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Master Thesis

An Organizational Culture for Excellence in Service: Fostering Favorable Conditions for Tailoring, Improvisation, and Judgement through a System of Six Sets of Practices

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An Organizational Culture for Excellence in Service: Fostering Favorable Conditions for Tailoring, Improvisation, and Judgement through a System of Six Sets of Practices

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Abstract

A growing body of theory and research applies a cultural perspective to the description of organizational phenomena. We have designed the multiple case study in this thesis report to contribute to this line of research by examining how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood. Due to the human intensive setting, a service organization has unpredictability at its core. Accordingly, we define excellence in service as favorable tailoring, and successful use of improvisation and judgement. Through in-depth interviews and observations, we located practices of an organizational culture that enable these behaviors. Our findings suggest that six sets of practices are vital in understanding the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service. These practices are: *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset; We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support; We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism; We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively; We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence;* and *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self.* In isolation, the practices foster distinct key enablers in each of the organizations that create favorable conditions for excellence in service, namely learning, collaboration, and safety. Learning enables advantageous judgment by expanding employees' knowledge base. Collaboration ensures more successful tailoring, as it provides a larger pool of personal and professional skills to draw upon. Safety triggers improvisation by creating a secure environment where organizational members can try out new ways to solve their tasks. By not identifying a sole mechanism, but six sets of practices that enable tailoring, improvisation, and judgement, we acknowledge that the practices work as a system. Each practice has positive spin-off effects on the others, and this interconnectedness reinforces and sustains the impact of organizational culture on excellence in service.

Keywords: organizational culture; excellence; practice-based study; service; tailoring; improvisation; judgement

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation: we do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have these because we have acted rightly; "these virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions"; we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Aristotle, Greek philosopher (384-322 B.C.),
as told by William Durant (1926, p. 76)

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"You have come a long way, but... ".

This phrase belongs to our supervisor, Professor Arne Carlsen, and symbolizes the honest feedback we have been given on many occasions the last year. Arne has encouraged and inspired us to go the extra mile for our thesis. Thank you for your guidance and enthusiastic involvement.

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We would also like to thank our classmates for daily input and laughter. The same goes to our families and loved ones. Thank you for your patience, interest, and support.

Lastly, we are humble enough to know that this thesis got a ton of flaws, but it has been stitched together with good intentions.

Maren Grønås Birkeland

Linn Ellinor Börjesson

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Introduction

Humans tend to believe that the world is more predictable than it actually is (e.g., Poundstone, 2014). However, in reality it is unlikely that organizations are able to anticipate and plan for all possible scenarios employees confront when at work (Kaplan & Mikes, 2012). This becomes especially evident in service organizations. These organizations differ from traditional manufacturing- and product-based organizations, as they primarily deal with perishable, intangible products – produced, presented, and consumed in a single episode or in a series of closely related episodes. Since service takes place in interaction, those involved continuously interpret the expectations for the service and its outcomes (Grönroos, 2007, p. 51-53). Hence, service work arguably requires a higher level of autonomy, where people are empowered to display discretionary thinking and act accordingly. The concern therefore turns to how service organizations can facilitate this, and thereby ensure the best possible outcome for the service receivers.

We agree with the many authors (e.g., Bate, 1984; Schein, 1990; Hennestad, 2015) who argue that organizational culture can be an important force in shaping behavior. Existing research, focusing on organizational culture in service organizations, emphasize a diverse range of concepts. Some have highlighted the impact of organizational values (e.g., O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000), while others discuss issues with regulation (e.g., Chatman & Cha, 2003) and standardization (e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Gittell, 2016). Elements of care have also gained a profound interest in this literature, and has been supplemented by research on the importance of authenticity in caring behaviors (e.g., Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993; Tsai & Huang, 2002; Gherardi & Rodeschini, 2015; Worline & Dutton, 2017). Some researchers have taken the concept of care in service as far as seeing it as evidence for companionate love (e.g., Sandelands, 2003; Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). The influence of emotions and emotion management is also an extensively discussed topic, and researchers are in an ongoing debate on the impact of being able to express feelings freely (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Lopez, 2006).

The cited research has yielded valuable understanding of what types of conditions that foster favorable behaviors in service organizations, but there is a lack of consensus in how these behaviors enable excellence in service. We do not claim that existing research has neglected the topic of how these influence performance of employees and quality of service. However, much of the research has been on explaining the specific behavior or phenomenon, and how it affects organizational members on an individual and collective level. For instance, being allowed to care freely for patients has been proven rewarding for both employees and clients (Bulan, Erikson, & Wharton, 1997; Lopez, 2006; Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 20-23). Freedom in expressing emotions has also shown to increase the quality of the service (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Nevertheless, these ultimate consequences have often not been what the researchers have sought to identify. Hence, the understanding of this arguably lacks richness. In this gap in existing literature, we position our study. We suggest that the link between organizational culture and excellence in service may be clarified by a having a more precise definition of excellence at the outset. By taking the human intensive nature, and the resulting unpredictability as a starting point, we define excellence in service as favorable tailoring, and successful use of improvisation and judgement. We do not claim that these characteristics of an excellent service culture are universal. Our intention is, however, that an explicit understanding of what we are aiming to explain may provide clarification of the proposed impact of culture in existing research. Ultimately, we seek to understand how service can become a natural way of life (Grönroos, 2007), and how organizational culture can enable excellence in service during the often coexisting and competing institutional logics present in service organizations (Reay & Hinings, 2009).

We investigated how organizational culture may enable excellence in service through an empirical analysis of a nursing home for elderly and a residential home for people who suffers from substance abuse. The nursing home and the residential home were nominated as participants for the present study as they were argued to display aspects of excellence. Existing research has acknowledged that high performing organizations often work in surprisingly similar ways (e.g., Collins & Hansen, 2011; Carlsen, Clegg, & Gjersvik, 2012). We therefore deemed it appropriate to supplement the two primary cases with an analysis of an organization already acknowledged for its excellence.

Accordingly, we analyzed existing research on the major U.S. airline, Southwest Airlines. Southwest is famous for the extraordinary service they provide to their customers, and its distinct and prosperous organizational culture. The nature of the work in the two care facilities and Southwest Airlines shares the feature of human intensity, but also that of being subject to coexisting and often competing institutional logics. We therefore regard them as appropriate for understanding how organizational culture may enable excellence in service in such a setting. Our research was of a qualitative nature and used an abductive, strength-based approach. Data collection involved interviews and observations, in addition to a comprehensive review of existing research on Southwest Airlines. The aim was that this multiple approach of including several cases, in addition to triangulation in data collection, would reveal recurring and differing themes in the three organizations. From this we sought to provide valuable and generalizable lessons organizations can use to mitigate the challenge of not being able to predict the unpredictable.

Theoretical Background

Exploring the Concept of Culture

Culture is a complex and ambiguous term (Kunda, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, not only is empirical observation required in order to study the concept, but also it is important that the understanding of culture is clear. We can start building our understanding of the general concept of culture by going back to the father of social anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor. Such early anthropology viewed culture as a homogenous, causal, and stable system of shared meanings (see Tylor, 1871), a notion gradually abandoned in the 1960s in favor of one that stressed heterogeneity and open-endedness (e.g., Rosaldo, 1993; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Kuper, 1999). Accordingly, the view of culture was as something more dynamic, consisting of divergent, fluid, and shifting perspectives in a continuous process of meaning making (e.g., Turner, 1967; Rabinow, 1977; Ortner, 1984; Swidler, 1986). In 1973, anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued that culture is the fabric of meaning through which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions. He further highlighted the notion of culture as an ordered system of meaning and symbols in which social interaction takes place. This view of

culture gained great popularity in the postmodern movement of the 1980's (Heijes, 2011), when the relatively mature discipline of organizational behavior first began to talk broadly about organizational culture (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). The interest in the concept has not yet stagnated. There has been a growing understanding and conceptualization of differentiation and ambiguity within the field of organizational culture (i.e., Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991; Martin, 1992, 2001; Alvesson, 1993, 2012; Parker, 2000; Kunda, 2009). This maturing body of theory and research attempts to define, redefine, and apply a cultural perspective to the description of organizational phenomena. In spite of this renewed interest, research in organization theory has become increasingly fragmented (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015), and this section therefore revolves around a review and exploration of culture. We commence by arguing for the appropriateness of a practice-based approach, followed by a description of culture as emergent, dynamic, situationally adaptive, and co-created. This review enables us to develop a working definition of organizational culture. As our research takes place in service organizations, we continue with a section about the role and distinct features of culture in such a context. Here, we examine the influence of elements of care, emotion, and love. In our aim to explain excellence in service, we conclude by discussing links between organizational culture and performance proposed in existing literature.

A Practice-Based Approach to Organizational Culture

Organization studies are to an increasing extent influenced by a practice based approach (e.g., Cetina, Schatzki, & von Savigny, 2005; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). This has yielded important development in the range of ideas and approaches scholars use to study organizational phenomena (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Central to such a practice lens is the notion that social life is an ongoing production that emerge through people's recurrent actions (Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003, p. 45-46). Continuously constructing objects is thereby a characteristic of the view of the organization as a zone of socially defined practice. This include the basic material handled by the organization (e.g., goods, services), the outside environment, and forms of authority (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Other authors who discuss the impact of objects have come to label these cultural artifacts (e.g., Schein, 1984, 1990; Shrivastava, 1985; Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Higgins, McAllaster, Certo, & Gilbert, 2006). Cultural artifacts are

the sets of attributes that characterize an organization – those objects and behaviors that distinguish one organization from another. These include physical surroundings and objects, myths and sagas, language systems and metaphors, and the way people address each other (Schein, 1984; Shrivastava, 1985; Schein, 1990). Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) also emphasize how this equally includes the nature and the mechanisms put in place to manage and control these objects. Smith (2000) agrees with this argument, and adds that organizational practices will reflect this. These objects thereby constitute the social architecture of the organization – "the pattern of networks, values, and routines that characterize an organization or a unit for a substantial period of time" (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2002, p. 14). Social architecture makes certain actions easier and more appropriate to perform (Dutton, 2003a). We expect that we will be more capable of identifying potential life-giving behaviors in the organizations by acknowledging its impact. Hence, we adopt a practice lens in our aim towards understanding how organizational culture can enable excellence in service. More specifically, we use the threefold approach suggested by Orlikowski, Golsorkhi, Rouleau, and Seidl (2010). Our study therefore involves a simultaneous focus on how people act in the organizational context; the understanding of the relationship between the actions people take and the structures of organizational life; as well as the constitutive role of practices in producing organizational reality (Orlikowski et al., 2010).

Organizational Culture as a Dynamic Concept

People have to act and orient in response to surroundings, and culture is the force that guides people in understanding these circumstances (Hennestad, 2015, p. 70). This is in line with Schein's (1990) argument for the existence of three levels of culture, of which one is basic assumptions. These comprise seemingly discrete and taken for granted behaviors, woven into systems and subsystems alongside other organizational manifestations. As such, they somewhat unconsciously determine perceptions, feelings, and thought processes. Thereby, organizational culture shapes human behavior by influencing what people actually do (Hennestad, 2015, p. 103). By this we do not refer to performing certain, predefined, desired activities (i.e., instrumental view), but to pursue actions in a way that is coherent with the organization's perception of what is appropriate in the particular situation. The view of what is appropriate will

arguably be a dynamic and ongoing process of social negotiation. Brannen and Salk (2000) highlight this, and based on this comprehension emphasize the importance of studying both the extra- and intra-organizational sources of influence on culture. The leadership literature further discusses dynamism and social negotiation. This line of research agrees in that it is necessary for people to have a continuing sense of reality to function in any given setting, and that the system ensuring collective meaning is culture (Pettigrew, 1979). Shared meaning aids in coordinating people's actions, such that they make sense to people with whom they interact (Hennestad, 2015, p. 70). A requirement for the existence of a culture is the involvement of more than one person (Schein, 1990). Hence, it is the socially shared, not the personally idiosyncratic meanings, that are of interest (Alvesson, 2012, p. 4). As such, Wenger's (1998, p. 53-54) emphasis on that meaning exists in the dynamic relation of living in the world, as the product of negotiation, seems well founded. Schein (1990) explicitly mentions this socially shared feature in his definition of organizational culture:

> (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 111)

Although the definition arguably has instrumental characteristics in relation to the formal goals of an organization, and to the management objectives or tasks associated with these goals (Alvesson, 2012, p. 52-53), it is extensively applied (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Denison, 1996; Erdogan, 2003), and comprises several of the aspects we have discussed so far. The definition highlights culture as developed in a certain context, by a certain group of people. Thereby, the difficulty in attaining one homogenous culture within a larger organization is stressed (Alvesson, 2012, p. 135-136). Moreover, we believe that in addition to recognizing the likelihood for subcultures, it is equally important to avoid a static view. Schein's (1990) definition incorporates a dynamic perspective by acknowledging how the organizational members and context are in a constant flux, and these are forces shaping the organizational culture. Thereby, it legitimizes qualities of vitality, openness, and responsibility in the processes of continuously constituting culture. Alvesson (2012, p.

4) agrees on the importance of a dynamic perspective by claiming that culture is not best understood as a cohesive and causal force, but as something people do. Accordingly, we interpret culture as an emergent, dynamic, and situationally adaptive process, co-created in dialogue (Heijes, 2011). Through this understanding, we also note the potential for a dual influence of context on organizational culture. Accordingly, we incorporate the view of culture as partly shaped by the extra-organizational context, and partly driven from within. Hennestad (2015) discusses how members of the system and their actions (p. 81), and tensions between cultural and structural arrangements (p. 158) shapes the intra-organizational context. Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 109) also emphasize the impact of organizational structure on work environments. They claim that when the structure is congruent with strategic goals and employees' skills to meet those goals, this facilitates coordination. Systems and procedures designed to facilitate smooth collaboration are other structural arrangements of influence. Amabile and Kramer's (2011, p. 109, 194-221) study among employees in diverse industries reported that coordination acts as one of the enablers to positive inner work life. Hence, the organizational structure has an impact on the daily work of employees, and ultimately performance. Accordingly, we argue that the relationship between culture and structure should not be underestimated, a matter further discussed by Bate (1984). He argues that the common distinction between culture as something soft, intangible, and perhaps even subjective, and the organizational structure as hard and objective may be deceiving. By making this separation, Bate (1984) argues that one may fail to acknowledge how culture provides meaning to members, and by doing so, defines aspects such as one's own rules, the roles of others, and the nature of authority, leadership, and democracy. Despite diverse views of what culture is, and its impact on human beings, there seem to be a general understanding of culture as:

> a learned body of tradition that governs what one needs to know, think, and feel in order to meet the standards of membership. It provides the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed (Kunda, 2009, p. 8).

A Working Definition of Organizational Culture

Even though the definition by Kunda (2009, p. 8) incorporates many of the aspects discussed, we identify three issues with it for our study. First, we view it as too static in order to fit with the desired interpretation. It does not highlight how standards of membership and shared rules may change in response to internal and external shifts. Second, we find the lack of specificity on how culture becomes a learned body of tradition confounding. Finally, we consider the explanation of its governing characteristic as too instrumental for understanding the complexity of how culture works to shape organizational members' behavior. These deficiencies point towards the necessity for a clarification of the interpretation we adopt in our research, as does the continuing lack of consensus on what aspects to emphasize most heavily in understanding culture. By applying the view of culture as ideas connected to values within a certain group, we see culture as a mindset-creating mechanism. We further understand culture as a determinant of the norms within the organization, thereby influencing behavior. In addition, we adopt a perspective of culture as dynamic, developed in human interaction, and it will change in response to flux in organizations' environment and members. Accordingly, we apply the following working definition:

Organizational culture is a pattern of basic assumptions (i.e., Schein, 1990, p. 111), a learned body of tradition, that governs what one needs to know, think, and feel in order to meet the standards of membership (i.e., Kunda, 2009, p. 8). It is developed by, and embodied in, organizational members (i.e., Hennestad, 2015, p. 81), constructed objects, theories concerning the nature of such objects, and the mechanisms put in place to manage and control them (i.e., Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). As such, it is in a more or less rapid continuous state of change (i.e., Heijes, 2011).

