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How members of high identity demand organizations perform identity work relating to organization membership

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This dissertation is submitted to Cass Business School, City University London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Table of Contents

Abstract 7

1 Introduction 8

1.1 Overview 10

2 Literature review 14

2.1 The objects of identity work verbs 14

2.2 Doing identity work: the verbs 23

2.2.1 Deep identity work: which verbs are included 23

2.2.2 Identification as part of identity work 25

2.2.3 Cycles of identity work 26

2.2.4 Types of identity work 28

2.3 Who are the performers of identity work, or the subjects of the verbs? 33

2.3.1 Individual needs 33

2.3.2 Individual as target 34

2.3.3 Change over time 34

2.3.4 Individual level differences 35

2.3.5 Effect of identification on individual 35

2.4 Professional service firms 38

2.4.1 What characteristics of PSFs make them high identity demand organizations? 38

2.4.2 Which individuals? Why? 44

2.4.3 What types of identity challenge are suggested by the literature? 49

2.4.4 Why is a study of identity work performed by professionals important? 51

3 Methodology 55

3.1 Research process 55

3.2 Ontology, epistemology, methodology 67

3.3 Presentation of data 74

4 Identity Work Setting 76
4.1 Partnership as an aspiration 77
4.1.1 Control 77
4.1.2 Symbol of success 77
4.1.3 Reward 78
4.1.4 To be a role model 79
4.2 Going for partnership 81
4.3 Acceptance/rejection 84
4.4 Demands made of, controls on and influence of partners 87
4.4.1 Demands 87
4.4.2 Controls 93
4.4.3 Influence 98
4.5 Interactions 103
4.5.1 Interactions with juniors 104
4.5.2 Interactions with CEO/managing partner and the corporate side 106
4.5.3 Interactions with clients 106
4.5.4 Interactions with partners 107
4.5.5 Interactions with others 111
4.6 Separation 112
4.7 In Summary 113
5 Four Identity Work Events 115
5.1 Public criticism of the firm 115
5.1.1 Event characteristics 115
5.1.2 Interactions 118
5.1.3 Identity challenge 120
5.1.4 Identity work responses 122
5.1.5 Consequences for organization/individual 126

5.2 Decision within the firm affecting only the individual member 129
5.2.1 Event characteristics 129
5.2.2 Interactions 130
5.2.3 Identity challenge 132
5.2.4 Identity work responses 133
5.2.5 Consequences for organization/individual 138
5.3 Redundancy programmes in the firms 139
5.3.1 Event characteristics 139
5.3.2 Interactions 141
5.3.3 Identity challenge 144
5.3.4 Identity work responses 146
5.3.5 Consequences for organization/individual 151
5.4 Changes in individual relevant to membership of firm 154
5.4.1 Event characteristics 154
5.4.2 Interactions 158
5.4.3 Identity challenge 159
5.4.4 Identity work responses 159
5.4.5 Consequences for organization/individual 162
6 Difficult identity work 164
6.1 Event characteristics 164
6.2 Interactions 167
6.3 Identity challenges 169
6.4 Components of recoveries 170
6.4.1 A change in the firm 170
6.4.2 Comparing the firm to other employers 171
6.4.3 Personal success within the firm 171
6.4.4 Communicating with senior people in the firm 172

6.5 The Identity Recovery Position 174
6.6 A note on the use of the blame tactics 177
7 Discussion 183
7.1 The performance of identity work 183
7.1.1 Subject 185
7.1.2 Salience and identity work 186
7.1.3 Implications of salience 189
7.1.4 Objects of identity work 191
7.1.5 Identity work challenges 196
7.1.6 Concurrence 198
7.1.7 Implications of concurrence 199
7.1.8 Identity work setting 201
7.1.9 Identity work tactics 204
7.1.10 Successful identity work 207
7.2 Difficult identity work 209
7.2.1 Organization sanctioned communications/signals. 209
7.2.2 Solo identity challenge 211
7.2.3 Implication of solo identity challenge 212
7.2.4 Identity work setting: High risk of withdrawal of affirmation from colleagues in interactions 212
7.2.5 Tipping point 214
7.2.6 Identity responses to difficult identity work challenges 215
7.2.7 Recovery position 220
8 Conclusion 223
Appendix I 239
Interview questions 243
Appendix II 246

References 253

Figures

Figure 2.1 Objects of identity work relating to organization membership 19
Figure 3.3 Different research traditions on the 'organizational identity' metaphor (Cornelissen, 2006: 696). 68
Figure 7.1 A diagram to summarise the performance of identity work triggered by a threat to the social identity relating to membership of the organization. 184

Tables

Table 2.1 Tenure of the senior partners at the top four UK law firms 47
Table 3.1 Description of the interviewees 56
Table 3.2 A comparison of the participating firms 58
Table 6.1 Challenges relating to organization membership 166
Table 6.2 Eleven difficult identity work accounts 179

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Abstract

This study asks: how do members of high identity demand organizations perform identity work relating to their organization membership? Using social identity theory, Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2006a) defined high identity demand vocations as imposing significant forces on members towards integration with a role. Through an inductive empirical study I respond to their call for studies taking the organization, rather than role, as the referent for identity work. Taking large professional service firms (PSF) as high identity demand organizations, this study explores: how identity work on the social identity is conducted from within multiple identity positions; how identity work responses are combined to address the challenges within multiple identity positions; how the identity work setting influences the performance of identity work; how the concurrent performance of identity work by others supports an individual's identity work; and the types of events creating difficult identity work for PSF partners. Finally I combine these in considering the reversal of spirals of de-identification.

1 Introduction

Using social identity theory I investigate the work performed on identity relating to membership of a work organization over the course of a continuous career in that organization. Rather than asking about identity work on moving to a new company or occupation, I ask about the identity work performed to continue in the same organization. I explore this in members of organizations which place significant demands on individuals to integrate their personal identity with the organization identity.

This study focuses on deep identity work rather than short-term work switching between identities with tolerable incoherence (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Clarke, Brown and Hope Hailey, 2009). This deep identity work involves the individual's social identities and takes place over a longer time frame, for example, forming identities by trialling provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999); and sense breaking and sense-giving triggered by organizational practices (Pratt, 2000b; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Identity work includes work on 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003:1165). Kreiner et al (2006a) developed a list of tactics for the maintenance of the boundary between an occupational identity and the personal identity. I extend this body of work by exploring how partners in professional service firms repair and revise their social identity derived from their organizational membership.

Organizational identification, as a process, is one part of the identity work performed at the boundary of the personal and organizational identity. Maintaining organizational identification over a long continuous career in a single organization is challenging because both the individual and organization are dynamic (Kreiner et al, 2006a). At the boundaries of the personal and social identities there is a constant negotiation (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Identity research suggests that:

> "One's sense of self is largely grounded in one's salient roles within a given context and that one looks to others for validation of this sense of self" (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark and Fugate, 2007: 150).

Being granted partnership in a professional service firm is a public validation of the importance of the individual to the organization. Yet, as both the individual and organization are dynamic, this validation from others in the organization may vary over the course of partnership (Kreiner et al, 2006a, Ashforth et al, 2007). As Ashforth et al argued in relation to dirty workers, those working in occupations "viewed by society as physically, morally or socially tainted" (2007:1), if organization members:

> "look to others for positive affirmation, they are likely to be frustrated; yet, if they do not look for affirmation, their sense of a workplace self may remain somewhat tenuous" (2007:150).

It is less clear how a tenuous social identity might in turn affect identity work. A social identity will become salient when it is "situationally relevant and subjectively important" (Ashforth et al, 2008:330). When a social identity is salient to an individual, that person shifts towards seeing themselves as an exemplar of the social group (Brewer, 1991). Yet little is known about the impact of the salience of a social identity on the appraisal of an event as challenging to an identity and on the performance of identity work. Existing research suggests that while those who identify with an organization are likely to seek to preserve a positive perception of the organization (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991), those who fall in to "degenerative identification spirals" (DiSanza and Bullis, 1999: 394) are likely to interpret workplace interactions in ways that reinforce their negative beliefs. How might that spiral be reversed?

While recent identity work studies have focused on discontinuous careers as likely to provoke identity work (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014), this study seeks to explore the identity work required of individuals to remain in one organization for the bulk of a career. The individual and organization are both dynamic over time. Professional partnerships provide a rich context for the study of identity work relating to organization membership in part due to their structure. Partners "in the aggregate … define the internal and external strategic identity of the firm," (Lorsch and Tierney, 2002). Not only do the partners change as individuals but also the members of the partner group change. A successful partner may stay in a firm for 25 years. If first made a partner in 1990, he/she will then have shared the

partnership with a group of partners, some of whom will have become partners 25 years before that, in 1965. By the time he/she retires, the group of partners will include some made partners 25 years later, in 2015. Some of the partners with whom the individual shares the firm at different times will have been made partners 50 years apart. If the partners are defining of the identity of the firm, this provides an interesting context for the study of identity work on maintaining a social identity relating to organization membership, as validation of a workplace self may be withheld at times as the partner group evolves.

Tenuous identity and de-identification spirals potentially raise problems for organizations. Low levels of organizational identification have been associated with intent to leave, and poor in-role and extra-role performance (Riketta, 2005). Levels of organizational identification have also been associated with various self-related motives, such as, organization-based self-esteem (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). Organizational identification can unite members of an organization who have categorized themselves in to subsets of the organization along spatial, functional, generational and occupational lines (Parker, 2007). Understanding the performance of identity work relating to organization membership is therefore important for both individual and organizational outcomes. The challenge for employers is to support the individual maintaining an optimal level of identification with the organization and groups within it (Kreiner et al, 2006a; Pratt, 2000b). To do this effectively, organizations and members need to understand the identity work performed by individuals to maintain, repair and revise the social identity relating to membership.

1.1 Overview

In the literature review I describe the concepts I will be using from social identity theory: multiple social identities, and the process of organizational identification as one part of identity work relating to organization membership. I develop an image to illustrate multiple social identities, and the strength and content of social identities. Ideas about salience, tolerable incoherence between multiple identities and the effects of existing social identities on perceptions, are combined to ask how social identities might influence the performance of identity work. A high identity demand organization provides a rich context for such a study.

I then review the literature on professional service firms and argue that, of the wide range of professional industries, accountancy, consultancy and law firms are likely to be high identity demand organizations. Within these industries the HRM practices associated with partnerships are mechanisms by which control is exerted over individual partners through their subjective understanding of their selves (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007; Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian and Samuel, 1998). While studies of professionals have noted the rise of discontinuous professional careers (Muzio and Ackroyd, 2005; Pinnington and Morris, 2003; Morris and Pinnington, 1998) or explored identity on the journey from junior to senior (Michel, 2012; Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson, 2000; Ibarra, 1999) I focus on the identity work performed by partners to continue in the same high identity demand firm over the course of maybe 25 years as a partner.

Professionals are comparatively powerful in the relationship with the employing organization because professionals' work is often bespoke, the expertise is located in the individual and the work is co-performed with the client, making the personal relationships with clients valuable (Greenwood, Hinings and Brown, 1990). For high identity demand PSFs seeking to keep expert partners and their clients, it is therefore important to understand the identity work of partners, not only in relation to discontinuous careers but also relating to continuing organization membership. In their practitioner-oriented book, Lorsch and Tierney (2002:106) say:

> "How many times have you been surprised by the retirement of a partner-level colleague or the sudden departure of a superstar producer? … What will it be that makes you stay? The answer to this question is one of the most important points of action for the leadership group of a professional service firm. If it's "Because you're one of us" or, even worse, if no one even notices the question is being asked, the game is over. Loyalty is a virtue, but it's not compelling in the abstract."

So what is? I focus on partners because in relation to their organization membership they combine roles not only as managers and client-facing workers, but also as owners of the firm. Addressing the needs of partners is "intrinsically challenging and becomes more so with time" due to this "three-hat" dynamic and people's priorities changing "as their careers and personal lives evolve" (Lorsch and Tierney,

2002:105-106). As well as being comparatively powerful in the relationship with the organization, their identity work in relation to the organization is therefore complex. Yet identity work studies in PSFs to date have tended to focus on the path to partner and the management of partners (Anderson-Gough et al, 2000; Covaleski et al, 1998), rather than addressing directly the identity work of these owners, workers and managers who are also valuable assets.

I ask: how do partners in professional service firms perform identity work relating to their organization membership?

Through a qualitative study of 50 individuals from three professional industries I explore identity work relating to organization membership by partners in firms. The 50 individuals in this study were all members of firms using HRM practices associated with partnership. The initial 11 interviewees come from a variety of transnational law and accountancy firms. The 39 other partners all come from two firms, supporting study of their identity work in depth and in context. Directors of partner training in these two firms acted as sounding boards and provided explanations, where needed, of organizational identity demands.

The 50 interviews provided over 80 hours of descriptions, accounts and explanations. I recognised examples from previous studies: of identity customization (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006), crafting of split identifications (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville and Scully, 2010), the narrative process as identity work (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), integration, differentiation and refreshing tactics (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006a), and attempts to control partners' identities (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian and Samuel, 1988). I gathered the accounts by event, compared and contrasted the events and looked at the accounts in full, as whole stories. I considered the sequences and combinations of responses, the combinations of the subject and object of the identity work verbs and the use or not of various types of identity responses.

In Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I describe the journey through partnership as the setting in which identity work is conducted. Identity work is not performed in a vacuum (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Are common assumptions about the experience of a professional partner still valid? In Chapter 5, Four Identity Work Events, I explore the identity work of partners in this setting in four categories of

events described by them as challenging: public criticism of the firm; decisions within the firm affecting only the individual partner; redundancy programmes; and changes in the individual relevant to membership of the firm. For each type of event I include the data which satisfied me that the event had prompted identity work. Looking at four types of event allows me to compare and contrast the event characteristics, the nature of interactions relating to the event, the identity challenges presented by the event, the identity work responses and consequences for both the individual partner and at the organizational level. In Chapter 6 Difficult Identity Work I collect together accounts of identity work in which the partner had taken steps towards leaving the firm. The taking of steps towards leaving the firm is taken as a proxy for falling identification with the firm. By comparing and contrasting these accounts with those in Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events I explore difficult identity work relating to organization membership.

