

## **A story we tell about ourselves**

A case study about the development of professional identities in a Swedish consultancy firm

Master's Thesis in the Master's Programme International Project Management

ALEXANDRA BEMM  
DIMITRIOS SINATKAS



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Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

Division of Construction Management

Chalmers University of Technology

SE-412 96 Göteborg

Sweden

Telephone: + 46 (0)31-772 1000

Cover:

Identity narrative, which is more closely described in conclusions.

Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering.

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## ABSTRACT

This master thesis aims to explore the development of professional identities in a Swedish consultancy firm. First, the concept of professional identity is explained as: *'a part of the self-identity one possesses. As part of one's self-identity it provides unconscious interpretations of continuity in the professional role.'* Second, the concept of identification is explained as: *'the construction of a social identity. It involves an individual seeking meaning to one's membership in a collective by being aware of that membership, valuing that membership and having emotions towards it. Identification is occurring by adopting the attributes of the collective's identity into one's self identity.'* These two concepts will, in combination with descriptions of motives towards identification and the explanation of the process of how identification is occurring provide the theoretical framework. Effective leadership in an identity regulation context, is defined by identity researchers, as the management of meaning in the organizations. Thus, managing the meaning one seeks in a membership translates to managing one's identity and identification. Based on that, the purpose of this thesis is to explore and explain how leadership influences the transition that an individual's professional identity goes through in a trainee program. A case study was carried out in a consultancy firm in Sweden. From the findings of the study, a model was created that explains the identity construction process in a trainee program, in a consultancy firm. This model offers an insight to the process of identity construction and is a contribution towards the understanding of the interplay between the individual and the organization.

Key words: consultancy, identity construction, leadership, professional identity, trainee program

En historia vi berättar om oss själva

En fallstudie om utvecklingen av professionella identiteter i ett svenskt konsultföretag

Examensarbete inom masterprogrammet International Project Management

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Avdelningen för construction management

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## SAMMANFATTNING

Det här mastersexamensarbetet syftar till att utforska utvecklingen av professionella identiteter i ett svenskt konsultföretag. Först kommer konceptet professionell identitet att förklaras som: *'en del av en persons identitet som bidrar med undermedvetna tolkningar av kontinuiteten i ens professionella roll.'* Sen kommer konceptet identifikation att förklaras som: *'konstruktionen av en social identitet vilken innebär en individ som söker mening till dess tillhörighet i ett kollektiv genom att vara medveten om den tillhörigheten, värdera den tillhörigheten, samt att ha känslor riktade mot den. Identifikation förekommer genom att en individ antar attributen av kollektivets identitet och applicerar på sin egen identitet.'* De två koncepten, i kombination med beskrivningar av motiveringarna för identifikation samt en förklaring av identifikationsprocessen, ligger för grund till teorikapitlet. Ledarskap är definierat av tidigare forskare som förmedlare av betydelse i organisationen. Att leda betydelsen som personer söker i en tillhörighet, innebär också att leda de personernas identitet och identifikation. Med det här som bakgrund, är ändamålet med den här rapporten att utforska och förklara hur ledarskap påverkar övergången som en persons professionella identitet går igenom i ett traineeprogram. En fallstudie över det här fenomenet utfördes i ett svenskt konsultföretag och efter avslutad intervjustudie, utvecklades en modell som förklarar identifikationsprocessen i ett traineeprogram i ett konsultföretag. Den här modellen erbjuder en insikt i hur identitetsutveckling sker samt erbjuder en förståelse för samspelet mellan individen och organisationen.

Nyckelord: identitetsutveckling, konsult, ledarskap, professionell identitet, traineeprogram



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## **Preface**

This study about the development of professional identities in a trainee program was carried out at a Swedish consultancy firm. To reach a conclusion and present a model describing the process of how a trainee's professional identity transitions from an expected to experienced identity, several interviews were conducted. The interviews took place between February and April 2017 and were carried out at both the firm's office building, but also via Skype with trainees and managers located in different cities.

So initially, we would like to extend our gratitude to the firm for the valuable time they granted us in order to conduct this thesis. We would also like to thank the Civil and Environmental Engineering department for the opportunity to be a part of the International Project Management master program. We would also like to thank our supervisor, Rikard Sandberg, for his valuable support and constructive feedback during this study. Lastly, we would like to thank our friends and family for the support they provided through this academically challenging time period.

Finally, as for the division of work, both of us have equally contributed towards the final result of this master thesis.

Gothenburg, May 2017

Alexandra Bemm and Dimitrios Sinatkas



# 1 Introduction

The focus of identity and identification regards the definition of either a social construct like an organization, a group, a collective, or an individual. Since an individual and a collective interact with each other, these concepts may underlie and influence that interaction to a certain degree. That influence derives from the need of the collective and the individual to answer questions like ‘*Who are we?*’ or ‘*Who am I?*’ but also to answer the question ‘*Who are they?*’. (Albert et al., 2000)

Neither of these concepts are new in the organizational literature. Research dates back to 1911 with the work of Taylor (2004), where he focused on reducing conflicts between managers and workers. Nonetheless, the research usually distinguishes between the organization and the individual. Changes in the modern organizations such as, minimizing the levels of hierarchy, outsourcing for necessary competences, teamwork, and empowerment, may create a more shifting and complicated environment to operate in. Therefore, to be competitive, an organization may need to change how the organization is perceived instead of relying in rigid methods and structures. The organization might depend on the perception of its own members, of what it is and what its purpose is. Albert et al. (2000, p. 13) state: “*A sense of identity serves as a rudder for navigating difficult waters*”. From the individual’s side, more flexible forms of working, such as short time contracts and employing mobility, might make notions of loyalty to a team, group, or organization seem outdated or a thing of the past. This employee mobility may also add to an increasing diversity in an organization. Individuals with different backgrounds, values, and cultures may interact with each other in all the levels of the organization. Thus, the perception of oneself in the organization and of the organization may be different from the one that would result from the interaction with a more similar individual.

In short, as Gergen (1991) describes in his book *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*, that as time progresses there are less identity characteristics, more options for identification, frequent identity changes, and more tolerance towards identity diversity. One may notice that this environment may not be stable regarding identification and as a result, it may be important to take into account and closer examine the dynamics of identity construction.

The consulting firm can be seen as an interesting case about identity construction, according to Alvesson and Empson (2008). In a consultancy firm, the professional identity of the individual must exist together alongside the collective’s identity. If the individuals primarily identify with what their role involves, then it is difficult for them to promote and circulate a collective identity, which encompasses and defines all the members of the group, especially new ones. As such, the organization may be a place where individuals gather, cooperate, work harmoniously and productively, and where individuals are committed to meet the needs of the client but at the end of the day disband, without feeling anything in particular towards it. The consultancy firm will therefore face the risk of only serving as a place for individuals, to gather and pursue their own goals rather than promoting, through their role, the goals of the collective.

The key point in the self-concept analysis of leadership effectiveness is that the self-concept is dynamic (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) and studies (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Ashforth et al., 2008, Pratt et al., 2006) reveal that there exists a process according

to which that identity changes. The potential influence of leadership lies in managing the different situations, which can bring different aspects into the identity content, thus resulting into different attitudes and behavior (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Since the motivation for identification is generated from inside the self-conception, the management of those motives depends less on monitoring and external rewards (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). From the findings of those studies, it is gathered that, the people who bear the responsibility of leadership must be aware that there is no '*one process fits all*' approaches to alter an individual's identity. Since the motivations for identification are intrinsic in nature, conventional means of identity control may be ineffective for an individual to identify with that particular identity. Thus, it may be necessary for leadership to find another way to manage those motivations.

The professional identity can be described as expected or experienced (Reid, 2015). For this study, those terms will be borrowed from Reid (2015) but used in a different way. Reid (2015) uses the term expected professional identities to describe what the organization's, or employer's expectations are for how the employee should be. On the other hand, the term experienced professional identities is used by Reid (2015) to describe people's beliefs and preferences regarding who they are as professionals. For the purpose of this study, the terms will be borrowed but altered. The term expected professional identities will be used to describe the expectations or image an employee has for the profession or for who one wants to be professionally. Experienced professional identity on the other hand, will be used to describe the professional identity that is articulated inside the organization, how one ought to be.

As it was gathered, organizational identity is important and its stability is challenged by the dynamism of identity changes and the tolerance towards those changes. Consultancy firms are in the center of these dynamics as the professional identity of the employees must coexist with the organizational identity. The leaders in a consultancy firm may therefore have a more challenging task to manage the process towards identification. Thus, the purpose of this study will be to examine this influence of leadership practices on the expected professional identity in the process of formulating it into an experienced professional identity, in order to match the collective's context. An environment where such an interaction is appearing intensively is in a training program inside a consulting firm.

Therefore, a trainee program held by a consulting firm is of great importance to the firm. By influencing the professional identity of the trainee, the firm can improve the trainee's efficiency when dealing with the client's challenges in the future. The influence of leaders during the official training period and after might have an impact on the identity and as such, it needs to be researched.

Regarding the purpose and the scope of this thesis, it is deemed appropriate to initially provide a theoretical background regarding professional identities; what is a professional identity, what is identification, the motives for identification, and how does the process of identification occur. Furthermore, the methodology used to examine the purpose of this study will be presented in Chapter 3 and the empirical data gathered will be presented in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, a discussion will be developed in order to analyze the data and provide an answer to the research questions. In Chapter 6, the conclusion of the study will be presented as well as possible managerial implications and recommendations. With this as the background, the aim of this master thesis is therefore to answer the following research questions:

## **How is the transition occurring from expected professional identity to experienced professional identity in a consultancy firm during a trainee program?**

- How does the firm regulate the collective identity?
- What is the role of leadership in this regulation process?
- What is the role of the individual in the identification process?

As for limitations regarding this master thesis, it was decided to stay within managerial aspects of the identity development. It was decided to be a case study to research the current situation in a Swedish consultancy firm and this includes the examination of two managerial levels, the trainee level and the senior manager level. This also includes an examination of the influence that the senior management may or may not be practicing towards the trainee. The organizational context, in which this influence is practiced, will also be examined. As for what will not be included, aspects regarding the environment, society, and culture will not be included.

The results expected to be found from this research is that both the individual and the organization play an important role in the individual's path of development, as well as the identification of leadership's importance and role in the identity development. Moreover, an understanding of the trainees' identification process is expected and from that understanding, to create a sufficient model explaining this process. It is hoped to provide the firm with an insight to the firm's internal process of identification, so they can analyze their leadership practices from another perspective and if necessary, improve them.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

In order to understand what professional identity is, one should take a step back and initiate one's search from what identity is and why it is important to be discussed and researched. The review of the theory will be initiated in Chapter 2.1 by examining categories, characteristics, and traits of the identity concept that previous research on the subject have revealed so far. By utilizing this knowledge, a definition of professional identity will be formed and presented. Progressing to Chapter 2.2, the concept of identification will be explored. A definition about identification will be presented as well as how it affects a person who identifies with a concept.

Moreover, in Chapter 2.3, the importance of identification will be explored and its correlation to the process of identity construction. The process of identity construction will be reviewed in Chapter 2.4, including mechanisms used from individuals to construct or reinforce an identity. Finally, in Chapter 2.5 the concept of multiple identities will be reviewed. The manner through which an individual can handle multiple identities and the relationship between those identities could influence the process of identity construction.

### 2.1 Professional identity

The theoretical framework will be initiated by exploring what professional identity is and why it is important.

Ashforth et al. (2008, p. 327) claim in their research that “*Identity is a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’*”. In other words, there are three characteristics of identity. An identity a) is descriptive about oneself, b) provides answers to the questions ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’ and c) corresponds to a particular context.

At this point, a distinction seems to exist between personal identity and social identity. Personal identity is defined by Postmes and Jetten (2006, p. 260) as “*a person’s unique sense of self*”. The identity forms from the composition of personal characteristics, such as traits, abilities, and interests (Ashforth et al., 2008). To clarify, all the attributes of an individual combined create a ‘self’. The particular perception one has for one’s self can be defined as personal identity. Tajfel (1978, p. 63) defined social identity as “*that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.*” In other words, social identity is a part of the identity an individual has. This part of identity is generated primarily by knowing one is a member of a social group and is enhanced by the value and emotions one invests in this membership.



The difference between personal and social identities does not lie on their respective aspects. To clarify, a team and an individual can each be described with the same aspects, for example being open-minded and creative. The distinguishing point between the personal and social identity is their respective levels of self. That means that a personal identity is unique to the individual and puts a distinction between individuals, for example between group members. A social identity distinguishes one group from another and a particular social identity is usually shared by the members of that particular group. (Ashforth et al., 2008)

Another aspect of social identities, compared to personal identities, is that they are “*relational and comparative*” (Tajfel and Turner, 1986, p. 16). A group’s social identity gains meaning for an individual when it can be compared and contrasted with another group. With that comparison, the individual can find an answer to two questions. The first one is ‘*Who are we?*’ and the answer to that question can provide a description of the identity. The second question is ‘*How good are we?*’ and the answer provides a sense of assessment for the individual (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Social identities are usually a mixture of the characteristics of the collective or role and of the unique characteristics, the members of the group are perceived to have (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Ashforth et al. (2008) claim that a profession or an occupation has a major role as an ‘*identity badge*’ for individuals who are attempting to adjust in an organization. As such, the aspiring future professionals frequently use their occupation as a mean to construct a ‘*self*’ inside an organization. As a result, the individuals are exploiting to some extent this social identity in an attempt to form their own identity inside an organization. Schein and Schein (1978) presents professional identity as a rather solid pattern, consisted of traits, principles, values, purposes, and knowledge, that an individual can utilize in order to define oneself in the professional role. In other words, professional identity is an organized pattern, which is composed from traits of the personal identity in the professional role. Since the professional role is also a collective role where many individuals can share the same profession in an organization, the professional identity falls under the description of a social identity. Van Dick (2001) also support that the more one’s career matches one’s character traits, the more the personal identity correlates with the collective identity. As such, if the career or profession matches the traits of the personal identity of an individual, then in one’s perception there is no distinction between the two. However, with that definition one may also assume that the opposite can occur as well. The more an individual’s career does not match one’s personal identity, the bigger is the chance that there might exist more than one identities.

