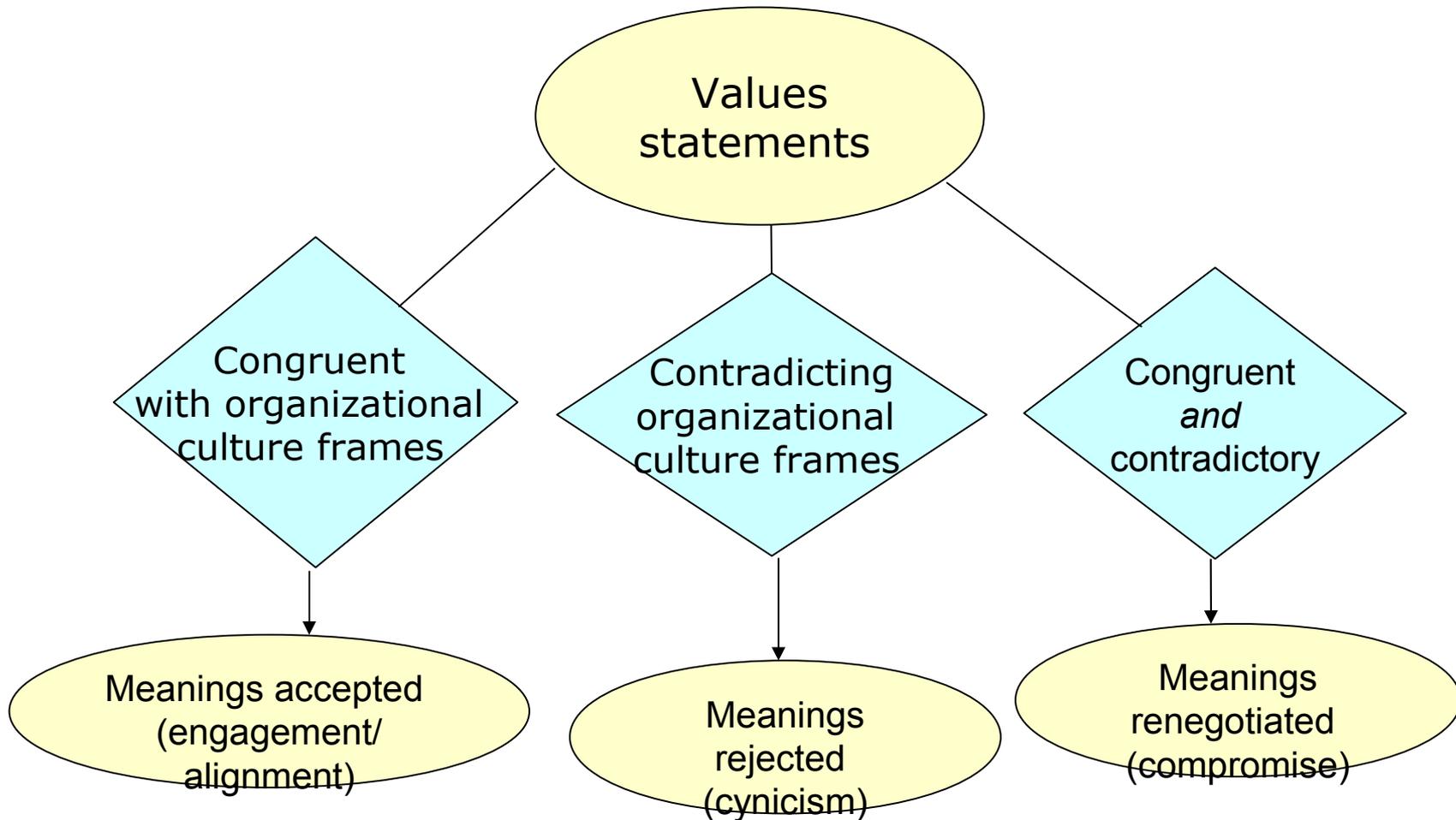
British shop floor operative, defining the value 'people' in terms of 'taking care of our people; showing compassion'