I draw together the importance of the salience of an existing social identity and the potential objects of the identity work verbs in fully specifying the identity work challenges created by an event. I look at the effect of the identity work setting and the concurrent performance by others of similar identity work on the availability of identity work tactics, and the evolution of identity work responses. Finally in the accounts of the more difficult repairing identity work relating to organization membership I explain the importance of four recurring elements in the identity work accounts of partners who came back from the brink, coming out of spirals of de-identification.

On a practical basis, the research yields insights in to the identity work of partners in the context of a large managed professional service firm and the more difficult identity work moments relating to that organization membership, enabling firms better to support the identity work of professionals, which could potentially help both firms and individuals. My aim is to focus on improving the understanding of the performance of identity work relating to organization membership by studying partners pursuing continuous careers in a single organization.

2 Literature review

Identity work refers to the ongoing struggle of the individual creating a sense of self (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). It is argued that individuals strive for "a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" and "for comfort, meaning and integration and some correspondence between a self-definition and a work situation" (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003:1165, 1188). Identity work includes "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1165). I consider here:

- the constructions productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness, or the objects of the verbs;
- the conduct of identity work, or the verbs;
- the performers, or the subjects of the verbs; and
- the work situation, or, in this study, professional service firms.

I present the literature in this way to answer calls for identity researchers to specify their use of terms which are common to multiple streams of identity research (Brown, 2014).

2.1 The objects of identity work verbs

Identity work is a compound of work and identity; what does identity include? Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) definition above focuses on the self. Similarly Ashforth et al (2008:327) say:

> "Identity is a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question 'Who am I?' or 'Who are we?'"

Human beings can self-reflect. Most of us engage in self-reflection every day of our lives. In the social science context, 'self' generally refers neither to the physical person nor to their personality (Leary and Tangney, 2003).

> "The self is a *mental capacity* that allows an animal to take itself as the object of its own attention and to think consciously about itself." (Leary and Tangney, 2003:8, emphasis added)

This definition draws together a variety of uses of 'self' in the identity literature, such as, the agentic ability of individuals to self-discipline (Brown, 2009; Covaleski et al, 1998); and the individual's knowledge and beliefs about the self (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). These rest on and are united by the mental capacity to take yourself as the object of your attention. Individual identity is:

> "something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual." (Giddens, 1991:52)

Through self-reflection an individual develops many definitions of him- or herself over time in relation to different contexts. This repertoire of self-definitions is called the 'self-concept' (Hogg and Terry, 2001; Leary and Tangney, 2003).

Within the self-concept we find social identities. According to social identity theory and self-categorization theory, a social identity is:

> "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." (emphasis added, Tajfel, 1978:63)

The self-concept contains an enormous number of self-definitions, only some of which will be significant to the individual. By contrast, social identities are "selected" by the individual (Brewer, 1991: 477). 'Selected' here is a simplification of a gradual complex process in which a person makes many small choices as they interact with the world around them. Social identities are part of the self-concept. Social identities can be chosen from the individual's cognitive links with groups defined by categories such as race, gender, occupational role or organizational membership (Ashforth et al, 2008). Social identities can be the objects of identity work, which may be work on the knowledge of membership and/or the value of membership and/or the emotional significance of membership.

An individual may develop multiple social identities in a work context. Taking a large law firm as an example, a solicitor might have social identities attributable to a team, the department, the firm and the profession. These have been visualised as nested identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social identities attributable to groups that cut across these nested groups, such as, a diversity action committee with members

from various departments, are known as cross-cutting identities (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). An individual therefore has multiple social identities on which identity work may be performed.

With what do individuals identify? According to social identity theory, individuals will have a perception of the identity of a group (Dutton et al, 1994). A group identity is called an organizational identity when the group is an organization. Broadly, an organization's identity is the organization members' answer to the question "Who are we as an organization?" (Ashforth et al, 2008:327). Albert and Whetton (1985) defined organizational identity as the central, enduring and distinctive characteristics of an organization. 'Enduring' suggests unchanging. This part of Albert and Whetton's (1985) definition has been criticised. Organizational identity is constructed and reconstructed, whether proactively or reactively (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000). This malleability is important for the adaptability of the organization. A broad conception of identity work includes work on the group identity, for example, work to influence the perceptions held by others which contribute to the group identity.

An individual member may perceive some overlap between their identity and their perception of the organizational identity (Dutton et al, 1994). Ashforth et al (2008: 328) also observed that individual' identities in organizations:

> "are usually an amalgam of the perceived characteristics of the *collective* or *role* (e.g. values, goals, beliefs) and the perceived prototypical characteristics of its *members*."

An individual may have several roles within their work organization. Identities inhering in the various roles within the organization for a lawyer might include owner, manager and worker and these might be combined with social identities attributable to a team, the department and the firm. The individual's perception of the organization identity, which is a complex mix of perceptions relating to different aspects of organization membership, can also be the object of work.

To the extent that an individual attaches value to a particular group identity and adopts some or all of that identity in to their self-definition as a social identity, the individual can be described as having a degree of identification with the social group.

This is a static use of 'identification'. 'Identification' is also used in social identity theory literature to refer to the process of identification (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000b). In this dynamic sense, identification refers to the ongoing "process of becoming", focusing on how individuals bring aspects of an organization into their identities (Ashforth et al, 2008: 339). When the social group is their employer, this is organizational identification[1]. In the static sense, organizational identification has been defined as an individual's "perception of oneness" with an organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989:34). This is conceived as a measurable state. There are multi-item scales developed to assess the degree of an individual's identification with an organization at a moment in time (Mael and Ashforth, 1992) and a visual scale based on the idea that organizational identification is the overlap between an individual's social identity and the perceived organizational identity (Dutton et al, 1994; Shamir and Kark, 2004). In the static sense, organizational identification can be the object of identity work.

I have focused above on social identity theory. Tajfel's (1978) definition of social identity can be contrasted with the definition of social identities as imputed by others, for example, Snow and Anderson (1987) described the identity work of homeless people striving to resist the social identities imputed to them by others and to construct personal identities more supportive of the self-concept. It has been proposed that for many people identities associated with the organization where they work may be more important than 'ascribed' identities attributable to categories such as gender, ethnicity or nationality (Hogg and Terry, 2001). Group identities ascribed

[1] I acknowledge there is a long-running debate about the distinction between organizational commitment and organizational identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al, 2008). In 2008 as in 1989 Ashforth and others distinguished organizational identification from organizational commitment by how the concepts relate to self-definition. Commitment does not include a perceived oneness with an organization and does not imply any work on the self-concept. Further, Riketta's (2005) meta-analysis suggests popular measures of organizational identification and organizational commitment are discrete. In spite of the differences the concepts do have much in common.

to an individual may or may not also be valued social identities. Unwanted ascribed group identities will be the object of resistance.

As well as social identities, an individual's identity has been conceived as containing a set of self-definitions which form their personal identity. Individual identity comprises the personal identity and the social identities. The personal identity is the:

> "individuated self - those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others." (Brewer, 1991:476)

Broadly, if the social identity describes values and characteristics that unite the group and distinguish it from other groups, the personal identity according to Brewer describes values and characteristics that distinguish the individual from other members of the same group. More recently Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) have interpreted the inner personal identity as a narrative self-identity. They see personal identity not only as relatively stable and less fluid but also as a "source of stability and occasional resistance" over time in identity work (2003: 1166). The personal identity can be taken as an object of identity work.

Both the individual and the organization evolve over time. Past, present and potential future identities relating to each are linked together by narratives.

> "The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual supplies about herself." (Giddens, 1991:54)

Both individual and organization identities have been conceived as narratives on which identity work may be performed (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). These narratives over time are objects of identity work.

Figure 2.1 is an attempt to summarise the concepts set out above.

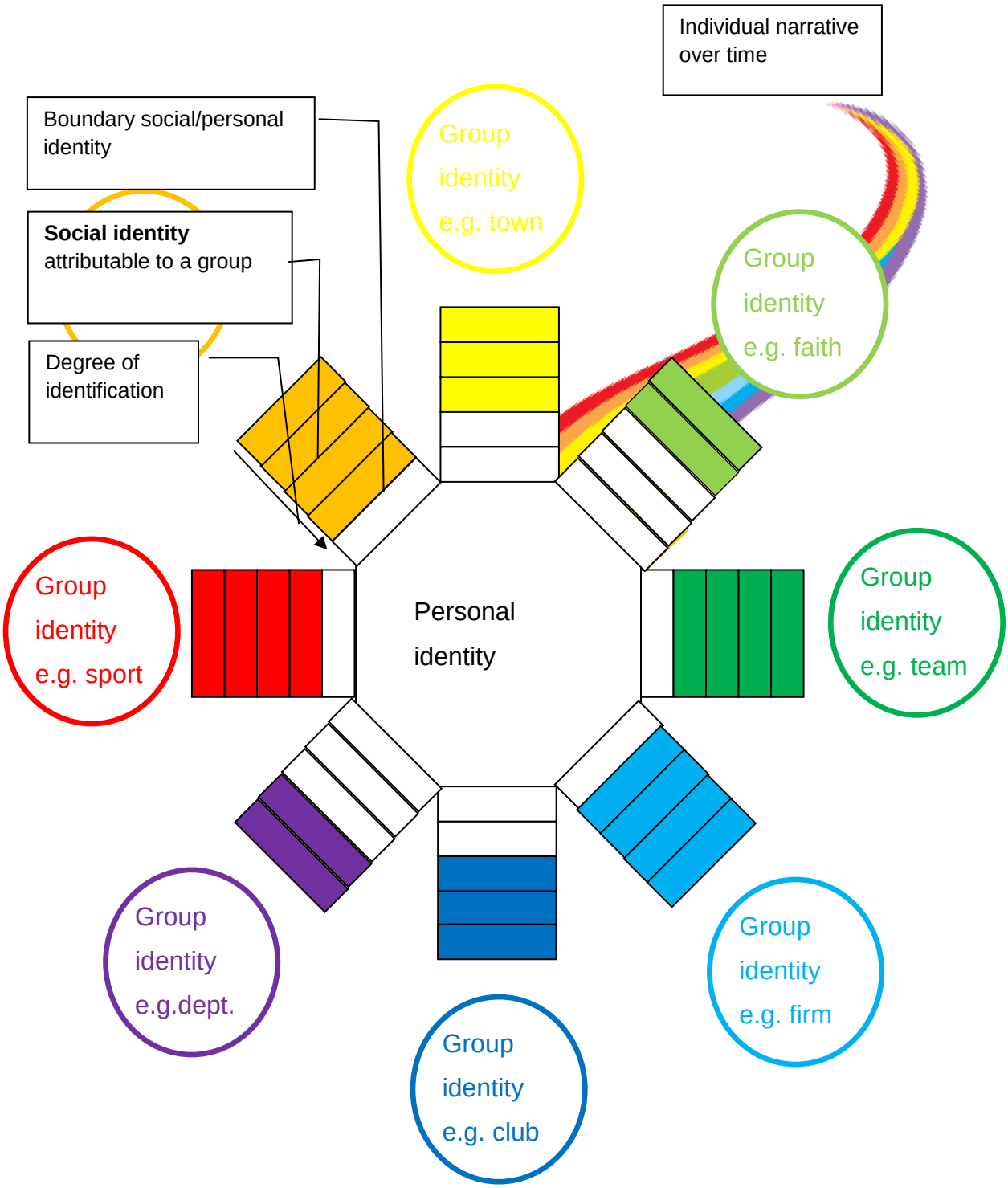

Figure 2.1 Objects of identity work relating to organization membership

Individual identity is represented here as the personal identity (central octagon) surrounded by the multiple social identities (bars). The group identities to which the social identities relate are in the circles surrounding the individual identity.

Social identities are valued by the individual (Brewer, 1991). Researchers should not assume that standard category memberships, such as, gender or race, will be of

importance to an individual (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Only the individual can reveal which self-perceptions are valued as self-defining social identities. The social groups in Figure 2.1 are suggestions only. It may be that an individual would value their work group membership in defining themselves and not place any value on their organization membership. The content of the social identities is understood by comparison of the group to others along various dimensions. Not all of these dimensions will themselves be valued identities. However, individuals' valued social identities are drawn from those group identities available to the individual.

The purpose of this diagram is to illustrate social identity theory, in which social identities are the cognitive links the individual forms between their identity and the identities of social groups or organizations (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). Organizational discourses and roles as well as social identities may influence identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), but in social identity theory group membership is seen as self-defining and the concept of roles is subsumed into the concept of group membership (Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty, 1994). Although Kreiner et al (2006a) see occupational identity as part of social identity theory, as noted above, Ashforth et al (2008) suggested that identifications are complex amalgams of the perceived characteristics of the groups and roles and the prototypical members of the group. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) see social identity theory as being at a collective level, adding a focus on relationships at the interpersonal level and on an autonomous self at the individual level:

> "Self-definition in organizational contexts is predicated at least partly on one's network of interdependent roles." (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007:10).

They see group-level analyses as overlooking, for example, differences between co-worker-co-worker relationships. In taking a social identity theory approach I see these as subsumed in the amalgams of perceptions related to organizational identification and therefore as potential objects of identity work and influences on identity work. I do not use Sluss and Ashforth's (2007) generalized relational identity because when group identification allows for adoption of some, but not necessarily all, of a prototype, existing conceptualizations of identification already accommodate the personalization of a role, or in my case, group membership.