Organizational Culture in Service Organizations

As emphasized in the working definition, organizational members, context, and nature of business influence organizational culture. Accordingly, it is organization specific. As our research takes place in three service organizations, we consider a review of the role and unique aspects of culture in such organizations as appropriate.

According to Grönroos (2007), service culture is defined as "a culture where an appreciation for good service exists, and where giving good service to internal as well as ultimate, external customers is considered by everyone a natural way of life and one of the most important values" (p. 418). This definition relates service culture to manners, values, and behavior of both the organization and its employees, and has three implications for how we approach the organizations in our study. First, we expect an appreciation for good service, where employees understand and recognize the value of assisting and benefiting customers. Second, we expect good service to be a way of life and provided naturally, as it is a crucial norm in the organization (Lewis & Entwistle, 1990; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009, p. 313). Finally, we anticipate that both internal and external customers receives good service. This is due to the understanding of the significant influence employees have on the service provided (Zeithaml et al., 2009, p. 313). Accordingly, the firm regards employees as the greatest asset of the firm, and all relationships within the organization are therefore emphasized (Lewis & Entwistle, 1990). A service organization tends to define that their customers or clients are a priority for the company in its values. Distinct for service cultures is, however, the alignment between the values of client-centricity, norms expressing these values, and specific attitudes and behaviors based on these values that build core capabilities (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000, p. 232-239). This is something we expect to identify in our cases. Chatman and Cha (2003) further claim that regulations and procedures are less predominant in service cultures in order to ensure a sense of ownership. As such, a culture that empowers people to think and act on their own beliefs increases commitment and involvement (O´Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Consequently, service cultures put less emphasis on standardization, and instead focus on developing employees' positive attitudes toward giving service to clients (Grönroos, 2007). In health care organizations, however, there are often coexisting and competing institutional logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Traditionally, principles of shared competence and ethical values guided this field (i.e., medical professionalism). The growing dominance of emphasizing efficiency and low cost (i.e., business-like healthcare) has altered the perceived power dependence caregivers have on management, and they are subject to increased legislation. Social movement theorists (e.g., McAdam et al., 1996) and Gittell's (2016) theory of relational coordination discuss this issue of standardization. Both perspectives highlight how initial contextual

conditions cannot be fully specified, and therefore, neither can the social behaviors that arise. Rather, the pattern of behavior (i.e., the form and magnitude of service that takes place) is partially due to the emergence of new players, new ways of understanding, and the activation of new interests that push and pull patterns of behavior in new directions (Dutton, 2003a). As such, work will be coordinated through relationships, shared knowledge, and ultimately mutual respect for the diverse perspectives. Moreover, relational coordination enables less standardization by fostering frequent, timely, and accurate high-quality communication, focused on problem solving rather than blaming. It further ensures that participants are receptive to input from colleagues, irrespective of their relative status (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). As prescribed ways to act are insufficient for service workers, we expect that excellence in service require less standardization, more flexibility, and autonomous coordination.

Elements of Care, Emotions, and Love in a Service Culture

Caring is an essential element to sustain and nourish the life in a system (Abel & Nelson, 1990, p. 40), and a determinant for how people perform their work (Dutton et al., 2002). Although an old concept in philosophical, theological, and scientific inquiry, care has become the explicit focus of management scholarship only in the last decades. Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, and Margolis (2012) argue that "care and compassion, which are grounded in relationships and relatedness, have much to contribute to an interconnected, suffering, and surprising world" (p. 504). As we have argued, unpredictability is at the core of service work, which makes the part about a surprising world especially related to the context of our study. Care is therefore, arguably, an essential part of a customer-centric culture. Dutton (2003a) highlights how caring practices are signs of aliveness and vitality in organizations, and a critical indicator for organizational scholars to attend to in the search for contexts that create and sustain life.

Care and compassion may emerge when least expected (Rynes et al., 2012). Deshpandé and Raina (2011) reported in their study of a terrorist attack in 2008 how kitchen workers at a hotel risked their lives to save their customers. Standardized processes may inhibit people from acting in this spontaneous and autonomous manner. However, a culture that emphasizes care for its clients fosters such behavior (Deshpandé and

Raina, 2011). Gherardi and Rodeschini (2015) state that caring is an ongoing, adaptive, open-ended response to care needs that emerge as a collective, situated practice. Hence, care is an organizational competence, not only an innate human capacity, situated where professionals enact and do their everyday tasks. Gherardi and Rodeschini (2015) further emphasize that good care ideally should be incorporated into the shared organizational practices. Caring behavior can also be encouraged through basic assumptions in the organization about human nature. By emphasizing principles of shared humanity, and that people are good, capable, and worthy of compassion, principles of care can become authentic (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 121). Accordingly, we regard the discussion of genuinity as important when integrating care into the study organizational practice. Dutton (2003b) highlighted in her study of a hospital that when people act nice by edict, the effects of such behavior are limited. However, when employees genuinely care, this may foster respectful engagement in the organization. Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, and Sideman (2005) further discovered that authenticity of the service provider enhanced perceptions of friendliness. Both experimental emotion research (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1982; Ekman, 1992; Frank et al., 1993) and customer service theories agree that authenticity enhances reactions to service encounters by influencing customer's attribution for employee behavior (e.g., Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Being allowed to care freely for patients in this manner has been proven rewarding for both employees and clients (Bulan et al., 1997; Lopez, 2006; Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 20-23). Worline and Dutton (2017, p. 14-15, 23) further argue that people show compassion by authentically recognizing suffering, and thereby feel moved to respond. This makes employees more effective and feel better about their work, which benefits the organization by increasing customer loyalty and inclination to recommend the service to others. Hence, compassion ultimately increases financial performance (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 14-15, 23). From this, we propose that an organizational culture of care, where employees express their natural feelings, can be an enabler for excellence in service in the cases of our study.

Employees, as human beings, express emotions when caring, and the nature of these are dependent on the context and individual motivation (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). Service work seeks to give a particular state of mind to the client (Leidner, 1999), and the

literature discusses different forms of emotion management to ensure task-effectiveness. How organizational members express feelings influence the experience of emotions, the attractiveness of the interpersonal climate, and the quality of the service provided (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Lopez (2006) revealed this through his research in a nursing home. Different approaches to managing emotions influenced the type of care given. When it was clearly stated how to act and feel, the care reflected this, and a culture of care was not achieved. On the other hand, when employees were freer to express their authentic feelings, this improved the care given to residents and resulted in a culture of care. We suggest that this relates to the discussion of the importance of genuinity in care. Accordingly, we regard Lopez's (2006) approach of organized emotional care as appropriate for understanding emotional management in excellent service organizations. Organized emotional care consists of attempts to develop a caring relationship between service providers and recipients, without prescribed feeling states or display rules, by developing procedures and organizational rules to foster relationship development (Lopez, 2006). Freedom to express feelings in this manner is likely to evoke strong emotional reactions, which makes emotional support important. A study by Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 132) showed that acknowledgement of emotional experience by managers eased employees' minds, which allowed them to get back to their tasks. As such, emotional support is a nourishment factor, which leads to positive inner work life. Inner work life "governs how employees perform their work and behave toward their coworkers". When inner work life is good, people are more likely to pay attention to, and become engaged in, the work itself and consistently pursue the goal of doing a great job (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 59, 64, 132). Hence, we acknowledge that emotional support can have a positive impact on inner work life and thereby enable excellence in service.

Sandelands (2003, p. VI) further argues that practices of care are evidence of the basic dynamic of love. A service culture with an emphasis on care and respect may therefore include an element of companionate love. Companionate love is a warm connection (Fehr, 1988; Sternberg, 1988), and the "affection we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply intertwined" (Berscheid & Walster, 1978, p. 177). It is a social, other-focused emotion, promoting interdependence and sensitivity towards other people. Organizational members display this emotion through the actual meaning of

expressions, or suppressions, and feelings of love in the organization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001). According to Barsade and O´Neill (2014), a culture of companionate love can influence employees and their work through two mechanisms, namely the feeling mechanism and the normative enactments. The feeling mechanism ensures that employees recognize emotions from coworkers, and that they genuinely try to feel the emotions they are required to display at work. The normative mechanism focuses on the expression of companionate love to conform to group expectations. This can make employees not previously inclined towards expressing love to do so due to external pressure. Barsade and O`Neill (2014) further argue that a stronger culture of companionate love leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction and teamwork, as well as lower levels of absenteeism and emotional burnout. Their study of a long-term care facility for elderly patients also revealed how a culture of companionate love made residents more satisfied and improved their quality of life. Based on this, we predict that a culture of companionate love may have positive ripple effects in the organizations in our study.

Connecting Organizational Culture to Performance

Organizational culture can be either an impediment or a facilitator of performance (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin, & Day, 2006), and research has directed attention towards how actors can use culture to their advantage (e.g., Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Molinsky, 2013). Early researchers who linked culture to organizational performance were certain in their claims of an existing relationship. The so-called 'excellence' writers (e.g., Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982) are an illustration of this. They claim that management has the ability to create a strong corporate culture by shaping norms, instilling beliefs, inculcating values, and generating emotions. They also argue that the more widely shared values are, the more robust, effective, and lasting the culture is. In addition, successful organizations distinguishes themselves by their ability to promote cultural values that are consistent with their chosen strategies (e.g., Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Although a popular argument, the major principles have been subject to extensive criticism (e.g., Ogbonna, 1992; Willmott, 1993). For instance, Gordon and DiTomaso (1992) agree that there may be

a link between certain organizational culture characteristics and performance. However, they add a number of assumptions. In particular, they note that the culture must adapt to changes in environmental conditions for an organization to achieve superior performance. Such a reasoning draws upon contingency thinking. According to this perspective, some situations call for certain cultures in order to contribute to performance. Hence, the optimal culture is dependent upon the internal and external situation (Morgan, 1986, p. 33). Worline and Dutton (2017, p. 28) argue that such adaptability is fueled by compassion. More specifically, they suggest a twofold impact of compassion on adaptability. On the one hand, compassion relieves those involved from the pain caused by change processes. On the other hand, compassion sparks passion that motivates resourceful change. Another perspective highlights a reverse relationship between culture and performance. This view argues for how success brings about a common set of orientations, beliefs, and values. As such, these cultures are not only a byproduct of performance, but they may also reproduce a successful organization (Alvesson, 2012, p. 61). Many have further rooted the positive relationship between organizational culture and performance in its ability to generate sustained competitive advantage (i.e., Barney 1986, 1991). The key is that the culture has to be strategically relevant (Chatman & Cha, 2003). Services marketing theorists have proposed that a service culture may influence performance by functioning as an organizational resource that is difficult to imitate (Homburg, Fassnacht, & Guenther, 2003). The resource-based view suggests a similar reasoning. A service culture is regarded as a crucial firm resource that is valuable and inimitable by competitors, thus likely to result in positive outcomes (Barney, 2001; Barney, Wright, & Ketchen, 2001; Yang, 2008).

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of learning and continuous improvement (Pfeffer, 1994; Shah et al., 2006), and training and development programmes (Watson & D'Annunzio-Green, 1996; Harrington & Akehurst, 1996; Haynes & Fryer, 2000) in order to sustain excellence in service performance. The focus should be on training interpersonal and teamwork skills, and communication practices (Bowen & Schneider, 1995, p. 131-142; Harrington & Akehurst, 1996; Redman & Mathews, 1998). Such learning is often motivated through the power of positive examples and success stories (Day, 1999, p. 57). Worline and Dutton (2017) argue that compassion is equally

important to ensure sustainability. Compassion makes strategies more sustainable by restoring and strengthening the organization's ability to accomplish its goals. In addition, compassion stimulates human creativity and foster learning (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 15-20). To ensure a continuous focus on service, and that employees make decisions with the clients' opportunities for advantage in mind, measures of quality and efficiency are often associated with customer satisfaction (Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster, 1993; Hennestad, 1999; Shah et al., 2006). The individual behind, and their unique experience, is at the center of attention when identifying the wants and needs of clients (Davenport, Harris, & Kohli, 2001). Moreover, when employees are able to take the customer's perspective, they can see themselves the way their customers see them. Hennestad (1999) states that this not only has a revealing impact, but also a directive, as it shows what has to be done on a concrete level.

Research Question

As we have discussed, existing research on service cultures highlights elements of dynamism (e.g., Heijes, 2011; Alvesson, 2012), care (e.g., Gherardi & Rodeschini, 2015; Worline & Dutton, 2017), emotions (e.g., Lopez, 2006, Amabile & Kramer, 2011), and love (e.g., Barsade & O'Neill, 2014) as important in encouraging people to go the extra mile to serve clients' needs. This in turn affects performance in service organizations (Hennestad, 1999; Alvesson, 2012; Worline & Dutton, 2017). Some even argue that the most profitable firms have a service oriented organizational culture (e.g., Deshpandé et al., 1993). Ooncharoen and Ussahawanitchakit (2008), and Gebauer, Edvardsson, and Bjurko (2010) go as far as to state that a service culture is a prerequisite for organizational excellence and business performance. We acknowledge how culture influences daily activities as it is embedded in, and developed through, social interaction in a dynamic process. As such, it also influences behavior. Since human interaction is in the nature of service work, employees display elements of excellence in service (i.e., tailoring, improvisation, and judgment) in potentially ambiguous situations. The research we have discussed has yielded valuable understanding of what types of conditions that foster these favorable behaviors in service organizations. However, the literature is scattered. As are the results on how organizational culture enables excellence in service, since this ultimate consequence

has often not been what the researchers have sought to identify. In addition, Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003, p. 367) argue for how more research is required on what attributes of organizational culture that are more conducive to positive dynamics in organizations. Hence, we recognize the need for additional research on how organizations, where employees face competing demands in their work, can enable favorable tailoring and successful use of improvisation and judgement. Accordingly, the aim of our study is to investigate the following question:

As service work is situation dependent; requiring tailoring, improvisation, and judgment under often coexisting and competing institutional logics, how can the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service be understood?

Methodology

Research Design

Our study explored the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service at a nursing home for elderly and a residential home for people who suffers from substance abuse, and compared them with Southwest Airlines. The aim was to generate nuanced knowledge from which valuable and generalizable lessons might follow. As the aim was to understand the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service from the perspective of those studied, we applied a qualitative research strategy (Pratt, 2009). Other research studying organizational practice, care, emotion, and situated decision making in similar settings have also regarded this strategy appropriate (See Lopez, 2006; Gherardi & Rodeschini, 2015). We further aimed at understanding the relationship between everyday language and concepts used by social actors, and explain the constructs grounded in these (Blaikie 2007, p. 3). We allowed our prevailing understanding, as well as existing theories regarding phenomena employees described, to be a part of the interpretation of the data. Hence, we applied an abductive approach (Martela, 2015).

We examined the relationship between culture and service practice through a flexible and evolving approach, which resulted in an exploratory research design. Gherardi and Rodeschini's (2015) study, which explored care as an organizational competence in a

nursing home for elderly, inspired this design. Our aim was that comparison of the three cases, and analysis of corroborating and contradicting findings, would reveal concepts relevant to the understanding of the possibility for an organizational culture to enable excellence in service. Such an intensive examination of each case, in addition to qualitative comparison, resulted in a multiple case study design (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 65). Lopez (2006) conducted a multiple case study when investigating care work and emotional care in nursing homes, which further supported its applicability for our research question.

Research Setting

The two care facilities we collected primary data from are a part of a diaconal foundation in Norway, which does social work such as elderly, alcohol, and mental health care. It has a long history and presence in many different areas in Norwegian communities. The diaconal foundation nominated the nursing home for elderly and the residential home for people with substance abuse as participants for our study, based on how they displayed aspect of excellence in service. Results of internal surveys supported this claim. The two care facilities provide service work that is situation dependent, which requires employees to improvise and use judgement in their everyday work. In addition, employees are subject to nationwide and organization specific legislation that may inhibit them from displaying these behaviors. These characteristics made the nursing home and the residential home suitable for our study.

The nursing home is of average size, 48 residents. We therefore regarded it as sufficiently small for the entire structure to be observable. It also runs a day center, and voluntary and network initiatives for the local community. The nursing home changed their management team a year before our study started. This has had a significant impact on the daily work of the organization and employees' work environment. A result of this change is, for instance, a reduction in sick leaves of approximately 50 percent over the last year. Moreover, a recent next of kin survey reports great satisfaction with the care provided. Hence, at the time of our study, the nursing home was experiencing positive results. This supported the decision to perform a strength-based study on this case.