Another point of view however, is present by Giddens (1991) referring to the distinction between personal and social identities. In his work, he uses the concept of self-identity. This concept is described as an organized story, which is composed without conscious thought; it happens reflexively. The source of this story is participation of the individual in various experiences and competing discourses. These experiences and discourses are

generated from the search of the individual for existential continuity and security. To clarify, self-identity is a story that is composed without the individual actually thinking about it, but by the participation in various experiences and from engaging challenging situations. To the individual, the participation in these experiences and situations have the purpose to provide a feel of continuity and security for oneself. As such, “*Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person . . . self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted reflexively by the agent*” (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). In other words, the ‘self’ that an individual possess is the unconscious interpretation of continuity that one strives to have in life and it cannot be distinguished as a specific trait.

At this point, it is deemed important to summarize the findings on the identity concept and provide a fitting definition for the concept of professional identity that will be used in this research.

- The particular perception one has for one’s self can be defined as personal identity.
- The social identity is a part of the perception an individual has for one’s self. It is generated by the knowledge that one is a member of a social group and is enhanced by the value and emotions one invests in that membership.
- The personal identity and the social identity could be considered as the building blocks of the self-identity concept.
- The self-identity concept is the unconscious interpretation of continuity an individual strives to have in life.
- The professional identity is an organized pattern, which is composed from traits of the personal identity in the professional role.

Combining these findings on the identity concept, the authors hereby provide a definition for professional identity for the purpose of this thesis. As such:

*‘Professional identity is a part of the self-identity one possesses. It is an organized pattern, which emerge from combining traits of one’s personal identity and the perception generated from the membership in the working group of one’s social identity. As part of one’s self-identity it provides unconscious interpretation of continuity in the professional role.’*

## **2.2 Identification**

Professional identity, as defined in Chapter 2.1, refers to an organized pattern, which is created by a combination of identity traits, both personal and social. In order to understand the parts from which this pattern emerge, one should take a step back and explore the concept of identification. This concept is presented in Figure 2.1.

Ashforth et al. (2008, p. 329) define identification as: “*Identification is viewing a collective’s or role’s defining essence as self-defining*”. In other words, identification is viewing a social construct (collective, organization, or role) as a concept through which one can define oneself. As such, identification has also been referred to as the perception of belonging to a group, when the attributes of that group are contained in a member’s self-identity (Ashforth et al., 2008). Since the identification is occurring with a social construct, the resulting identity will be a social identity. In Chapter 2.1, social identity was described as a part of identity, which is generated by primarily knowing that one is a member of a social group and is enhanced by the value and emotions, which one invests in this membership.

Tajfel (1982) states that for an individual to achieve the stage of identification, three elements are required to be possessed. Those elements are also present in the definition of social identity as well. Two of them are fundamental while the third is regularly correlated with them. The first fundamental component is one knowing is a member of a group. This component is cognitive, as one rationally understands when being a member of a group. The second fundamental component refers to the sense which the membership, has a significant value, regardless of amount, to the individual. As such, this component is evaluative, as the person judge and determine the significance, worth, or quality of one’s group membership. The third and regularly correlated component is the emotional investment in the previous two components. How the individual feel about one’s membership and about the significance that membership has, is the basis for identification as the emotions can reveal to oneself and others what one in fact identifies with Ashforth et al. (2008). Harquail (1998, p. 225) stated that identification “*engages more than our cognitive self-categorization and our brains, it engages our hearts.*” Those three components form the core of one’s identity, which is presented in Figure 2.1.

However, the emotions involved in the identification depend on the collective’s identity and the situation and often they vary with the fluctuations of the collective’s life. Individuals might want to feel positively about their membership, and as such, they might find sources of positive feelings even in the most ‘*disgraced*’ collectives or roles. In such a case, the individual establishes the collective or role as a continuous source of positive feelings. In other words, one can think or feel one’s way into identification. This is explained further in Chapter 2.3 when the motives for identification are described. (Ashforth et al., 2008)

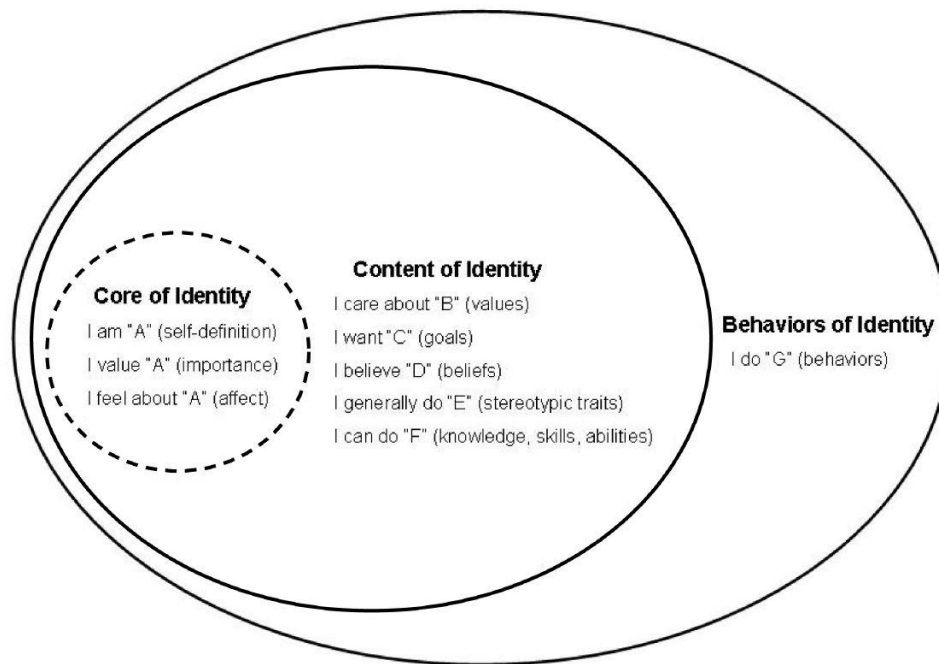


Figure 2.1 Identification formulation (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 330).

Identities in collective contexts are usually consisting of elements in the second ring, as shown in Figure 2.1. As the formulation of identification is expanded to the major content of a collective's identity, the values (I care about B), goals (I want C), beliefs (I believe D), stereotypic traits (I generally do E), and knowledge, skills, abilities (I can do F) are revealed. These components usually define what it means to be a member of the collective and as such, identification with the collective suggest that an individual accepts one or more of those attributes as one's own. (Ashforth et al., 2008)

The number of attributes that one will accept depends on how strong the identity is and how densely those attributes are communicated. As such, if those attributes are not expressed or are unclear, or in flux, one might not necessarily accept certain attributes as one's own. On the other hand, the stronger collective identity, the more attributes will be adopted by the individual. As a result, the more attributes of the collective an individual embrace, the more one becomes a typical example of that collective. As such, identification shapes the individual into a prototype of the collective. As such, identification shapes the individual into a prototypical member of the collective and as a prototypical member of the collective they express their self-definition to others, and use that definition to navigate in the professional field (Ashforth et al., 2008). The broadest formulation of identification also includes the behavior or the behavioral patterns the individuals adopt or express due to identification. (Ashforth et al., 2008)

Identification can be distinguished as situated or deep-structured. In a situated identification, the sense of being a member of a collective is triggered by situational signals. Therefore, a situated identification could be considered temporary and unstable. This type of identification is common in a lab or workshop setting. These settings support a temporary identification in order to accomplish a certain task. As soon as the experiment or workshop ends, the identification disappears. On the other hand, deep structure identification refers to a more close correlation between the individual and the collective. In this type of identification, there is an alteration to the self-identity of the individual and a closer correlation of whom the individual is at one's

profession and one's broader self-concept, as formerly described in this chapter. As such, it can be considered a stable quality that go beyond specific situations and follow the individual through one's correlation with the collective. In terms of which of the two are formed first, a situated or a deep structured identification, the situated category always predate deep structure due to the fact that one must first be aware of social categories and then self-categorize before more fundamental connections can form. (Ashforth et al., 2008)

Summarizing the main points of Chapter 2.2, identification is viewing a collective as a concept through which one can define oneself. In the core of identification one finds:

- A cognitive part, the awareness of belonging to a group
- An evaluative part, the significance of value the individual senses for that membership
- And an emotional part, the feelings towards the cognitive and evaluative part

Expanding the formulation of identification from that core, one encounters the content of that identity, which are the attributes included in the collective's identity. An identification can be situated, which is temporary and unstable and deep structured, which is long enduring and more stable.

Comparing the definitions given for social identity and identification, the authors can provide a definition for identification for the purpose of this thesis:

*'Identification is the construction of a social identity. It involves an individual being aware of membership to a collective, valuing that membership and having emotions towards it. Identification is occurring by adopting the attributes of the collective's identity into one's self identity.'*

## **2.3 Identification motives and relationship to leadership**

In Chapters 2.1 and 2.2, an explanation and definition was given for the professional identity and identification concept respectively. Having explored those, it is time to establish how they connect to the concept of leadership. For this purpose, two perspectives will be considered, a bottom-up and a top-down approach. Initially, the motives driving an individual to identify with a collective will be described. Subsequently, the mean through which the collective, and especially leaders, can handle identification will be explored. A connection between the two exists since identity construction, as will be explained further in Chapter 2.4, is characterized by an interplay between individuals and the collective context. (Ibarra, 1999)

Identity motives are defined as pressures toward certain identity states and away from others, which guide the processes of identity construction. People are not necessarily aware of these motives— nor are they necessarily unavailable to consciousness—but their operation can be inferred from their predictable effects on people's identities. Ashforth (2001) also have identified six self-related motives for identification. Those include:

- Self-enhancement (one perceiving oneself positively in the collective)

- Self-knowledge (locating the self within a context so as to define the self)
- Self-expression (enacting valued identities)
- Self-coherence (maintaining a sense of wholeness across a set of identities)
- Self-continuity (maintaining a sense of wholeness across time)
- Self-distinctiveness (valuing a sense of uniqueness)

The basic motive for identification is self-enhancement (Ashforth, 2001) or otherwise presented as self-esteem (Vignoles et al., 2006). Individuals identify with a collective in order to have a positive perception of themselves through the collective's identity (Vignoles et al., 2006). Experiencing the identity positively and a development towards the adaptation of the valued identity is important for the self-enhancement motive (Ashforth et al., 2008). Self-knowledge refers to information about oneself within the collective context. For an individual to act in that context, one must understand the situation and one's place within it in order to learn about oneself. The way that an individual can accomplish that is by assessing oneself and comparing it to people who are considered exemplary carriers of the collective identity (Ashforth, 2001).

The self-coherence motive refers to the desire of a unified and consistent sense of self. The individual seeks a sense of coherence among one's self over and across situations. Inconsistencies are sources of anxiety because of the threat an inconsistency implies to the sense of oneself. Self-continuity also provides a sense of stability in the sense of self, however the individual seek stability over and across time. Continuity is expressed through a narrative, a story in simpler terms, which is meant to provide a meaning of one's life. In both motives, the individual value the security of possessing a fundamental self and they seek to manage their environments in order to receive appropriate feedback about its stability (Ashforth, 2001, Vignoles et al., 2006). In this regard, Swann (1990) states that individuals might go as far as to manage their environment in order to obtain only positive or negative feedback about themselves, depending on the view they have of themselves in the collective. They also selectively perceive and recall instances of inconsistencies and continuity (Ashforth, 2001, Vignoles et al., 2006).

Self-expression regards putting into practice (enact) a valued identity. Through that expression, one can affirm the worth and value of the identity and express that way the '*real self*'. The more an identity is enacted the more the contents of that identity become self-defining. Individuals prefer to act and express their '*real self*' in any opportunity because it generates positive emotions (Ashforth, 2001). Finally, the self-distinctiveness motive refers to finding differences between the individual and the group identity. As such, one can affirm their own sense of uniqueness. However, an individual wanting to be unique and yet part of a group, seeks a kind of optimal distinctiveness, which balances the desire for membership with the desire for uniqueness (Ashforth, 2001, Vignoles et al., 2006).

Summarizing, the individual approach to identification is initiated by the human desire to satisfy basic human needs such as safety, relationship, assurance, and trust (Erez et al., 1993, Pratt, 1998). The basic motivation for identification seems to be the self-enhancement motive. Individuals identify in order to feel good about themselves in the collectives and should experience becoming a member of the collective in a positive way. It seems that there are some motives, like the self-knowledge, self-expression, and self-distinction, which might be used more as a '*means to an end*'. Being able to locate the self in the collective, having opportunities to express it, and perceiving that

expression as distinct and acceptable in a group may reinforce identification. Furthermore, self-coherency and self-continuity seem to target mostly at the sense of security that the self is not radically altered by identifying with the collective. However, the manner in which one perceives continuity and coherence relies on their individual perception and as such is subjective. Weick (1995) argues that humans always seek meaning and by identifying with a collective, they reduce the uncertainty when interacting in new environments. As such, it seems that the main goal of those motives is to find meaning about oneself inside the collective. In order to accomplish that, individuals are managing the environment of the collective, professional or otherwise, depending on their perception of themselves into the collective. As Swann (1990) states, they might go as far as to manipulate the immediate environment by selecting the appropriate people to interact with.