As for groups within the organization, an interesting study is Reade's (2001) "case study of the antecedents of organizational identification among local managers in a multinational corporation (MNC)" in which she shows "that there are different sets of factors that promote identification with the local and global levels of the organization." The prestige and distinctiveness of the local company was a better predictor of local identification but the prestige and distinctiveness of the global organization was a better predictor of global identification. Reade demonstrated that identifications with different levels within the organization may have different antecedents, but this does not preclude organizational identification being an amalgam of various identifications within the organization. While I have shown 'team' and 'firm' as distinct social identities, identity work on one may involve identity work on the other, consistent with being 'nested' identities.

The gaps in Figure 2.1 between group identities and the social identities reflect the idea that although the content of a social identity is influenced by:

> "the central, distinctive and more or less enduring aspects – in short, the essences – of the collectives and roles in which he or she is a member [...] individuals will often vary in what they perceive to be those essences." (Ashforth et al, 2008:328)

Also, attempts to influence the group identity involve work extending beyond the individual identity.

Over time the various social identities will wax and wane around the personal identity as the narrative repertoire evolves (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). The resulting individual identity over time could be conceived as a twisted thread of many colours.

Strength of identification

There will not only be an 'amalgam of perceptions' content to a social identity but also strength of identification. If identification is very high, the social identity will completely obscure the personal identity and the individual would be likely to adopt attitudes and behave completely in accordance with the exemplar when the social identity is salient. Dukerich, Kramer and McLean Parks (1998) used 'overidentification' to describe a state:

> "where the self gets lost, the identity of the organization replaces the self, and little of the self is left – there is little or no perceived uniqueness or differentiating factors, similar to the Borg of *Star* Trek, where there is *only* the collective." (1998: 247)

Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010: 618), drawing on Hillman, Nicholson, & Shropshire (2008) and Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep (2006a) suggested:

> "individuals who identify the most strongly with their jobs focus their thoughts on work and interpret more situations as opportunities to perform work role activities."

In considering the objects of identity work verbs it is useful to separate the perception of the organization from the strength of identification. Petriglieri (2011) similarly draws a distinction between work on the meaning of a social identity and work on the value of it. However since social identity is always based on the individual's perception of the organization and every individual's perception will be slightly different, I am cautious of research which attempts to measure and compare levels of identification between individuals. Yet I would not want to abandon the idea of strength of identification. The idea of high/low, increasing/decreasing identification is still useful in conceptualising the performance of identity work. If an organization is in a period of relative stability but the individual is evolving rapidly, the value and emotional significance of membership could vary while the perception of the organization remained stable.

However the use of strength in the current literature is complicated by the idea of negotiation at the boundary of the personal and social identity. Each member of a group has a perception of the group. In addition, an individual may adopt only part of the perception. I am interested in asking about the objects of the identity work verbs. Since 'strength' has been used to combine value, emotional significance, and degree of adoption (Shamir and Kark, 2004), I set out here that I will use it to refer to value and emotional significance only.

In this section I have looked at the potential objects of identity work: the personal and social identities in the individual identity; the perceptions, values and emotional significance of social identities; the narrative; and group identities. I now consider

the doing of identity work, or the verbs. While looking at the nouns in isolation may present identities as relatively stable, combining the verbs with the nouns reveals the dynamic nature of identities (Parker, 2007).

2.2 Doing identity work: the verbs

In this section I first distinguish deep work on identity. Then I acknowledge the contribution of studies of the process of identification to studies of identity work relating to organization membership. Third I look at cycles of identity work before finally considering the activities.

2.2.1 Deep identity work: which verbs are included

According to social categorization theory, which developed out of social identity theory, when a particular social identity is salient to an individual, that person will shift away from seeing themselves as an individual and towards seeing themselves as an exemplar of that social group (Brewer, 1991). A social identity will be activated (or salient) when it is "situationally relevant and subjectively important" (Ashforth et al, 2008:330). Here there is a distinction between situational cues that may change many times during a day and a more stable subjective importance. Managers may try to cue an individual to activate their organizational identity at appropriate times. In everyday life it is likely that an individual at any one moment will experience cues from several groups to activate the relevant social identities, which may conflict with each other. The individual then has to manage these competing demands. This has been conceived as shifting between multiple identities (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001) and compartmentalizing or buffering identities (Ashforth, 1998). While this may appear somewhat mechanistic it nevertheless expresses how an individual may behave in accordance with apparently inconsistent social identities at different times.

It may be useful to conceive of such competing demands as triggering identity work on two levels: an immediate situational response to which social identity to perform at that moment, and possibly also a deeper identity work to prevent that situation arising again. This is similar to Rousseau's (1998) distinction between situated identification and deep structure identification, in the sense of a temporary or fundamental identification, but I am using the temporary/fundamental scale to distinguish types of identity work. A distinction can be drawn between triggering a

social identity to be active (as in a laboratory experiment, Brewer and Kramer, 1986) and the project of building and maintaining identification (as described in Pratt, 2000b). Identification here is seen as a longer term project involving the self-concept; activation as a more temporary relevance.

This distinction is made for two reasons: deep identity work takes place over a longer time frame; and the cues for short and long term identity work may be different. First, in 1999 Ibarra described professionals trying out provisional selves and responding to the reactions of those around them as they developed their identities in a professional organization. There is a time lag in this cycle. Pratt (2000b) described how Amway distributors attempted to manage their members' identification in a highly dispersed network marketing organization by triggering[2] sense-breaking in members and then providing sense-giving practices promoting incorporation of the organization into the self. Again this process takes time. It is not an immediate response to situational cues.

Second, conflicting social identities may trigger saliency issues without triggering deep identity work. The importance of coherence to individuals should not be overemphasized (Sims, 2008). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003: 1165) suggested:

> "a process in which individuals create several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities (identity positions) rather than one stable, continuous and secure, manager identity"

with a more stable personal identity on which the individual may draw in certain work situations. Clarke et al (2009: 341) argue that:

> "identities may be stable without being coherent, and consist of core statements but not be unified."

They show that individuals' work identity narratives "may not merely lack coherence but incorporate antagonisms" (Clarke et al, 2009:347; Sims, 2008). It appears that some conflict between identities may be tolerable. This tolerable level of conflict prompts switching between social identities without prompting deep identity work on the social identities.

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[2] The distributors triggered the sense-breaking; the individual allows it to happen and performs it.

I use identity work to refer to deep identity work, rather than switching between multiple social identities.

2.2.2 Identification as part of identity work

I am interested in identity work relating to organization membership. Why am I not focusing on organizational identification? The dynamic, rather than static, meaning of identification refers to the process of identification (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000b). In this dynamic sense, identification refers to the ongoing "process of becoming", focusing on how individuals bring aspects of an organization into their identities (Ashforth et al, 2008: 339). Ashforth et al (2008: 346) consider there is:

> "a relative dearth of research explicitly focusing on the process of identification [...]. In our view, research on the process of identification is a low-hanging fruit for future research."

The word 'identification' emphasises the individual's effort to integrate the organizational identity in to their own identity through the forming of a positive attachment. It underplays not only the balance of identity work at the boundary, but also any work by the individual to get the organization to adopt aspects of the individual. In relation to occupation, Kreiner et al (2006a) describe identification as one part of identity work at the boundary of personal and social identities, balanced by identity work to preserve the personal identity. In a similar vein, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) saw the inner narrative personal identity as a "source of stability and occasional resistance" over time in identity work (2003: 1166).

Does the expanded model of identification (Pratt, 2000; Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004) address my concerns? This expanded model of organizational identification comprises: identification, disidentification, ambivalent identification, and neutral identification (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). An individual may define their self-concept not only by affinity with an organization but also by, for example, cognitively separating themselves from an organization (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). This expanded model illuminates the complexity of an individual's identity work in relation to an organization but I am cautious of using this stream of social identity literature because the results are not perhaps as strong as the reliance later placed on them (see Appendix II). Even with the expanded model

of identification (Pratt, 2000; Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004), studies of identification still underplay any efforts by the individual to influence the group identity.

Kreiner et al (2006) looked at identification as part of identity work with the occupation as referent. They include not only differentiating as well as integrating but also refreshing identity tactics. They go on to suggest "another clear area for future research is to test the applicability of these identity dynamics with the *organization* as the referent for identity work, as opposed to the *occupation*" (2006: 1054). I follow Kreiner et al (2006a) in seeing identity work relating to organization membership as including but not limited to the process of organizational identification.

2.2.3 Cycles of identity work

If part of identity work at the boundary of personal and social identities is identification, cycles of identification are relevant to identity work at the boundary. Dutton et al (1994) drew together a wide range of research on organizational identification at the time to link the perceived organizational identity and construed external image to strength of organizational identification. Organizational images feed in to the perceived organizational identity. The principles of self-definition (self-continuity, self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement) feed in to the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity and construed external image, which both feed the strength of organizational identification. The perceived organizational identity and construed external image are presented as antecedents of the strength of organizational identification. Dutton et al also captured ideas about reinforcement cycles of identification, proposing that the greater the strength of organizational identification generated, the more members will evaluate the perceived organizational identity and construed external image as attractive (building on Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As will be discussed further below in 2.3, existing identification affects subsequent interpretations of interactions and communications (Weick, 1995; DiSanza and Bullis, 1999; Martin and Epitropaki, 2001). This is where work on organizational communications and managerial attempts to control perceptions, such as, DiSanza and Bullis (1999), Gioia et al (2000) and Ravasi and Phillips (2011), contribute to our understanding of identity work. Managers can seek to control the

images of the organization available to the individual and to those external to the organization. Indeed Elsbach and Kramer (1996) argued that any member who identifies with an organization may engage in work to manage others' perceptions.

However the process of identification is based on the interpretation of many interactions, some of which may be rejecting of the individual. As a whole these have been depicted in Ashforth et al's Process Model of Identification (2008: 341, Figure 2), which shows an episode of identification. The individual enacts an identity, members of the organization give sensebreaking and sensegiving messages, these are interpreted by the individual, incorporated in to an identity narrative and the cycle repeats. As Brown (2014:4) notes, there are "patches of agreement" between different identity traditions. The emphasis here on interactions resonates with work on identity claims (Beech, MacIntosh and McInnes, 2008) and identities as socially constructed stories (Westenholz, 2006).

According to social identity theory, the strength of identification will affect the interpretation of the interactions (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Ashforth et al draw on the work on the process of identification of Pratt (1998) and Ibarra (1999). The Process Model shows "the individual linking together "who I am now" with "who I have been" and "who I might become" from each episode of identification" (Ashforth et al, 2008: 340) to construct an identity narrative.

In Ashforth et al and Dutton et al's diagrams, identification refers to the ongoing "process of becoming", focusing on how individuals bring aspects of an organization into their identities (Ashforth et al, 2008: 339) to a point where they experience the organization's highs and lows as their own and tend to act in support of the organization. However identification is only part of the identity work at the boundary. While Dutton et al (1994) have self-distinctiveness as one of the self-definition needs at the centre of their figure, they sought only to depict those contributing to the strength of organizational identification. Ashforth et al (2008) focus only on the boundary of the organization and the individual. Kreiner et al (2006a) model identity work, rather than identification. The identity demands of the occupation/organization are balanced by the identity demands of the culture of individualism. Identity demands are:

> "situational factors that pressure individuals toward extreme integration or segmentation of personal and social identities" (Kreiner et al, 2006a: 1034).

Kreiner et al also include competing individual factors, with the need for self-enhancement (by association with the occupation/organization) balanced by the need for uniqueness (through separation from the occupation/organization). The reinforcement cycle of Dutton et al becomes a detailed focus on just part of the ongoing negotiation at the boundary of the personal and social identities, to achieve an optimal balance. Ashforth et al's sensebreaking and sensegiving messages from organization members would be pitted against messages from outside the occupation/organization. To fully understand the boundary of personal and organization membership it is necessary to include such opposing factors when exploring organizational identification, in other words, to take an identity work approach to investigating the making, maintaining and revising of social identities. The opposing situational demands and individual needs echo work on resistance (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) and cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2003).

For responding to these situational demands and individual needs Kreiner et al listed three types of identity work tactics: integration tactics, differentiation tactics and neutral/dual-function tactics. I now turn to look at identity work activities.

2.2.4 Types of identity work

Given the conceptual divide in social identity theory between the personal and social identities, both internal to the individual identity, and the group identity, seen as a collective identity relating to who 'we' are, I separate the activities by the objects to which they relate. While studies such as Kreiner et al (2006a) have focused in on work on the individual identity, others have explored both internal and external work, such as Elsbach and Kramer's (1996) study combining internal identity work and external impression management.

2.2.4.1 Work activities on individual identity

In their early empirical study of identity construction amongst homeless people, Snow and Anderson (1987) split the identity work tactics in to three categories: distancing (from homeless people as a group, from the role, from agencies), embracement (acceptance of role identity, of other homeless people, of beliefs about

homeless people) and fictive storytelling (use of fictional identities). They suggested the use of these tactics was linked to the length of tenure as a homeless person. Kreiner et al's (2006a) integration, differentiation and dual function tactics reflect similar categories, but Kreiner et al saw them all being used on an ongoing basis to maintain equilibrium between internal personal and social identities. Considering the performance of identity work with others, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) theorised the creating of identity narrative repertoires for different audiences and elaborated the narrative process as a form of identity work; and Petriglieri and Stein (2012) described the use by leaders of projecting unwanted aspects of their individual identities on to others.