Examples of cultural identity influences



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Message

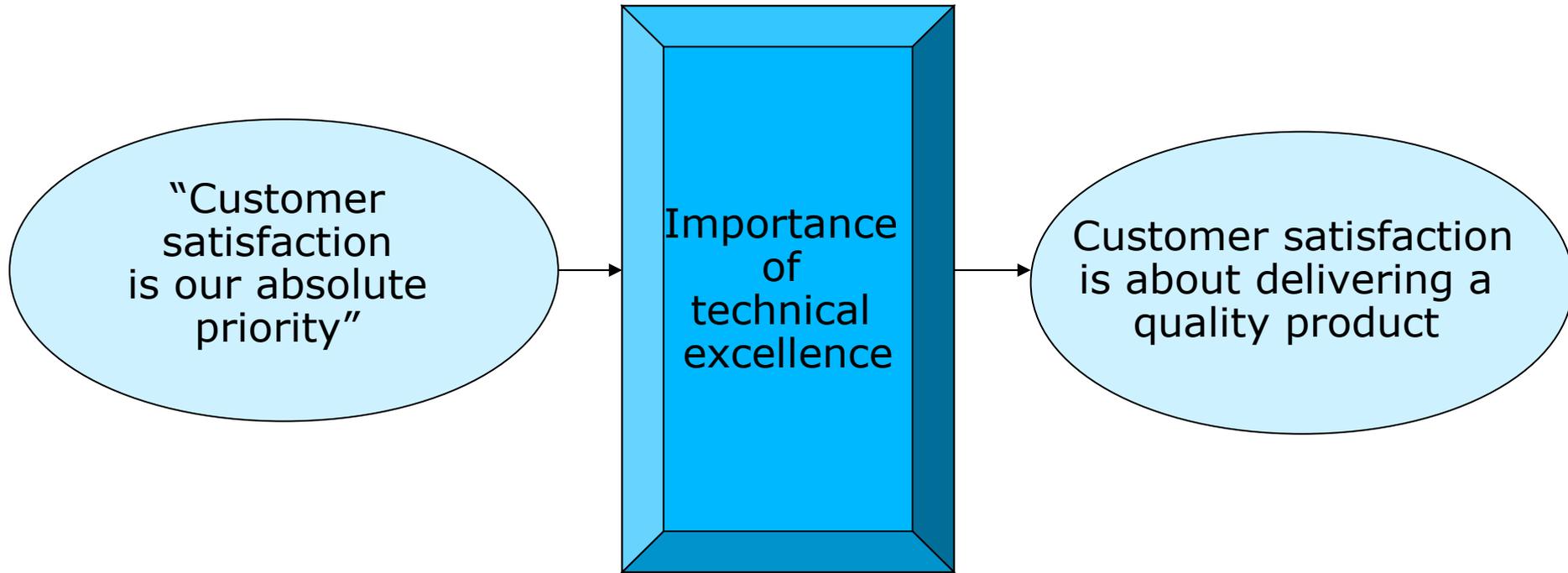
“Customer satisfaction is our absolute priority”

Cultural Frame

Importance of technical excellence

Meaning

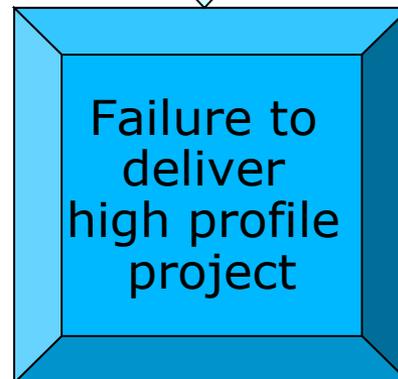
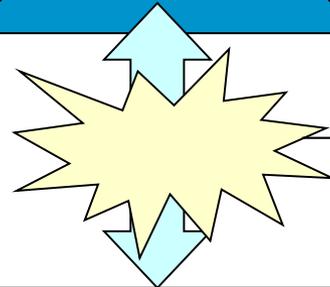
Customer satisfaction is about delivering a quality product