Initiating the top down approach, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) states that, leadership is considered effective when it unites and balances the collective identity. As such, leadership in this context can be considered as the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982) because the meaning depends on the collective identity in question. As a result, managing meaning is essential to managing identity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Organizations have in their contexts processes that help reduce uncertainty and provide meaning such as routines, meetings, and gatherings in their day-to-day organizational life (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999, Trice and Beyer, 1984). As such, identification can reduce uncertainty in an organizational environment as the individual associates with the meanings provided and creates a sense of order (Hogg, 2000).

From that perspective, a great deal of what a leader practices could be considered as identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Identity work refers to the development and expression of common group membership sense and purpose for themselves and the members of the group. As Reicher et al. (2005) state, they might be considered entrepreneurs of identity, who are building a sense of shared social identity. Finally, as Ladkin (2007) proposes, identity work is the exchange of meaning and the co-creation of a shared understanding. As a result, leadership is a process which require the development of people (Day, 2001) and that require leaders who are proficient not only in technical skills but in soft skills as well (Grint, 2007, Raelin, 2007).

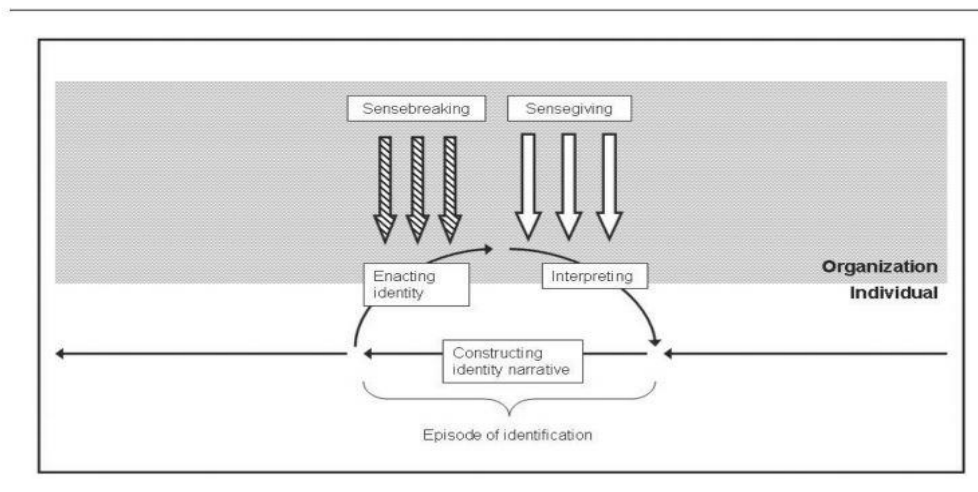
As it is gathered, the interaction between leadership and identification relies on the management from the leaders' side of the meaning of the collective identity. In other words, the leaders of the collective express and demonstrate what it means to be a member of a collective. The way to accomplish is through identity work that unite and balance the collective identity. The unification and balancing are occurring through the expression of the common group membership sense and purpose for the members of the group and for themselves. As such, through the identity work occurring between leader and group members, the identification with the collective's identity is becoming stronger for both. In short, the interplay between individuals and leaders is generated through the motivation of the earlier to find meaning in the collective's identity and the former managing that meaning. As such, a leader who can recognize the motives behind an individual wishing to join the collective can manage the meaning articulated as to match the individual's motives.

## 2.4 How does identification occur?

Identification, as described in Chapter 2.2, relates more to a situation than a process. However, identification is described as a dynamic and turbulent process (Albert et al., 2000, Gioia et al., 2000) and this process can be described in two ways. The self-referential way refers to the acknowledgement of a collective or role being similar to one's self. The self-defining way refers to the individual changing to become more similar to the collective or role (Ashforth et al., 2008). Researchers (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Ashforth et al., 2008, Pratt et al., 2006) on identity construction have proposed models with common background its circularity. For this thesis, the Ashforth et al. (2008) model was chosen as a reference due to its general approach and simplicity, as presented in Figure 2.2.

The process of identification is characterized by an interplay between individuals and the collective context. Individuals are enacting identities or as Ibarra (1999) states, by experimenting with provisional selves. From the feedback gathered and interpreted from these actions, the individual begins to incorporate the elements of that self, which fit the collective context. The collective provides feedback on the provisional self through the sensebreaking and sensegiving processes (Ashforth et al., 2008). The manner through which the collective is utilizing the processes of sensebreaking and sensegiving are linked to the aspects of the individual's identity, which the collective wishes to control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The processes of experimentation and feedback collection operate together as a cycle (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Ashforth et al., 2008, Pratt et al., 2006). Those processes are continuously occurring as the individual attempts to become a characteristic member of the collective (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This process is expressed from the individual's perspective as a story or narrative describing the changes occurring from the past towards the future (Ashforth et al., 2008).

**Figure 2**  
**A Process Model of Identification**



*Figure 2.2 Process model of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 341).*

Usually, career transitions that are due to the requirements of new skills or behavioral patterns, are causing identity changes and initiate an identification process. That process requires an amount of time and as such, identity and role are evolving together rather than adapting the self which the role demands (Ibarra, 1999).



### 2.4.1 Provisional selves

Ibarra (1999) defines provisional selves as temporary solutions, which individuals may use in order to cover the distance between their perception of their current self and the perception about attitudes and behaviors in the role. Using that temporary solution to experiment on, one gathers feedback from the collective. As such, one may maintain or modify their self. At this point one might be able to correlate this action with the self-knowledge motive described in Chapter 2.3. One wishes to locate oneself within a context to define the self. As a result, one can assume that the driving force an individual utilizes for testing a provisional self is the self-knowledge motive.

Expanding that definition, an identity enacted (provisional self), can be used by an individual to examine how close one is to the content (attitudes and behaviors), of the collective's identity (role). In short, that enacting identity offers an answer to the question: *'How close am I to the identity I value?'*

Ibarra (1999) describes three tasks, which an individual usually undertakes in order to construct a provisional self:

- Observation of role models
- Experimentation with identity
- Evaluation according to internal and external standards

Through observation, individuals are attempting to acquire the necessary knowledge in order to function in that the role and to satisfy its requirements. In other words, through observation the individual understands how things are done. The observation phase includes two tools: role prototyping and identity matching. With role prototyping, the individual is observing a successful role model and understands what elements make it so. With identity matching, the individual is attempting to judge if those elements are suitable for one. In short, the observation task is about gathering a number of suitable identity elements from role models for potential use in the future. (Ibarra, 1999)

With the identity experimentation task, the individual attempts to acquire behavioral skills and those must be developed and polished by experience. In other words, the individual attempts to answer the question *'in which manner are things done?'*. There are two strategies to accomplish that. The first strategy is through the imitation strategy where the individual is mimicking the professional style of either a single role model's style with no adaptation to oneself (wholesale) or by selecting the appropriate elements from various role models to create a more suitable behavioral model. The second strategy for experimentation is the true-to-self strategy. Instead of imitating or adopting elements, the individual wishes to retain one's authenticity and as such is crafting a very well-thought enacting identity based on the already possessed self-identity. (Ibarra, 1999)

Reflecting on the two tasks described, they seem to correlate with the self-expression motive. The individual wishes to express the real self and is therefore seeking after opportunities to do so. These opportunities are presenting themselves more frequently as the identity of the individual leans towards the collective identity. As a result, despite of which tool or strategy one might utilize, the driving force remains the same. One may say: *'I can more frequently express myself the closer my self-identity is to the collective identity.'*

Finally, by evaluating an enacted identity, an individual can adopt or discard it. By using Internal and external evaluations, one can perform adjustments to reduce inconsistencies among their self-identity, the collective identity, and the image they project. Internal evaluations focus more on reducing inconsistencies in the self-identity and its relation to the collective identity while external evaluations tend to bring a balance between the individual and the collective. (Ibarra, 1999)

As one may notice, the internal evaluations seem to correlate with the self-coherence and self-continuity motives. As the individual wishes for a coherence across a set of identities and a sense of continuity across time, one engages in an evaluation to establish how far one has diverted. The external evaluations on the other hand, seem to be driven from the self-distinctiveness motive as the individual evaluates his enacting identity with the group identity, seeking a balance between the two.

To summarize, individuals are enacting identities during the identity construction process in order to assess the distance between *Who am I now?* and *Who do I want to become?* inside a new role or a new collective in general. This is accomplished by observing role models, organization leaders, or managers, for the purpose of gaining knowledge about the role, and through experimentation to establish the appropriate behavior for the role. Finally, the elements gathered from the observations and tasks were evaluated for inconsistencies with the true self. An individual may not use the whole repertoire of the tasks described, that depends on the role and its requirements. The motives for identification described in Chapter 2.3 seems to be the driving force behind these techniques. As such, one may presume that the technique one will utilize to enact an identity depends on the motivation one has for identifying with the collective in the first place. For example, one may notice in the data of Ibarra (1999) that the techniques and evaluation assessment one makes, directly correspond to a motivation one has towards the role or for identifying with the collective. Concluding, one may assume that the correlation between the motives and techniques is also a bridging process between the unconscious and conscious choices one makes through the identity construction progress.

## **2.4.2 Sensebreaking and sensegiving**

As described in Chapter 2.3, the identification process influences the manner in which leadership is exercised inside the collective context. The leaders are entrepreneurs of identity and managers of the collective meaning. The manner and tools used by the leaders and the collective, to regulate the identity towards the individuals will be explored in this chapter.

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) states that organizations use a variety of tools and methods to promote consent and commitment to corporate goals. Creating a setting where elements of an identity can be adapted and discarded flexibly is increasingly desired from individuals wishing to be employed in the organization. As such, the focus is directed to employees who can switch between activities and assignments where their role and position may be varied, such as for example self-managing and multi-functional work groups or teams. There are multiple target areas within an organization where the identity regulation is focused on, however they are categorized by Alvesson and Willmott (2002, p. 632) in the following: "*the employee, action orientation, social relations and the scene*". In the employee category, the identity regulations are focused on either directly defining an identity or implying an identity by referencing to a prototypical group member. In other words, either the characteristics of the position

inside the collective defines the individual or the individual is defined by being compared to others.

In the second category, one may find methods of identity regulation that are more action-oriented from the organization's side. By providing examples and stories that demonstrate specific behaviors in the collective, a specific vocabulary for the motivations is established that demonstrate what is important and natural for an individual to do. Thus, the employees are encouraged to understand that specific meaning of their work and behavior routines. Those stories possessing a strong morality message are focused on orienting identity to a specific direction. Moreover, with the construction of knowledge and skills the identity can be regulated in an organizational context. The knowledge defines the person who possess it. As a result, it defines also what the capabilities and competences that person has or what is expected of one as well. Educational programs are powerful media of identity construction and regulation. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)

The third category is social relations, which refers to identity regulations that enhance the sense of belongingness and differentiation with the organizational context. One powerful way to regulate and reinforce the identity of the collective is to categorize the group as '*we are...*'. By creating a separation between them and us, boundaries are created in the social world and as such, the identity of the collective becomes more distinct. As such, feelings of belongingness and affiliation to a group can arise without any specific references to values or content of the identity. Moreover, hierarchy can have a major role in the regulation of identity. As there is definite distinction between a subordinate and a superior, it is easier to answer the question '*Who am I?*', since a position in the hierarchy is supported by repeated symbolism. On the other hand, there is another model of more progressive companies where the formal internal hierarchy is not considered important. Hierarchy is still typically expressed, through terms of seniority, however it is more subtle and, as such more complex tools for identity regulation from the senior to the junior are necessary. The entire collective and its members are usually regarded as elite, indicating that organizational members are unique in their orientations and capacities. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)

The final category sets the scene and includes identity regulations which focus more on giving meaning to the larger context, within which the collective and subsequently the individual operates. As such, a kind of '*rules of the game*' are clarified and distinguished. These rules refer more to proper organizational citizenship behavior rather than organizational values or morals. They compose a structure of meanings and guidelines that offer guidance on what is natural for the organization in order to operate in a smooth manner. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)

As it is gathered, sensebreaking, as an identity regulation process from the organization's side, may include practices and tools that target not only to directly define the individual but also indirectly through with the context in which the individual operates. One may argue that these tools are interwoven in the organizational structure or operations and as such, identity is regulated through them nonetheless. However, since not every organization is the same and not every organization operates in the same context, different tools for identity regulation may apply resulting in different identification techniques from the employees' side, as seen in Chapter 2.4.1. Despite this, the identity regulation tools, which an organization chooses to use, are usually used simultaneously and not in a specific order. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)

As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) state, regulation of the identity may be pursued purposefully by the organization or be a byproduct of its operation. Nevertheless, for this regulation to have an effect and be significant, it should possess a certain amount of power. With enough power, it is possible that the regulation has an intensity of meaning and delivers a range of emotions. In order to deliver that power, media of regulation might be designed in a strategic way or members of the collective might deliver that message through their everyday interactions as part of the organization's operation.

The basis, through which those media are regulating identity, could be categorized in two paths. In one category, they refer to broadly shared understandings and convictions, which may be organizational in origin and effect and as such be subjected to organizational control. In the other category, they might move along the lines of giving a certain amount of freedom as discourses and practices are allowed to circulate freely in the organization. In the first case, those patterns have various effects on management driven regulation as they may support, oppose or independently regulate identity. On the other hand, allowing a large number of discourses and practices to form identities leaves the responsibility to managers for the regulation of those discourses with proper frequency and power. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)

However, no matter the path that an organization might choose to regulate the collective identity and discourses defining it, the employees are not passively receiving and carrying those. They actively and critically interpret and test them (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This testing is described in Chapter 2.4.1, with the use of provisional selves and identity enactment. As Kunda (1995) describes, the discourses may be familiar to the individual and matching one's ongoing identity narrative and emotional condition towards the collective's identity or they can be experienced as disruptive of it. As such, individuals always critically analyze and interpret those discourses based on their perceptions and dispositions of themselves and the collective's identity.