Remembering the distinction between the perception and intensity elements of a social identity sheds light on identity work studies to date, for example, applied to the identity work tactics in Kreiner et al (2006a) which look at the boundary of an internal social identity and the personal identity, it highlights that the study focused on the maintenance of the balance between the two; there are no tactics in that study for updating the perception part of a social identity over time. Looking at perceptions relating to role identity, Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006:255) discussed "specific types of customization (e.g., identity enriching, patching, and splinting); sources of customization (identity sets); and sources of validation of these identities (e.g., grapevine feedback and role models)," describing the role identity learning (rather than balancing) cycles of medical residents and doctors. 'Enriching' acknowledges how the understanding of an identity can become deeper and more nuanced, therefore having a different emphasis to the idea of repairing damage. Similarly 'patching' and 'splinting' are about adding to an identity, or ongoing learning. Pratt et al (2006) studied role identity in junior professionals. Is validation of new identities from senior people or learning from role models still available to those who are themselves senior and defining of an organization?

None of these studies took the organization as referent for the identity work. While it has been proposed that more parsimonious conceptions of identification may be possible (Ashforth et al, 2008), studies have yet to test the use of such processes in other settings. However studies of identity in organizations have focused on the regulation of the self in the face of efforts by others in the organization to control the subjective understanding of the self (Covaleski et al, 1998, Alvesson and Willmott,

2002). Humphreys and Brown (2002) who, using narrative identities, expressly consider identity work relating to the organization on both individual and collective narratives, described employees ignoring and contesting attempts by managers to overwrite the organization identity. As will be discussed further in 2.3 below, managers are constructing their identities within organizations as well as seeking to manage the organization identity.

2.2.4.2 Work activities on the group identity

Studies emphasising a reciprocal dynamic between individual and organizational identity (Empson, 2004; Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006b) and the value of combining institutional claim and collective understanding approaches to organizational identity (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006) acknowledge:

> "the freedom that organizational members enjoy in renegotiating shared interpretations about what their organization is about." (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006:436)

Focusing on the 'content' rather than the 'strength' of an identification raises questions about the extent to which members push back against identity demands from groups and seek not only to resist or distinguish those demands (Karreman and Alvesson, 2009; Fleming and Spicer, 2003) but also to change the group identity. A broad interpretation of identity work would include attempts by managers to control the image of an organization, for two reasons:

- Dutton et al's (1994) feedback loop shows how image affects perception, which affects identification strength; and
- these studies can contribute to understanding the identity work of those issuing the communications (Scott and Lane, 2000; Humphreys and Brown, 2002).

Studies have included how organization leaders strive to control the perceptions held by members of the group (DiSanza and Bullis, 1999; Gioia et al, 2000; Ravasi and Phillips, 2011). Leaders who perceive discrepancy between their perception of the organization and the image of the organization may engage in work to realign those (Ravasi and Phillips, 2011; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach and Sutton, 1992).

This work to influence the perceived organization image may work to influence a group identity to better suit the individual. DiSanza and Bullis (1999), building on the work of Burke (1969) and Cheney (1983), listed strategies used by organizations in general communications, such as, newsletters, to include, inter alia:

- common ground : espousing shared values, repeating praise by outsiders, offering testimonials by employees, recognising individuals contributions at work group level, recognising individuals contributions outside the organization, and bragging about completed projects;
- antithesis: invoking a common enemy to implicitly portray insiders as a united collective;
- using "we": a subtle appeal to identify with the collective; and
- unifying symbols: invoking a revered symbol and its meaning.

Similarly Humphreys and Brown (2002) describe attempts by managers to control the collective narrative of an organization, including authoring a new identity and overwriting previous identities. These verbs for influencing others' identities contrast with the integrating, differentiating and refreshing identity work on individual identity. Seeking to change others' perceptions of the organization, if successful, results in change in the organization identity in the desired direction. This identity work has been described as available only to managers; is it available to an individual who is just one of many owners or just one of many managers? Elsbach and Kramer (1996) argued any member who identifies with an organization may engage in work to manage other's perceptions.

A recent study suggests it is not only leaders who strive to influence organizational identity. Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville and Scully (2010: 674) describe a group of Roman Catholics who sought to resolve their identity crises after recent scandals in the Church by separating themselves from the existing administration of the Church while retaining the true essence of the Church.

> "Through splitting, individuals can retain a high level of identification with valued aspects of an entity while calling for other aspects to be reformed or restored," Gutierrez et al (2010: 674).

Gutierrez et al describe this identity work as allowing continued involvement, rather than exit from the entity, although in that case the split identity ended up being sustained rather than re-united. Inter alia, Gutierrez et al describe the group discussions (interactions) which enabled the problematizing and envisioning of a solution. They argue this focus on splitting as identity work goes beyond theory on 'ambivalent' identification or 'schizo-identification' (Dukerich et al, 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Humphreys and Brown, 2002) because rather than just accommodating mixed feelings about the entity, it is "a mechanism for repairing identification" (Gutierrez et al, 2010:674). They describe splitting as a collective activity.

As an individual activity, Sluss and Ashforth (2007:12) proposed that, except in very strong situations, individuals can enact a role-based identity "according to their own needs and preferences," so a person-based identity influences the enactment of a role-based identity. Enacting a role-identity in your own way then influences the identity attaching to the role. What this adds to ideas about strength of identification is the injection of something personal in to the enactment of an identity; rather than just adopting some but not all of a collective identity. If organizational identification is based on a perception of an amalgam of roles, collectives and relationships, this effect is part of the influencing identity work performed by individuals in organizations. However when the focus of identity work is the organization, would an individual feel they had an influence on the group identity to the same degree as influencing the performance of a role?

These attempts to influence organizational identity reflect recent studies of institutional work, which include identity work as one form of institutional work (Empson, Cleaver and Allen, 2013; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Here identity work is involved in the disruption of an existing institution as well as the creation of a new one.

How do individuals use these various identity work tactics? Recent research proposed that the source of an identity threat may predict how a person will respond to the threat (Petriglieri, 2011). It has also been predicted that individuals will use identity-protection responses, such as, blaming the source of the threat, before using identity-restructuring responses, such as, reducing the value of the membership to the individual (Petriglieri, 2011).

> "Scant attention has been paid, however, to what happens in-between an identity threatening experience and its consequences—that is, to the process by which individuals recognize an experience as identity threatening, assess its impact, and decide how to respond to it," (Petriglieri, 2011:642).

While there are various recent studies describing particular tactics, such as 'splitting' or 'splinting,' there is little to date on how individuals combine identity work activities to achieve successful identity work relating to ongoing organization membership. I therefore now consider the individuals, or the subjects of the identity work verbs, who are combining the verbs and the objects to work on identities.

2.3 Who are the performers of identity work, or the subjects of the verbs?

In this section I explore the subjects of identity work verbs with regard to: individual needs; the individual as target; the changing individual; individual level differences; and the impact of existing identification.

2.3.1 Individual needs

I mentioned above the principles of self-definition (self-continuity, self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement) feeding in to the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity and construed external image, which both feed the strength of organizational identification in Dutton et al's (1994) model. Individuals are driven to form social identities. Categorizing people enables the individual to impose order on their world and to locate themselves in that order (Mael and Ashforth, 1995). Brewer (1991:477) contends that the adoption of social identities is driven by:

> "human needs for validation and similarity to others (on the one hand) and a countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation (on the other)."

Social identity is hypothesized to be strongest for social categories that simultaneously satisfy both of these. If groups become too large and heterogeneous they will lose their distinctiveness causing identification with the group to fall.

Individuals seek a balance between assimilation and differentiation from the social group and may feel excluded if underidentified or a loss of self if overidentified. It is therefore in the interests of work organizations to support the whole of an individual's

identity work at the boundary, not to focus solely on inducing high identification to the exclusion of promoting a balance with the personal identity (Kreiner et al, 2006a).

2.3.2 Individual as target

Identity work relating to organizational membership may be triggered by "forces toward integration" (identity demands from the organization) or by "forces toward differentiation" (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Yet as Pratt et al (2006:237) observed, little has been said:

> "about how members actively use identity-related information to construct their own identities."

Sensegiving by the organization has received attention from both the identity and communications literatures (Ashforth et al, 2008; Pratt, 2000a and 2000b; Covaleski et al, 1988; DiSanza and Bullis, 1999). As noted above, the leaders in organizations both define and are defined by the organization.

Sensegiving is not the only role of organization members in identity construction. Individuals in organizations also send sense-breaking messages. Psychological contract breach, where the individual believes the organization to have failed to meet perceived obligations, has been found to undermine organizational identification (Epitropaki, 2003; Epitropaki, 2013). As well as being the source of identity demands, the organization can also be the source of identity threats. What do individuals do with contradictory messages from the organization? An organization might declare its people to be the focus of its attention (asserting an identity), while also being the source of a psychological contract breach event (an identity threat). The easy answer is to predict exit from the organization to get rid of the contradiction. How might an individual in receipt of such conflicting messages perform identity work to stay?

2.3.3 Change over time

Both organizations and individuals are dynamic so these forces change over time too. While "changing the meanings of an established identity can threaten an individual's legitimacy as a holder of the identity" (Petriglieri, 2011: 652), for example, a merger of two organizations will trigger identity work in members (Maguire and

Phillips, 2008), identity work can also be triggered by changes in the individual. Identity threats have been defined as any "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011). An event such as the member's fortieth birthday could trigger reflection on the member's identity. A member might realise he/she had been in the one organization for twenty years and question whether he/she sees him/herself doing the same thing for another twenty years.

2.3.4 Individual level differences

Identity work scholars have suggested that identity work may vary with age. Ibarra (1999) when looking at the construction of role identity suggested that professional identities would be more mutable early in an individual's career. The literature on older employees says that they require competency in the learning skill of identity growth and increased adaptability (Hall and Mirvis, 1995). Hall and Mirvis go on to note that for older employees who have spent years developing a particular work identity, changing that identity may be particularly challenging. Petriglieri (2011) suggested for identity relating to organization membership that meaning change would more likely be used on newly acquired, rather than long-held, identities; changing the value, or importance, of an identity would be more likely for established identities.

It may be that tenure as a member of a work organization would affect identity work tactics used in organizational identification as well. Snow and Anderson (1987) in their early empirical study of identity construction amongst homeless people found some evidence of individual level differences affecting identity work. They found that the patterns of identity talk suggested that identity work tactics varied with the length of time spent on the streets i.e. tenure as a homeless person. This study will seek to allow for this possible variation.

2.3.5 Effect of identification on individual

According to social categorization theory, which developed out of social identity theory, when a particular social identity is salient to an individual, that person will shift away from seeing themselves as an individual and towards seeing themselves as an exemplar of that social group (Brewer, 1991). This performance by group

members of a perceived prototype produces social identity phenomena (Turner et al, 1994). It has been proposed that members will then make decisions that benefit the social group and disadvantage outgroups (Pratt, 2000b). When the social group is a work organization, organizational identification has been found to correlate with a variety of work-related attitudes and work-related behaviours (meta-analysis, Riketta, 2005). Organizational identification is positively related to work motivation and task performance (van Knippenberg, 2000). Organizational identification is a better predictor than organizational commitment of extra-role performance (Riketta, 2005).

However organizational identification affects employees' perceptions of leaders' behaviours (Martin and Epitropaki, 2001) and it has been argued that leaders' conformity to the group prototype influences followers' perceptions of the leaders' behaviour (Platow et al, 2006). If members of a group overidentify, they might not question the ethicality or legality of the behaviour of the group (Dukerich et al, 1998). Highly identified members have been found to continue their commitment to a failing organizational project (Haslam et al, 2006). Given that organizational identification affects employees' perceptions of leaders' behaviours, it will affect the interpretation of leaders' attempts to influence the identity of the organization.

Individuals reading communications from organizations have existing levels of organizational identification which affect how they receive messages:

> "If the organization is unsuccessful at shaping members' early identification, experiences may be negative. Furthermore, if those personal experiences conflict with current organizational persuasive efforts, past personal experiences not only will guide interpretation, but organizational discourse also is likely to be interpreted negatively and dismissed." (DiSanza and Bullis, 1999: 391)

People who already identify are likely to interpret communications as reinforcing of their organizational identification; people who already disidentify are likely to interpret communications as reinforcing their disidentifaction. But how is identity work performed at this identification/disidentification point? The identity work to pass between these positions is less clear.

> "In fact, because employees with low feelings of membership and negative personal experiences tend to interpret articles in ways that reinforce their negative beliefs, newsletters may worsen their attitudes toward the organization, not improve them … Changing degenerative identification spirals is only possible by improving the work context. This is especially true in organizations that consist of career employees." (DiSanza and Bullis, 1999: 394)

This identity work relating to organization membership has not yet been fully explored. As well as being salient, existing identities can presumably be the objects of identity work both when an identity is salient and when it is not. The combination of salience and cycles of de-identification is not clear. Petriglieri (2011) considered responses to identity threats, yet the combination of salience and the assessment of identity threat has yet to attract much attention. Similarly the combination of salience and high identity demand organizations is ripe for further exploration.

DiSanza and Bullis (1999) recognised the importance of doing more than merely sending out mass communications to reverse cycles of de-identification. The actions that sophisticated high identity demand organizations might want to take to reverse such cycles are less clear. This is not socialization in to a new identity, nor is it maintenance of a valued identity because the value of the identity to the individual is damaged.

Pratt et al's (2006) enriching, patching and splinting took account of the impact of existing identity on subsequent identity work. Their model accommodated a base identity against which current identity work is performed. Returning to Figure 2.1, Ashforth et al's episodes of identification are occurring repeatedly for every social identity, or every colour. Interactions with others are continuously feeding in to the narrative to change the combination of colours, or thickness of any strand. Studies of the reversal of cycles of de-identification will be complicated by the impact of residual identities on individuals. Individuals who have been socialized in one period maintain their organizational identification through cycles of identity work affected by their existing identification; that residual identification may mean that individuals socialized in to an organization at a different time perform maintenance identity work relating to the same event in a different way. If individuals, for example, demonise

the source of an identity threat to protect their identity, in preference to altering their organizational identification, there may be increasing disparity between their perceptions of the organization and those held by others. How might identity work be performed by members of a group where individuals have been socialised in to the group at different times and the group has evolved in the intervening period?