The residential home is a living and care facility for 35 residents who suffer from substance abuse. We regarded this research setting as appropriate to answer our research question, as the services require a large degree of tailoring to satisfy the wide range of needs among residents. Employees are also required to handle challenging and deviating situations. The residential home has previously shown success in this. A resident survey reports great satisfaction with, for instance, engagement of employees and perceived respect and understanding for their situation. We therefore regarded it likely that this context would illustrate aspects relevant for determining how organizational culture may enable excellence in service.

The nature of the work at the two care facilities is, despite similarities of providing care and help for people in need, considerably different. The nursing home serves people who have reached an old age – whose life is taking a natural transition. The residential home also works close to death; however, the residents' conditions are self-inflicted. The residents are often people who at an early age made some decisions that resulted in a lifelong substance abuse. Since the residential home is not a rehabilitation center, but a home for people in active drug abuse, residents daily pursue actions that work against the efforts employees pursue to help them improve their lives. Hence, employees do not have improvement of their residents' conditions as a motivator in their job. In a matter of fact, as residents often live at the residential home over a long period of time, employees often watch as their condition worsens. Hence, the environment at the residential home is more destructive than at the nursing home. In addition, since many residents are often on drugs while suffering from psychiatric conditions, the environment at the residential home is more violent than at the nursing home. Accordingly, employees will often have to improvise and use judgement in more severe situations.

Since existing research has acknowledged that excellent organizations work in a surprisingly similar manner (e.g., Collins & Hansen, 2011; Carlsen et al., 2012), we supplemented the above cases with a case that is well known for its excellence in service, namely Southwest Airlines. This provided the possibility to identify recurring and varying themes. The case was analyzed by reviewing existing studies on the company, as the success story of Southwest Airlines is widely reported (e.g., O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Collins, 2001; Gittel, 2004; Lauer, 2010; Collins & Hansen, 2011).

We therefore regarded the richness of data as sufficient to enable purposeful secondary analysis. Southwest Airlines is a major U.S. airline, and one of the leading low-cost carriers in the U.S. The company was established in 1972 (Southwest Airlines, 2016a), and is often admired for its excellent customer service. The firm is also famous for its distinct and prosperous organizational culture. Existing research emphasizes that Southwest Airlines' employees are other-oriented, and care both for their coworkers and for customers (e.g., O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Collins, 2001; Gittel, 2004; Lauer, 2010; Collins & Hansen, 2011). Organizational practices support this focus, for instance the consistent capitalization of words such as Employees and Customer. Employees go the extra mile to fulfill customers' needs, and help their coworkers with whatever, whenever because of these practices. In addition, management acts according to the principles of other-orientation and care. Their mission statement highlights that, "Above all, Employees will be provided the same concern, respect, and caring attitude within the organization that they are expected to share externally with every Southwest Customer" (Southwest Airlines, 2016b). This well-articulated mission acts as a foundation for practices in the company. It further highlights concepts that are at the core of our study. Accordingly, we acknowledged some distinct features of Southwest Airlines' organizational culture, and sought to understand which of them that have been major determinants for enabling excellence in service.

The nursing home, the residential home, and Southwest Airlines are organizations which offer some kind of service – the nursing home and the residential home have a caregiver-caretaker model, while Southwest has a conventional client orientation. Hence, human interaction is a huge part of the daily life of employees in each of the organizations. As such, tailoring, improvisation, and judgment is required in potentially ambiguous situations. We therefore regarded them as appropriate to understand how organizational culture may foster these behaviors and thereby enable excellence in service.

Participants

We collected data from nurses, nursing assistants, milieu therapist, and members of the management team at the nursing home and the residential home. Participants who had been part of deviating situations were preferable, in order to explore the influence of

the organizational culture. We selected participants in cooperation with management at both the nursing home and the residential home. This was to ensure inclusion of key employees, who would provide a complete understanding. The sample consisted of both genders, as well as employees with diverse length of employment. At the nursing home, the length of employment ranged between 1 and 26 years, whereas it at the residential home ranged between 2 and 32 years.

The governance structure at the nursing home and the residential home is slightly different. Each has one top administrator, who has the responsibility for managing the care facility (e.g., planning, organizing, and ensuring the quality of the service provided). This person has a high degree of control and influence. The nursing home further consists of two departments, for which two department heads have responsibility. A department head has responsibility for the everyday operations (e.g., communication between the staff and top administrator, development and implementation of nursing policies, and overseeing continued employment of nursing staff). At the residential home, no such division of responsibility is present. However, an administrative consultant supports the top administrator. Moreover, the workforce at the nursing and residential home includes nurses, nursing assistants, professional development coordinator, and milieu therapists. We use the collective term caregivers to refer to these people. They are in direct contact with the residents, assisting them in their everyday activities. The caregivers have no managerial responsibility.

Data Collection

Arne Carlsen, Professor at the Department of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at BI Norwegian Business School, enabled the initial contact with the diaconal foundation. After a successful meeting with the top administrator at the nursing home and the residential home, our research proposal was accepted. In return for allowing us into their organizations, and taking up time from their employees, we agreed that we would present feedback to them through a presentation of key findings. We collected primary data through both in-depth interviews and observations over a period of a month and a half. Table I presents an overview of data collection.

In total, we conducted 13 in-depth individual interviews with 13 different participants. The focus of the interviews was on gaining insight into the relationship between organizational culture and service. They were of a semi-structured nature, and existing research on Southwest Airlines was the inspiration for the themes and questions included (See interview guide in Appendix I & II). We conducted interviews through a strength-based method by asking questions focusing on the positive aspects of the job and the interviewee's coworkers. The aim of the interviews was to discover underlying beliefs, feelings, and attitudes on the topic of handling deviating situations (e.g., Can you please recall a time something unexpected happened?). Accordingly, they were influenced by narrative methods of inquiry (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Mishler, 1986; Czarniawska, 1997; 2004; Clandini & Connelly, 2000), as this is considered a natural way of communicating (Gee, 1985; Flyvbjerg, 2006). We encouraged interviewees to exemplify through storytelling by asking them to recall memorable events (e.g., Can you please recall a scenario when you as a group experienced something with which you lacked knowledge to handle?). This enabled the lived experience to be at the center of the interviews (Dutton, 2003a), and gave us an understanding of how the participants perceive the social world around them. Hence, the use of narratives made it easier to grasp the complex concept of organizational culture. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes (averaging around 40 minutes), and were recorded, and transcribed.

Table I

Overview of Data Collection

	Interviews		Observation	
	Interview Subject	Length	Setting of Observation	Length
Nursing Home	Department head, dep. 3	50 min	Management meeting	1 h 30 min
	Assistant department head, dep. 2	45 min	Interdisciplinary quality-development meeting	45 min
	Nursing assistant	40 min	Working environment committee meeting	1 h
	Department head, dep. 2	1 h	General meeting	1 h
	Nursing assistant	55 min	Observation in entrance area	1 h
	Nursing assistant	50 min	Observation in common area, dep. 2	1 h
	Top administrator	1 h 30 min	Observation in common area, dep. 3	1 h
			Report meeting, dep. 2 (2 occasions)	1 h 15 min
			Report meeting, dep. 3 (2 occasions)	1 h
Residential Home	Milieu therapist	40 min	Residents' breakfast	30 min
	Nurse	50 min	Weekly candle ceremony	1 h
	Milieu therapist	1 h	Observation in common area	1 h
	Administrative consultant	35 min	General meeting	30 min
	Top administrator	1 h 10 min	Weekly treatment meeting	1 h 30 min
	Professional development coordinator	45 min	Report meeting (2 occasions)	1 h

Due to how social expectations may influence people's descriptions of their own behavior (Lopez, 2006), we assessed interviews as insufficient to show the whole reality. We therefore regarded triangulation appropriate. Observations enabled further analysis of behavior of employees at the nursing home and the residential home, and the meaning they attribute to their environment. The data gathered during interviews guided the observations, by engaging us in a search for corroborating evidence. In total 15 hours of observations were conducted (nine and a half hours at the nursing home and five and a half hours at the residential home). We observed a variety of settings and activities, including morning and afternoon reports, staff meetings, management meetings, interdisciplinary quality-development meetings, working environment committee meetings, and informal conversations. We regarded these situations as appropriate as they involve interactions and discussions between organizational members. The observations focused on what people said, their reactions, and nonverbal behaviors. This enabled us to get an understanding of the interplay between the organizational members, everyday routines, and organizational structure in a manner that official records rarely record (Lopez, 2006). We took observation notes both during and directly after observing.

We terminated data collection when interviews and observations no longer provided novel aspects and understanding, meaning that participants highlighted similar instances of data repeatedly. We were also in a continuous dialog with Ph.D. student Jo Sundet, and read transcripts of two interviews she had conducted. Her findings revealed a high degree of corroboration with aspects and stories from our interviews. We therefore considered complementary sampling of data as unlikely to yield more information related to the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service.

The Role of the Researchers

We experienced many of the same emotions as the organizational members during our time in the organizations (e.g., joy when talking about improvements; frustration when observing the destructive behavior of residents at the residential home). In order to ensure that these impressions did not bias our interpretation of what we saw and heard, we focused on processing what we experienced. Joint reflection did not only have a

revealing impact, but it also facilitated sharing of perspectives on what we had learned about the organizations and their work. We also reflected together with Ph.D. student, Jo Sundet, who conducts research on the same organizations, and therefore experienced the same emotions.

Data Analysis

We used systematic coding in order to move from empirical observations to theoretical categories. We were guided by the central approach of grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Charmaz, 2006), and especially that of using an iterative process in data analysis. First, all the interviews were transcribed. As we studied both feelings and attitudes, we did this instantly after the interviews to ensure that impressions and memories were fresh in mind. Thereby, we were able to give weight to both the actual content of the data, but also phrasing, body language, and the overall mood of the individual(s) interviewed or observed (Hickson, 2013, p. 124).

We analyzed the transcribed interviews in several rounds, in order to mitigate the risk of overseeing important themes in the process of identifying core practices. In the first round, we read the interview transcripts separately, to prevent the risk for groupthink. In this process, each of us took notes and highlighted stories we found relevant to the research question. After reviewing each of the interviews in isolation, we compared notes and stories highlighted to identify common and distinct features. In the second round of analysis, we developed tentative conceptual categories based on the interviews and the data highlighted in the first round of analysis. As in the first round of analysis, we created these categories individually, before we compared them to identify similarities and inconsistencies. As there was much correspondence, we were able to narrow the data down into 24 tentative conceptual categories (e.g., care, family, and humor). For the third round of analysis, we invited Arne Carlsen and Ph.D. student Jo Sundet to a workshop where they provided nuanced input on the data. This provided us with valuable insight, which we incorporated into the fourth round of analysis. At this stage, we revisited the tentative conceptual categories to identify the most significant narratives. Through this process, we were able to merge the 24 tentative conceptual categories into eight sets of practices. However, when working with the data it became evident that only six of these were distinct enough, whereas two of them

were recurring features in the other practices. This resulted in the six sets of practices of excellence in service presented in this paper (See figure I, p. 27, & Table I, p. 55-60). We regarded each feature as adequately accounted for in the selected practices. These six sets of practices were based on the most significant aspects of excellence in service observed in the organizations (e.g., the practice *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism* includes humor, raw humor, black humor, and gallows humor).

We then further analyzed the six sets of practices by revisiting the interview transcripts and observation notes, which thoroughly described the aspects and stories connected to each practice. We also regarded the data gathered through the two methods as consistent. This supported the decision of focusing on these practices. For each practice, we made a list of first order themes that the practice included. For instance, first order themes related to the practice *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset*, include *we trust each other*, *we don't give up*, and *we're forgiving*. At this stage, we conducted a second workshop with Arne Carlsen and Jo Sundet to ensure robustness in the connections we had made within and between the practices.

The research process has been of a dialogic nature in order to enable joint learning and inclusion of diverse perspectives. By having employees in the organizations participate in the interpretation of the data, we ensured that we had understood stories and events accurately. Studies with similar methods in similar settings have used inclusion of participants in data analysis. For instance, Amble (2012) utilized the benefits of this approach in her study of elderly care in Norway. As in her study, we developed collective reflection and knowledge enhancement through such an interactive research process.

Findings

The day is finally here. The top administrator – let us call her Jane – has planned the general meeting for several weeks. She quickly walks around the room lighting candles. The tables are gathered along the walls, opening up a space in the center of the room. The employees walk into to the open area near the entrance that serves as the heart of the building – a room for socializing and

making memories. Some arrive in groups, whereas others come alone. Jane expects many people to attend the meeting, because she talked to one of the department heads earlier about him not participating to make it possible for the majority of employees to attend. Jane walks towards the center of the room. She hears a hum of voices, abrupted by outburst of laughter. She feels energized. As she starts to talk, the room falls silent and the participants look at her with interested and excited eyes. She smiles and starts by saying:

> This is a meeting for everyone. I don't want it to be a monologue, but rather a dialogue, where everyone can contribute with their opinions! Therefore, I wanted to start, instead of end, this meeting by hearing what you want to say.

Jane looks at everyone in the room with a contagious smile, and when she turns to the left an employee stands up. Everyone turns towards her with curious eyes. She starts describing the success they have had in a specific project directed towards increasing the quality of life of their residents. "I just want to thank each and every one of you for a very, very good cooperation (...) I couldn't have done this on my own. Thank you!" In response to this, people start applauding. After discussing topics employees bring to the table, they direct the focus to possibilities for improvement. "Regarding the sheets we use during report meetings; those sheets are so good now!" Jane says with a proud voice. "Therefore, it's important that they're shredded and don't lie around". She continues with a serious tone, emphasizing that they include a lot of sensitive information. They move on to the next topic on the agenda, namely the new IT system. The atmosphere in the room is playful while talking about this. However, not everyone seems convinced of its usefulness. "I've been thinking about the privacy of the residents in the system. How much sensitive information can actually be shared?" one of the participants questioned. Several of the people in the crowd nod at this and exclaim that they have been thinking about the same. "First and foremost I want the system to be a way to spread positive information. I want it to be a place where we can share pictures of the nice things that happen at the nursing home", Jane answers smiling. This response does, however, not seem to calm the participants, and they continue

to ask questions about privacy and the security of the system. Jane appreciates these comments, and she smiles and considers everyone. She further encourages the participants to say what they mean, and answers their concerns with positive stories about her own experiences. After this, one of the employees is given time to talk about physical activity at work. She starts by expressing how impressed she is of the improvement they have made. Then she adds, "we want you to have a more active everyday". In response to this, Jane says with a playful, ironic voice, "all of us [the management team] not only you [Employees]", and chuckles. Then she shows employees some exercises, and encourages them to stand up and try. "Is this work or working out?" one of the participants laugh. "I'm getting sweaty", another adds. This makes everyone laugh. When it is time to close the meeting, Jane again walks to the center of the room. She emphasizes that lack of resources at the nursing home should not be a source for frustration. That she works actively with securing that they have what they need to do their work successfully. She concludes by saying on behalf of the management team, "we're in the service sector too, just like you. We're all in the service sector, and it's very demanding. I'm really proud to be your colleague!"

We were witness to this general meeting during our time at the nursing home. It illustrates six sets of practices that explain the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service. The practices' impact is evident through how they foster favorable conditions for tailoring, improvisation, and judgement. The following section will explain the six sets of practices. While supplementing with other content examples, we will continuously revisit this story throughout the rest of the paper. In concert, these exemplify how the respective practice is evident at each of the organizations, and provide insight into how the practices enable excellence in service. Figure I provides an overview of the practices, and outlines the definition of each.

Figure I

Six Sets of Practices in Organizational Culture that Enables Excellence in Service

We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset

A glance at the story from the general meeting (see p. 24-26) highlights the core of this practice, "Those sheets are so good now!" Jane said with a proud voice. "Therefore, it's important that they're shredded and don't lie around". She highlighted the progress employees have made in using them, instead of pointing out the misconduct – that they leave sensitive information open for public display. We quickly identified such a positive focus as a recurring theme in the organizations – weight was not given to the negative, but instead on that people are and do good. This mindset influenced interactions through positive emotional contagion, increased receptiveness, and advancement focus in everyday work. We label this practice *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset,* and define it as *a shared mindset of emphasizing what*

works in the organization, and a determination to see the good in people, embodied in daily actions, interactions, and language. Such a focus makes individuals more solution oriented, which enables improvisation. It also makes them more able to learn from mistakes, and thereby expands the knowledge base they use in tailoring and judgement. Thereby, *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* is an enabler for excellence in service.