Summarizing, sensebreaking and sensegiving are two processes driven by the organization in order to regulate the collective identity to its members. The organization possess processes interwoven in its structure and operation that communicate this identity. However, it seems that an organization can choose, either to leave control of identity regulation to its managers or keep the control in a higher level by establishing its own media. Either way, the managers of the organization play a vital role, as at some level, low or high, they will be called to manage that identity and the meaning that identity carries, as described in Chapter 2.3. Taking into consideration the individual's perspective and one's motives for identification, then one might see that recognizing the identification motive or motives of the employee the manager should handle the meaning of the collective's identity in the frame and through the channels that the organization provides. As such, a manager can regulate an identity that is more compatible to the individual's sense of self and as such increase one's disposition towards the collective's identity. However, recognition should be established to the fact that the individuals are not engulfing those discourses and assimilate them as their own identity components, but critically evaluate them according to their motivations for identification.

## 3 Methodology

In order to study the process of development of the professional identities from the expected to the experienced, the proper methodology should be selected. The methodology is an important part of the research due to the fact that it describes the steps the researchers have followed in order to reach the conclusions they have. In Chapters 3.1 to 3.6, the choice of the case study research method will be justified by presenting the fundamentals of the method and explaining how they support the intended methodology. In Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 a description of the characteristics of the case study research method will be given. Furthermore, in Chapter 3.3 the data collection method, which was used in the study, will be presented, and in Chapters 3.4 and 3.5, ethical considerations will be reported and which method for the data analysis was chosen respectively. In Chapter 3.6 the methodology of the discussion in terms of the manner through which those data were interpreted and discussed, will be presented. Finally, the presentation of the firm will be carried out at Chapter 3.7.

### 3.1 Characteristics of a case study

Yin (2014) defines a case study as an empirical research of a phenomenon that is occurring simultaneously with the study. Moreover, it studies the phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, notably when the borders between phenomenon and context are obscure. In other words, the case study method is selected when the purpose is to understand a real life event in depth but this understanding is embedded into a significant surrounding context. However, that definition might not be able to completely differentiate the case study from other social research methods. As such, the question arises: what differentiates the case study from other methods of research?

The usual types of research questions in a case study are the *How* and *Why* questions. Usually, these question types attempt to explain, describe, or explore processes, which are occurring over a period of time. However, they are also used for experiment and history research methods. (Yin, 2014)

Furthermore, the case study research is needed when the purpose is to understand complex social phenomena. It allows researchers to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior or managerial processes, to name a few. However, experimental methods could be used to understand these complex phenomena. (Yin, 2014)

The previous two characteristics can be shared to a degree with other research methods and do not distinguish the case study clearly. However, there is a unique strength of the case study, which clearly separates it from the other forms of research. To clarify, the experiment method differs from history and case study methods, due to the fact that the researcher has complete control over the behavioral events occurring. If the researcher has no control over the events, the preferred research method is history. However, history deals with events of the past while a case study deals with occurring events. Consequently, the case study possesses two sources of evidence that history do not have and those are interviews of the people involved and direct observations of the events. Thus, the great strength of a case study, and what separates it from the other research

methods, is that it can deal with a full variety of evidence over uncontrolled, by the researcher, current events. (Yin, 2014)

Criticism towards the case study research method has been expressed from the research community over a period of time. One reason for this criticism arise when systematic procedures are not followed allowing doubtful evidence or biased views to affect the findings and conclusions of the study. As such, the case study can be criticized for carelessness and the accuracy of the study may easily be challenged. Another reason for criticism is the small basis the case study offers to generalize its results. A response to this criticism is that the results of the case study can be analytically generalized. That means that the conclusions and findings supporting or rivaling the claim of the study can be expanded and generalized to a similar situation or context. The final reason for criticism derives from the effectiveness of the results of other research methods, since a case study cannot be used to examine if certain procedures have certain effects. However, the case study can be used to offer evidence in order to complement other methods. It can answer to how or why the procedure worked a feat that the other methods were unable to deliver. (Yin, 2014)

The methodology, which is followed to perform one's investigation, has particular weight on the results and conclusions drawn. When the researcher follows a properly structured and thoroughly reasoned methodology, the case study increases in validity. To increase the validity of the case study the researcher should address four tests in one's methodology. The purpose of the first test is to construct validity for the case study. Three tactics can be used in this regard. Multiple sources of evidence can be used to establish a converging line of inquiry; the establishment of a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the case study. The second test is aiming to the internal validity of the study. The internal validity demonstrates the meticulous approach of the researcher in explaining and analyzing the different angles of the case. Tactics that can be used for this purpose include explanation building, using logic models, pattern matching, and addressing rival explanations. The third test is targeting the external validity of the case study and it regards the ability of the results to be generalized regardless of the research method used. The method of analytic generalization is the legitimate approach in generalizing case study results. Finally, with the test of reliability, the researcher makes sure that if one follows the same research steps, with the same method, and the same case study, one will reach the same results and conclusions. (Yin, 2014)

To summarize, the case study method is selected when the purpose is to understand a real life event in depth but this understanding is embedded into a significant surrounding context. It usually attempts to explain, describe, or explore processes in complex social phenomena which are occurring over a period of time, using a full variety of evidence over uncontrolled, by the researcher, current events. Tactics to increase the validity of the case study include gathering evidence from multiple sources to establish a converging line of inquiry, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the case study. Moreover, explanation building, using logic models, pattern matching, and addressing rival explanations increase the internal validity of the study. By analytic generalization, the external validity of the case is increased. The description of the research steps makes sure the research can be repeated and duplicated.

As such, to justify the selection of the case study as a research method, the development of the professional identities is a real phenomenon, embedded in the professional context. Moreover, this research attempts to explain the process of professional identity development through a certain period of time with events occurring outside the researcher's control. To increase the validity of the study all the tactics was attempted to be followed and each tactic followed will be described in the following chapters.

### 3.2 Case study design

There are four types of case studies, as presented in Figure 3.1. The multiple case design is used when one is studying cases in different contexts, for example examining a subject in different cultural backgrounds. A single case design is appropriate when the context within which the case is studied does not change. A single case is also appropriate when examining two or more different points in time in order to assess how the subject change over time following a before and after logic. There are two types of single case study: the holistic and embedded. The holistic case study regards one unit of analysis when no logical sub units can be identified. The embedded design regards sub units of analysis inside a larger context. (Yin, 2014)

Since this case study is focusing on one professional consulting firm, the single case design was appropriate to follow. Moreover, the development of the professional identity was examined in the employees who were recently employed in the firm, as trainees. Initially there was to be only one case to be studied inside this context. However, since the collection data began it seemed that the embedded design style can be used also. Nevertheless, this study aims to maintain a holistic approach and as a result, the single unit analysis was used in this research.

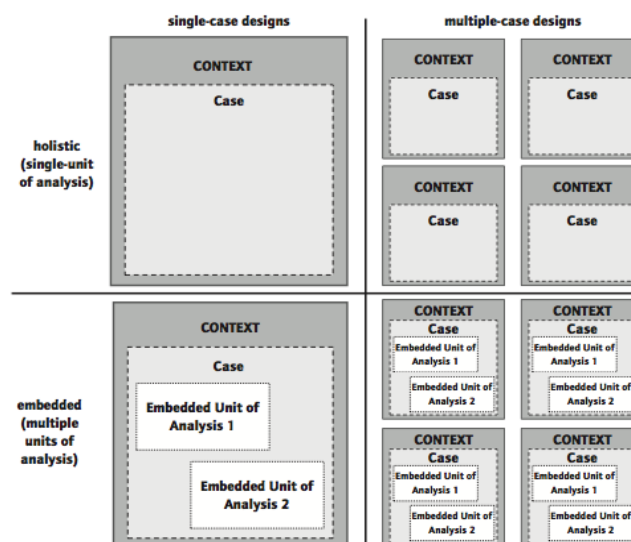


Figure 2.4 Basic Types of Designs for Case Studies  
SOURCE: COSMOS Corporation.

Figure 3.1 Basic types of designs for case studies (Yin, 2014, p. 50).

### 3.3 Data collection

A case study research can manage the unique situation, in which there might be more variables of interest than data points. As a result, in order for the case study to be able to draw results, it should rely on multiple sources of evidence. The data from these sources need to converge into findings in a triangulating fashion as presented in Figure 3.2. Greatly beneficial to data collection and analysis is the prior development and establishment of a theoretical background, as it will guide and direct them in a certain direction. Sources of evidence include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and artifacts. The data should be validating and enhancing the same findings (as shown in Figure 3.2), in a similar way that a triangulation reveals the exact location of an object. (Yin, 2014)



Figure 3.2 Convergence of evidence sources (Yin, 2014, p. 121).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), Wilson (2014), and Bryman (2012) describe methods for data collection in qualitative study such as the case study, where a commonly used data collection method for the single case study design is the semi-structured interview method.

The semi-structured interview is used to explore the point of view and perspectives of the interviewee. The form of this interview method encourages the interviewee to derive to matters that one finds interesting within the topic that the interviewer might not have thought of (Bryman, 2012, Wilson, 2014) provides the opportunity for the observant interviewer to explore new questions, which may not have been discussed otherwise. Therefore, the semi-structured interview is flexible as it allows the integration of the direction the interviewee brings into the interview. Overall, the aim in the semi-structured interview is to gather detailed and comprehensive answers from the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). As such, the semi-structured interview leaves room for exploration of the chosen topic. It is also preferred as a method when gathering facts, which reflects personal experiences, attitudes towards situations, and opinions (Wilson, 2014).

There are positive effects of conducting a semi-structured interview as a research method. Due to the openness of the interview, issues and results that was previously unknown may be uncovered which may be of great value to the research. This means



that high clarification on complex topics can be made from the participant. By using a structured interview method, the researcher needs to have training in how to conduct the interview, meanwhile in a semi-structured research interview, the researcher does not need as much training due to the set of specific starting questions at the beginning of the interview. (Wilson, 2014)

On the other side, some training of the researcher may be necessary to conduct a semi-structured research interview. The focus of this training is to avoid leading the interviewee in directions the researcher might wish in order to reach a specific answer and reduce bias. This is also called the “interviewer effect” where the background of the interviewer can influence the participant in how much one reveals. Finally, it might be challenging to generalize the findings of a semi-structured interview since not two interviews are alike. (Wilson, 2014)

In order to collect useful data in a proper manner from a semi-structured interview, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) present seven stages of an interview inquiry: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. Thematizing is the initial step in formulating the interview questions. The purpose of the interview needs to be clarified in this stage and the motivations regarding the why and what of the questions needs to be answered. Designing the interview is the second stage. In this stage, the interview should be designed and the questions be clarified. The third step is performing the interview in regard to the type of interview structure. Subsequently in the fourth step, the results of the interview are transcribed in order to analyze them. The fifth step include to analyze the gathered data and the sixth to verify them in order for the reliability of the findings to be ascertained. Finally, the results of the study should be presented in a report.

Summarizing all the characteristics of the semi structured interview method it was deemed an appropriate method for the purposes of this research and it was the main data gathering method used. The interviewer effect was countered by the usage of explanatory and probing questions based on what the interviewee had already mentioned. There was no reference during the interview to some theoretical framework as to not guide the answers towards a specific path. The interviews were recorded and then fully transcribed. For the analysis and reporting of the interviews, the results are presented in Chapter 4 and for the discussion of these results are presented in Chapter 5.

Commenting on other evidence sources gathered, opened and structured interviews were not used. Some documentation sources were revealed during the interviews.

### **3.4 Ethical concerns**

Within these seven steps, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) also states that ethical concerns may arise and it is important to ensure that no conflicts arise due to them. It is not uncommon for tensions to appear in qualitative researches. Initially, in the thematizing phase, it is important that the researcher remembers that a qualitative research should be conducted for the improvement of the situation for people. During the design stage, the consent of the participants in the study should be of high importance, as well as securing confidentiality, and ensuring that there are no negative consequences to the

participants because of the research. During an interview situation, the personal consequences of the participants should be considered since an interview situation can be stressful. During the transcription, the confidentiality of the participants, as mentioned, is of great importance as well as the ensuring of the truth behind the transcription, how well it is corresponding to the participants' views. During the analysis phase, there is an ethical issue to consider from the researcher if the participants should be a part of interpreting the transcribed interview. Moreover, the researcher has an ethical responsibility to ensure that the knowledge, which one is reporting, is as true and verified. The issues of confidentiality extend to the reporting phase of the research.

Bryman (2012) also report ethical issues to be considered based on four principles. It must be ensured that no harm came to the participants through stress or violation of employment rules. Anonymity and confidentiality is an issue regarding this first principle also. The second principle is informed consent. The participants should be aware that they are interviewed or studied. Privacy is the third principle and it refers to invasion of privacy. Finally, the fourth principle, deception avoidance, refers to present the purpose and topic of the research to the participants clearly.

During this research, regarding these ethical issues, the following steps were taken: the interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview and the topic of this research, however, not of the context of the interviews. With the consent of the interviewee, the interview was recorded and then fully transcribed. The transcription of each participant's interview was emailed to that participant only. Transcriptions were sent to participants who only expressed the wish to possess the document. The names of the interviewees were not reported. If there was any reference during the interview to a name other than the participant's it was erased in the transcriptions. Moreover, it was made clear to the participants that they were allowed to interrupt the interview at any time if their attention were immediately requested elsewhere.