> "As both individuals and their social contexts are dynamic, so too will be the relationship between them." (Kreiner et al, 2006a:1032)

I now turn to the dynamic context for this study of identity work: professional service firms.

2.4 Professional service firms

High identity demand organizations provide a rich context for the study of identity work relating to organization membership. In this section I consider:

What characteristics of PSFs make them high identity demand organizations?

Which individuals should be studied? Why?

What types of identity challenge for professionals are suggested by the literature?

Why is a study of identity work performed by professionals important?

2.4.1 What characteristics of PSFs make them high identity demand organizations?

A high identity demand organization imposes significant forces on members towards integration with the role/collective (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Past research suggests PSFs impose strong identity demands on the professionals as a means of controlling them (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian and Samuel, 1988 on accountants; Alvesson and Empson, 2008 on consultants; Brown and Lewis, 2011 on lawyers). Organization processes such as profit allocation, promotion processes and annual reviews all act as sense-givers and sense-breakers. Alvesson and Karreman (2007) provide a

detailed examination of how HRM practices act as a mechanism connecting organizational identity and individual identity projects in a management consultancy. Alvesson and Karreman (2007:713) define individual identity projects to include:

> "long term orientations and self-improvement efforts supported by cultural norms and guidelines structured by a specific social architecture (e.g., an HRM system). Identity projects bear the imprints of organizational arrangements and are prone to efforts of identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), rather than emerging more or less spontaneously."

Although in Alvesson and Karreman's study the role of senior professionals is characterized mainly as sense-givers, Covaleski et al (1998: 322) described the ongoing operation of management by objectives (as sense-breaking) and mentoring (as sense-giving) in Big Six public accounting firms to show "how control is enacted at the level of constituting the subjectivity of firm partners, in the realm of their identities." The control of professionals through their subjectivity is not limited to the junior ranks. The partners are not only controlling but also controlled.

There is an ongoing debate about the exact meaning of "professional service firm" ("PSF") (for example, Lowendahl, 2005). A broad definition (used in studies such as Empson and Chapman, 2006) includes not only firms in the highly regulated professional industries such as law and accounting but also those in knowledge–rich industries like management consulting and advertising. A narrow definition restricts the term to the industries where entry and practice are strictly regulated (for example, Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007). However the professional service firm literature has been criticised for "conflating the implications of professionalization with those of knowledge intensity" (von Nordenflycht, 2010:155). Professionalization and knowledge intensity have different managerial and organizational implications. If professional industries vary along the dimensions of professionalization and knowledge intensity, then the implied utility of controlling the subjectivity of firm partners as a managerial approach will also vary. It is not necessarily the case, therefore, that all PSFs will make high identity demands of their members.

What characteristics suggest that high identity demands will be present? In von Nordenflycht's (2010) taxonomy, knowledge intensive firms rely "on an intellectually skilled workforce, not just among its executive or support functions (e.g., R&D) but

also among its “frontline workers” (Alvesson, 2000; Starbuck, 1992)” (2010:159) and this reliance gives rise to two managerial challenges: “cat herding” (2010:160), or retaining and directing the intellectually skilled workforce; and “opaque quality” (2010:161) where the quality of the output of the intellectually skilled workforce is difficult for customers to evaluate. As Alvesson (2001) argues, ambiguity is inherent in knowledge work and the regulation of employee identities provides a solution to the challenges raised by ambiguity.

Knowledge intensity is not, however, an adequate description of a PSF (von Nordenflycht, 2010). PSFs are also characterised, to varying degrees, by low capital intensity and a professionalized workforce. Von Nordenflycht links low capital intensity to the intensity of the retaining and directing problem (the human and social capital is therefore potentially highly mobile), making knowledge intensive firms which also have low capital intensity potentially rich contexts for investigating identity work relating to organization membership. A highly knowledge intensive firm with low capital intensity would be likely to be making high identity demands. Examples of firms with both knowledge intensity and low capital intensity are the regulated PSFs, such as, law and accounting, and von Nordenflycht’s “neo-PSFs”, such as, consulting (2010:166). He contrasts these with hospitals where medical equipment and highly specialized buildings are required.

Von Nordenflycht’s third characteristic, a professionalized workforce, includes the features that the use of the knowledge base is regulated and controlled and there is a shared ideology. This distinguishes the regulated PSFs from the neo-PSFs. In law and accountancy the professionals have claimed jurisdiction over an identifiable body of knowledge and regulate the exploitation of it (Abbott, 1988) but in management consultancy the expert knowledge is less clearly defined and there are no single recognised national institutions regulating entrance to the profession and the conduct of professionals. Indeed the European Court of Justice, in response to a request from Germany, said legal regulation of consultants would be impossible (Gross & Kieser, 2006). von Nordenflycht’s explanation highlights changing responses of professional industries to the problem of opaque quality; drawing on McKenna (2006) he argues that while regulated professions, such as, law and accounting, can refer to regulation as a mark of quality, other professions, such as management consulting, use “firm-specific reputations” (2010:163). However I

would argue this varies across the professions; the big accountancy and law firms are perhaps closer to the "firm-specific reputation" model than relying on membership of their professions to answer opaque quality. The large audit firms have set the benchmark for best practice in their industry (Ramirez, 2013) and across both industries the large firms are increasingly important influences on the norms of the industries (Muzio, Brock and Suddaby, 2013:700):

> "Professional firms now tend to be multidisciplinary (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) and transnational (Brock et al., 2006; Suddaby et al., 2007), eroding the value of traditional institutions of self-regulation (Clementi, 2004) and making the professional service firm the primary site of professional control and regulation (Cooper and Robson, 2006)."

Further, in discussing the implications of the professional ideology, von Nordenflycht focuses on the norm that outside ownership would compromise the ethical performance of professional work, even though in the UK at least this professional norm is changing e.g. The Legal Services Act (HM Government, 2007) allows non-lawyers in UK law firms to become partners (Empson, Cleaver and Allen, 2013). The professionalization of the workforce may therefore be increasingly less relevant than von Nordenflycht suggested in 2010 to whether a firm uses the mechanisms which promote a high identity demand environment. Like the large consultancies, the large, international law and accountancy firms with worldwide brands also rely on firm-specific reputations. The regulated/less-regulated distinction may be relevant to identity work in the sense that a professional identity, if inconsistent with the organizational identity, may be a source of identity conflict for a professional. However Gunz and Gunz (2007) suggest individual professionals perceive less identity conflict between organizational and professional identities than theory might predict, so even on this basis the regulatory distinction may not predict greater use of high identity demands towards integration with the organization.

Although von Nordenflycht reaches the conclusion that regulated PSFs are extreme examples of knowledge-intensive firms, facing the most intense cat-herding challenge, when considering large firms it appears that accountancy, law and management consultancy are all industries in which the organizations are likely to make high identity demands.

Organizational identity provides a response to the managerial and organizational challenges in these industries (Empson, 2004). Organizational identity performs several functions in PSFs. It can:

> "provide a focus for member identification in an insecure employment environment; it can serve as an informal means of managerial control within a diffuse authority structure; and it can represent a tangible 'external' identity within the context of an intangible service offering." (Empson, 2004: 759)

The arguments so far have focused on inter-professional industry variation but there is also growing interest in intra-professional industry heterogeneity. At an organization level, within a single professional industry, there are multiple forms of governance (Malhotra and Morris, 2009). So even within industries with the same knowledge intensity, capital intensity and degree of professionalization there is heterogeneity in forms of governance.

Historically firms in industries which are both knowledge intensive and highly professionalized have been partnerships rather than companies. Large UK PSFs are typically run as partnerships in which the partners between them both own the firm and work as professionals in the firm (Greenwood and Empson, 2003). In the legal and accounting industries partnership was a matter of regulation but as Empson and Chapman (2006) explain, partnership as a form of governance also suited PSFs well because it balanced the interests of clients, owners and professionals. Greenwood and Empson (2003) explain the benefits of partnership as follows: by placing ownership of the firm in the hands of the professionals, it reduces the risk of each professional taking their knowledge and client contacts elsewhere; by making the professionals liable for each other's mistakes and able to share in each other's success, it provides efficient quality control of highly individual products while allowing the professionals to enjoy a high level of autonomy to determine their own role; and the personal liability of the partners enables clients to trust the product in industries in which it is difficult to test the product in advance. The structure reflects the relative power of partners; powerful because they perform "individualised, indivisible work" (Greenwood, Hinings and Brown, 1990:734) and they hold the key assets of knowledge and relationships (Maister, 1997). While there was always variety in the detailed structure of individual firms, even within

individual industries, the Professional Partnership (P^2) archetype, based on large accountancy firms, is often used to describe the traditional organization of PSFs (Greenwood, Hinings and Brown, 1990). This partnership structure itself supports the subjective control of professionals. In partnerships the goal of partnership makes a junior professional ask questions about him/herself (sense-breaking). The junior perceives a gap between their current understanding of their self and their dream view as a partner and the partner election process provides a road-map (sense-giving).

However the traditional partnership model has some disadvantages. As firms grew there was a tension between participation through having a voice in governance and the benefits of bureaucracy through rational managerial structures (Nelson, 1988). The partnership structure was increasingly regarded as problematic, due to endless committees and typically a lack of strategic direction (Aharoni, 1999). As firms grew, a new archetype emerged: the Managed Professional Business based on a study of large law firms (MPB) (Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood and Brown, 1996). The MPB did not necessarily replace the P^2; in some firms the P^2 was wrapped in layers of the more business-like managerial systems, structures and values of the MPB. As PSFs continued to grow rapidly, expanded overseas, faced increasingly litigious clients and needed to raise capital to invest in the technology required to survive in competitive markets, they adapted in a wide variety of ways, some becoming public companies, some private companies, others adding elements of corporate governance to a partnership (Empson & Chapman, 2006). Rapidly changing PSFs continue to strive to find the new perfect form of governance, for example, in May 2007 the multinational law firm Linklaters adopted limited liability partnership status (Linklaters, 2008); and in January 2014 the multinational audit firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) was approved as an Alternative Business Structure (ABS) by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), enabling PwC to become an owner of PwC Legal (Lex100, 2014), combining lawyers with accountants and consultants. There is heterogeneity in forms of governance both between and within PSF industries (Malhotra, Morris and Hinings, 2006; Malhotra and Morris, 2009). Not only do partnerships vary in their structure and values but the use of a partnership promotion system is not always accompanied by a legal form of partnership. The structures of large global firms are complex and vary by country,

even within one firm. As PricewaterhouseCoopers succinctly explain: "The PwC network is not a global partnership, a single firm, or a multinational corporation." (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014)

In spite of the variety of legal forms of governance, it is still possible to find core principles of partnership and professionalism common to large multinational PSFs: management should be kept to a minimum, managers should strive for long term rather than short term growth, and individuals should have autonomy to pursue their professional interests (Empson & Chapman, 2006). In this way partnership is now used not only as a legal form of governance but also as an interpretive scheme of governance (Empson and Chapman, 2006). For example, a firm may have legal governance in the form of a private company but overlay a non-legal partnership scheme, even still electing members as 'partners.'

A high identity demand organization places significant forces on members towards integration. As a managerial response this is likely to be found in professional service firms which are knowledge-intensive and have low capital intensity. The form of governance in these firms is typically partnership. Partnership may be a legal form or an interpretive scheme. Historically it has been the stipulated form of ownership in the regulated professions but it has also been adopted by neo-PSFs by choice. The HRM practices associated with the larger more bureaucratized partnerships act as mechanisms connecting organizational identity and individual identity projects. These high identity demand environments which use partnership are a rich setting for the investigation of identity work relating to membership.

2.4.2 Which individuals? Why?

Within the firms from which these individuals are drawn there are professionals working on the core service the firm provides and also others working to support the professionals. However the ownership largely still rests in the hands of the professionals. The partners, as owners of the firm and working within the firm, are figureheads and therefore each partly defining of the organization identity. From an identity theory perspective, the utility of organizational identity and professional identity in these industries is in regulating the professional work and enticing the individual professionals to work for the benefit of the firm. The professionals are the cats to be herded. The high identity demands are targeted on the professionals.

This project therefore focused on professionals in the firms, rather than the business services staff.

In professional partnerships the professionals can broadly be divided in to trainees, qualified professionals, assistants/managers and partners (see Alvesson and Karreman, 2007, for a detailed description of HRM practices in a management consultancy). The trainees are being socialized in to the organization. The qualified professionals are motivated by the possibility of partnership to work their way up through the ranks. The largest UK law firms have traditionally used up-or-out structures and the probability of a newly recruited trainee making partner is low (Morris and Pinnington, 1998). It is the partners who are considered to be defining of the firm. Their expertise is leveraged through the teams of trainees and qualified professionals (Maister, 1997).