Both the nursing home and residential home displayed a *Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* from the first meeting in the morning, and throughout the day. For instance, we observed a tolerance and understanding for why people may be late. Colleagues did not get angry or judgmental with each other when this happened. Instead, they emphasized that it could happen to everyone, and that no one does it on purpose (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). The caregivers, department heads, and top administrator at the nursing home further showed this positive mindset through the trust they had in one another. A department head highlighted this through her positive attitude towards employees asking to change shifts. "People don't request to change a shift without having a reason", she said. She further emphasized that employees not necessarily need to give her a specific reason. Instead, she trusts that they are honest in their claim (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2016a). At Southwest Airlines, we identified a *Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* through a tolerance for failure. This forgiving feature gives employees confidence to improvise and use judgement in decision-making. Hence, it enables excellence in service:

> Crucially, however, there is a 'no blame' culture. There are many stories about managers taking an initiative that cost the company money – in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars – only to be told, 'You made a decision; it turned out to be the wrong one; but tomorrow is another day. Let's learn from it and push on.' (Hope, Bunce, & Røøsli, 2011, p. 45)

A member of the Culture Committee at Southwest further explained how they have a healthy sense of understanding and forgiveness of shortcomings, "as long as these shortcomings are not detrimental or destructive, forgiveness is all part of the family spirit at the company" (Lauer, 2010, p. 126). Hence, the focus is on understanding, learning, and problem solving rather than scapegoating (Gittell, 2016, p. 13).

Another aspect of this practice is the consistent celebration of small wins. We observed a positive shift in participants' mood and energy level at the nursing home when they during interviews talked about residents who made progress. For instance, a department head talked with great enthusiasm about the recovery of a resident who had been bedridden for a long period of time. She described how they all were excited to help the resident up from bed and 'back to life', "When someone has been sick and you think 'how will this end', and then there's plenty of life left. There's nothing better than that". Likewise, Herb Kelleher, co-founder, Chairman Emeritus, and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, also emphasized the importance of acknowledging small wins throughout the day, "It is a daily celebration here of customers. It is a daily celebration of positive things that happen" (Freiberg & Freiberg, 1996, p. 190). A caregiver at the residential home further described how employees focus on the optimistic aspects of the often tragic situations they experience at work (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2016b). She explained how one of the residents used to throw up and urinate on the floor, with which he has now made progress, "he's still got a bucket for vomit and urine, but at least it's in a bucket and not on the floor". Several stories of this nature came up during interviews, and the caregivers displayed genuine joy when talking about such minor progress (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 76-77). We further observed that employees share these success stories with one another. This spreads positive energy throughout the workplace (Schoenwolf, 1990; Barsade, 2002). Celebration of small wins, breakthroughs, and forward movement thereby influenced motivation, emotions, and perceptions (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 76-77). Hence, it triggered peoples' efforts towards behaviors that enable excellence in service. The top administrator at the residential home also displayed features of *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* in a meeting where they discussed residents' habit of smoking weed inside. "All this smoke in the hallways, I don't like it, but it creates a fantastic atmosphere at the house [at the residential home]", she said grinning. In this situation, we observed first-hand how management acts by example. When doing this, they display the appreciated way to react to challenges. This strengthens the practice and its potential to enable excellence in service (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 109).

An additional feature of *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* is that when employees experience adversity, they focus on finding a solution, not on the problem

itself. We observed this during our time at the residential home. When we arrived a cold morning in mid-February, we were met by a fire truck. The caregivers explained that the fire alarm had gone off because one of the residents had been smoking in his room without opening a window. The caregivers came together and discussed how to prevent this from happening again instead of becoming discouraged. By facing problems with plans to overcome or learn from them, the caregivers were able react and make sense of the events of their workday in a more positive manner (Amabile & Kramer, p. 20, 106). The persistent ability to *Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* thereby triggers improvisation, and by that enables excellence in service. The top administrator at the residential home further highlighted how employees consistently focus on the positive:

> It's a destructive environment, what's going on up there [at the residential home], it's destructive. They're living a lifestyle which makes them hasten their death. [Therefore] it's so important to try to find what's positive. (...) Okay, so there were seven hours where everyone worked against you, when the environment was against you, but then you had ten minutes with a good cup of coffee and a nice chat. Then focus on those ten minutes! That's what we have to do. (...) They're simply very good at recognizing those moments, focusing on what went well.

We further identified the practice at the residential home during a general meeting. The top administrator shared a story from when she had been at a lecture, and the speaker had explained how six out of ten people walk by homeless people without offering them a look. She described how she had raised her hand, irritated, and asked the presenter to focus on the four that actually do care. The top administrator then applied her experience to a problem they had at the residential home regarding residents being sloppy with washing their hands before meals, "we have residents that wash their hands every time, can't we focus on them? (...) Don't degrade yourself [talking to the residents] to people who don't manage to wash your hands! You're great, nice, and lovable people". The top administrator was optimistic and hopeful that everyone would do better in the future (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Likewise, the top administrator at the nursing home exemplified how she embodies a positive mindset through the description of her approach for setting the tone in meetings:

I've never started a meeting by saying that we don't have any money, that we've got poor economy. But instead I talk about what we can do with the money that we actually have. And we don't talk about absence due to sickness, but about what it is that makes you want to go to work. (...) What's making you enjoy being here?

A caregiver, when talking about the repeated rejections they receive when applying for additional resources, also displayed this positive mindset, "We feel it, but we don't give up. We apply often [for additional resources]; we try the best we can". The caregiver displayed a positive attitude towards this issue (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1), and this perseverance in ensuring quality enables excellence in service.

We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support

Let us revisit the story about Jane (see p. 24-26), and in particular what she did at the very end of the general meeting. She emphasized that lack of resources at the nursing home should not be a cause of frustration – that she worked actively with securing that they have what they need to succeed in their work. She concluded by saying, on behalf of the management team, "we're in the service sector too, just like you. We're all in the service sector, and it's very demanding. I'm really proud to be your colleague". By relating herself to struggles of employees, Jane displayed vulnerability and support, and thereby behaviors relevant to this practice. We found this kind of support to be a reappearing feature in each of the organizations. Employees expressed it through practical arrangements targeted toward physical and emotional relief from the work itself. This support also allowed colleagues to show vulnerability by being open about their personal problems. We name this practice *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support,* and define it as *physical and psychological support between colleagues, actualized through practical arrangements and emotional expressions.* By allowing colleagues to reveal weaknesses, they can spare each other from too much pressure. This ensures that a service provider who has the physical and emotional capacity to succeed in tailoring, improvisation, and using favorable judgement handles each situation. The genuine care between all members of the

organization also transmits to the client. Thereby, *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support* is an enabler for excellence in service.

A department head at the nursing home described that support and care is shown within and across departments, as well as hierarchical levels. She explained that she suffers from back pain, and that a premise for her taking the job was that she would not perform heavy care work. Even though this puts extra pressure on her colleagues, they coordinate the work to make sure that she is relieved from inappropriate tasks (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). Thus, support triggers improvisation, and thereby enables excellence in service. The department head also highlighted the care employees have for each other. She described a situation that occurred when one of the caregivers came back after being on sick-leave. Also this time, colleagues had been prepared to take on an extra workload to ensure that the caregiver took care of her health. She recalled what they had said, "You're not to take on too much tonight – we don't want you to become ill again". When the department head talked about this caring behavior of employees, she did so with great admiration, "there's a lot of safeguarding; it's very moving". Support through relief and encouragement is also an evident feature of Southwest Airline's culture. A member of the Culture Committee recalled:

> We challenged our California employees unmercifully, and the way we challenged them is we dumped flights on them like you wouldn't believe. (...) And we supported them by going out there and helping pack bags and cooking burgers for them and ordering pizza and saying, 'Hey, we know we're giving you an impossible challenge here, but thanks for doing it as well as you're doing it.' (Lauer, 2010, p. 86)

Thus, we observed how employees in each of the organizations showed support by sparing each other from too much physical burden (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Moreover, we identified another kind of support. Employees also sought to relieve each other from the psychological burden resulting from the work. A caregiver at the residential home recalled a period when one of the residents stalked employees, "everyone got exhausted after a day because he was everywhere, all the time"! She explained how they at one point decided that it was enough – they had to find a way to ensure that this behavior did not become overwhelming for the employees. "We needed to spare each other from this", she said. The collectively

agreed upon the solution that the caregivers worked half a day on the floor with the demanding resident, and then changed with a colleague from another floor. Compassion for colleagues' situation, thereby secures the quality of the service (O'Boyle & Adkins, 2015). This exemplifies how the practice *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support* enables excellence in service. Another caregiver at the residential home explained how the support given also is contingent upon the situation:

> At some places where I have worked before, when you ask for assistance, people come in and take over the situation and push you into the background. Then they beat their chests because they have saved the situation. (..) Here [at the residential home] it's more that they start in the background, read the situation, and let you do what you can. They're more like a back-up in a way, and do what has to be done in order to help you. They don't take over the situation.

This reveals the respect colleagues have for each other's skills, and the trust they have in each other. Even though they ask for assistance in handling a difficult situation, this does not influence how colleagues perceive them. That the caregiver highlighted the above scenario as something positive further illustrates the importance of the right kind of help, from the right people, at the right time (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 106). The situational assistance the caregiver described did not rob her from the feeling of being a capable worker, but had a positive influence on her emotions. Hence, this kind of support maintains people's perceived ability to tackle deviating situations, and thereby their readiness to improvise and display discretionary thinking. The practice *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support* thereby enables excellence in service. The caregiver further emphasized how the support she receives from her colleagues differs from what her own family gives her:

> Home with your own family, if you experience something heavy, there are many people who got your back for a while, but then they stop backing you. When you need them the most may in fact be three months later. It's then when you experience the real grief, or feel that you have experienced something. Here, at work, people know how it works, and they got your back over a long period of time.

This psychological support establishes safety for revealing vulnerability. It makes people more inclined towards sharing personal problems and showing genuine emotions (Dutton, 2003b). A caregiver at the nursing home described how he had reached out to his colleagues for support when having problems at home. He displayed gratitude towards them when explaining how it helped him get through this difficult time (Eisenberg, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). The emotional support eased his mind, allowed him to recover from his struggles, and get back to the task (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 132). The caregiver described that this freedom to express genuine emotion and get support also creates a special bond between colleagues. To our astonishment, he emphasized what working at the nursing home was like, "it's not only about work, but we're tied like a family". This culture of companionate love, which is a feature of the practice *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support,* enables excellence in service (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014).

Another caregiver at the residential home shared a personal story about a time when she had problems at home. She described how proactive her colleagues were in noticing her struggles:

> I came to work and thought no one would notice. I'd put on makeup as usual, and behaved like I normally do. And then directly after the morning meeting, she [the top administrator] approached me [and said], 'I see that something's wrong – what's up?' And then I talked to her. Throughout the day, several of my colleagues asked me what was wrong. I really felt that they saw me. People were like... attentive. I often feel that people see me here. It's not embarrassing to have a bad day.

That colleagues approached the caregiver when she struggled engendered a feeling of being valued (Kahn, 1990). We observed that this supportive climate further influenced how employees acted toward those they serve (Schmit & Allscheid, 1995). During interviews, many participants at the nursing home revisited a story that highlights how support and care also extend to people outside the workforce. Earlier this year, a resident's next of kin died. This person had been at the nursing home visiting every single day, and employees and residents knew him well. The same day they received the sad news that he had abruptly passed away, they were having a party to celebrate the New Year. One of the department heads shared her experience:

> We care, cared, a lot about him, it was so incredibly sad when we received the news that he'd passed away. (...) Our top administrator started the party by remembering him. (...) It wasn't planned, but she managed to hold a tribute to him. Then we all stood up and made a toast in his honor. I'm almost about to cry only by talking about it, but it was so nice. And then we ate, and partied. And that was actually in his honor as well.

This story does not only highlight aspects of sincere care and affection for the next of kin, but also the safety employees feel to show emotion. By initiating a toast, the top administrator created a safe arena where employees could reveal their genuine grief, without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Employees at the residential home displayed similar behavior of showing genuine emotions and receiving emotional support at work. During interviews, many participants recalled a recent episode when one of their colleagues passed away in cancer. A caregiver explained how they during their weekly candle ceremony paid tribute to her:

> We lit a candle for her [sick colleague] every Friday, and then we took a picture of the candle and sent it to her [and wrote], 'we're thinking about you'. We talked about her – the residents missed her as well. (...) And we continued to light a candle after she had passed away.

When sharing this story with us, the employees were open about their emotions, and showed grief and affection. We also found tribute of, and care for, employees at Southwest Airlines. An employee explained:

> If there's something going on in their life, if they allow you to know about that, then you either celebrate with them [colleagues], or you grieve with them, or you're happy with them, or you're sad with them. That's what family does! (Lauer, 2010, p. 126)

We found several similar stories at Southwest. Employees contacted each other when they were ill, and it even extended to people whom no longer work in the company. "We have people who have been retired for 10 years, and we keep in touch with them" (Hope et al., 2011, p. 42) an employee said. The reason for this was a genuine care for each other. "We want them to know that we value them as individuals, not just as

workers. So that's part of the esprit de corps" (Hope et. al, 2011, p. 42) he continued. Being able to show compassion triggered employees to engage fully in their work (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 26). This further validates how *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support* enables excellence in service.

We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism

Recall how Jane walked towards the center of the room when she was about to start the general meeting (see p. 24-26). She heard a hum of voices, abrupted by outburst of laughter. Colleagues had unsolicited engaged in energizing conversation, where laughter played a natural part. This not only influenced those directly involved in the dialogue, but it also energized Jane. We found such humor to be a salient aspect of the organizational culture in the organizations (Bradney, 1957). More specifically, humor had at least two purposes and functions relevant to excellence in service (Duncan, 1982; Holmes, 2000). Humor nourished and energized relations between colleagues through increased engagement among employees and positive emotional contagion. It also functioned as a tool for responsive coping by releasing emotional capacity after challenging situations. We title this practice *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism,* and define it as *highly informal behavior displayed by employees at all levels, including practical jokes, witty comments, and crude remarks, used for relationship and coping purposes*. Pranks and a playful attitude reinforce a sense of safety in people, which makes them more inclined to tailor services and use judgement. Gallows humor enables people to process the emotions resulting from their work, releasing emotional capacity, making them more prepared to improvise in the next situation they face. As such, *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism* is an enabler for excellence in service.

When we asked participants about which characteristics they value in their colleagues and the relationship they have with them, humor was by far the most mentioned trait; "In our relationship, humor is very important"; "humor is an important part of every day, both to make the job easier, but also on a personal level"; and "humor is actually very important in our relationship", are but some ways employees emphasized this.

The importance of humor is partly due to the positive emotions it engenders (Cooper & Sosik, 2011, p. 475-476). We observed a playful attitude during the first meeting we attended at the nursing home. When a caregiver entered the meeting room, her immediate reaction to the large number of participants was to exclaim, "oh, it's a party!", while waving her arms. This spontaneous playfulness made everyone laugh, and seemed to nourish social bonds (Bradney, 1957; Holmes, 2006). The general meeting described above further illustrates the informal behavior at the nursing home. The caregiver presented a new initiative for creating a more active workplace, and asked her colleagues to stand up and join her in some physical exercises. This resulted in a collective laugh, where people exclaimed things such as, "is this work or working out?", while laughing at themselves. This playfulness was contagious and influenced everyone, no matter his or her relative status or profession (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Decker & Rotondo, 2011). Hence, play and laughter removes barriers and by that enables interdisciplinary collaboration. This ensures that multiple perspectives are included when working towards providing the best care for their residents. Thereby the practice *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism* is an enabler for excellence in service. A department head at the nursing home further demonstrated how humor cuts through hierarchy, by recalling how the caregivers pranked her:

> Someone called me at the office and pretended to be someone who wanted to work here [at the nursing home]. (...) He didn't introduce himself. I get quite a few phone calls like that. I felt that I became a bit like: 'yes, who am I talking to', and then the person introduced himself with a weird name. (...) I was becoming a bit frustrated, like: 'this is not OK'. Then I completely collapsed in laughter! They [the caregivers] were just calling to tell me it was time for our weekly joint lunch. But the way that person managed to trick me. (...) I love that kind of humor!