Regarding the anonymity issue, it came to the researchers' attention that there was communication between the interviewees regarding the context of the interview. As such, the anonymity inside the firm might have been compromised. However, since the researchers did not initiate that communication, it is regarded that the principle of anonymity was upheld. With the steps and actions taken, described in Chapters 3.1 to 3.3, the authors of this report believe that the ethical issues reported in 3.3 were fully addressed.

### **3.5 Method for analysis of the empirical data and abductive reasoning**

Yin (2014) describes in Chapter 5 of his book a number of strategies and tools that can be used when analyzing and discussing the collected data. However, the analysis and discussion of the findings, independently of the strategy and tools used, should follow four principles.

Initially, the analysis and discussion should show that all the evidence were taken into account. The key research questions must be thoroughly covered. The analysis and discussion should show that it used as much evidence as was available, and the interpretations should be based on all the evidence, leaving no loose ends. If this

principle is not addressed, the discussion can be subjected to alternative interpretations based on evidences that were ignored. (Yin, 2014)

The analysis and discussion should address, if possible, all possible rival interpretations. If the data offers the probability for an alternative interpretation one should turn this alternative into a rival. If there are evidence to counter the rival interpretation, they should be stated. Otherwise, it should be restated as a proposition to be investigated in future studies. (Yin, 2014)

Furthermore, the analysis and discussion should address the most significant aspect of the case study. Independent from the case design, the analysis and discussion should focus on the most important issues. Extensive analysis of lesser issues should be avoided due to the vulnerability to the accusation that the attention was shifted from the main issue. (Yin, 2014)

Finally, the researcher should demonstrate knowledge in the case study in terms of demonstrating awareness of the current thinking and ongoing discourses about the case study topic. (Yin, 2014)

The principles mentioned by Yin (2014), describe the destination to accomplish a proper analysis and discussion in a case study, however, they do not describe the reasoning in order to reach that goal. Bryman (2012) reports that in qualitative research the perspectives of the participants should be taken into account. As such, the researcher should base a theoretical understanding of the contexts and the participants of the study in their perspectives, which form their worldview. The crucial step in this kind of reasoning is that the researcher must conclude based on those perspectives. Therefore, the topic is interpreted based from the view of the participants who provided the data and the theory is stranded in the worldview of the participants one researches about. This kind of reasoning is called abductive reasoning (Bryman, 2012).

In Chapters 4 and 5 of this report the analysis and discussion was carried out based on the principles and reasonings described in this chapter. To provide a connection with Chapter 4, the empirical data, the case will be presented in Chapter 3.7.

### **3.6 Methodology discussion**

The semi-structured research interview was decided to be held in English for the convenience of the master thesis as well as for the convenience of one of the interviewers, as he was lacking the necessary Swedish language skills. All the interviewees had Swedish background and they were all fluent in the English language. Despite this, some language barriers might have been present where the interviewees' answers might not have been delivered as well as they would have been in their native language. Nevertheless, the presence of a native speaker on the interviewer's side, reduced that barrier significantly. The interviewees therefore had the opportunity to express themselves in Swedish when the need arose and the final results gathered from the interviews (see Chapter 4) were identified as sufficient enough for a thorough analysis.

Three interviews were held at the firm's office building in Gothenburg while four were held via Skype due to long distances to the other office locations. Regarding the interviews held via Skype, only minor and insignificant issues arose, such as some words disappearing due to short disconnections. However, these rarities in the loss of sound, was not enough to impact the results in any negative way.

Choosing the semi-structured interview method was proven an advantage in some aspects as well as a disadvantage. As mentioned before, the semi-structured interview offers freedom in the exploration of a certain topic and this was experienced during the interviews. As such, every topic that arose from the participants were explored to the best of the researchers' abilities. However, the same can be regarded as a disadvantage due to the fact that the researchers are not experienced interviewers and some topics might have eluded their perception during the interviews. Although, by recording and transcribing the interviews, the impact of that disadvantage was contained as the precise phrasing of the interviewees were examined. As such, topics that might not have been explored will be offered as topic for further study. Summarizing, the findings in this case study are relevant to the context of the firm and can be used to explain the phenomenon through the worldview of the participants as the abductive reasoning states. Moreover, they can be used by future researchers as a reference in designing their own research regarding the development of professional identities in consultancy firms.

It would be more beneficial to the study if the authors had access to observation data in order to complement the semi-structured interview findings. The authors could have insisted more to be integrated into meetings in order to observe the interactions between managers and trainees. However, due to confidentiality issues that may have arisen and the administrative work, which would have been required to cover that issue, the observations were deemed as an unobtainable data source.

Initially, the number of interviews that was deemed necessary was around the number of eight however, only seven participants were able to be interviewed due to their heavy working schedule. The researchers were aware that increasing the number of interviews would increase the saturation point of knowledge gathered. With this number of interviews, behavioral patterns were emerging, however, a larger sample would possibly provide a clearer image. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis, the volume of the sample was deemed sufficient to draw conclusions about the development of professional identities.

Regarding the construction of validity of the study, during the course curriculum it was mandatory to pass stages of a peer review, an opposition and an oral presentation of findings. In these stages the study was evaluated from external sources like peers and audience in the presentation. These occasions were attended successfully and as such, validity of the study was established. The report was also delivered to the key informants of the study for reviewing, and thus, increasing its validity. Moreover, through close collaboration and supervision with the appointed supervisor at Chalmers University of Technology, the direction of the study did not divert from the topic.

### 3.7 Firm selection

Before describing the firm and the context in which this research was carried out, a reasoning why this particular context was chosen should be provided.

As Ibarra (1999) describes, transitions into one's career in the service sector are particularly suited to explore identity construction processes for three reasons. Initially, a professional characteristic such as the ability to sell a service, strongly affects a client's perceptions of quality. Subsequently, employees are expected to represent the firm's identity to the client as professionals. In those interactions with the client, it is difficult to predict what will occur and it requires careful handling and proper mentality by the professional. These situation demands are always challenging, especially for a junior employee handling such a role for the first time.

The appropriate case for the study should meet three standards. Initially, the firm should be located in the service business sector. Secondly, individuals upon entering the service sector are expected to handle clients or participate in such processes quite early. Thirdly, since the scope of the study is to study a dynamic process affected by a context, those individuals should have entered the context ideally at the same time. Finally, the number of individuals should be sufficient in order to create a data sample. To meet these standards, it was deemed that the appropriate context was a trainee program held by a consultancy firm.

The firm that was chosen was a Swedish consultancy firm, which also has offices in other locations abroad. The number of employees are in the thousands and they offer a range of consultancy services in various sectors and aspects of infrastructure and construction projects. For that reason, the firm is separated into different departments.

There was previous knowledge gathered about the context and way of working in the firm from the master program's course called Organizational Project Management. That knowledge encouraged the choice towards the firm. As was found during that course, project management is seen as a profession and is highly valued within the firm, and the philosophy of assigning tasks is to use the right person for the right job. Leadership skills are highly valued and carry certain gravity towards one's career advancement. Managers undertake training in special courses and are being certified in order to be more competitive. The firm promotes a senior-junior manager collaboration in different projects and the managers are working in several projects simultaneously. This allows the junior project manager to have multiple mentors and receiving different perspectives on management and therefore the trainee will be accumulating knowledge faster. They are also assigned with a more personal mentor responsible for the juniors' advancement and development of leadership and communication skills. The firm possess a document describing general guidelines on how leadership is exercised in the firm's operations. As the managers are the ones who are practicing those leadership guidelines, in our report the term of leader and manager will be used interchangeably.

## 4 Empirical Findings

For carrying out the semi-structured interviews, it was decided that two sets of interview questions would be used. One for the trainees and one for the experienced managers who had been in the firm for a longer time. The firm, as described in Chapter 3.7, uses a mentor-trainee pairing system to help guide the new employees. As such, the ideal case, in terms of cross-referencing analysis ability, was considered to interview the trainee and the respective mentor. Unfortunately, as the interview study proceeded, it was acknowledged that in the majority of the pairings, the mentor could not participate due to heavy work schedule and therefore other senior managers were approached and interviewed for the study.

Since this study is focusing on the process of change in an individual through time, the questions for the trainees were formulated as to provide data about the past, present, and future. It was established in Chapter 2 that, identification has duality in its nature, both as a situation and as a dynamic process. As such, identity was considered as a kind of snapshot of that dynamic process, three moments during identification was chosen for examination. The background was studied in order to see the coherence in the identity development up until the moment of employment and what the expected professional identity was before entering the firm. This expected professional identity was compared to the current situation when the trainee had been working full time in the firm for several months. The possible change in their professional identity was attempted to be recognized and analyzed through interview questions about their working environment at the time of the interview. In an attempt to better understand the current identity situation of the trainees, the trainees' future goals and visions were examined. To have a complete picture of the current identification state, one should take into account the perspective that the trainee has for the future based on one's current professional identity, as well as the factors and the respective level of importance to the individual, contributing towards this change throughout the full process of development.

Regarding the questions to the senior managers, data revolving around the organizational context was extracted, as well as the manner of influence and the process of influence, which they may exercise through the means of organizational identity regulation as described in Chapter 2. Specifically, the managers' way of handling the processes of sensebreaking and sensegiving was examined, as well as the managers' perspectives of the trainees' processes of identity change was sought. This was performed through questions revolving around three main areas; the working environment, support, and change.

Summarizing the data collection approach, the trainees' perspectives were recorded regarding the influence they experienced from their seniors and then they were attempted to be cross-referenced with the seniors' perspective on how they exercised their influence on the trainees. Moreover, an attempt was made to identify any inconsistencies and differences that may exist between the trainees' expectations of the collective identity and the managers' circulation of the collective identity. This was done by cross-referencing the interview data between trainees and managers.

By following the semi-structured interview approach, data was extracted that are valuable to answer the main research question by initially answering the complementary research questions, as was presented in Chapter 1:

### **How is the transition occurring from expected professional identity to experienced professional identity in a consultancy firm during a trainee program?**

- How does the firm regulate the collective identity?
- What is the role of leadership in this regulation process?
- What is the role of the individual in the identification process?

## **4.1 The trainees' perspectives on their own development**

In order to collect data regarding the identification with the collective and the alteration of the expected professional identity, four trainees from different departments within the firm were interviewed.

### **4.1.1 Past**

From the information gathered regarding the educational backgrounds, it was quickly established that the backgrounds for all four trainees were similar as well as diverse. For instance, all of them graduated from different engineering universities in Sweden, however, from a variety of programs.

During their education, interests started to develop, through curiosity as well as from experience during internships. The motivation for the consultancy career was mainly the diversity in everyday work tasks and the possibilities they offered, the opportunity to choose projects and roles to fit their personalities and preferences as well as the constant interaction with customers and vast variation in knowledge within a big consultancy firm.

Moreover, the possibility of social and personal development within the dynamic role of a consultant and the challenges it brings, were personal driving factors towards the profession. The opportunity to influence the internal organization, but also the customer's organization where the consultant is hired to improve the customer's way of working rather than do what they normally do, was mentioned as well as a personal driving factor.

As for the choice towards this specific firm, the answers varied between the trainees. A majority of them had previous experience with the firm and it was referred to as a natural way of employment for them. However, even if they recognized that this big consultancy firm offered many possibilities and had a known good working environment, it was also mentioned that it was a mere coincidence had it not been for previous connections and experiences with the firm.

It was mentioned that school does not really prepare one for work situations and therefore the role of a consultant was appealing since it offers many possibilities when working with customers from different parts of the construction sector. It was therefore difficult to imagine what a typical day at work would look like, so the expectations

before employment were mostly task-oriented. But also some expectations existed regarding vast knowledge development as well as personal development.

When the trainees were notified of their upcoming employment with the firm, they received similar feedback from their close environment. Neither their family nor friends were professionally related to the same industry and were therefore not familiar with the firm or its profession. However, all the trainees received positive feedback because they had succeeded in being employed in a trainee position and thus, that positiveness was not connected to the specific profession or firm.

#### **4.1.2 Present**

Compared to previous expectations, the trainees' answers converged to agreeing on the astonishment of how independent they became so quickly, as well as the amount of responsibility they felt comfortable with so soon after the beginning of their employment. Work-related tasks were as expected, as they had the opportunity to work with projects, which suited their personal interests.

These experiences made them very happy towards their choice at working at this firm. The feeling of a continuous learning process also made them feel like they were becoming more and more valuable to the firm and this added to the development of themselves as individuals. The main reason behind this positive emotional disposition was mentioned to be the working environment where the open and social environment fostered a feeling of belonging and support from more experienced employees.

*“I feel that I become more valuable or bigger as a person for every day, I feel more responsible, I feel that I am involved in a good way.”*

*“It feels like home. I think it's because we have this open environment.”*

The trainees acknowledged that challenges arise however, but with the supportive environment at the firm, the trainees said that they received all the support they needed, as long as they asked for it. Many projects in a construction consultancy firm were said to be time challenging but when a technical issue occurred, there was always someone in the firm who could answer the question as the firm consists a broad base of knowledge. All the trainees agreed that the environment in the firm is very open and that they all feel that their requests for help are always answered.

When the trainees were requested to present themselves, in terms of how they perceive themselves at that moment, the responses varied. At this point, two different discourses surfaced through their answers. The participants who were employed in technical expertise-oriented departments emphasized in their technical and engineering competence as well as their knowledge to carry out a project assignment. On the other hand, the trainees employed in managerial-oriented departments emphasized more on a personal description with a focus on their soft skills and their competence of interacting productively with their colleagues in teams.