Message

**Cultural
Frames**

Meaning



Message

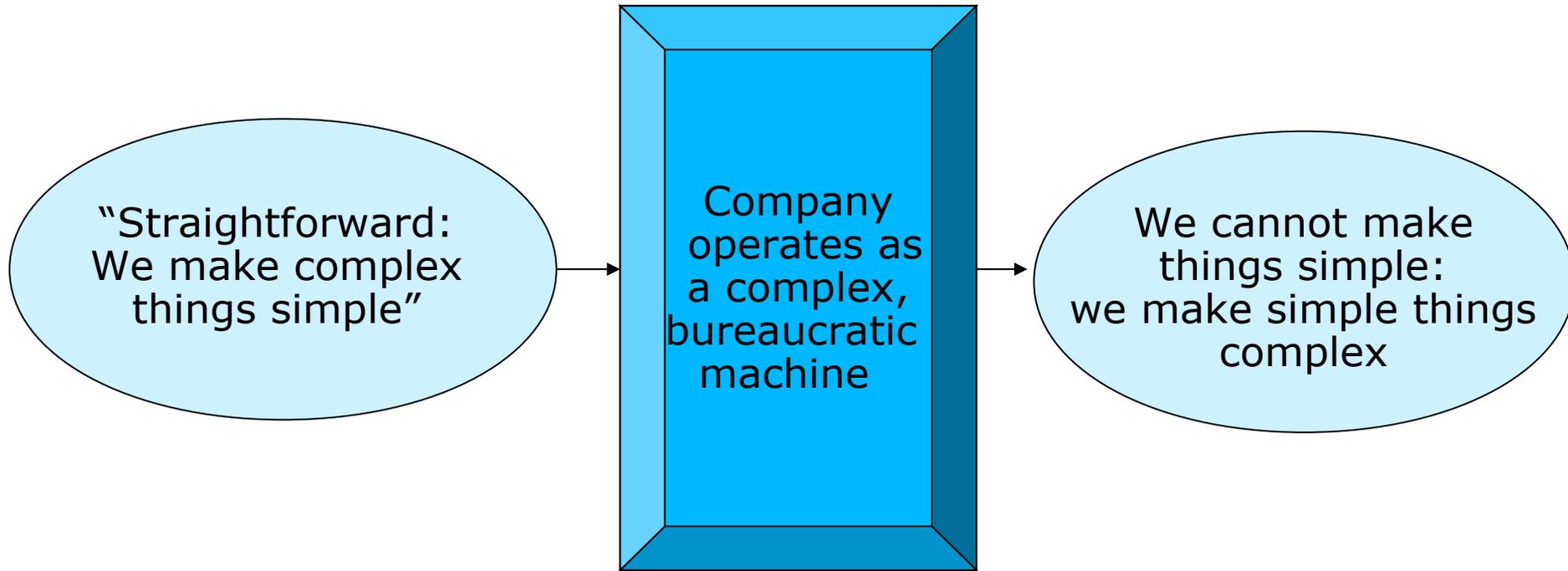
"Straightforward:
We make complex
things simple"

Cultural Frame

Company
operates as
a complex,
bureaucratic
machine

Meaning

We cannot make
things simple:
we make simple things
complex



- ❑ Culture matters, because it is a meaning making framework
- ❑ We cannot predetermine employee responses to messages on the basis of cultural categories
- ❑ 'Shared meaning' in multinational organisations is both possible and achievable, but this is not the same as homogenisation or uniformity
- ❑ Successful communication practice must take into account the way explicit management messages trigger underlying (shared) cultural meanings

So what is simple about that?

- ❑ Culture matters, because it is a meaning making framework
- ❑ We cannot predetermine employee responses to messages on the basis of cultural categories
- ❑ 'Shared meaning' in multinational organisations is both possible and achievable, but this is not the same as homogenisation or uniformity
- ❑ Successful communication depends on understanding how explicit management messages relate to underlying cultural meanings shared by employees

So.....

- ❑ Do not assume universality
- ❑ Do not 'segment' audiences on the basis of cultural labels; understand them in context
- ❑ Understand your organisational cultural context
- ❑ Educate managers about the difference between message and meaning
- ❑ Test messages against underlying assumptions/ frames/ discourse employees will use to interpret these messages.

Meaning is in the culture



THANK YOU

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