The department head explained that she appreciates practical jokes and play in the workplace as it helps them tackle the physical and psychological load the nature of the work results in (Abel, 2002). "It makes every day easier, when you can have a laugh, and if you do something stupid, you can laugh at that as well", she said. The possibility to laugh at mistakes further illustrates that humor creates psychological safety in the

workplace. By being able to show vulnerability and shortcomings, employees were more inclined towards taking risks when serving the resident, which encourages improvisation (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 107). This impact of humor thereby enables excellence in service.

Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines, was a leader who understood the power of humor in creating organizational success. The playful attitude at Southwest began with casual clothing, or 'fun ware', designed to engender a lighthearted perspective. Kelleher himself has appeared at meetings dressed as Elvis and other celebrities (Perkins, 2000, p. 138-139). Employees have adopted his vision of a playful workplace, and they express it both airports and on Southwest's flights. Every Southwest passenger has his or her favorite Southwest joke, and one example is the flight attendant who announced:

> Okay. It's been a really long day for us. To tell you the truth, we're tired. Ordinarily, this is the part of the flight when we announce we're going to be passing out peanuts and crackers, but as I said, we're tired. So instead of passing the peanuts out, we're going to put them in a big pile up here at the front of the plane. When the plane takes off, the peanuts are going to slide down the center aisle (Blanchard & Barrett, 2010, p. 44 – 45).

Then, to everyone's surprise, the flight attendant did just that. By acting in this manner, employees engage customers and make them loyal (O'Boyle & Adkins, 2015). Thus, we see humor as one of the key ingredients for Southwest's sustained excellence in service.

We also identified how employees use play and laughter to show appreciation and encouragement (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 82). When we asked the top administrator at the nursing home to recall a time she had felt seen and valued at work she highlighted a playful event. She described with excitement what had happened a couple of weeks earlier when she arrived at the nursing home:

> When I came through the main entrance, I heard a loud cheer, like the ones you hear at the world championships. They [the employees] sat around a table, and when I came in, they all stood up and performed a Mexican wave for me. (...) It was so moving; I really took it as something positive.

Based on this, we see that humor has a nourishing function – laughter, pranks, and play engages, encourages, and comforts. Hence, it triggers improvisation and collaboration and thereby enables excellence in service (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 82). In addition to this, humor serves as a responsive coping mechanism. At the nursing home, gallows humor is an evident part of every day, and they use it to cope with the situations they face (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). We observed this first hand during a discussion in the management team about the status of residents' mobility. Due to illness, many of the residents have amputated limbs, and employees handle this tragic fact with crude, yet respectful, humor. During the discussion, the top administrator asked with a smile on her face, "Ok, so for those five residents, we have two legs?". By actively using humor in this manner, employees were able to discuss practical arrangements in a straightforward manner (Lefcourt, Davidson, Prkachin, & Mills, 1997). This allows them to use judgement and favorable tailoring, and thereby enables excellence in service. We were able to validate that the top administrator consistently uses this kind of language when observing another meeting – "they're not dying, so we must be doing something right" she chuckled. Thus, gallows humor encourages, and the top administrator role models this by consistently using humor for such a purpose (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 82, 109).

Residents at both the nursing home and the residential home often suffer from psychiatric conditions. Especially at the residential home, residents often display aggressive behavior, and this is something employees have to cope with in their everyday to ensure that it does not influence the quality of the service. The top administrator at the residential home described how morbid humor is a tool to process such difficult situations (Sliter, Kale & Yuan, 2014). "We sometimes joke about that it's death, fire, and bedbugs that requires debriefing" she chuckled. She explained that the latter refers to a period when they got bedbugs at the residential home. This forced them to decontaminate the whole building, which put immense pressure on the employees. She described how everyone felt discomfort – fallaciously experiencing how the bedbugs crawled around in their bed at night. She said this with sincere repugnance. We therefore find it remarkable that she could look back at this difficult period with a humorous note:

> We had one year when many residents died – that's the 'death year'. And we
> had one year with a lot of acting out, violence, and threats – so that's the 'violent
> year', and then we have the 'bedbug year'!

Hence, humor functions as a processing mechanism (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). This ensures that employees are ready to use judgement in the daily work, and by that enables excellence in service. We also identified that gallows humor indirectly had a nourishing function. Employees at the residential home took substance abuse with grave seriousness when talking to the residents. However, they used the concept to joke with each other, and this fostered social bonds. For instance, a caregiver struggled to hide from his colleagues how tired he was during a morning meeting. "There's something [referring to some kind of substance] in his cup", one of the caregivers laughed. Another colleague joined the joke by adding, "you can see it in his eyes". Hence, colleagues bond, but also show support and comfort by joking crudely with each other (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 82). We identified similar behavior at Southwest Airlines, but here customers often received the support. Flight attendants and pilots used black humor during announcements to distract those who suffer from fear of flying. For instance, a flight attendant used a humorous tone when informing passengers about how to handle the unlikely event of an emergency landing:

> If you are sitting next to a small child, or someone who is acting like a small
> child, please do us all a favor and put on your mask first. If you are traveling
> with two or more children, please take a moment now to decide which one is
> your favorite. Help that one first, and then work your way down (Stewart, 2011,
> p. 22).

Although this announcement may be regarded a bit morbid, it acted like a buffer against discomfort (Abel, 2002). We therefore identify that the nourishing and coping functions of humor influence daily life – that it is a natural way of life (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 52). The positive emotions humor creates are contagious, releases emotional capacity, and increases engagement among employees. Hence, the practice *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism* enables excellence in service.

We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively

For this practice, the story from the general meeting (see p. 24-26) and especially the discussion regarding the new IT system is useful. "I've been thinking about the privacy of the residents in the system. How much sensitive information can actually be shared?" one of the participants questioned. Several of the people in the crowd nodded at this and exclaimed that they had been thinking about the same. Here employees felt safe to state their opinions. That Jane takes everyone's point of view into consideration further illustrates how everyone's input is valued. We found this attitude towards concerns to be a common feature in each of the organizations. We observed that employees engaged in a high level of candor during communication, and felt safe to discuss, but also to disagree. They actively sought to make sure that everyone performed to the best of their ability, and did therefore not avoid disputes based on constructive criticism. This allowed for more timely conflict resolution. We term this practice *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively,* and define it as *an openness towards disagreements and conflicts, as long as it leads to a better service*. People are receptive to input from their colleagues, irrespective of their profession or relative status. This results from mutual respect and trust between colleagues (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). This practice of the organizational culture thereby enables continuous learning, which results in a better use of judgement and improvisation. The larger pool of perspectives to draw upon also facilitates tailoring. Hence, *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* is an enabler for excellence in service.

In each of the organizations, management trusted employees, and this resulted in a sense of safety. This influenced communication by making it clear and free flowing (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p.109). Accordingly, employees were able to be open about their opinions. This openness, in combination with remarkable engagement among employees (Wenger, 1998, p. 53), occasionally created a high tension during discussions. Honesty was also a valued feature in the organizations. A caregiver at the nursing home described how she believes that it is important not to be afraid to state your opinion in meetings, even though they may be incompatible or in opposition with

others' (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 6). She also explained the dynamic they have in the communication on the departments:

> That's perhaps the most important – that we communicate very well with each other, and that the tension can run high once in a while, because we don't agree on everything. Generally, I'm very happy with that we can discuss things and not always agree.

This signalizes that employees feel safe to express their views, and that they are inclined towards letting the tension run high. Such candor in solving problems enables learning, and thereby makes employees more capable to improvise successfully. In this way the practice *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* enables excellence in service. We also observed how safety in expressing opinions applied to everyone, independent of profession or relative status (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). During a morning report, a caregiver student opposed one of the more senior caregivers at the nursing home who questioned him about not assisting in caring for one of the residents during her morning routine. He explained that this particular resident previously had expressed resistance towards men being present during the care. She was not comfortable with males helping her shower or go to the bathroom. The caregiver student simply stated that he did not assist in the care work, as the resident did not want him to. This made the senior caregiver react, and she said with a stern voice, "it's your job as a caregiver to do this". To this the student openly disagreed, "I hear what you're saying, but I'll continue to respect her wish!". The caregiver student was able to secure client centricity by being able to state his opinion. Hence, this kind of working environment, where multiple points of view are included, can create a shared understanding of the daily work (Gittell, 2016, p. 70). This insight makes employees more capable of favorable tailoring and successful use of judgement, and thereby enables excellence in service. Honesty between colleagues is also encouraged at Southwest Airlines. Colleen Barrett, President Emerita and Corporate Secretary of Southwest Airlines, explained a situation when an employee, who is also one of her best friends, got a new supervisor for whom she had little respect. Normally, this person was an exemplary employee, but after getting a new boss, she suddenly changed:

> In a challenging conversation, I had to let her [the employee] know that her supervisor would be staying in place for at least a couple of years and that if

she couldn't find a way to recapture her once positive attitude and make it work with him, she needed to leave (Blanchard & Barrett, 2010, p. 11).

This reprimand illustrates the dedication Barrett has to the company, but also trust, openness, and honesty towards her colleague. This ultimately benefits Southwest, as it ensures that personal matters do not come in the way of serving the customer. Hence, the practice *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* enables excellence in service (Gittell, 2016, p. 70).

One of the caregivers at the residential home further highlighted the importance of allowing tension to run high. She described a situation when a resident had told her that he wanted to commit suicide – that he did not want to live anymore. She explained that declarations as such are common at the residential home, and that she had experienced it many times before. Therefore, her reaction to this remark had been limited (Jehn, 1997), which made one of her colleagues react, "no matter if he says it one or ten times – it must be taken seriously". This resulted in a loud, emotional discussion between the colleagues. By being free to express emotions in this situation, the caregiver's poor judgement was improved. Hence, fruitful, emotional conflicts enable excellence in service (Lopez, 2006). Moreover, candid input does not restrict itself between colleagues. We were able to identify how employees also feel safe to express discontent with their top administrator. The top administrator residential home recalled when they had discovered bedbugs in one of the resident's room. She described her immediate reaction with embarrassment, but also how those her frustration affected confronted her:

> I really told them off! I completely lost it! (...) It only took an hour or two before they came down and said, 'Hey, we need to talk about what just happened!'. I was thinking all the time that I had to go talk to them but that I would have to do it later.

The top administrator knew that she had acted unfairly, and that she had to apologize for her behavior. However, her colleagues and she were able to reconcile quicker as she did not have to be the one to take initiative (Edmondson, 2012). This was possible due to the existing tolerance for mistakes, and safety in reprimanding everyone (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 107). In this way, the practice *We Allow Tension to run*

High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively enables excellence in service. The top administrator shared another story about a time where the tension ran high at the residential home. One of the temporarily hired caregivers had successfully applied to a fixed contract. The top administrator knew from the beginning of the process that he was getting the job, but the caregiver in question was not aware of this. She explained that she forgot to tell him in person that he got the job, but instead called him up and simply asked him to come down to her office and sign the contract. The reaction from the caregiver had been a surprised, "Did I get the job?". One of the administrative consultants overheard this conversation and said with a strict voice, "you've got to remember that sometimes things are really important for others even though it's a trifle in your everyday". When the top administrator described how she was reprimanded, she made it seem like this was the most natural thing in the world. This shows the open norms that exist towards conflict. These create an open, healthy, and constructive atmosphere that permits people to investigate various alternatives and to excel at their tasks (Jehn, 1997). Hence, *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* enables excellence in service.

An important aspect in the organizations, which enabled people to be candid, was that employees admitted flaws and mistakes in own behavior. This was evident at the nursing home. The top administrator explained an incident that had happened when she was struggling with an IT system, and became frustrated. Suddenly, one of the department heads had popped his head around the door and made a little joke. At the time, she could not appreciate his attempt of lightening her mood, and it negatively changed the atmosphere in the room. She described that the department head must have realized this, because the next day he came back and apologized for the poor timing of his joke. When asking for forgiveness, he showed compassion for her stressful moment, even though he did not know the underlying cause for her struggles (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 50). The apology was of course accepted, and received well by the top administrator. The willingness to admit mistakes thereby ensured that the tension did not become destructive. When employees know that colleagues forgive potential missteps, they also feel safe to improvise and display discretionary thinking. Hence, *We Allow Tension run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* enables excellence in service. We identified similar ways of handling conflicts at Southwest Airlines. A

pilot explained, "because we are moving at a fast pace, miscommunication and misunderstanding happen sometimes" (Beer, Eisenstat, & Foote, 2009, p. 37). This may, as in the incident with the failed joke at the nursing home, result in conflicts. "We take great pride in squaring it away as quickly as possible" (Beer et al., 2009, p. 37), the pilot continued. At Southwest, employees are encouraged to approach the person with whom they are having problems with directly to avoid that misconceptions as such create a toxic workplace. This enables them to reconcile quickly, and direct their focus toward new opportunities (Edmondson, 2012). As such, the practice *We Allow Tension run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* enables excellence in service.

We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence

Let us again revisit the story about the general meeting (see p. 24-26). Jane expected many people to attend the meeting, as she had talked to one of the department heads earlier about him not attending to make it possible for the majority of employees to participate. This act by the department head made the caregivers feel that their opinions are valued, and thereby raised their self-worth. He made everyone feel that that he or she are important to listen to, and by that, he fostered a sense of equality. This characteristic highlights a certain kind of attentiveness that we found among management in the organizations, namely physical and psychological presence. Leaders actively sought to ensure accessibility through, for example, an open door policy. However, they did not only wait for employees to come to them. Instead, they practiced a proactive approach by continuously reaching out to them. We label this practice *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence,* and define it as *the act of being there, both physically and psychologically, by responding and reaching out.* Openness for input makes people feel seen and valued, and thereby they are more inclined toward raising concerns and provide suggestions. As a repercussion, this creates a safe and learning working environment where tailoring is encouraged. By being truly present, leaders are able to identify situations where people's knowledge fall short in enabling them to improvise and use judgement. This makes them more capable to take appropriate decisions regarding resourcing and

training. As such, *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* is an enabler for excellence in service.

As mentioned, we observed presence through an open door policy in each of the organizations. A department head at the nursing home explained that this practice is important as it makes it easier for caregivers to contact her, "it's important for them, and it's important for me to listen to them, to make them feel heard". One of the caregivers at the nursing home explained that whenever they have something to discuss with the department head, she is available – she never turns them down, no matter how busy she is. Instead, she engages herself in their problems with a genuine desire to understand what they have on their mind (i.e., Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005). This ensures that employees feel safe to ask questions, which in turn make them more capable to use their own judgement in future situations. Hence, *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* enables excellence in service. The caregiver added that it is equally unproblematic to approach the other department head at the nursing home who is not her manager. In addition, the top administrator is, with few exceptions, always available. Many participants highlighted this accessibility. We were able to observe how employees utilize this opportunity. During the interview with the top administrator, employees came bursting in the door to talk to her, or wish her a good afternoon. She explained that this happened all the time – it was just business as usual. As was the case at the residential home. The top administrator's door was wide open whenever we passed. We also became aware of the low threshold for approaching her during interviews with caregivers. When we asked them what they did if they had anything they needed to talk to the top administrator about the answer was unanimous, "It's just to go down to her office. We do it all the time!". However, not only can employees come whenever, but also when they come they are truly listened to. The top administrator engages in their thoughts and feelings (Kahn, 1992), and tries to help to the best of her abilities. An employee at Southwest further explained how former CEO, Herb Kelleher, also holds this skill. He described that Kelleher has the ability to stay focused on one person in a way that makes him or her feel like the most important person in the whole wide world. It did not matter who the person was that entered the room – he would always finish the conversation first (Lauer, 2010, p. 99). A former Southwest employee shared yet an example of the

possibility to approach management. She described an unfortunate situation when she lost a manual with highly confidential information her third day at work:

> On my first day at work, my boss had given me her home telephone number and insisted that I call her anytime if I needed anything. So, after retracing my steps and a thorough search, I called her at 11:00 that night and sought her advice. Losing the notebook was not a good thing, she agreed, but also assured me I was not going to lose my job and she would help me look for the book on Monday (Grubbs-West, 2005, p. 28).