*“[In a professional environment] I would just say what I do at work, that I am going to a trainee program.”*

*“I identify myself as one of the young ones that I have much to learn, but also as one who take the opportunities that are given. For example doing the trainee program.”*



*“I am quite personal in my role as a consultant. Here at this firm, people actually do focus on the soft skills as well, it’s not only the engineering and the technical aspects that matters, it’s the soft ones as well, which I think is useful and that’s the way I want to approach my role.”*

*“I would say that first of all I am the one I want to be. I put more value in how I interact with other persons, how I actually care about other persons, more than what car I own.”*

### **4.1.3 Future**

All the trainees agreed on their will to be able to continue to develop themselves. All four gave examples of physical goals related to tasks within the consultancy field. However, the trainees from the management department also mentioned development goals not only related to their consultancy role but also aspects and goals that might relate, impact or derive from other perspectives of an individual's life.

In order to reach these individual goals, the responses of the trainees converged to the fact that they knew what they had to do. As mentioned earlier, the trainees agreed that the working environment is very supportive, and the trainees employed in the technical department referred to it by stating:

*“You get the support you ask for”*

*“You are the manager of your own development.”*

The trainees mentioned that they had to be the driving force in regards to their own development because the manager, for instance, cannot know what the trainee wishes or desires. One of them stated: *“It’s hard to support someone that doesn’t know what they want.”*

However, the management-employed trainees put emphasis on what they have to do, for example gain experience, ask questions, value time, working on relations, and have someone to reflect with about different situations.

## **4.2 The managers’ perspectives on the identity regulation context**

For the purpose of identifying the context in which the trainees’ professional identities were developing, managers from different departments within the firm were interviewed.

### **4.2.1 Working environment**

The structure of the trainee program is a regular employment contract within the firm with approximately 90% regular work tasks and 10% educational events. Approximately, once per month all trainees, located in different offices around Sweden, gather to interact and learn about topics such as legal aspects of working as a consultant, economics, planning, and environmental issues. The goal of performing this type of integration of regular work tasks and educational events is to get the trainees involved

with regular work in a natural way by simultaneously offering them deeper insight on the work procedures the firm has. It is a fast-growing firm and therefore the trainees should learn the responsibilities of the role fast, as they do not possess enough working experience. One of the purposes is also to get a wider network of connections within the firm and as such, there are gatherings organized among the trainees regularly. Overall, the aim is to provide the trainees a faster development in their role.

When a trainee is introduced in the firm, that person is given a personal associate to help with administration procedures. In project situations, it was mentioned, that they work closely with a senior and more experienced colleague to gain experience by observing and gaining knowledge in a variety of situations. The trainees in the management department are also given the role of leading project manager for smaller projects early on in their career to learn about the responsibility the role carries. In order to accomplish that it was mentioned that the trainee should feel safe, supported and not being alone in the whole process. The learning process is occurring by observing and analyzing the faults in other colleagues' processes of handling the role but also in their own process. There is always room for improvement as the trainees are encouraged to venture outside their comfort zone. An early introduction to clients is also important since the whole consultancy line of work is revolving around providing consultancy services to client's projects. The importance of understanding the client's desires and needs can vary vastly in every project.

#### **4.2.2 Organizational support**

In order to ensure this learning working environment, certain supportive initiatives were taken from the senior managers' sides. The perceptions of all three was that it is a good working environment, which included an innovative and driven team where everyone included was proud of what they were accomplishing in their professional role at work. One manager stated that the best way to set an example for the trainee was to show by doing.

In addition, it was stated to have an open-minded perspective as an individual, and to not always copy other colleagues, but rather observe them and analyze them to reach one self's own way of working.

From a third manager, importance was put on encouragement in general to ensure that everyone in the firm had high interest in what they do, and that they do it in an inspired working environment.

When inquired about the initiatives taken towards the trainees' development, many and varying responses were given. In order to make the trainees to start thinking like a consultant, the managers encouraged them to feel and see how day-to-day work was like. By interacting with the trainee, it is possible for the manager to see what the trainee would like to develop after being exposed to a mixed working environment where they can find their own interests. It was then possible to match upcoming assignments to their individual needs. The word encouragement was often used among the interviewees, for example the constant encouragement towards the trainees to seek out more education apart from the trainee program, as well as encouragement for them to feel free to aim towards anything within the field and the encouragement to find one's personal attitude and approach towards the profession. There was also mention of encouragement towards knowing oneself and one's limits. Even if the trainee may

be very ambitious in the beginning, one of the managers put emphasis on the importance of saying no when lack of time is present.

Another challenge for the trainees recognized by the managers was in being a newly graduated employee. They stated the importance of a suitable introduction to the line of work. There was much focus put on the process of working in projects as well as the understanding of the differences that may arise in situations with different clients. One of the managers also mentioned the challenge of communication with a trainee who was located at a client's office several times per week. That manager had to concentrate on the communication when they actually met, to ensure that the trainee was progressing correctly and remembered who employed the trainee. The manager stated: *"When you are working as a consultant it is easy to forget where you get your loyalty."* To maintain loyalty, he mentioned that he tried to regularly arrange meetings, lunches, after works, and educational events among other things, with his team members.

It was mentioned that technical issues, which arises with the trainees, were the easy problems to solve while the emotional issues were harder. All three agreed that they had to be good listeners, that the firm encouraged a give and take environment. It was important to identify the problem and what the person felt about the problem and then together analyze what had to be done in order to solve the issue. One manager also mentioned that he tried to make the trainee realize that they cannot know everything and that a project is not a single person's responsibility, but rather a mix of knowledge and that the trainee should take advantage of that.

In addition to the support, the managers were providing inside projects, there was also the support provided outside of projects. Continuous private meetings where the trainee has the possibility to sit down with the manager and talk about the past week's experiences, issues, and thoughts for example, were brought up as one way of providing out-of-project guidance. Another mention was the break room, where most of the emotional issues arose over coffee. They all agreed that emphasis should be put on listening to what the trainee was saying in order to be able to help them to their best ability. One mentor stated: *"I have to make sure that my trainee is learning and also to see how that person feels."*

### **4.2.3 Trainee development**

The interviewed managers all noted a clearly noticeable change in the trainees during the program. It was stated that this development in the trainees occurred faster than in a regular employee and that the trainees learn more about how the firm works in a faster way. Another difference, which gave an advantage towards the trainees' fast development, was their broad network within the firm from the start which regular employees do not construct as fast. When a comparison was made of who the trainees were before employment and at the time of the interview, almost at the end of the program, the managers noted more maturity as well as more confidence and responsibility. This fast development was important and valuable to the trainees and their future as well as for the future of the firm.

*"If you are a trainee, you probably have this personality. You are open, you are quite forward and find it easy to interact with other people. And that is, I think, one of the key ingredients to have as a successful trainee."*

Two reasons regarding the speed of their development was acknowledged in addition to the nature of the program. The first was the personality of the trainee. When employed as a trainee, it was mentioned that they all share a base personality to match the firm's desire for a trainee. The firm wanted to employ open-minded individuals who were future-oriented and had a talent as well as comfort in and handling contacts. Moreover, they should possess communication skills, as well as being service-minded. It was then the task of the managers to assess these personalities and recognize the opportunities they brought for the firm and what assignments best suited the newly employed. The second reason was the leadership practices the managers exercised. Leadership guidelines provided from the firm were mentioned from one of the managers and in those guidelines, it was stated that the leaders in the firm should provide purpose and context to the employees as well as encouragement towards personal growth which would benefit the firm as a whole.

The high speed of the trainees' development and integration in the role was aimed at providing the necessary elements and traits that could help them be evaluated as professional consultants. The desired traits were many, for example; being innovative, having a broad interest and curiosity regarding all aspects of the profession, result-oriented, being a team player, loyalty towards the firm, being service-minded and to always deliver what was promised. One of the managers also mentioned that he wished to be challenged by the trainee, in terms of the trainee providing a fresh eye perspective on how a project issue or a situation in general can be resolved.

*"I expect them to challenge me as a line manager, to make me see other ways to do some things."*

These traits and experiences gained from the trainee program was mentioned that would benefit the trainees in several ways after the completion of the program. The trainees absorbed knowledge that their educational programs did not offer which would benefit them in the consulting line of work in the future. It was also stated that by working as a consultant, most of the time the person is dependent on his or her own personal brand. *"You cannot hide behind a company, it's the person that do the actual work"*, one of the managers mentioned. By doing the actual work and by being a good ambassador for the firm, that is how the consultant will get more assignments in the future.

The firm is striving towards being number one in sustainable engineering and design. The firm's way of approaching this long-term goal is through the trainee program, the managers' leadership practices, and to have the trainees integrated in day-to-day work. One of the managers also noted that in order to reach this goal, everyone employed by the firm needs to be a good ambassador, which includes keeping promises, achieving good results, always taking the client's needs into account, ensuring the client's happiness, positive thinking, solution-orientation, and proactiveness.

## 5 Discussion

The study has reached the point where the findings from the convergence of the empirical data presented in chapter 4, must be interpreted in order for the research questions to be answered. The proper interpretation of the findings is crucial for constructing validity by establishing a chain of evidence and to increase the internal validity by approaching the case from many angles and viewpoints, as described in Chapter 3.1.

To interpret the data, we will attempt to put ourselves in the position of the participants to better understand their worldview and decipher the data according to that perspective. The theory behind the identity construction process described in Chapter 2 will be used to strengthen the interpretations and not guide them. As such, the theory will be grounded to the worldview of the participants and help reveal the different angles by surfacing elements or highlighting the absence of them.

The discussion will compare the bottom-up with the top-down interpretation of the findings. A bottom-up perspective refers to the trainees' perspectives, how they are perceiving themselves, their motivations, their goals, and the elements of their identity in general. The top-down perspective refers to the senior managers' perspectives, how they perceive identity regulation, what actions they make towards it, and the potential changes in the professional identity of the trainees. For purposes of consistency, the research questions should be reminded at this point.

### **How is the transition occurring from expected professional identity to experienced professional identity in a consultancy firm during a trainee program?**

- How does the firm regulate the collective identity?
- What is the role of leadership in this regulation process?
- What is the role of the individual in the identification process?

The purpose of the main research question is to examine the influence of leadership in the process of identity construction. A process has three main elements: a beginning, a procedure, and an end. From the research questions, the beginning is set as the expected professional identity and the end as the experienced. The process of identity construction was described as a dynamic process, whose elements will be debated.

As such, in Chapter 5.1 the elements, which construct the expected professional identity, will be defined. Moving on to Chapter 5.2 and Chapter 5.3 we will examine the bottom-up perspective, that of the trainees. The motivations for identification will be examined and the extent and manner in which a trainee might be experimenting with a provisional self. In Chapters 5.4 and 5.5, the top-down approach will be explored. The firm's identity regulation tools and the role of the firm's managers in this regulation will be examined. In Chapter 5.6 we will return to the individual level to understand the purpose of critical evaluation of the top-down regulation process and its importance in identity construction. Finally, in Chapter 5.7, the two approaches will be compared and a model of identity construction will be presented based on the conclusions of our discussion.

## 5.1 The expected professional identity

To explore the expected professional identity, which the trainees had when entering the program, we should take a step back and examine their background. From what was gathered from the empirical findings, all the trainees had limited professional experience as consultants in the time of their employment. Although, they shared a similar background as they had obtained degrees from Swedish engineering universities.

The trainees' responses to the question for the reason regarding their choice towards the consultancy career path, began similarly but diverted towards the end. All of them began in their narrative from their educational background and as their storytelling progressed, it was described as a natural choice for them based on that education. However, all of them provided different reasons why they considered this choice as natural:

*“I always liked math and problem-solving, so the engineering path was like a natural choice.”*

*“It was quite a coincidence [that I ended up here]. The only way I would have considered changing my direction was if I could get a position in my hometown, so the firm changed their offer so I could get a position here.”*

*“I want to try different things at the same time, not to get restless and therefore being a consultant is the perfect start.”*

*“It was more or less the opportunity to be able to choose missions and roles within the consultancy role that really got me interested.”*

From their statements, the common ground for their choice can be considered to be their educational background. However, the reason they chose that instead of another profession relating to their education is dependent on the personal preferences and character. Reid et al. (2008) focused in their study, which was carried out in a European context, on the Swedish data they gathered from a project involving students. In that study, they concluded that the construction of the professional identity is a relation between how the student experience learning and what they anticipate from the working life. The study does not express it directly, but from this study's findings, it can be implied to a certain degree that the professional identity is constructed in the university environment.

When the trainees were asked about the feedback they received from their close environment about their professional choice, the responses were similar. All of the participants commented that that the responses were positive and described feelings of happiness directed towards them regarding their choice.

*“I think they were happy for me of course because having a job. My friends aren't from the same education and my parents are in different businesses, they didn't know what the firm was so I could have said any company and they would be happy.”*

*“Regarding the career choice, my family knew I was on track of becoming an engineer so there was no surprises really.”*

*“They were happy (laughs) I would say because they know how hard it is to get a trainee spot.”*

*“Well, I am the only one in my close environment that is active in this field of business, so not many of my friends or family knew actually what the firm was, so the feedback was more or less really happy for me for getting such a nice job.”*

From those responses, it is gathered that from the social environment of the trainees, there was no particular influence towards the construction of their expected professional identity. As stated in the theory, feeling positively about one's membership in a collective is a basic requirement for identification with the collective. As such, feeling positively about the profession before experiencing it, one can be positively dispositioned to adapt the contents of that professional identity. However, it is a different matter receiving positive feedback for getting a job and a different case receiving positive feedback towards a certain role or a collective. Nevertheless, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed or discarded yet and it needs to be approached from another perspective.