The pyramid shape of most partnerships illustrates the competitive nature of the path to partnership (Galanter and Palay, 1991). Not all professionals can be promoted to partner so there is an expectation that there will be movement in the non-partner professional population. However if an individual is granted partnership in the full sense (with equity in the firm) then the individual takes on some ownership of the firm and is expected to be committed to the firm. Although it has been argued that professional careers are increasingly discontinuous and that discontinuous careers give rise to tougher identity work than continuous careers following conventional paths in an organization (Ashforth et al, 2008; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), existing work also comments on the strong expectation of loyalty and describes such organizations as career organizations where even new joiners expect to stay and progress (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). Table 2.1 below shows the tenure in the firm and the tenure as a partner of the senior partners in four top UK law firms. The shortest tenure as a partner was 22 years. The following quote is the first two paragraphs from a press release issued by a Big 4 accountancy firm to announce the new global chairman; the inclusion and prominence of the length of service of both the outgoing and incoming chairmen illustrate a similar emphasis on length of service:

> “Michael Andrew, 54, has been elected Chairman of KPMG International. He will lead the KPMG global network of professional services firms providing

> Audit, Tax, and Advisory services for a four-year term, effective October 1, 2011. He succeeds Timothy P. Flynn, who announced in January that after 32 years with KPMG, he would retire when his term as Global Chairman expired at the end of September 2011.
>
> Michael Andrew, who will be based in Hong Kong, is currently Chairman of KPMG Asia Pacific and also of KPMG Australia; he was elected to his new role unanimously by KPMG International's Global Board and Council. In his 27 years with KPMG, Andrew has had broad experience in emerging markets, both in Eastern Europe and Asia Pacific, and has been a key driver of the Australian firm's robust growth. In recent times, he has been one of the architects of KPMG's global strategy." (KPMG, 2014)

While this may change with the introduction of ABS mentioned above, the promotion to the most senior positions in the firm of people who have demonstrated long-term loyalty to the firm reinforces the expectation that partners should stay committed to their firms. If an individual is selected to become a partner, which may happen in his/her early thirties, he/she may then stay in that same firm for over 25 years (Morris and Pinnington, 1998). Given this tendency, PSFs provide the opportunity to study partners, those individuals both controlling and controlled by the firm, with a variety of tenures in the organization.

Partners are managers, workers and owners (Greenwood et al, 1990). Just as Ashforth et al (2007) looked at managers in dirty work occupations because they face challenges not faced by frontline workers, similarly partners face expectations not faced by frontline workers in PSFs. As outlined in the Introduction above, an individual who, for example, joined a firm in 1975 and was made a partner in 1984, over the course of 25 years shares the ownership and management of his firm with partners of varying ages, including some who have been made partner in 2009. Similarly, in 1984, some of his/her then fellow partners may themselves have been partners for 25 years already, having been made partners in 1959. At different times he/she is likely to have shared the ownership and management of his/her organization with individuals made up to partner over a period of 50 years. A partner therefore shares the ownership and management of the firm with people who have been socialized in to the firm at a variety of points over 50 years. Prior socialization

is relevant to how individuals subsequently construct identities (Pratt et al, 2006) so there may be considerable variation between fellow partners responding to the same identity threats, making these 'career organizations' a rich environment for the study of identity work relating to organization membership.

I look at the identity work of the partners in these firms because they are in high identity demand environments and there is an expectation they should stay in that environment. To meet the expectation, they have to perform maintenance identity work relating to their organization membership as the organization, and they, change over time. The partnership comprises a group of people who have been socialised in to the organization at a variety of points spanning over 50 years, potentially providing diversity in the performance of identity work relating to the organization.

Firm name	Overall tenure at the firm/years	Tenure as a partner at the firm/years	Source
Linklaters	36	30	http://www.linklaters.com/WhoWeAre/OurPeople/Pages/DavidCheyne.aspx
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	(joint senior partners) - 24	(joint senior partners) 24 20	http://www.freshfields.com/people/profile/11/2622 and http://www.freshfields.com/people/profile/11/20397
Clifford Chance	34	26	http://www.cliffordchance.com/directory/lawyers/details.aspx?FilterName=@URL&LangID=UK&contentitemid=4048
Allen & Overy	30	22	http://www.allenovery.com/AOWEB/PeopleOffices/CVDetails.aspx?contentTypeID=4&itemID=5597&prefLangID=410

Table 2.1 Tenure of the senior partners at the top four UK law firms

(top four by 2009 turnover according to The Lawyer, 2010; tenure calculated as at 29.03.10)

Not only are partners the targets of ongoing high identity demands, but also, to the extent that organizational identification is induced in them, it is likely to be salient

frequently. Accountant, consultant and lawyer partners are often in front of clients, representing their organization. In contrast to van Knippenberg and van Schie, (2000), they are therefore frequently approached in terms of their organizational membership, rather than working mainly within their organization and being approached in terms of their department membership.

Membership of an elite firm is also associated with high status, for example, the law firms with the highest financial turnover (in 2009, Linklaters, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Clifford Chance, Allen & Overy (The Lawyer, 2010)) and in which the profits per partner are high (for example, for the financial years ending 30 April 2007, 2008 and 2009 at Allen and Overy the profits per equity partner were at least £1 million (Allen & Overy, 2009)) are elite organizations at the top of an established profession. Social identities attributable to organizations of high status may be more subjectively important to individuals (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001) and therefore, again, likely to be salient frequently.

What defines a partner? Whichever professional industry a partner is in, the organizations in which they work are commercial and it is generally a pre-requisite of gaining and keeping partnership that an individual can generate a profit from client work (Anand et al, 2007). The role of the partner is looked at incidentally in much of the literature on PSFs (for example, Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood and Brown, 1996; Malhotra, Morris and Hinings, 2006) and is the focus of attention in the practitioner-oriented literature (for example, Maister, 1997; Lowendahl, 2005). Aharoni gathered together some of the changes relating to the role of the partner in accountancy firms (Aharoni, 1999:32) but there is little in the literature on the role of these central figures as the multinationals have developed further. Partners are producers and managers as well as owners, working in and managing a practice group and client projects, and traditionally involved in the overall management of the firm (Greenwood, Hinings and Brown, 1990).

In all three industries in this study the work is conducted in conjunction with the client, although there is some variation in the nature of the co-production (Nikolova, 2012). Audit and management consultancy work is often conducted on the client's premises so the professionals may spend long periods away from the firm. Partners put together teams to work on client projects (Gardner, 2012; Gardner, Gino and

Staats, 2012). This project team working practice requires the partners to interact with individuals throughout the firm from different areas of expertise (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham and Clark, 2012). The nature of the work involves relationships with multiple colleagues and with multiple clients. Relationships are assets for professional partners. For professionals to work together well for a client, interactions are fundamental for the successful combination and application of knowledge (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006). Although partners need to share their knowledge to get the optimal result for the client, doing so reduces their power within the organization (Morris, 2001). However a benefit for this study is that there can be high levels of task interdependency when members from several different departments within a firm are all working together to serve a client, promoting a sense of shared identity as an organization (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001).

These individuals are both figureheads, partly defining the organizational identity and subjectively controlling the members, as well as being subjectively controlled members of the organization. They are the cats to be herded and are the targets of high identity demands over potentially long careers in the same organization. Due to the nature of their role, the social identity attributable to their membership is likely to be salient frequently.

2.4.3 What types of identity challenge are suggested by the literature?

I referred in the identity part of this chapter to Petriglieri's (2011) observation that an identity threat can only be appraised as such by the individual who finds it threatening. Here I consider ongoing tensions and events which previous studies of PSFs suggest might trigger identity work relating to organization membership.

Large PSFs in the UK have experienced great changes in recent years (Empson, Cleaver and Allen, 2013; Empson, 2007; Pinnington and Morris, 2003) making this a context in which we are likely to find individuals performing identity work relating to organization membership. As well as institutional change in the industry, organizational change is inherent in the partnership structure described but has received less attention to date. The constituency of the partner group gradually changes over the years as new partners are promoted and older ones retire. The

partners, who are figureheads of the firm, are replaced by the next generation and so the identity of the firm necessarily moves on too. To continue to identify with the organization, the partners must perform identity work. Maintaining organizational identification over a long continuous career in a single organization is challenging because both the individual and organization are dynamic (Kreiner et al, 2006a). At the boundaries of the personal and social identities there is a constant negotiation (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Identity research suggests that "one's sense of self is largely grounded in one's salient roles within a given context and that one looks to others for validation of this sense of self" (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark and Fugate, 2007: 150). Being granted partnership in a professional service firm is a public validation of the importance of the individual to the organization. Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 1, as both the individual and organization are dynamic, this validation from others in the organization may vary over the course of partnership (Kreiner et al, 2006a; Ashforth et al, 2007). As Ashforth et al (2007: 150) argued in relation to dirty workers, if organization members:

> "look to others for positive affirmation, they are likely to be frustrated; yet, if they do not look for affirmation, their sense of a workplace self may remain somewhat tenuous."

So identity work relating to organization membership can be prompted by routine change internal to the firm.

As well as change external and internal to the organization requiring identity work, a partner may be subject to conflicting identity demands. The practitioner literature recognises the potential conflict between loyalty to the profession and loyalty to the organization (Lowendahl, 2005; Maister, 1997). Studies of ethics in the professions, while typically exploring the possibility of conflicting demands from professional codes and commercial organizations, reference the scandals which have hit the professions, such as, Enron. Gunz & Gunz (2007) started to explore the overlap of social identity theory and these ethical studies of conflicting demands. For my purposes, not only does any discrepancy between the demands of the profession and the demands of the commercial organization potentially prompt identity work (for example, due to client capture, Leicht and Fennel, 2001), but the publicity received by such scandals may also prompt identity work. Big PSFs are named in the

headlines, for example, ‘RSA eyes action against Deloitte over irregularities at Ireland arm,’ on the front page of the Financial Times Companies and Markets, Friday, January 10, 2014 (Financial Times, 2014). It has been argued that conflicting identity demands contribute to these events; the publicity generated by them potentially generates identity work in many members.

Inter-partner conflict could also trigger identity work, for example, disagreement between partners over the distribution of profits (Lorsch and Tierney, 2002). In the knowledge literature there is reference to partners guarding the “defensible turf” of a defined area of expertise and client relationships, described as an “inherent tension” between partners (Anand, Gardner and Morris, 2007: 413, 414). In such ways, the competitive environment of a PSF partnership, epitomised by the struggle for partnership, continues beyond the award of partnership. I also mentioned above how teams of professionals come together to work on a client project (Gardner, 2012). O’Leary, Mortensen and Woolley (2011) use Fiol, Pratt and O’Connor (2009) to argue that membership of multiple teams within a single organization could itself be enough to trigger identity-related conflict, in the form of conflict between the identities attaching to the teams.

Finally, psychological contract breach, where the individual perceives the organization has failed to meet perceived obligations in the psychological contract, has been found to undermine organizational identification (Epitropaki, 2003; Epitropaki, 2013). The organization is no longer perceived as a desired social membership and as capable of fulfilling individual level needs for self-enhancement, so the employee distances their personal identity from the organization identity.

So examples of potential triggers for identity work by a partner relating to organization membership include: changes in the organization as it responds to a changing environment; the inherent change attributable to the partnership structure; identity demands attributable to a competing professional identity; reputational challenges for the organization; conflict between partners within the organization; and breach of the psychological contract. As noted above, these will only be identity threats if appraised as such by the individual affected (Petriglieri, 2011).

2.4.4 Why is a study of identity work performed by professionals important?

First, studies of identity work, rather than just organizational identification, are important due to the potential for 'overidentification' (Dukerich, Kramer and McLean Parks, 1998), described as a state in which the individual is completely replaced by the exemplar associated with the organizational identity. While a low level of organizational identification (in the static sense) is a predictor of high turnover (Mael and Ashforth, 1995), if an individual identifies too highly with an organization, they can sense a loss of their independent sense of self so a high level of organizational identification (in the static sense) is also associated with high turnover (Pratt, 2000b). As mentioned in 2.3.5 above individuals are affected by their existing identifications. Highly identified members have been found to resist organizational change (Bouchikhi and Kimberley, 2003). To avoid this dark side of identification (Dukerich et al, 1998), organizations need to support the whole of an individual's identity work, not to focus solely on inducing high identification to the exclusion of promoting a balance with the personal identity (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Organizations therefore need to attend to all of the identity work performed by members relating to their organization membership.

Second, studies of professionals as individuals are important because, as Alvesson and Karreman succinctly say (2007:711):

> "The principal resource in knowledge-intensive firms is the competence of the work force."

There has been a shift in the PSF literature from a focus on the sociology of the professions to "the issue of how to motivate and retain highly skilled and mobile labor" (von Nordenflycht 2010:158). Suddaby et al have noted:

> "that there is a considerable gap in our knowledge and understanding of the *internal* workings of contemporary professional service firms. We actually know relatively little about human resource and related practices within these firms." (Suddaby et al, 2008:990, emphasis author's own)

We do know that at the organization level in PSFs organizational identity is useful as "an informal means of managerial control within a diffuse authority structure" (Empson, 2004: 759). It is also argued that the overall trend across PSFs is towards managerialism but that there are gaps in our understanding of PSF change (Brock,

2008). However there has been less focus on the partners' experience of these increasingly managerial high identity demand firms.

Third, PSFs are significant within the UK and world economies. The professional service sector accounts for 8% of UK output and for 11.5% of total employment (HM Treasury, 2009).

Many recent studies of identity work have taken the occupation, role or profession as the referent for identity work (Pratt et al, 2006; Ashforth et al, 2007; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). As mentioned above, it has been argued that professional careers are increasingly discontinuous and that discontinuous careers give rise to tougher identity work than continuous careers following conventional paths in an organization (Ashforth et al, 2008; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2020). It has been argued that professionals define themselves by what they do, not by their organizations (Pratt et al, 2006) but there have been calls for researchers to distinguish between professional industries (Suddaby et al, 2008). Pratt et al (2006) studied medical residents. Unlike medical residents, many accountants, lawyers and consultants work in prestigious, global organizations. These vast global organizations have been described as setting the standards for the professional industry (Ramirez, 2013, on auditors). Professionals may define themselves as, for example, a partner in a certain Big 4 Firm, rather than as an accountant because this better satisfies the individual level needs. Professionals in these elite global firms are therefore likely to define themselves by their organizations, not by what they do.

While professional careers may be increasingly discontinuous, this is an increase from a tradition of loyalty to a single firm, and for many such professionals their careers are still continuous, in the sense of being pursued within a single organization. I use professional firms as a rich context for investigating the performance of identity work relating to organization membership. I do not suggest that the insights in to identity work are necessarily peculiar to professionals, but partners in professional firms are a complex mix of owner, producer and manager. This study contributes to the identity work literature by focusing on maintenance identity work relating to organization membership in continuous, rather than discontinuous, careers in the context of high identity demand professional firms.