The manager was available for questions, even though it was very late in the evening. This illustrates that she assures availability, even though she is not there in person. By being able to ask questions, employees experience more rapid learning. If they are unsure about how to act in a certain situation, they ask for advice. This makes employees more capable to display situation dependent behavior, hence enabling excellence in service.

As previously noted, we observed that each of the organizations took the concept of the open door policy further (Detert, Burris, & Harrison, 2010). Management did not only wait for employees to come to them, they also approached them. One of the department heads at the nursing home highlighted the importance of being present at the morning report, and that this is something she prioritizes. We were able to validate this claim through her consistent attendance during the time we spent at the nursing home. During the interview, the department head provided us with her reasoning behind this, "If the employees have something they want to talk to me about they can do that. (…) Or I can tell them about my day so they know where to find me". Hence, she wants to be available, but also to ensure the caregivers that she is accessible throughout the day. In addition to this effect of her presence, we also experienced a positive spin-off from it. Her engagement during the morning report seemed to make others more engaged. We observed that meetings often started a bit slow – people were still tired. The department head's positive and optimistic attitude was, however, contagious (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Decker & Rotondo, 2011). She also persistently asked questions and invited caregivers to volunteer for diverse tasks. Through this behavior, she empowered the caregivers and strengthened their sense of capableness. This makes them more inclined to try out new ways of solving problems (Amabile &

Kramer, 2011, p. 107), and thereby enables excellence in service. The department head also emphasized how it is important to be out on the floor throughout the day just to talk to the caregivers, and be there with and for them.

The importance of presence did not restrict itself to the department heads, as both top administrators also acted upon this principle. The top administrator at the residential home explained during her interview that she spends as much of her day as possible together with the caregivers and residents. We observed this through how she was a regular at the morning meeting and the residents' breakfast. The top administrator at the nursing home also displayed such behavior. She described during her interview that she has a personal goal to know everyone that works there, the residents, and their closest family, at least by name. She emphasized how important it is for these people to know who she is in case they need her for anything. She wants to be there to help, but also to praise the caregivers. She does so by actively seeking out opportunities to recognize progress. This reinforces the employees' confidence, which empowers them to improvise and use judgement in their service work. By that the practice *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* enables excellence in service (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, in Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 81). She further explained how her presence is important to quality of the care provided. If she is not there to listen, she will not be able to incorporate input from the residents' families. The top administrator at the residential home also highlighted the importance of presence in order to improve. She explained that it is her responsibility to train the employees to become even better. Hence, it is important that she knows both employees and residents well. To establish a relationship with them, and be able to provide relevant training, she emphasized the importance of spending as much time as possible on the different floors:

> I like it, to be a part of it – to be close. To see them [the caregivers] in their work. To see what they're doing. I hear what the rooms look like, but I need to see it to know it. Yes! I like it – to see them in their everyday.

We were able to observe first hand that the top administrator is quite successful at being present. A chilly Friday afternoon in February, she invited us up to the loft at the residential home – it was time for the weekly gathering. Waffles and coffee were on the menu, and residents and employees sat in the sofas chatting with each other.

Suddenly the top administrator stood up and walked towards a small tray full of candles. She lifted one of them and addressed one of the caregivers, "I know you haven't been feeling very well this week, but thanks for being here", while lighting the candle and placing it on the tray. The top administrator then turned to one of the residents, "Thanks for being with us, thank you for this week", while lighting a second candle. This continued until each of those present had received their own, personal greeting. We were amazed. When we later asked caregivers about this event, they explained that she does this every week. By being truly present throughout the week, the top administrator is able to show compassion through this tribute (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 49). This compassion nourishes the relationship she has to the caregivers, and creates safety. It also exemplifies to the caregivers the compassion they should show towards each other and residents (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 109). By that the practice *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* enables excellence in service. The top administrator at the nursing home demonstrated similar extra effort. She described how she aims at always being the first person coming to work in the morning – to be able to welcome everyone. She explained that one of the first things she does when she arrives in the morning is to light some candles in the open area at the entrance. She highlighted the warmth this spreads, to both those who arrive at work in the morning and those leaving after the night shift. We were able to validate the impact of this effort through interviews. When we asked one of the caregivers if she could recall a time she felt seen at work, she highlighted the top administrator's efforts. She explained how they can arrive at the nursing home, only to be surprised with freshly made breakfast prepared by the top administrator. "It makes the little extra", she said when describing how these small endeavors make a difference at the nursing home. Another caregiver shared what he believes makes the nursing home a nice place to work. Yet again, the top administrator's efforts were at the center of the story, "around Christmas she can stand ready in the door with Lucia buns, with Christmas music, and sing to us when we come to work in the morning. It's those things that makes it so nice here". We found similar stories at Southwest Airlines, which described how leaders are present and walk the extra mile for employees. The Teamster leader, who represents Southwest mechanics and cleaners, described with appreciation and admiration the behavior of Herb Kelleher, former CEO:

> Let me put it this way. How many CEOs do you know who come into a cleaners' break room at 3 a.m. on a Sunday passing out doughnuts or putting on a pair of overalls to clean a plane? (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 1995, p. 6).

Hence, presence by management has an energizing function (Kyle, 1998, p. 10). It makes employees more motivated to perform well, and care for residents and passengers in the same way they are. This makes them more inclined towards tailoring services in a favorable manner. Thereby the practice *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* enables excellence in service.

We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self

Let us again recall the story from the general meeting (see p. 24-26), and especially Jane's opening words:

> This is a meeting for everyone. I don't want it to be a monologue, but rather a dialogue, where everyone can contribute with their opinions! Therefore, I wanted to start, instead of end, this meeting by hearing what you want to say.

Jane's behavior illustrates the final practice of an organizational culture we identified as an enabler for excellence in service. She showed compassion by reinforcing the belief that everyone is equally important. In this way, Jane strengthened the conviction that everyone at the nursing home play an important role in attaining the shared discourse – to serve (Wenger, 1998, p. 289). This in turn reinforced a higher degree of acceptance among employees. We identified such extensive inclusion and collaboration as a recurring feature in each of the organizations. A shared goal to approach residents and customers with a servant's heart made people display more help giving behavior. We name this practice *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*, and define it as *a feeling of a higher purpose – a shared goal to serve, to serve first, evident through equality and inclusion.* The employees understand that cooperation makes the whole become greater than the sum of its parts (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27). Therefore, colleagues collaborate across hierarchical levels and professions in order to provide the best possible service. This interdisciplinary cooperation and help giving behavior widens

the knowledge base, and thereby generates successful use of tailoring and judgement. Acceptance and compassion also create a safe working environment, where employees feel able to improvise.

We quickly identified servant behavior as a natural way of life in each of the organizations. Colleagues expressed this towards each other, but also those they serve. A caregiver at the residential home recalled a situation that highlights how they coordinate their energy and activity to walk the extra mile for residents (Wenger, 1998, p. 179-180):

> A resident with a life threatening disease said that he wanted to die here [at the residential home] – that he didn't want to die at the hospital. We didn't have the competence to do the final palliative treatment he needed. But we still let him die here. We got external expertise to help us with the treatment and teach us what to do.

The caregiver explained that this put immense pressure on the department. The workforce did not only have to perform their ordinary tasks, but one of them had to be with the resident in question at every hour. In this situation, a higher purpose guided employees, and this made them move the boundaries for what they were able and willing to tackle (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004). From this we see how the practice *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self* enables excellence in service.

Servant behavior of this nature was also evident at the nursing home. One of the department heads explained, "Lately, we've been standing in line when new residents arrive to welcome them. We're very interested in who the new person is". She described that everyone at the nursing home is excited when a new person comes to live there. We were able to see this in practice, but also that this behavior extends to next of kin and visitors at the day center. During our time at the nursing home, we spent much time in the entrance area – the room that serves as the heart of the building. At this premise, the nursing home hosts different events for the residents, and it is here employees have their lunch. Employees coordinate their efforts and collaborate extensively to ensure that someone is there to greet everyone that comes through the door (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). The department head emphasized that it is equally important to care for visitors

and next of kin during her interview. Therefore, they ensure to greet them and by that feel welcome.

A caregiver at the residential home further described that colleagues always are available for each other. She shared a story about how they complemented each other when a resident suffered from anxiety:

> "I feel that I'm not especially good with those existential questions that arise when a person is about to depart this life. Then I'm dependent on help – that we're a group that work closely together to provide what he or she needs."

Thus, colleagues were willing to work together, even when not formally demanded. This ensured the best quality of the service as it allowed them to tailor the care provided (Chatman & Barsade, 1995). Hence, *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self* enables excellence in service. Another caregiver at the residential home described similar complementary efforts:

> One of my colleagues is very good at setting limits. I'm sometimes a bit too kind and not so good at being strict. We complement each other very well. She knows that I think it's hard to set limits and need her help for that, and on the other hand, I can help her with a slightly milder appearance when needed.

We found a similar approach towards achieving the best result for the client at Southwest Airlines. A flight attendant explained the importance of helping each other in order to reach the shared goal – to provide excellent customer service:

> No one's job is too important that they can't pick up trash on the airplane. The pilots come back and help us pick up trash during our quick turns. Everyone's pitching in and helping each other (Gittel, 2004, p. 73).

Thereby, employees at Southwest emphasize that everyone's work is equally significant – that no department is more important than another is. An employee explained that everyone can count on colleagues doing their job and being there, but that "no one takes the job of another person for granted" (Gittel, 2003, p. 7). Hence, they work for something larger than self (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2006), and everyone is seen as equally important to enable excellence in service. This mindset was also

evident at the nursing home. One of the department heads exclaimed, "I can't emphasize this enough, and I really believe this, and have believed ever since I started working here [at the nursing home], that everyone at a workplace is equally important". Several similar stories and observations of times cooperation crossed hierarchical levels and professions validated this. The reasoning behind this was simple, and a caregiver was confident when describing why everyone's efforts count:

> I can't work alone, and therefore, I need to have a good dialog with all the people working here. For example, the cleaner must do his job properly so I can do mine. If he doesn't do his job good, diseases will spread. So we must have good contact with everyone.

This exemplifies that everyone in the organization functions together as pieces in a puzzle. Colleagues have strong connections to each other, and respect them and their job, because this is the only way to ensure quality in the service (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 23). Working together towards the shared goal thereby foster conditions where employees can tailor services, and successfully use improvisation and judgement. In this way the practice *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self* enables excellence in service. The same caregiver shared another story where collaboration spanned hierarchical boundaries. He described how his department head and he solved a challenging situation when a resident celebrated her 100th birthday, while at the same time, another had just died. They had encouraged the relatives to the deceased to come another day and empty the room, for their own sake. Nevertheless, in the middle of the grand celebration of the hundred-year-old resident, the deceased's next of kin unexpectedly came through the doors. In this situation, the employees had to act quickly in order to ensure that the next of kin did not feel disrespected. Through a quick dialog, they decided who was best suited to care for the relatives, and who should stay at the celebration. The caregiver acknowledged the ambivalence in this situation, "someone is very happy; someone has just lost someone". In this situation, they had to control a mix of emotions. Nevertheless, they did not force each other to hide their feelings (Lopez, 2006). Instead, they ensured that the right person was at the right place in order to fulfill everyone's needs. The caregivers gained a sense of mastery by successfully dealing with this problem together (Bandura, 2007, p. 1397-1400). Thus, this kind of cooperative

problem solving gave the employees confidence and made them more inclined towards displaying discretionary thinking and improvisation in future situations. Hence, enabling excellence in service.

We were able to identify that the view that profession and/or relative status is irrelevant also applies to management. The top administrator at the nursing home displayed a consistent attitude as everyone else. During her interview, we became convinced that she actively sought to make sure that everyone feels welcome and included, no matter who he or she is. She described that even though the cleaners not formally are her employees, she always invites them to social gatherings and parties. This inclusion made everyone feel respected, and thereby worked as recognition (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 131). The top administrator described her reasoning behind this, "They're one of us, although we're not the one handing them their paycheck. They're our colleagues because they work at this house [at the nursing home]". She talked about the management team in the same way. "They all play a part in making the puzzle complete", she said proudly. As such, she displayed a comprehensive understanding of what is required to ensure sustainability in behaviors that foster conditions for favorable tailoring, and successful use of improvisation and judgement. Also this feature of the practice *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self* enables excellence in service.

Table II
A Comparative Overview of Practices, Themes with Content Examples, and Key Enablers

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset *A shared mindset of emphasizing what works in the organization, and a determination to see the good in people, embodied in daily actions, interactions, and language.*	*Nursing Home*			At the nursing home, positive emotional contagion reduces the amount of negative thoughts and feelings, and thereby releases emotional capacity that can be used towards colleagues and residents. At the residential home, increased receptiveness makes people more open towards other people, and their decisions and opinions. It creates a larger degree of tolerance. At Southwest, the advancement focus makes employees inclined to learn from each other and improve their personal and professional skills.
	We trust each other	People don't request to change a shift without having a reason! - Department head	Positive emotional contagion	
	We've got a positive dialogue	We don't talk about absence due to sickness, but about what it is that makes you want to go to work. - Top administrator		
	We don't give up	We feel it, but we don't give up. We apply often [for additional resources]; we try the best we can. - Caregiver		
	Residential Home			
	We celebrate positive things every day	He's still got a bucket for vomit and urine, but at least it's in a bucket and not on the floor. - Caregiver		
	We don't judge each other	Don't degrade yourself [talking to the residents] to people who don't manage to wash your hands! You're great, nice, and lovable people! - Top administrator	Increased receptiveness	
	We see solutions, not problems	Okay, so there were seven hours where everyone worked against you, when the environment was against you, but then you had ten minutes with a good cup of coffee and a nice chat. Then focus on those ten minutes! - Top administrator		
	Southwest Airlines			
	We're forgiving	As long as these shortcomings are not detrimental or destructive, forgiveness is all part of the family spirit at the company. - Employee		
	We learn from mistakes	You made a decision; it turned out to be the wrong on; but tomorrow is another day. Let's learn from it and push on. - Employee	Advancement focus	
	We celebrate positive things every day	It is a daily celebration here of customers. It is a daily celebration of positive things that happen. - Leader		

Table II
(Continued)

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support *Physical and psychological support between colleagues, actualized through practical arrangements and emotional expressions.*	*Nursing Home* We relieve each other We show genuine emotions We reach out to help and get help We're like a family	There's a lot of safeguarding; it's very moving. - Department head We care, cared, a lot about him, it was so incredibly sad when we received the news that he'd passed away. (…) I'm almost about to cry only by talking about it. - Department head You're not to take on too much tonight – we don't want you to become ill again. - Caregivers to caregiver returning from sick-leave It's not only about work, but we're tied like a family. - Caregiver		The ability to show vulnerability allows employees in each of the organizations to reveal shortcomings in their emotional and physical capacity. Thereby, enabling colleagues to support them. Physical support is the predominant kind at the nursing home and Southwest, while emotional support is more evident at the residential home. This difference is a result of the nature of the work, where the two former imply more heavy work physically and the latter emotionally. A comparable feature is also that support is used as damage control in the particular situation at the nursing and residential home, while it functions as a healing mechanism at Southwest.
			Ability to show vulnerability	
	Residential Home We relieve each other We do what has to be done to help We see each other We show recognition	Everyone got exhausted after a day because he was everywhere, all the time! (…) We needed to spare each other from this. - Caregiver They're more like a back-up in a way, and do what has to be done in order to help you. They don't take over the situation. - Caregiver I came to work and thought no one would notice. I'd put on makeup as usual, and behaved like I normally do. (…) She [the top administrator] approached me [and said], 'I see that something's wrong – what's up?' - Caregiver We lit a candle for her [sick colleague] every Friday, and then we took a picture of the candle and sent it to her [and wrote], 'we're thinking about you'. - Caregiver		
			Ability to show vulnerability	
	Southwest Airlines We encourage each other We show recognition We're like a family	We supported them by going out there and helping pack bags and cooking burgers for them. - Employee We want them to know that we value them as individuals, not just as workers. - Leader If there's something going on in their life, (…) then you either celebrate with them [colleagues], or you grieve with them, or you're happy with them, or you're sad with them. That's what family does! - Employee		
			Ability to show vulnerability	