The perspective through which this should be examined is why those responses were given. From the participants' responses, one might notice that their close social environment was actually unaware of what a consultant does. It is regarded by them as just a job. The reason for that could be that consultancy is a profession “hidden” in the processes of other professions. Allow us to offer an example: a construction site. In a construction site, all the different professions involved are covered under a hard hat and a neon yellow jacket. As such, there are few people who can recognize a consultant on a construction site and the people who do are usually aware of the internal processes of a construction project. The majority of people are unaware of what the profession of a consultant is. Thus, there is a higher probability that the feedback someone would receive would be more abstract towards the content of the professional identity of the consultant.

Thus, it seems that the social environment outside education influences the expected professional identity only if they are aware of the content of the profession or of its role. Otherwise, it will be considered as just a job and will have a neutral influence on the individual attempting to identify with the collective that individual is about to enter. We are not claiming that the profession of the consultant is generally not characterized by assumptions, images, and perceptions from the society. However, in this particular case, we have found that it did not have any effect on the expectations of the trainees about the profession.

To summarize, considering the development of the expected professional identity, it seems that it is constructed mostly in the educational environment. The social environment influence it positively or negatively only if it is aware of the identity's content. For the expected professional identity of a consultant specifically, we advocate that it is a byproduct of the educational background, which is mostly dependent on the anticipations of the individual.

## 5.2 Organizational identity regulation

As we have described in Chapter 5.1, the trainees are carrying an expected professional identity as they are entering the trainee program in this firm. Upon entering that program, their expected professional identity is exposed to the organizational identity, context, and practices. Since those are always present, despite of personal motivations, expectations, and preferences, it is prudent to initiate the discussion from the top-down approach.

From the senior managers' responses, it was clear that the firm is fostering a learning environment. As was mentioned in Chapter 4.2.1, the trainee program aims to offer a fast development for the future role and an understanding of the way that the firm is handling projects and clients. We have identified several media that are used to regulate the requirements of the role.

We will focus on the tools of regulation that were most frequently mentioned. The educational programs seem to play a vital part in the role articulation. They were mentioned from both managers and trainees and that demonstrates that a lot of gravity is given to it. Moreover, depending on the preferences of the trainee about the skills one wants to develop, the appropriate education is arranged. Education is stated in the theory to be a powerful tool of identity articulation. However, even if everyone mentioned the education, its importance was directed mostly on the skills that it provides and not about circulating the meaning of how a consultant should be. It therefore seems that the major role of education is to provide skills necessary for the role and not articulating a collective identity. To enhance this even further, it was also mentioned by all participants that in case there was a knowledge gap, in technical or other skills, there is always someone in the building who has the answer to the problem and one has only to ask. From that, it is established that knowledge flows freely inside the firm and therefore knowledge as part of identity regulation media has little to no power. In this firm, knowledge does not define the knower.

Hierarchy was also mentioned in the firm's processes. Its importance was undermined by the participants, stating that because one is senior does not mean that one is better in any way. As such, hierarchy has little power in articulating any identity in the firm. Instead, as it is stated in the theory, from the responses gathered, we determine that every person is regarded unique in its orientations and capabilities. This is also strengthened by the variety of the responses given on what it means to be a good consultant at the firm:

*"I would like to say the innovation part. As I mentioned, when I take on the trainee I expect them to challenge me as a line manager, to make me maybe see other ways to do some things."*

*"Attitude. You should be interested and curious of all aspects. You should be motivated over results and you should be a team player."*

*"To be a good consultant, it is the approach and attitude, but then of course after half a year or a year you also get to know the technical aspects a bit."*

From those responses, we see that there is a freedom for several discourses to circulate within the firm that demonstrates what a consultant is. And that freedom of circulation



can have an influence on how the trainees are perceiving the role of a consultant and the firm's collective identity.

Summarizing the discussion in this chapter, we see that this firm uses most of the formal structures that an organization might possess, as supportive structures for the consultancy role. From the two paths that an organization might choose to regulate identity, strictly controlling it or leaving freedom for discourse, we determine that the firm chooses the second path. As such, the weight of identity circulation with the proper power and frequency falls on the shoulders of the senior managers. The firm is using the leaders as the major media identity regulation tool, and they are the ones setting the scene of what is good and natural for a consultant to do. The shift towards a less hierarchical and more flexible organizations in terms of discourses regulation is also supported by the findings of Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) where they claim that hierarchy is slowly replaced by coaching managers and leaders capable of managing autonomous and creative employees.

### **5.3 Leadership**

As we established in Chapter 5.2, the leaders are the major identity media circulators. It is therefore important to discuss which actions they are taking towards that goal, what their purpose and aim are. With that discussion in place, we will be ready to initiate the examination of the influence on the identity construction process.

From the senior managers' responses, we gather that they support the trainees in many different ways. Inside projects, the managers are matching assignments that fit the trainees' interests, trying to put them outside of their comfort zone, and the managers are encouraging the trainees to offer them a new perspective on the projects. Outside project work, the senior managers mentioned that they are having small meetings with the trainees about their development, where they are encouraging the trainees to seek further education and participate in different types of events to gain experience. The trainees in their responses also confirmed this kind of support. Moreover, all the managers have mentioned that this process is not directed only from them toward the trainees but rather that the trainees' development is a give and take. Thus, we can establish that one of the roles of leadership is to support the development of the trainees in a cooperative manner.

From that finding alone, we cannot decide if that support has an influence on the professional identity. However, we need to consider that from the perspectives of the trainees. As the trainees have collectively stated, they consider themselves as new to the firm and that they have a lot to learn. Thus, we advocate the mental state that they are in resembles a sponge. They soak up all the information that they are given. That is also supported by the managers stating that being open, curious, and engaged is important for their upcoming career path. As such, we support that the leadership practices of the managers may not influence the professional identity by itself, but set the foundation of the direction that the individual will choose in the future career path. Therefore, the future development of the professional identity depends on the leadership practices of now.

We asked the managers to give us their perspectives about how this process will benefit the trainees' future development. While most of the answers moved along the line of an abstract beneficial future, one answer intrigued us especially when coupled with an answer given by a trainee:

*“Working as a consultant, I would say most of the time you are dependent most on your own personal brand. So if you do a good job as a consultant you will get more and more jobs and if you do not such a good job... It can be trickier to get a job.”*

*“I am new and it's okay within the firm because they know that, but the customer expect some kind of professional kind of view, which I don't have.”*

Thus, we establish that developing a personal brand, as a professional, is going to provide more jobs for the trainee. Considering the time perspective, the faster this development will occur, the faster the personal brand of an individual will grow, resulting in more jobs. Thus, encouragement towards identification with the firm is weak and only peripherally related at this specific point in time. We advocate that the leadership practices are focusing on developing a professional identity related to the role of the consultant as a consultant and not the consultant belonging to the firm. This claim is also supported by taking into account the following trainees' responses:

*“I am (name) and I am working for the firm. I am not the firm and by the way my name is.”*

*“We are not the only big consulting company doing the same kind of work so I believe that there are employers to choose from.”*

That weak identification with the firm has an impact on the loyalty of the trainees, mentioned in Chapter 4.2.2, as well as for the manner that the managers are communicating with them. One of the managers stated:

*“The challenging thing for me is that I have to be very concentrated when talking to the trainee. Most of the time is spent at the client rather than the firm, which is a little bit challenging, it's easy to forget where you get your loyalty.”*

That problem seems to bother other consultancy firms also. Wallgren and Hanse (2011) support in their study, which was carried out in IT consultancy firms in Sweden, that the consultants working at the client's site develop a dual loyalty. One towards the firm and one towards the client. As such, the managers of the consultants must learn what motivates the consultants when working at the clients' sites. Moreover, the consultancy role involves a certain degree of autonomy, distance control, and self-controlled development and that means that the chances for interactions are limited and that time must be spent efficiently in order to understand the motivation of the consultant.

Thus, we establish that loyalty is a concept that impacts the development of the future professional identity as it may shift towards the client if there is no effective communication between the manager and the trainee. To expand this argument, it was stated in Chapter 2 that the leaders are the managers of the meaning of the collective identity. Thus, we establish that in a consultancy firm at the trainee level, what the managers are called to manage, are the motivations of the trainees in their work, in the little time that they have to do it.

Summarizing this chapter, we establish that leaders are the main media for identity regulation in the consultancy firm. The purpose of that identity regulation is to set the foundations for the development of the trainees' future professional identity. That professional identity is providing a stronger identification with the role of the consultant at this specific time, as it is the client's requirement to deal with professional consultants. Identification with the firm and development of loyalty towards it relies on the leaders managing the meaning of the collective identity and transmitting it effectively, depending on the motivations of the trainees in their line of work.

## 5.4 Critical evaluation

As we have stated in Chapter 5.3, we consider the mental state of the trainees as a sponge that soaks up the information given. We advocate that, as a sponge can be wringed, the trainees are wringing the given information through a critical evaluation process. We have established from the empirical data that every trainee possesses their own motivations, perceptions, and goals about themselves. Thus, we support that the critical evaluation is occurring along the lines of what the trainees consider important for themselves. That is backed by the empirical data in Chapter 4.2.1, as two discourses among the trainees were surfaced. Depending on their motivations, the trainees gave different definitions about themselves but have also given different orientations about their futures. However, it is not only the trainees who are participating in this critical evaluation process, but it is also encouraged by the senior managers:

*“My philosophy is showing by doing. I am trying to set an example on how to be a colleague, how to be a project manager, and support each other in a positive way and help each other in projects. Be what you like other people to be.”*

*“As young, you have to support the older, have an open-minded perspective, not always copy but just look and see other more experienced people do and sort of analyze and do your way of it.”*

*“So we encourage of course that you can take and do some tasks independently, because that is also a way to get a person to grow I think.”*

As we see from these responses, the seniors want the trainees to develop their own identity as a consultant and to be independent. As established, the firm allows the circulation of different discourses, as discussed in Chapter 5.2, and the leaders are trying to manage the meaning of them as established in Chapter 5.3. Thus, we advocate that the role of the firm in this process is to allow the existence of critical evaluation and the role of leadership is to further enhance and promote it. Important in this whole process seems to be the direction towards filtering identity contents that will help the trainees in the creation of a role-oriented professional identity repertoire dependent on their own motivations.

Moreover, from what the seniors are mentioning, it seems that they indirectly recognize that the strategy the trainees are using in order to absorb information, is the observation strategy, which is presented in the Chapter 2.

## 5.5 Motivations for identification

In Chapters 5.3 and 5.4, we established that the motivations of the trainees affect the meaning that the leaders have to manage and that those motivations have an effect on their critical evaluation process. Therefore, it is prudent to discuss those motivations. However, we will not initiate a general discussion on motives. We will explore the significance of these motivations to the identity construction process, from the trainees and managers' perspective, as they were also described in the theory.

As presented in Chapter 4.1, the trainees in their answers mostly mentioned what they are doing, what their work involves and how this will benefit them as professionals. They were mostly referring to what tasks and challenges the role involved and that through those, they would learn and improve very fast as consultants. This fast development granted them a sensation of positive feelings. As such, the self-enhancement motive is present in the trainees and is generated by their fast development. They are driven towards their development as consultants because they experience this development in a positive way. That fast development is also promoted and encouraged by the senior managers and that support also generates positive feelings to the trainees. The managers enhance the power of this motive by offering support to the fast development that generates positive emotions. From the theory, it is gathered that feeling good when experiencing an identity is important in order to adopt the contents of that identity in the future. As a result, we advocate that the self-enhancement motive is present and guiding the trainees to the development of their future professional identity.

*“I feel professional already after 6 months, so that's what I like.”*

*“It feels like I have been working for years and I think that's quite a good feeling I would say, to improve quite fast.”*

*“I realized that it's even more fun than I thought it would be, the opportunities are great, I am very happy with working at this firm, it's been really educational.”*

*“I am more calm in the role as a consultant than I thought I would be this quick.”*

Moreover, considering the responses presented in Chapter 5.1, the trainees chose consultancy because it felt like a natural choice. The trainees made a choice that was compatible to their history and self-definition. As a result, we see that the self-coherence and self-continuity motives are present and can offer to the individual continuous motivation towards identification with one's role. We can also see from those responses that each trainee perceives that continuity and coherency subjectivity as their narrative could be fulfilled in other professions besides the consultancy.

In addition, that subjectivity is very interesting when we take into account how they perceive themselves now and their future disposition towards their profession. As it was stated in the empirical data, two different discourses surfaced regarding their development. The motivations are directing them to different destinations. As Vignoles et al. (2006) supports, the motivation for identification rather sets a predestined path for the individual. We will not advocate that these motivations predestine one's path, as that depends on many factors. However, we support that these motivations play a significant role to the future path of an individual. What we also see, is that the firm,

by allowing the circulation of identity discourses, it also allows the existence of motive for identification. The trainees are allowed to choose the path that fits their own self-definition. This is enhanced by the senior managers through the development talks, where they appoint tasks that fit the interests of the trainees. These two motives are important to be managed appropriately in that stage because, as it stated in the theory, inconsistencies in the fulfillment of those motives are sources of anxiety and sources of negative emotions towards the identity.

*“It's not like someone else is driving your development because you have to do it yourself so to speak. If you ask for help or support you get that.”*

*“I want to be experienced in many different areas regarding fire engineering and risk management and so on but I think the long-term goal is to find what area I am most happy pursuing.”*

*“I am quite personal in my role as a consultant. Here at this firm, people actually do focus on the soft skills as well, it's not only the engineering and the technical aspects that matters, it's the soft ones as well, which I think is useful and that's the way I want to approach my role.”*

*“I would say that first of all I am the one I want to be. I put more value in how I interact with other persons, how I actually care about other persons.”*

Moreover, it is apparent from the responses that the self-enactment motive is strong and present. The ability to express their own self through their work and choose the career path that mostly fits their interest seems to be contributing to the generation of positive feelings. As we have seen, the seniors also promote the creation of the trainees own style of consultancy. As such, we support that the self-enactment motive is also a driving force for the development of their future professional identity.