So this study asks: how do members of a high identity demand organization perform identity work relating to their organization membership?

3 Methodology

In this chapter I look at the research process and then the ontology and epistemology underlying it. The research process includes extracts from my research diaries. They illustrate that this process was not completely smooth and executed to a perfect plan. Rather it evolved.

3.1 Research process

My focus was on how partners perform identity work so I used an exploratory, qualitative method. I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews, typically one and a half hours long, with professionals from three industries: law, accountancy and consulting.

The profile of the interviewees is described in Table 3.1. I initially hoped to gain access to conduct all the interviews in a single firm. However 2009/2010 was a challenging time economically for the firms in which I was interested. While seeking to negotiate access I conducted interviews with individuals from various large law and accountancy firms in the City of London. Of the 11 early interviews, 8 were partners, 2 were recently retired partners and 1 was at a senior non-partner level. These interviews allowed me to refine my questions and to start to identify potential areas of interest. The content of the partner interviews and the contrasts between the partner and non-partner/retired partner interviews made me want to, as far as possible, interview current partners. The challenges for me in gaining sufficient understanding of the contexts when every interviewee came from a different firm, made me want, as far as possible, to minimise the number of firms.

Once I had agreed access with an accountancy firm and a consultancy firm, 39 further interviews were conducted with partners drawn from those two firms. Both firms are multinational PSFs where partnership is the legal form of governance or is overlaid on a corporate structure with no external ownership. Having interviews with multiple partners in the participating firms allowed comparisons between interviewees' identity work performed in response to identity demand practices and events which had impacted many partners in that firm.

Date of birth	Lawyers	Accountants		Consultants	Male	Female	Total
	Early inter-views	Early inter-views	Participating firm	Participating firm			
1950-1959	0	2	6	7	13	2	15
1960-1969	4	0	7	8	12	7	19
1970-1979	5	0	4	7	12	4	16
Total number of interviews	9	2	17	22	37	13	50
	Early interviews: 11		In participating firms: 39		Overall total: 50		

Table 3.1 Description of the interviewees

I shall briefly compare the two firms from which 39 of the 50 interviewees were drawn. I cannot reveal the names of the firms.

- Governance: In both firms the global structure includes multiple legal entities; neither firm is a single company or a single partnership. Both firms are entirely owned by the members; there is no external membership. In both firms the liability of the partners is limited.
- Size and locations: Both have offices in over 10 countries. Both firms are multinational. To protect the firms I am not going to describe whether they are federated, networked or global but in both firms the interviews were primarily conducted in the headquarter offices with less than a quarter of the interviewees being from overseas or smaller UK offices. The headquarters of both are in London. The partners interviewed were of various nationalities. Although within its sector the consultancy firm is medium-sized, for my purposes both firms are large in the sense of having over 100 partners.
- Organizational structure: In both firms the majority of partners are not involved in the strategic management of the firm. This is carried out by committees. In

the accountancy firm there is greater rotation of partners in the most senior posts; in the consultancy, ownership and power have become more concentrated. However, in both firms, due to the highly customized services provided and the importance of the competence of the partners in delivering those services, leadership has to be built on consensus among the partners to be successful.

- HRM systems: As Alvesson and Karreman (2007) describe, the HRM practices in PSFs are mechanisms for the creation and dissemination of organizational identity and for the control of individual identity projects. Partnership is the goal for more junior professionals; election to partnership is highly competitive; aspiring partners are mentored by existing partners; some mentoring continues through partnership; and partners' performance is reviewed. In essence, the hallmark attempts to control partners' subjectivity (Covaleski et al, 1998) exist in both firms, suggesting both are high identity demand environments (Kreiner et al, 2006a).
- Product: the products in both industries are intangible, highly customized for clients and involve the professional using discretion in the application of their expertise. Firms have low capital intensity. The main difference between the products is in the degree to which production is regulated by a professional body.

I give a summary of the comparison of the two firms in Table 3.2.

The eleven early interviewees came from ten firms. The firms of the eleven early interviewees are all either law or accountancy firms. Both industries are regulated by a professional body. Not all of these firms have headquarters in the UK but the interviewees for this study all came from the London offices of the firms. All ten firms use partnership as both a legal structure and an HRM system.

	Accountancy Firm	Consulting Firm
Governance (LLP/Corporation)		
Limited/unlimited liability	Limited	Limited
Outside ownership	None	None
Size and locations		
Headquarters in UK	Yes	Yes
Offices in >10 countries	Yes	Yes
>1000 professional staff	Yes	Yes
>100 partners	Yes	Yes
Small/medium/large within sector in UK	Large	Medium
Organizational structure		
Annual meeting of all partners, with all partners voting	No	No
Votes on new partners/election of new partner selection committee	Yes	Yes
HRM systems		
Performance reviews	Yes	Yes
Mentor system	Yes	Yes
Values statement	Yes	Yes
Compensation performance related/lock-step; profit share element	Complex combination including profit share	Performance related including profit share
Election process to get partnership	Yes	Yes
Product		
Customized/commoditized	Customized	Customized
Organization/discretionary expertise	Discretionary expertise	Discretionary expertise
Intangible/tangible	Intangible	Intangible
Regulated by professional body	Regulated	Less regulated
Capital intensity	Low	Low

Table 3.2 A comparison of the participating firms

Categories drawn from Lowendahl, 2005; Lorsch and Tierney, 2002; von Nordenflycht, 2010; Greenwood and Empson, 2003

Interviewing individuals from three PSF industries means this study helps to answer the call for more PSF-field rather than single-profession studies (Brock, 2008) and guards against generalizing across the PSF field from a study of a single industry

(Lowendahl, 2005). The study was dependent on access. Various large firms were approached and these two agreed to take part.

Identity researchers have suggested that individual level differences may affect the performance of identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Ibarra, 1999). As far as possible interviewees were purposively selected to cover various individual level differences, such as, age and tenure as a partner, but this was limited by the willingness of partners to participate. The consent of each individual to be interviewed was required. The 11 early interviews were solicited through personal contacts. For the 39 later interviews in the participating firms HR sent out an invitation to a group of partners purposively selected and provided me with the names only of those willing to participate. In one firm HR sent out a second round of invitations to improve the profile of the sample.

A challenge of interviewing partners in service industries is that they are at the mercy of their clients' demands and a significant proportion had to rearrange interviews. Although a few of the willing interviewees proved to be too busy in the interview period, 50 interviews were completed. All but seven of these were conducted face-to-face in meeting rooms in their workplaces. Five were conducted outside work and two by telephone. Conducting (most) of the interviews in the workplace may have prompted the interviewees' organizational identification, if any, to be salient during the interview. The first of the early interviews was in 2010 and the rest of the interviews were between June 2011 and March 2012.

> Diary extract from February 2012: Problem of interviewing people in service industries: the interviewees were at the mercy of their clients and a significant proportion had to rearrange interviews. I declined to interview those who postponed three times because I was losing too much time travelling to interviews which were cancelled at the last minute due to client commitments. I did agree to do two interviews by telephone in the end. These tended to be shorter than those conducted face-to-face. It may be that the interviewees were prepared to tell me more when they met me face-to-face.

As in Ashforth et al (2007), the interviews were semi-structured so the interviewer was free to explore interesting themes and not required to ask every question in the protocol. The first 6 questions were adapted from the Mael Scale (Mael and

Ashforth, 1992). I was seeking to heed Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) warning that a researcher cannot assume that organizational identification is part of an individual's identity. I subsequently decided that members of an organization are subject to identity demands from an organization when the strength of their identification is low as well as when it is high; so identity work is likely to be ongoing, irrespective of the strength of identification at that moment. However the benefit of still asking these questions may have been to help direct the interviewee towards the abstract concept of identity. The same part of the interview was used to collect information on tenure in the organization, tenure as a partner, job title, department, year of qualification (where relevant) and age. The age and job title items were adapted from the European Social Survey (2006). The tenure and gender items were adapted from the Labour Force Survey (2008). These questions were designed to minimise the effort required of the respondent.

The interview protocol developed slightly over the early interviews but then remained stable. To help direct the interview towards the individual's identity work on organization membership, I asked about how the firm compares to other firms, rather than asking, say, about how the profession compares to different professions (Ashforth et al, 2008: 332). Interviewees were asked about the people in the firm and how the firm is distinctive; how the individual saw their self in relation to the firm; for any challenges both inside and outside the firm; about times when they had felt various emotions in relation to the firm; about moments when they had considered leaving; and about groups of value to them within the firm. Consistent with Petriglieri (2011) the interviewer allowed interviewees to appraise identity threats for themselves. I attach the protocol and Mael Scale/individual data collection questions as Appendix I. All interviews except one were recorded and professionally transcribed. For the one interviewee who preferred not to be recorded, I took extensive contemporaneous notes and transcribed them myself.

The following diary extracts record questions I reflected on at the time about my conduct of the interviews.

> Diary extract from interview period: About the interviews: I found that to keep the conversation flowing it helped to change the order of the questions occasionally to pick up leads from the interviewee … I cannot claim to have

> asked the questions in the same order every time. The sequence of questions may affect the interviewee's answers.

Although I found myself reflecting on this at the time, I concluded that altering the sequence of questions to fit with the flow of an interviewee's talk was appropriate to my research. I wanted to compare the identity work of individuals, and to do this I needed accounts of identity work. I sought to engage in a conversation rather than treat the interviewee as a vessel of answers (Coupland, 2007). This flexibility allowed me to be sensitive to what the interviewees wanted me to know in understanding and explaining events (Bryman, 2008).

> Diary extract from interview period: The main things I regret are giving the interviewees the reactions they sought e.g. if a law partner described the division of equity in his firm in a way that was designed to make it sound shocking to me, I automatically gave the anticipated shocked reaction 'yes, I can see that is quite unusual', as if I were having a normal conversation. If a lawyer said lightly 'not that anyone would employ me', then I would give the polite response 'Oh I am sure they would'. … the delay between doing the interviews and receiving the transcripts was such that I did not [reflect on this] as fast as I might have done.

Again, I needed to put the interviewee at ease; instinctively performing normal conversational practices is more natural and might help reduce any reactive effect to the "unnatural character of the interview encounter" (Bryman, 2008: 468). I was not conducting an experiment; rather I was interested in the interviewee's account of identity work. Given my purpose, I would need a special case to override the interviewee as the best authority on their identity work (Harré and Secord, 1973).

In addition to identify organization level issues of power relating to identity construction, I needed to include contextual conditions when looking at the identity work of the individuals (Brown, 2001; Covaleski et al, 1998). In the two participating firms I had access to senior managers in HR who agreed to explain relevant practices. I held two meetings with senior managers in each firm to find out about the practices and to get feedback on developing ideas. I did not have access to HR files; rather I was able to ask questions to clarify matters raised in the interviews, for

example, which partners could vote on the election of new partners. Feedback from managers also helped me assess the validity of the analysis.

I conducted one interview with each interviewee. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) assumed that "identity lacks sufficient substance and discreteness to be captured in questionnaires or single interviews" (2003: 1165), however Kreiner et al (2006a: 1035, 1036) used open-ended surveys from 220 Episcopal priests and single hour-long telephone interviews with 60 priests to probe "more deeply" into their identity work. The telephone interviews with 60 respondents approach had the advantage of allowing the researchers to compare findings from a group of 60 priests, however a significant disadvantage, in comparison with Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) approach, is that the number and geographical spread of the respondents prevented Kreiner et al from assessing the identity work relating to occupational identity of the priests in relation to all the identity work performed by the individual and prevented them studying the priests in context. The choice of a limited site, a manager, enabled Sveningsson and Alvesson to study wider organizational processes. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) designed their study to investigate the whole of the respondent's identity work. Sveningsson and Alvesson interviewed their respondent on six occasions, interviewed colleagues about the respondent and observed the respondent in managerial and employee gatherings over several months. I wanted to compare the identity work performed by different individuals in the context of a large, professional partnership. Having 17 of my interviewees in one firm and 22 in a second firm gave me the opportunity, even though I was conducting only single interviews with each individual, to visit each organization on multiple occasions. The presentation of the same event by multiple interviewees supported understanding of the presentations themselves.

In the participating firms I saw the offices and became familiar with various staff. The interviewees occasionally talked about each other, so in some cases the combined transcripts provided a picture of not only an interviewee's perceptions of others but also others' perceptions of an interviewee. I assume I might have achieved greater depth with repeated interviews but I have focused in my analysis on the strengths of my design: having interviews with multiple people who have appraised the same events as threatening to their identity. I used interviews in order to extract the group identities and identity work tactics from the identity talk of the

partners (Snow and Anderson, 1987). The disadvantage of interview data is that it is not as situated in the day-to-day running of the partnership as observation would be but it does provide the researcher and interviewee with the opportunity to engage and for the interviewee to seek to persuade, which supports the researcher understanding the identity work of individuals.

After conducting the interviews I listened to each interview to check the audio recording against the professional transcription and then, as agreed with firms and individuals, read the transcripts a second time to clean the transcripts of identifying names and incidents. I added any field notes to the transcripts, systematically ensuring that all the data for each interviewee went in to Atlas.ti in one document.

> Diary extract from spring 2012: I had the audio files professionally transcribed (all except one). Most of the transcripts were good and using transcribers will have saved me some time. … Frustratingly different transcribers used different protocols. In future projects I will specify the formatting … I would also use only transcribers with experience of relevant vocabulary. It has been slow work to spot and correct errors such as "The chairman allocates the chairs in that meeting" which should have read "The chairman allocates the shares in that meeting". I could generally complete 2 transcripts a day. I have 50 transcripts, making 25 working days on correcting transcripts, i.e. over a month just on correcting transcripts. One particularly difficult audio file and transcript has taken me over 4 working days to sort out.