Table II
(Continued)

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism	*Nursing Home*			At the nursing home, positive emotional contagion functions as a nourishment factor for relationships between colleagues. At the residential home, emotional capacity is released and thereby enables employees to move on from difficult situations. At Southwest, engagement among employees is increased, which makes them more involved in the organization. Southwest also uses this practice for branding purposes.
Highly informal behavior displayed by employees at all levels, including practical jokes, witty comments, and crude remarks, used for relationship and coping purposes.	We're playful	When I came through the main entrance, I heard a loud cheer, like the ones you hear at the world championships. They [the employees] sat around a table, and when I came in, they all stood up and performed a Mexican wave for me. - Top administrator	Positive emotional contagion	
	We prank each other	Someone called me at the office and pretended to be someone who wanted to work here [at the nursing home]. (...) I was becoming a bit frustrated, like: 'this is not OK'. Then I completely collapsed in laughter! They [the caregivers] were just calling to tell me it was time for our weekly joint lunch. - Department head		
	We can laugh at mistakes	It makes every day easier, when you can have a laugh, and if you do something stupid, you can laugh at that as well. - Department head		
	Residential Home			
	We're playful	There's something [referring to some kind of substance] in his cup (...), you can see it in his eyes! - Two caregivers to another caregiver	Release of emotional capacity	
	We use gallows humor to cope	We had one year when many residents died – that's the 'death year'. And we had one year with a lot of acting out, violence, and threats – so that's the 'violent year', and then we have the 'bedbug year'! - Top administrator		
	Southwest Airlines			
	We prank and joke with customers	Okay. It's been a really long day for us. (...) So instead of passing the peanuts out, we're going to put them in a big pile up here at the front of the plane. When the plane takes off, the peanuts are going to slide down the center aisle. - Employee	Increased engagement among employees	
	We use humor to comfort customers	If you are traveling with two or more children, please take a moment now to decide which one is your favorite. Help that one first, and then work your way down. - Employee		

Table II
(Continued)

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively	*Nursing Home*			Each of the organizations value openness and honesty, but feedback is given in different ways. At the nursing home, a higher level of candor enables employees to gently be open and honest with each other. At the residential home, employees give more constructive criticism to each other, and this can be both gentle and harsh depending on the nature of the work. At Southwest, timely conflict resolution ensures that disputes does not interrupt the work. A contrasting feature is that at the nursing and residential home use candor and constructive criticism during the situation, while Southwest use conflict resolution after the situation has occurred.
An openness towards disagreements and conflicts, as long as it leads to a better service.	We feel safe to state our opinions	Tension can run high once in a while, because we don't agree on everything. - Caregiver	Higher level of candor	
	We value everyone's opinion	I hear what you're saying, but I'll continue to respect her wish! - Caregiver student to caregiver		
	Residential Home			
	We reprimand in order to improve	You've got to remember that sometimes things are really important for others even though it's a trifle in your everyday. - Administrative consultant to top administrator	More constructive criticism	
	We tell everyone when they're unfair	Hey, we need to talk about what just happened! - Caregiver to top administrator		
	Southwest Airlines			
	We reprimand in order to improve	I had to let her [the employee] know that her supervisor would be staying in place for at least a couple of years and that if she couldn't find a way to recapture her once positive attitude and make it work with him, she needed to leave. - Leader	More timely conflict resolution	
	We reconcile quickly	Because we are moving at a fast pace, miscommunication and misunderstanding happen sometimes. We take great pride in squaring it away as quickly as possible. - Employee		

Table II
(Continued)

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence *The act of being there, both physically and psychologically, by responding and reaching out.*	*Nursing Home* We want everyone to feel listened to	It's important for them, and it's important for me to listen to them, to make them feel heard. - Department head		At the nursing and residential home, the key enabler is related to the individual level. At Southwest, it is directed towards the collective. At both the nursing and residential home, employees' raised self-worth increases their self-confidence and perceived value. This impacts how they solve tasks and enables them to provide better service. At Southwest, a higher sense of equality impacts the collective feeling which positively influences the way tasks are solved.
	We inform about our whereabouts	If the employees have something they want to talk to me about they can do that. (…) Or I can tell them about my day so they know where to find me. - Department head	Raised self-worth	
	We do the little extra	Around Christmas she can stand ready in the door with Lucia buns, with Christmas music, and sing to us when we come to work in the morning. It's those things that makes it so nice here. - Caregiver about top administrator		
	Residential Home We practice a low threshold approach	It's just to go down to her [the top administrator's] office. We do it all the time! - Caregiver		
	We spend time with Employees	I like it, to be a part of it – to be close. To see them [the caregivers] in their work. To see what they're doing. I hear what the rooms look like, but I need to see it to know it. Yes! I like it – to see them in their everyday. - Top administrator	Raised self-worth	
	We show appreciation	I know you haven't been feeling very well this week, but thanks for being here. - Top administrator to caregiver		
	Southwest Airlines We can come with whatever, whenever	I called her at 11:00 that night and sought her advice. Losing the notebook was not a good thing, she agreed, but also assured me I was not going to lose my job and she would help me look for the book on Monday. - Employee		
	We make people feel seen and valued	How many CEOs do you know who come into a cleaners' break room at 3 a.m. on a Sunday passing out doughnuts or putting on a pair of overalls to clean a plane? - Employee	Higher sense of equality	

Table II
(Continued)

Practice	First-order Themes	Content Examples	Key Enablers	Comparison
We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger Than Self	*Nursing Home*			Each of the key enablers change the behavior employees express towards their colleagues in a positive manner. At the nursing home, employees show a more intense compassion, which enables them to work more closely together. At the residential home, a higher degree of acceptance of peoples' imperfections enables them to work with everyone. At Southwest, employees show more help giving behavior, which enables them to collectively provide the best possible service.
	We've got one shared goal	They all play a part in making the puzzle complete. - Top administrator about the management team		
A feeling of a higher purpose – a shared goal to serve, to serve first, evident through equality and inclusion.	We see everyone as equally important	I can't emphasize this enough, and I really believe this, and have believed ever since I started working here [at the nursing home], that everyone at a workplace is equally important. - Department head	More intense compassion	
	We see everyone as one of us	They're one of us, although we're not the one handing them their paycheck. They're our colleagues because they work at this house [at the nursing home]. - Top administrator		
	Residential Home			
	We've got one shared goal	A resident with a life threatening disease said that he wanted to die here [at the residential home] – that he didn't want to die at the hospital. We didn't have the competence to do the final palliative treatment he needed. But we still let him die here. We got external expertise to help us with the treatment and teach us what to do. - Caregiver		
	We complement each other	I feel that I'm not especially good with those existential questions that arise when a person is about to depart this life. Then I'm dependent on help – that we're a group that work closely together to provide what he or she needs. - Caregiver	Higher degree of acceptance	
	We respect each other	She knows that I think it's hard to set limits and need her help for that, and on the other hand, I can help her with a slightly milder appearance when needed. - Caregiver about another caregiver		
	Southwest Airlines			
	We've got one shared goal	No one's job is too important that they can't pick up trash on the airplane. The pilots come back and help us pick up trash during our quick turns. Everyone's pitching in and helping each other. - Employee	More help giving behavior	
	We see everyone as equally important	No one takes the job of another person for granted. - Employee		

Discussion: Contributions and Implications

The Pattern Connecting Organizational Culture to Excellence in Service

We have now shown how the six sets of practices in isolation enable excellence in service. Now, let us revisit the very first words of our thesis. The philosopher Will Durant (1926, p. 26) elegantly sums up some of Aristotle's thoughts:

> Excellence is an art won by training and habituation: we do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have these because we have acted rightly; "these virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions"; we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Although an old thought, we find this quote valid, and it applies to our findings. When organizational members repeatedly display behaviors relevant to the six sets of practices, they enable excellence in service. We therefore support Aristotle's statement about excellence being a habit, as consistently acting in accordance with the practices foster favorable conditions for learning, a safe environment, and fruitful collaboration. The following section will focus on the reasoning behind this claim.

A Culture for Daily Opportunities for Learning

As employees in service organizations are more likely to face more unpredicted situations, learning is essential to use judgement successfully. Learning is a process by which experience creates a relatively permanent change in behavior (i.e., Coon, 1983; Anderson, 1995). It thereby expands existing knowledge available to achieve excellence in service. We find support for how learning and continuous improvement is essential to sustain excellence (Pfeffer, 1994; Shah et al., 2006). As opposed to some existing research (e.g., Watson & D'Annunzio-Green, 1996; Harrington & Akehurst, 1996; Haynes & Fryer, 2000), our study reveals that everyday practices that enable learning and development are more important than training and development programmes. In each of the organizations, the most significant learning took place when performing the tasks themselves. Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing was prompted by increased receptiveness, and advancement focus (i.e., *We Focus on the*

Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset), the ability to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*), a higher sense of equality (i.e., *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence*), and more help giving behavior (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*). In situations of knowledge sharing, these key enablers also triggered learning in both parties. It further empowered employees to learn through experience, and from own and other's mistakes. We therefore suggest that organizations that seek to enable and sustain excellence in service should direct resources towards learning on the job, and utilize the six practices when teaching members how to become successful in knowledge sharing.

A Culture for Continuous Collaboration

When employees approach a resident or customer to solve a problem with combined skills and experience they have a more diverse knowledge pool to draw upon. Hence, they are likely to be more capable of tailoring the service when they collaborate. During collaboration, a group of people engages in an interactive process, guided by norms, shared rules, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to a problem domain (Wood & Gray, 1991). Gittell's (2016) theory of relational coordination emphasizes the importance of a focus on problem solving rather than blaming, and high quality communication, when collectively solving tasks. We support this, and add the importance of the ability to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*) when communicating. This indicates a connection between Gittell's (2016) theory of relational coordination and Worline and Dutton's (2017) work on compassion. Compassion in organizations empowers people to display authentic emotions at work, which enables colleagues to recognize suffering, and feel moved to respond accordingly (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p. 20-24). Our study therefore supports the notion that compassion is at the heart of cooperation (Dutton, Lilius, & Kanov, 2007, p. 107-126). Moreover, our research provides new insight into what makes people display these authentic emotions. Not only do we identify compassion as an enabler for expressing genuine emotions, but also the ability to show vulnerability (*We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*), a raised self-worth, and a higher sense of equality (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A*

Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self). We therefore suggest that practitioners that seek to have fruitful collaboration in their organization should initiate activities where employees are encouraged to show genuine emotions. Organizational members at all levels should take part in these, and management should invite and act by example. To release the power of these activities, it is important that the activities are continuous and modified to the participants.

Existing research further emphasizes that a culture of companionate love leads to a higher level of teamwork (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Our research supports this, as we identified characteristics such as more help giving behavior (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*), higher level of constructive criticism (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*), and the ability to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*) as enablers for collaboration. In addition, the word 'family' appeared, without any provocation from us, in the organizations (see p. 28, 34-35). Hence, we propose that researchers may further understand the concept of companionate love by reflecting upon the relationships in families, and apply them to the organizational context.

A Culture with a Strong Sense of Safety

Tailoring, improvisation, and judgement is contingent upon confidence in employees that they can try out new ways to solve their tasks. Hence, these behaviors, and thereby excellence, is connected to the concept of safety. Kahn (1990) explains safety as a condition where a person feels able to show and employ their self, without fear of negative consequences. An aspect that creates safety in an organization is that of being able to express genuine emotions (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). Our research supports this by identifying constructive criticism and a higher level of candor (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*) as key enablers for excellence in service. We further add new insight into what creates safety by identifying positive emotional contagion, increased engagement among employees (i.e., *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism*), and more intense compassion (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*) as key enablers. Our study supports that confidence in

being able to be genuine with residents and customers is rewarding for employees (Lopez, 2006; Worline & Dutton, 2017). We also add that employees who feel safe are more capable to tailor the service, use judgement, and improvise in deviating situations. We therefore suggest that practitioners should pay attention to the key enablers for safety in their organization. As previously claimed, our definition of excellence is not universal. Hence, organizations should first define what excellence means for them. Then they should direct efforts toward fostering an environment where employees feel confident to display behaviors relevant to their interpretation of the concept.

Existing research further argues that regulations and procedures are less predominant in service cultures (Chatman & Cha, 2003). Our findings stand in contrast to this. The organizations in our study are subject to nationwide legislation, and this naturally creates pressure on employees. What we found was, however, that each of the organizations have designed their practices to encourage employees to act in accordance with these regulations. In this way, employees gain a sense of safety when tailoring, improvising, and using judgement when solving tasks, as institutional logics are transparent and lie at the core of their behavior. Hence, legislation does not become an impediment for excellence in service. Instead it increases engagement among employees (i.e., *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as Nourishment and Coping Mechanism*), as they feel safe to act within these constraints. With this insight, our study contributes with an understanding of the importance of consistency between structure, practice, and regulations and procedures in service cultures.

A System of Six Sets of Practices

In the findings section we argued for how the six sets of practices enable excellence in service in isolation. We have tried to demonstrate this through the discussion where we connect the pattern, and explain the favorable conditions for learning, collaboration, and safety they foster. By not identifying a sole mechanism, but six sets of practices that enable tailoring, improvisation, and judgement, we recognize that the practices work as a system. Their influence on each other plays a key role in enabling excellence in service. Model I provides an illustration of this system. The system also became evident through how the individual practices often were present at the same time. For example, the story from the general meeting (see p. 24-26) illustrates a situation where
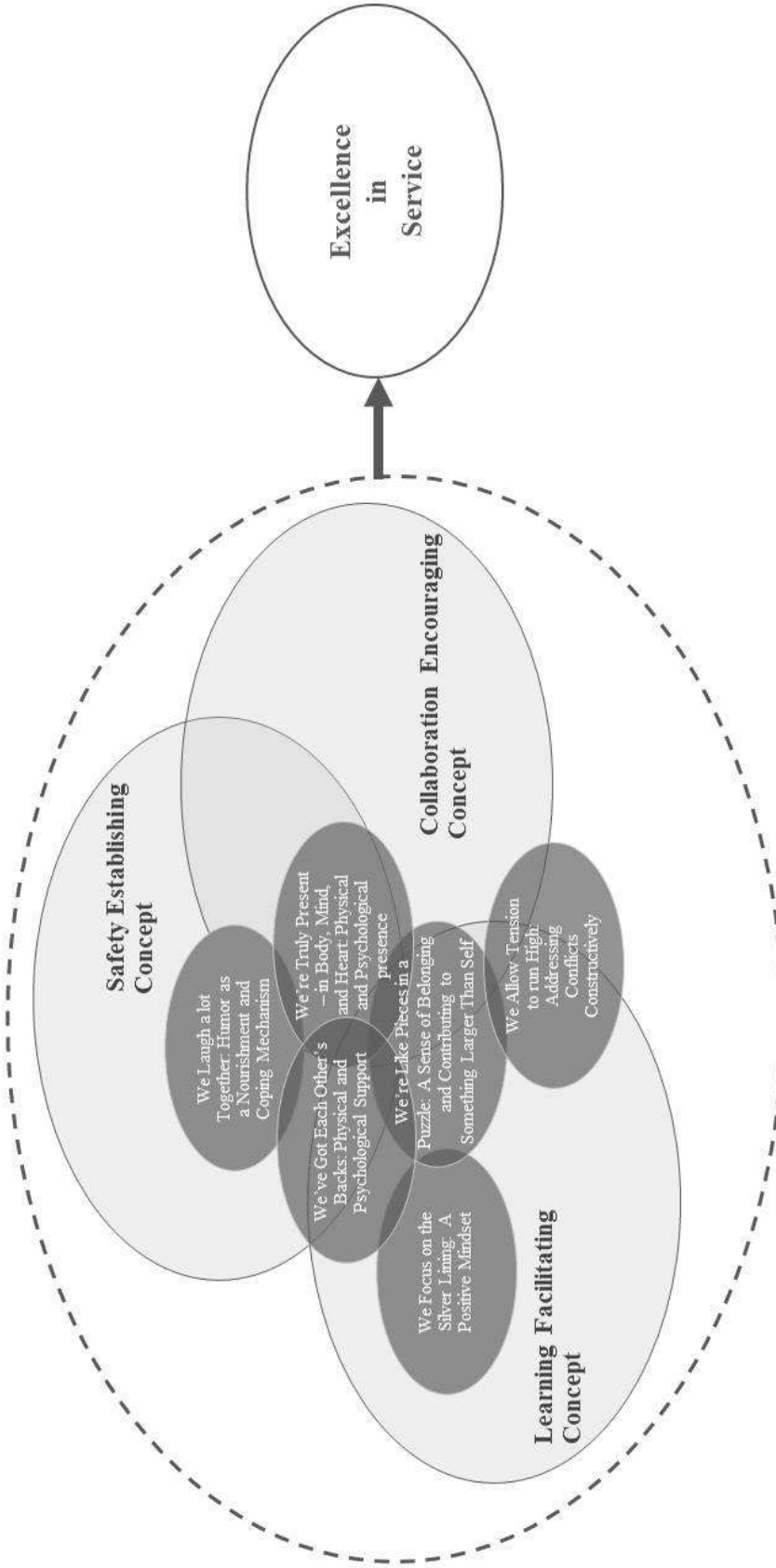
Jane and the other employees displayed each of the practices. Positive emotional contagion (i.e., *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism*) was spread by Jane's positive focus on the progress employees had made in using the report sheets. She also gave them the opportunity to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support)* when she admitted that also she would benefit from a more active everyday. This enabled a higher level of candor in the dialog about employees' health (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*). The general meeting is just one of many similar situations we experienced during our time in the organizations. We found that the prevalence of one practice alone is not enough to enable sustained excellence in service, because they together function as a system where good performance in one practice has positive spin-off effects on others. One example of this positive spin-off is that constructive criticism (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*) is enabled by employees increased receptiveness (i.e., *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset*) and their high degree of acceptance (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*). Moreover, raised self-worth (i.e., *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence*) influences the ability to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support),* which reinforces help giving behavior (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*). This again results in release of emotional capacity (i.e., *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism*). Hence, we identify an interconnectedness between the practices, as well as a reinforcing mechanism.