Furthermore, it seems that the motive of self-knowledge is existent and driving identification with the role. They are referring to themselves as a new employee who has a lot to learn. It seems to be a common perception among all participants, trainees and seniors alike. We support that in a certain degree that motivates their development towards identification. When one realizes that there is a lot of ground to cover towards an identity one values and feels good about, then that provides an extra driving force towards it. The theory also supports that, if there is an acceptance, by the collective when that distance is expressed by the individual, then identification may be reinforced.

On the other hand, the self-distinction motive appears to be less powerful at this point. The trainees are expressing their own desires for their development, however they do not link those to any desire to be distinct from the group. As such, we support that the self-knowledge motive is in a sense more powerful than the self-distinction motive at this point in time. The trainees understand that they are new, that they have a lot to learn and that sets the mentality, which was described in Chapters 5.3 and 5.4, as a sponge. That seems to suppress in a degree the self-distinction motive.

However, from the senior responses in Chapter 5.3, a consultant usually relies on the personal brand and cannot hide behind a company. When one increases one's brand, which results in getting more jobs, it then means increasing one's chances to expand that brand even further. As a result, as a consultant in the firm, one will bring more jobs

to the firm that will help promote the firm's goals. Therefore, it seems that from that perspective, the self-distinctiveness motive is encouraged from the seniors towards the trainees. However, from the trainees' responses we gather that they translate this encouragement into increasing their personal brand for themselves and not the firm. As such, we see responses, which are more directed to their personal development without mentioning how that development will promote the firm's goals. And that is also a clue that help us support that identification at this stage is moving towards the role of the consultant and not the consultancy firm's identity.

*“It felt good [when receiving support] because otherwise you would just quit. And it would hurt the firm so they are doing themselves a favor by doing me a favor. It's important to know your own worth.”*

Summarizing, we establish that the motives for identification described in the theory are present and are guiding the path towards the future identification with the professional role. The freedom in identity circulation of the firm allows the existence and expression of those motives while the leadership practices enhance those motives and attempt to manage the meaning behind them. We support that the meaning, which the self-distinction motive provides to the trainees, what it means to be distinct in the firm, is the meaning that the leaders has to manage. That ties directly to the loyalty issues as mentioned in Chapter 5.3. This claim is also supported from the theory, in Chapter 2.3, that leadership is considered effective, in an identity regulation context, when it unites and balances the collective identity. Thus, we support that, if the future professional identity of the trainees contains elements of the firm's identity, then that will depend mostly on the successful management of the self-distinction motive and its balance with the collective identity.

## **5.6 Identity construction and provisional selves**

So far, we have established that the foundations for the future professional identity of the trainees are set, that this identity construction is directed towards the role of the consultant, and that there are strong motivations, from both the organizational and individual level, for that identification process to continue. As a last component to our discussion, we should examine the content of that identity and how that content is tested and enacted.

From the trainees' perspectives, we establish that they are aware of being a member of a group, they value the contents of that membership and they are being possessed with positive feelings towards both the membership and the contents of the identity. We support that the core for identification, as described in the theory, is existent and identification has high chances of occurring as the time passes. However, as we have established from our discussion so far, the identification will occur initially with the role of the consultant and as such, the content of the identity will be aligned towards that. Their perspective is more directed to the skills and competences they need for the job and not for the collective. Thus, we support that the repertoire of behaviors, in the broadest formulation of identification, will include what is natural and good for a consultant to do for one's own brand, and not what is natural and good to do in order to collectively promote the firm.

This direction of identification influences in turn the enactment of that identity through the use of provisional selves. From the trainees' responses, we conclude that, the skills and competences are compared against the requirements of the role, rather than their self-defining attributes. In other words, it is a comparison of *how good am I* as a consultant, and not *who am I* as a consultant. To examine this, we should consider the context of these responses:

*“With this expanded knowledge I have about the role I also see that there is responsibility. I would say my personality is kind of suitable for this responsibility.”*

*“I don't try to be personal [in my line of work] it's just the way I am. I try to get to know people who I am working for.”*

*“I think you have like a basic person that you always are. There are always small things that affect you, but this hasn't really changed my attitude.”*

From these responses, we support that the trainees have already found their personalities and self-definitions fitting for the role. As such, the construction of provisional selves revolves around the assessment of their skills and not the assessment of their self-definitions in the role. That can also be supported by the fact that to enter the trainee program in the first place, one must possess at least some self-defining attributes that would justify their position in a consultancy firm. The seniors mentioned in their responses:

*“If you are trainee you probably have this personality. You are open, you are quite forward and find it easy to interact with other people.”*

*“I hope she picked up something from us leaders as well of course, but she was quite almost professional from the start I must say.”*

Summarizing this chapter, we advocate that all the necessary elements for identification to occur with the role of the consultant are present. The trainees are enacting identities and probably experimenting with provisional selves to assess their skills and competences and not self-defining elements at this point in time.

## **5.7 Summary**

Closing the discussion chapter, we consider it prudent to summarize the main points of our discussion in order to proceed to our conclusions in Chapter 6 and answer our research questions.

The expected professional identity is constructed mostly in the educational environment. The social environment influences it positively or negatively only if it is aware of the identity's content. The expected professional identity of a consultant is a byproduct of the educational background, which is mostly dependent on the anticipations of the individual.

The formal structures that the firm possesses are used as supportive structures for the consultancy role. The firm chooses to leave freedom for discourse circulation. As such,

the weight of identity circulation with the proper power and frequency falls on the shoulders of the senior managers. The firm is using its leaders as the major media identity regulation tool, and they are the ones setting the scene of what is good and natural for a consultant to do.

The purpose of the identity regulation, that the managers are promoting, is to set the foundations for the development of the trainees' future professional identity. That professional identity is providing a stronger identification with the role of the consultant at this specific time, as it is the client's requirement to deal with professional consultants. Identification with the firm and development of loyalty towards it relies on the leaders managing the meaning of the collective identity and transmitting it effectively, which is depending on the motivations of the trainees in their line of work.

The motives for identification are present and are guiding the path towards the future identification with the professional role. The freedom in identity circulation of the firm allows the existence and expression of those motives while the leadership practices enhance those motives and attempt to manage the meaning behind them. The motive that correlates directly to the firm's loyalty is the self-distinction motive. If the future professional identity of the trainees come to contain elements of the firm's identity that will depend mostly on the successful management of the self-distinction motive and its balance with the collective identity.

Finally, the trainees are enacting identities and probably experimenting with provisional selves to assess their skills and competences and not their self-defining elements, at this point in time. That is occurring mostly due to their high compatibility with the role from the start.



## 6 Conclusion

Concluding this report, we will answer its research questions, incorporate those answers into a model of identity construction process, and offer suggestions for further study.

Regarding the first question '*How does the firm regulate the collective identity?*', we conclude that the firm uses the formal structures as supportive regulation media for the consultancy role. Its sensebreaking process is carried out through free circulation of identity discourses. The firm chooses to loosely control that circulation and that control is in the hands of the senior managers who take on the responsibility of leadership. They are the ones setting the scene of what is good and natural for a consultant to do. The freedom in identity circulation of the firm allows the existence and expression of identification motives from the individual.

For the second question '*What is the role of leadership in this regulation process?*', we answer that the managers are setting the foundations for the development of the trainees' future professional identity. Identification with the firm and development of loyalty towards it relies on the leaders managing the meaning of the collective identity and transmitting it effectively, depending on the motivations of the trainees. The leaders enhance those motivations in order to achieve a faster development of the trainees.

Finally, for the third question '*What is the role of the individual in the identification process?*', we conclude that the individual navigates the identification process based on one's identification motives which are intrinsic in nature. The motives for identification are always present and active in the interplay between the individual and the organization. The motives are guiding the path towards the future identification from the individual's side. The steering wheel of this navigation is the critical evaluation of the individual, which is also based also on those motives. In this firm, the navigation through the identification process is providing a stronger identification with the role of the consultant at this specific time. The trainees are enacting identities and probably experimenting with provisional selves to assess their skills and competences. Thus, their current professional identity is directed towards the role of the consultant rather than the firm.

To answer our main research question '*How is the transition occurring from expected professional identity to experienced professional identity in a consultancy firm during a trainee program?*', we created the model represented in Figure 6.1. Initiating from left to right, the individual carrying an expected professional identity enters the context marked with light gray. The context is separated in two sections, the organizational section and the individual section. The individual is carrying motivations for identification, intrinsic in nature, which are present through their interactions with the organizational section. The sensebreaking process is occurring through the identity regulation media. This consultancy firm, which tolerate freedom in the regulation of identity discourses, are choosing to carry out sensebreaking by allowing the identification motives of the individual to exist and leaving the responsibility of regulating the collective identity to the leaders. The leaders initiate the sensegiving process, which must enhance the identification motives and manage the meaning, which the individual tries to find through identification. Through this interaction with the organizational section, the individual is critically evaluating the identity information gathered, which is depending on one's motivations for identification, and chooses a

strategy for absorbing identity contents. This creates a repertoire of identity elements, which again depending on one's motivation for identification, constructs a provisional self, which is expressed through the identity enactment, replacing the original expected professional identity, initiating the process all over. As such, leadership practices are influencing this transition by effectively handling the whole organizational section of interaction.

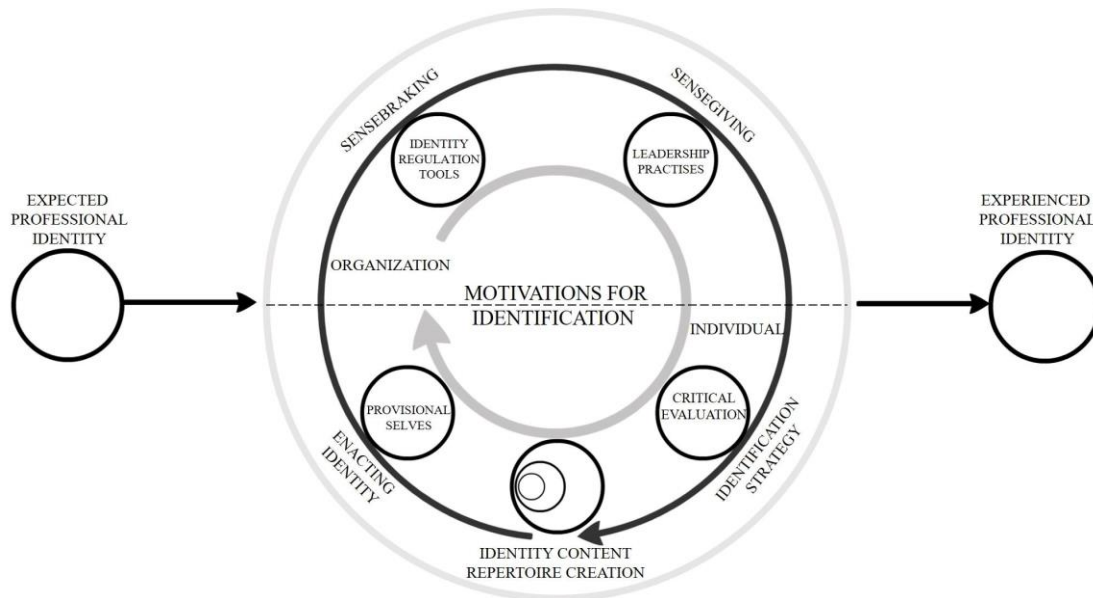


Figure 6.1 Professional identity construction model.

Finally, regarding the validity of this study, except form what was mentioned in Chapter 3.6, we have used all available sources of evidence to converge our findings and established a chain of evidence. For the external validity of the study, we cannot analytically generalize our results but we can offer an insightful example on the identity construction process. Since organizations are moving towards a model were leaders are called to manage autonomous and creative employees, (as stated in Chapter 5.2), managing the intrinsic aspects of them is becoming more and more crucial for the organization. As we have established, the professional identity of graduates will initially adopt elements of the role and not the collective's. The mechanism, through which this direction will be shifted, is by proper management of their motives for identification. Those motives follow the individual in one's interactions with the organizational level as shown with the internal arrow. Thus, it is possible for the employee to adopt elements of the collective's identity in a later time through many iterations. As such, one can expect that the process of identity construction is dynamic, circular, and continuous with elements from the individual and organizational level interacting consecutively, as shown with the outer arrow.

The model we are proposing reveals some managerial implications as well. It seems that motivations such as rewards or promises of advancement are losing their power for identification. The identification motives are intrinsic and the identity regulation responsibility is shifted towards the managers. One major implication that this study revealed is the loyalty issue. Organizations and managers should not take the employees' loyalties for granted but reflect on their own identity regulation processes to assess the effect they have on the employees' motivations since loyalty and identification can be connected. As such, the managers should not be passive

transmitters of identity content, but should be involved in active identity work that would stimulate the individual to align with the collective's identity content.

## **6.1 Suggestions for further study**

While conducting this study, we have recognized issues that we recommend to be explored further. Initially, it would be interesting to shift the design of the case study from single to multiple and compare between consultancy companies, educating graduates in their firms. Moreover, we would advocate the need for more case studies in consultancy firms in the professional identity construction subject. There are aspects: cultural, educational, organizational, and individual that can have a plethora of effects in the construction of the professional identity of the graduates. One aspect to be considered as well is the effect of multiple identities, which was not explored in this study due to insufficient number of participants to establish a pattern.

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