If nothing keeps the parts together

One should'nt think about this in an airplane. Very unsuitable. Leads to stiff neck and watery breathing in no time – don't move, who knows…good thing that it occurs rarely, the thought as well as the real…you know.

But let's be honest: the feeling is just as existential when you lead a company and one day you think: „What if nothing keeps the parts together?" No, this feeling is not less scary, and you are lucky if nobody sees you when you are having it.

What keeps an organisation together, after all?

The processes? But what happens to them when everything is agile, fluid, organic and self organising? What does generation Y care about processes? „Don't trust anybody who gives you more than zero regulations."

The physical structures? The walls of your building? At least they are quite stable. Although, if it's just them you are probably in a prison. That doesn't sound very competitive neither.

A culture that developped back in the Pleistocene and is sustaining itself? Is that still functional? And if you start jiggling it, will the whole thing – or it's parts – come flying at your head?

One thing is for sure: Money and power are not the factors that keep an organisation together. Because money and power are unspecific dimensions. You can get them in any company, in some organisations a bit more, in others less. And because money and power are unspecific, they are completely useless for fostering identification with a company. People keep trying, anyway….

But to achieve that you need a dimension that will touch people sustainably – authentically, not neurotically – and is specific to your organisation in content. Ideally it is unique, but one step below can do as well. This might be a vision (if it is a powerful one), a common idea, a shared narrative, an answer to the question „why is it good and why does it make sense to do exactly this exactly here?"

Value systems and organisational culture are downstream to this, actually: they define the „how", the way you do things. Before that the „what" and „what for" should be clear, or else culture will be free floating without momentum. So organisational culture ends up in second place, but not at all distant: together with a shared narrative it constitutes the royal couple in successful companies.

Both elements can serve as a constant in times of change: a culture might carry an organisation through disruption in content, or a shard idea might be your beacon for developping your culture. More and more change will carry away both at the same time, which creates new dimensions for change processes and their management. Account yourself lucky if you already have a culture that allows to learn and innovate quickly, it's the best life insurance. But it needs a quintessence in content that it will shape.

Such a quintessense has it's charm: it can act even in fluid organisations, changing project teams, self organising units. It even allows for some cultural differences whithin organisations, so that everybody is relieved from cutting down variations with Bonsai scissors all the time. This works only by order, anyway, in other words: never.

So what is needed is a gravitational center that will make sense; one that will transcend phsyics and not be located in a center of mass (which CEO would like to be called a center of mass, anyway?), but will be distributed in a fractal way, and is therefore scalable. And then the door opens for great things to happen.