In addition to the influence the practices have on each other, the system became evident by how the practices share some core features. As existing research has highlighted, freedom in expressing emotions is a crucial element in service (Lopez, 2006; Gherardi & Rodeschini, 2015). We also identified this to be important in each of the practices. The feature is evident in the key enablers positive emotional contagion (i.e., *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset*), ability to show vulnerability (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*), higher degree of acceptance (i.e., *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping*

Model I

How the Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Excellence in Service

Excellence
in
Service

Safety Establishing
Concept

Collaboration Encouraging
Concept

Learning Facilitating
Concept

We Laugh a lot
Together: Humor as
a Nourishment and
Coping Mechanism

We're Truly Present
– in Body, Mind,
and Heart: Physical
and Psychological
presence

We've Got Each Other's
Backs: Physical and
Psychological Support

We're Like Pieces in a
Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging
and Contributing to
Something Larger Than Self

We Allow Tension
to run High:
Addressing
Conflicts
Constructively

We Focus on the
Silver Lining: A
Positive Mindset

The dark grey area between the practices represents that they are intertwined, and to what extent they are connected (the larger area, the more intertwined). Their location of the practices illustrates which condition(s) they facilitate(s). The stippled line symbolizes that also other factors, both internal and external, may have an influence on how organizational culture enables excellence in service. Excellence in service is defined as favorable tailoring of services, and successful use of improvisation and judgement.

Mechanism), and more constructive criticism (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*). The importance of this concept is highlighted, for instance, by how allowing employees to show genuine emotions at work raises their feelings of self-worth (i.e., *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence*), which may create more intense compassion towards others (i.e., *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self*).

The identification of how the practices work as a system supports the relinquishment of an instrumental view of organizational culture. From this systems perspective we acknowledge that members are not simply influenced by the organizational culture, they develop it – they are the culture. In a service culture, this means that service becomes a natural way of life (Grönroos, 2007, p. 418) by employees acting by example every day (Weaver, Trevino, & Agle, 2005). Service is therefore not merely a natural way of life, but it becomes so through active role modelling. This is the second shared characteristic of the system. Let us again revisit the story from the general meeting (see p. 24-26). Jane started by encouraging employees to share topics they wanted to discuss. This showed her priorities – that it is important for her to include and listen to everyone in the organization (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 109). Her priorities influence the department heads by triggering them to see the importance of listening and being available for the caregivers. This in turn teaches and inspires caregivers to treat colleagues in a similar way (i.e., Bandura, 1977) – to be present and help each other. Ultimately, this raises employees' self-worth (i.e., *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence*) and their ability to show vulnerability at work (i.e., *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support*). In this way, role modelling reinforces the prevalence of the six sets of practices, and empowers employees to act accordingly.

The above indicates that the practices serve as a complex system, and together they enable excellence in service by reinforcing and having positive spin-off effects on each other. Since the system is so complex, it is arguably difficult, if not impossible, for organizations to duplicate it. Nevertheless, these practices, and the manner in which we have identified them, represent an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to learn

valuable and generalizable lessons. In concert, the system makes employees more capable to tailor the service, improvise when unexpected situations occur, and use judgment under coexisting and competing institutional logics. This explains how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our research is not without limitations. We collected data over a relatively short period of time (approximately one month). This prevented extensive repeat visits and limited opportunities to build trust with respondents over time, thus affecting the reliability of the data. In addition, the duration for data collection in the two organizations varied. Contextual factors limited the time spent at the residential home and by that the numbers of hours observing. The relatively short time in the organizations might have distanced us from the participants, thereby making them resistant to share personal stories. However, we did spend time at the research locations pre-interviews in order to become a familiar face. The manner in which organizational members met us suggests that we were successful in assuring them that we were reliable, and that they felt safe to share their experiences and opinions. In addition, we only interviewed parts of the organizations. This limited scope may have influenced the understanding of the role of organizational culture in enabling excellence in service. However, the sample of participants was diverse (e.g., gender, profession, seniority) in order to represent different parts of the organizations. This somewhat overcomes the weakness of the limited scope. Furthermore, all data we have on Southwest Airlines is collected by other researchers with other research questions. This leaves us without a comprehensive understanding of the accuracy of it for our study. This may have had an impact on the understanding of the data.

We do not suggest that we have generated a complete understanding of how organizational culture enables excellence in service. In a matter of fact, we believe no one has at this stage, and arguably, it might be impossible to get. As organizational culture is in a continuous change, its impact on excellence in service might have a similar feature of dynamism. Hence, we do not claim that the practices found in this study necessarily are stable over time or something recognizably homogenous. The

statement about generalizability of the findings must therefore await the result of research in additional settings. We suggest that further research should investigate whether they discover similar practices as enablers for excellence in service, or not. In particular, we encourage researchers to explore the practices *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* and *We're Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self,* as these practices cover a wide range of topics in our study. Moreover, we recommend future studies to investigate the distinction between physical and psychological support, as we have gained a sense that their impact differs, but that they are not mutually exclusive. Researchers should focus on gathering more extensive data, and collect it through one or more sources. Triangulation has proven useful in our study, as it allowed us to gain a broader perspective, identify corroborating phenomena, and ensure that we understood what was said accurately. This mitigated the risk of the data misguiding us. Moreover, a longitudinal study might be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the six sets of practices. By collecting data on several occasion, studies might also be able to identify changes in the influence of each practice. For instance, we encourage researchers to explore the impact a sustained high level of candor and constructive criticism (i.e., *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively*) have over time, to determine whether there is a certain threshold where these features of an organizational culture become destructive. We further suggest that future research should investigate a more distinct clustering of the practices. Especially, since the six sets of practices are highly connected, and we have identified learning, collaboration, and safety as overarching concepts, we suggest that future research should explore clustering in terms of these. The limited scope of our study inhibited us from doing this with confidence. However, the identified interconnectedness suggests that such a simplification might be difficult. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive study might be able to identify features we were unable to.

Conclusion

In this thesis, we have offered insight into how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood. Our aim was to shed light on the aspects of organizational culture that enable tailoring, improvisation, and judgement in

service organizations, where employees often work under coexisting and competing institutional logics. We collected data through interviews and observations at a nursing home for elderly and a residential home for people who suffers from substance abuse, supplemented by an extensive review of existing research on Southwest Airlines. From this we suggest that six sets of practices are vital in understanding the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service: a) *We Focus on the Silver Lining: A Positive Mindset* which promotes positive emotional contagion, receptiveness among employees, and advancement focus; b) *We've got Each Other's Backs: Physical and Psychological Support* that permits organizational members to show vulnerability at work; c) *We Laugh a lot Together: Humor as a Nourishment and Coping Mechanism* which creates positive emotional contagion, releases emotional capacity, and increases engagement among employees; d) *We Allow Tension to run High: Addressing Conflicts Constructively* by allowing for a higher level of candor, more constructive criticism, and more timely conflict resolution; e) *We're Truly Present – in Body, Mind, and Heart: Physical and Psychological Presence* that raises perceived self-worth, and creates a higher sense of equality; and f) *We're Like Pieces in a Puzzle: A Sense of Belonging and Contributing to Something Larger than Self* which ensures more intense compassion, a higher degree of acceptance, and more help-giving behavior. These practices foster favorable conditions for tailoring, improvisation, and judgement, by giving rise to learning, collaboration, and safety at work. Learning enables advantageous judgment by expanding employees' knowledge sets. Collaboration ensures more successful tailoring as it provides a larger pool of personal and professional skills to draw upon. Safety triggers improvisation by creating a secure environment where organizational members can try out new ways to solve their tasks. By not identifying a sole mechanism, but six sets of practices that enable tailoring, improvisation, and judgement, we acknowledge that the practices work as a system. Each practice has positive spin-off effects on the others, and this interconnectedness reinforces and sustains the impact of organizational culture on excellence in service. Our study thereby contributes to our knowledge of organizational culture in several ways. It illustrates the complexity of sustaining a fruitful culture, as the interpretation of these practices may differ between organizations. This is partly due to the lack of a universal understanding of what excellence is. Hence, it is up to each organization to define excellence, and from this investigate what the six sets of

practices mean for them. Our study also contributes to the scattered literature on the impact of organizational culture on excellence in service. By incorporating concepts and proposed linkages from diverse research streams, and connect them to our definition of excellence, we add to how they function on a meso- and macro-level. Our findings are important as the world is becoming more unpredictable. Hence, tailoring, improvisation, and judgement is to an increasing extent demanded from employees to ensure excellence in service. By revealing these practices, and being transparent in how we identified them, our study provides valuable and generalizable lessons for both researchers and practitioners. These lessons about how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood may mitigate the challenge of not being able to predict the unpredictable.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Guide Employees

	Questions	Probes
Phase 1: Initiation and warm-up *Introduction of us and purpose of study, permission to record, build rapport and find common ground*	**1a.** Can you please describe why you started working at the nursing/residential home? **1b.** Can you please describe what a typical day looks like?	**1a.** Name, position, tenure, responsibilities? **1b.** What do you see as your key tasks?
Phase 2: Interview *Eliciting extended storytelling on pre-defined theme and directed comparative questions*	**2a.** Can you please describe the relationship you have with your colleagues? **2b.** Can you please describe which characteristics of your colleagues that you cherish? **2c.** Can you please recall a situation where you and your colleagues solved a situation by drawing on each other's knowledge? **2d.** Can you please recall a time when a colleague taught you something especially useful? **2e.** Can you please recall a scenario when you experienced something with which you lacked knowledge to handle? **2f.** Can you please recall an event where you and your colleagues had a wonderful time together? **2g.** Can you please explain what happens if there is something that you need to talk about with your manager?	**2a.** Do you meet outside of work? Do you feel that you have a personal bond? **2b.** Personal and/or professional characteristics? **2c.** Which professions were present? Who took the initiative? **2d.** Where and how did the knowledge exchange take place? **2e.** What happened? How did you solve this? **2f.** Was it during work hours or spare time? Initiator? Your contribution? **2g.** Which forum is available where you can meet your manager?

	2h. Can you please recall a time when you felt seen and valued at work?	**2h.** What happened? How did this make you feel?
	2i. Can you please describe a situation when you took initiative to, for instance, a change without consulting with your manager first?	**2i.** What was the reaction from your colleagues and your manager?
	2j. Can you please recall a time something unexpected happened?	**2j.** Who were present? How did you solve this?
	2k. Can you please describe how you perceive the degree of flexibility you have at work?	**2k.** Do you decide how to perform your tasks? How does this flexibility affect you?
Phase 3: Closure and sharing *Clarify interpretations, repeat context where the interview will be used, and thank interviewee.*	**3a.** Based on what you have shared and what we have talked about, have we understood you correctly that...	**3a.** Summarize key takeaways
	3b. Is there anything you would like to add, or something we have not covered which you mean is important to the question of how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood here at the nursing/residential home?	**3b.** The interviewee is encouraged to speak freely and revisit themes.
	3c. Are there any of your colleagues you would recommend that we interview?	**3c.** Where they present at any of the events you have described?

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Questions 2a–2b are related to the concept: hire for attitude, train for skill; questions 2c–2e are related to concepts of: learning and knowledge sharing; questions 2f–2h are related to the concept: put people first; and question 2i–2k are related to concepts of: autonomy and empowerment. (These themes are inspired by existing research on Southwest Airlines. For more information, see Gittel, 2004)

Appendix II: Interview Guide Management

	Questions	Probes
Phase 1: Initiation and warm-up *Introduction of us and purpose of study, permission to record, build rapport and find common ground*	**1a.** Can you please describe why you started working at the nursing/residential home? **1b.** Can you please describe what a typical day looks like?	**1a.** Name, position, tenure, responsibilities? **1b.** What do you see as your key tasks?
Phase 2: Interview *Eliciting extended storytelling on pre-defined theme and directed comparative questions*	**2a.** Can you please describe the relationship you have with your colleagues? **2b.** Can you please describe which characteristics of your colleagues that you cherish? **2c.** Can you please describe what you look after when recruiting new employees? **2d.** Can you please describe what you do if you have to make an important decision? **2e.** Can you please recall a time when a colleague taught you something especially useful? **2f.** Can you please recall a scenario when you experienced something with which you lacked knowledge to handle? **2g.** Can you please recall an event where you and your colleagues had a wonderful time together? **2h.** Can you please explain what you do to ensure that employees feel that they can come to you if they have something on their mind?	**2a.** Do you meet outside of work? Do you feel that you have a personal bond? **2b.** Personal and/or professional characteristics? **2c.** Personal and/or professional characteristics? **2d.** Do you involve colleagues' opinions? If so, how? **2e.** Where and how did the knowledge exchange take place? **2f.** What happened? How did you solve this? **2g.** Was it during work hours or spare time? Initiator? Your contribution? **2h.** Any particular practices? When do you ensure this?

	2i. What happened? How did this make you feel?
2i. Can you please recall a time you felt seen and valued at work?	
2j. Can you explain if you do something in particular to ensure a positive working environment?	**2j.** How do you think this affects the employees?
2k. Can you please describe how you react if one of the employees take initiative to, for instance, a change without consulting you first?	**2k.** Do you trust your employees?
2l. Can you please recall a time something unexpected happened?	**2l.** Who were present? How did you solve this?
2m. Who takes over your responsibilities when you are not here?	**2m.** Do you worry when you are away?
Phase 3: Closure and sharing	**3a.** Summarize key takeaways
Clarify interpretations, repeat context where the interview will be used, and thank interviewee.	
3a. Based on what you have shared and what we have talked about, have we understood you correctly that...	
3b. Is there anything you would like to add, or something we have not covered which you mean is important to the question of how the relationship between organizational culture and excellence in service can be understood here at the nursing/residential home?	**3b.** The interviewee is encouraged to speak freely and revisit themes.
3c. Are there any of your colleagues you would recommend that we interview?	**3c.** Where they present at any of the events you have described?

Questions 2a-2c are related to the concept: hire for attitude, train for skill; questions 2d-2f are related to concepts of: learning and knowledge sharing; questions 2g-2j are related to the concept: put people first; and question 2k-2m are related to concepts of: autonomy and empowerment. (These themes are inspired by existing research on Southwest Airlines. For more information, see Gittel, 2004)