The main ethical concerns to be met during this study were informed consent/ the right to refuse to participate of individual interviewees, protecting the confidentiality of commercially sensitive and human resources data, and data protection issues (ESRC, 2009). Even though the interviewees were wealthy, highly educated individuals, thought was also given to the interviewer/interviewee power relationship. The potential impact on the career of an interviewee or the wider community in a case study firm was considered in designing how to store and present data.

> Diary extract relating to the cleaning of transcripts (March, April, and May 2012): I cleaned the … transcripts. I created a key for all identifying names

> and incidents. The key is stored separately to the transcripts. As required … once I had checked the transcripts against the audio files I deleted the audio files from my computer. I am therefore keeping only a clean anonymous transcript of each consultancy interview on my computer. This has been a very slow process and I would strongly encourage future PhD students to avoid this requirement in agreeing access. I have already conducted the interview and then listened to the whole interview to check the transcript for each interview before I have started coding it in Atlas-ti. The advantage is that I have been able to compose a list of ideas for coding in advance of starting with Atlas-ti.

I had attended a training day at the University of Surrey on 26 January 2010. This training day was one of the outputs of an ESRC funded project known as the CAQDAS Networking Project. I was particularly drawn to the co-occurrence tools available in Atlas.ti 6.2

Atlas.ti aided organization, exploration, interrogation and interpretation of the data (Lewins & Silver, 2007). The use of CAQDAS packages in qualitative research has been criticised for pushing researchers to analyse their data by coding, raising the possibility of being 'seduced by the convenience and credibility of the program's rendering of sense' (Fielding and Lee, 1993). Coding can lead to fragmentation of the data, making it inappropriate where the sequence of data is relevant, e.g. in life history accounts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Mason, 2002). From the early data it was apparent that each interview was likely to contain accounts of several instances of identity work. In order to protect against the loss of the sequence of the data in each account, whole accounts were coded. These might be one or two paragraphs long. I kept returning to the original full transcripts during the analysis (Lewins and Silver, 2007). This proved to be valuable as various elements of the data were understood in a new light as the thesis developed. Coding supported analysis; analysis was not limited to coding.

I would argue that I was not seduced by the software. Atlas.ti offers a wide range of tools for analysing data. I have not used those which are inappropriate to my methodological approach. I have not used auto-coding because this can lead to a "greater level of analytic reliance on possibly limited catchments of data, and, by

implication, a lowering of the status of the text left out of the auto-coding process" (Lewins and Silver, 2007: 57). However tempting the speed of auto-coding might be, I would be using it for convenience rather than because it would be the best way to interrogate the data for my research question. Likewise I am not using hyperlinking, even though it has been argued to avoid the fragmentation problem of coding (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), because with my volume of data it would be difficult to organise the hyperlinks to get an overall picture of the processes in the data.

> Diary extract: 12 June 2012 Today I am labelling questions and answers in the … transcripts in order to be able to use the co-occurrence tools in the new Atlas-ti more easily. I have decided to make the time to do this even though my interviews are semi-structured because the fact that some of the answers become discussions of other topics does not affect the utility of co-occurrence for the questions and answers which are more structured. … The final step in preparing the transcripts for Atlas was to … group the transcripts in to families by socio-demographic dimensions. I also went through my field notes in which I had noted in capitals anything which had been said after the end of the recording but which I could add to the transcripts. In this way I systematically ensured that all the data for each interviewee went in to Atlas in one document.

I used Atlas.ti only to the extent that it helped me think about the data. The combination of coding and co-occurrence tools facilitated my performing the analysis which I would otherwise have done in a less efficient and possibly less rigorous way. Rather than driving the PhD, the software has facilitated an efficient performance of otherwise repetitive tasks.

A variety of approaches to coding were used, for example:

1 Triggers of identity work

An inductive approach was used for coding triggers of identity work. In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1998) the initial coding for this was open coding of indicators, e.g. an article in a newspaper being critical of the firm. When the long and unwieldy list of triggers was reviewed, axial coding was used to group them in categories, e.g. a negative article in a newspaper and a fine from a regulator were

both examples of a firm being criticised publicly by a body external to the firm. The account of identity work was my unit of coding because I was concerned not to lose the interviewee's purpose and positioning of elements in the accounts.

2 Identity work on organization membership

Following Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), here the literature review was given a sensitizing role. The initial coding for identity work was at a more abstract level than with the coding for the triggers. Accounts of identity work were tagged by the type of work involved, e.g. work on the interviewee's perception of the firm, and work on the emotional significance of the identity. After organising the data in this way I then coded the accounts again, breaking the 'identity work on perception' code down by a process of constant comparison in to several codes.

I struggled with coding the accounts for work on the value and emotional significance of the identity and would now question the feasibility of trying to code these two separately. I in practice took a grounded approach. I developed codes around 'leaving': 'thought about leaving', 'almost left', 'left this firm', 'left another firm'. Having used an account of identity work as my unit for coding, I was able to see links between the emerging categories of identity work triggers and the emerging 'leaving' codes. I developed broad, inclusive codes for references to positive and negative emotions.

3 – Developing hypotheses. Using selective coding I developed ways to test emerging ideas by comparison, supported by the co-occurrence tools in Atlas.ti.

Coding erred on the side of inclusiveness, putting rich examples into more than one category. In the data section on blame tactics, counts are provided where possible but the interview questions were open and did not specifically ask about, for example, the use of specific tactics, so the absence of a certain tactic for a certain event does not mean that it was never used. I provide tendencies, not frequencies (Ashforth et al, 2007).

The software is only a toolbox and the researcher's use of that toolbox must always be driven by their methodological underpinnings (Lewins and Silver, 2007) to which I now turn.

3.2 Ontology, epistemology, methodology

This study is approached from a subjectivist/constructionist ontological position, that PSFs are socially constructed organizations. Hatch, in describing the theory of the social construction of reality, says it:

> "explicitly recognises that the categories of language used to understand organizations (such as environment, structure, culture) are not real or natural in an objective sense. Instead they are the product of beliefs held by members of a society." (Hatch, 1997:42)

When first designing the project I was aware of ambiguities in what identity concepts are and how best to access them. Organizational identity is particularly hard to pin down. Of what does the individual have a perception? It is a metaphorical compound of 'organization' and 'identity' which each have several interpretations (Cornelissen, 2007). Cornelissen identified six research traditions with different assumptions underlying the interpretation of 'organizational identity': the organizational communication, organizational behaviour, cognitive framing, discursive psychology, institutional theory and social identity research traditions. These traditions occupy different positions in the three dimensions of language, cognition and behaviour because they consider the 'organization' to be constituted by different combinations of one or more of these three (see Figure 3.1).

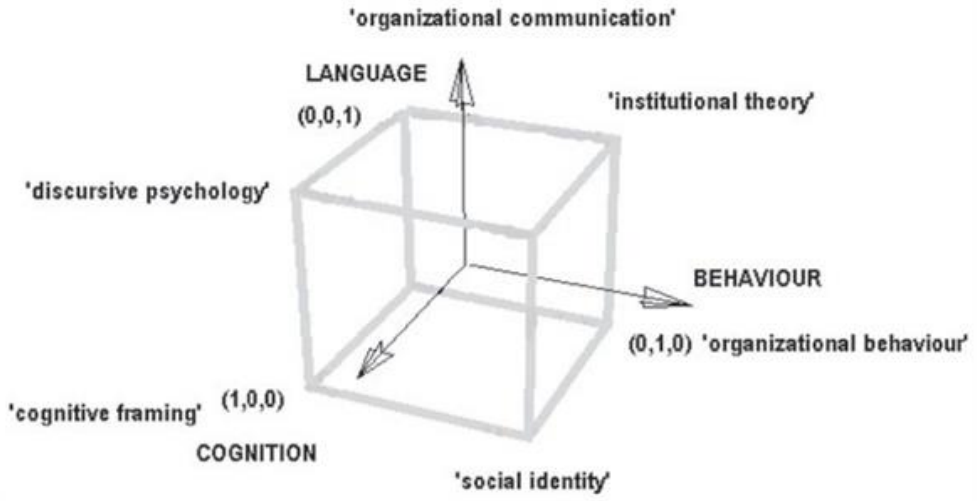

Figure 3.1 Different research traditions on the 'organizational identity' metaphor (Cornelissen, 2006: 696).

> "Note: The figure visualizes the general categories of `research traditions' that were identified. Here, each of these traditions is considered as an analytically separate category, although these research traditions may at least to some degree overlap and interpenetrate in the actual practice of theorizing and research on 'organizational identity'." (Cornelissen, 2006: 696)

For example, Albert and Whetton's (1985) famous definition of organizational identity as the central, distinctive and enduring characteristics of an organization rests on the assumption that organizations are "more than social collectives, in that modern society treats organizations in many respects as if they were individuals" (Whetton (2006: 221). Cornelissen (2007:51) sees this position as falling in his organizational behaviour category, at "the far end of the behavioural dimension [...] at odds with an extreme language position, or indeed a cognitive grounding of 'organization' for that matter." The definition "eschews conceptions of organizational identity formulated from the perspective of individuals" (Whetton (2006: 219). In contrast, Cornelissen (2007: 48) sees Ashforth and Mael's (1989) position as in his social identity category where the organization is conceived as a collective product of "group cognitions, sense-making and behaviour." For them organizational identity is in the cognition of a group of individuals and appears in the collective activities it promotes.

For the current study organizational identity is in the overlap between the discursive psychology tradition, where the organization is seen as discursively constructed through both the language and sense-making of its members (2007: 48), and the social identity tradition, so that organizational identity is a combination of all three dimensions of cognition, behaviour and language, with greater emphasis on language and cognition than on behaviour. For this study which is rooted in perception and identification, this rejects the argument that an organization is more than a collective of individuals and roots organizational identity in the shared cognitions and discourses of individual members, which can then result in collective behaviours.

However I sought to be alive to ideas from other traditions in identity theory, not to be limited only to social identity theory, for example, Watson (2008: 128) proposed a three step framework for understanding the relationship between, in his case, managerial identities, discourses and self identities (note he uses 'social identities' to refer to externally available discursive notions of role models). He proposed that this framework could usefully be applied in the study of identity work to illuminate the internal and external aspects of identity work. I found this useful when developing my ideas about shared and solo identity work and the performance of identity work as "I" and as "We." Using ideas from different traditions helped me develop my ideas and understanding. As Brown (2014:4) observes, while characterized by different ontologies and epistemologies, there are "patches of agreement" between the social cognition, symbolic-interaction, post-structural and psychoanalytic approaches; they are "not hermetically sealed."

Organizational identity and other workplace group identities will be evidenced in the talk of members and in their behaviour. For PSFs, Alvesson and Empson (2008) suggested that the dimensions of organizational identity (based on a study of consulting firms) should be:

- "What do we know and how do we work?"
- "How is the organization managed and how do members relate to it?"
- "What kinds of people are we in the context of the organization?"
- "How are we seen and how do we see others?"

These dimensions influenced my development of the interview protocol.

In terms of my guiding methodological principle, I rejected the systematic detachment of Durkheim (2003) as undesirable in the study of identity work, inconsistent with my ontology and in reality impossible (Lazar, 2004). I am sympathetic to Weber's (1991) assertion that objectivity (not defined as systematic detachment) has a role to play even when the concepts to be studied are subjectively constructed. I found Rosaldo's (1993) work on how a researcher's own experience supports understanding social phenomena to be persuasive.

Particularly relevant to my study is Rosaldo's (1993) use of Kondo's (1990) arguments that observers themselves have plural identities. I am partly defined by my former role as a solicitor in a multinational PSF; I value that identity but I do not see that as my only identity. I won prizes from the Royal Society of Chemistry as a teenager, and when it is salient, I am aware I draw on that, but do not see myself as a chemist now. While I understand Rosaldo's argument that all researchers are positioned, I think if you combine Kondo's ideas with recent work on tolerable ambiguities in identity and multiple identities, the position occupied by the researcher has the potential to be less narrow than Rosaldo suggests. Indeed if you follow this path it is worth considering the extent to which any one of us tolerates inconsistencies in our ontological positions. Linking back to the objectivity/subjectivity debate, I am interested in William's' (2005:108) example:

> "To be objective in science commits us to other scientific values, but to be objective in the law commits us to values of law. Objectivity, then, is not an homogeneous value and its context will determine its relationship to other values." (Williams (2005) p. 108)

As one position on a value continuum, objectivity (not defined as systematic detachment) can be present in the study of subjectively constructed concepts in that it can be present:

> "both methodologically and in analysis terms in respect of adjudicating between social positions expressed as viewpoints and ideas" (Williams, 2005: 118).

Am I limited to just one interpretation of objectivity when studying chemistry, writing about law and conducting qualitative research in organizations?

I sought to apply objectivity as a value in my methodology and analysis. In operationalising this, the tools of qualitative research for developing theory include coding while collecting, theoretical saturation and constant comparison (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The outcomes are concepts, for example, references to the past; categories, for example, temporality; properties, for example, the attributes of a category; hypotheses, for example, hunches about relationships between concepts; and theory, meaning a set of well-developed categories systematically related through statements of relationships to make a framework explaining a phenomenon. In my research I worked with: concepts in the interview transcripts, such as, blaming a regulator for scapegoating; categories, for example, blame tactics in identity work; properties of categories, such as, putting the blame outside the organization, on the organization in the past, on to the self or on a subset of the organization which is then described as not part of the organization; and hypotheses, such as, the use of blame tactics being less frequent in a cycle of de-identification. In the Discussion chapter I seek to link together the performance of identity work from within different identity positions, how different responses are required to answer each identity challenge, and how these responses combine in successful identity work.

I sought to generate substantive theory rather than formal theory. I have developed theory in a certain empirical instance, identity work relating to organization membership, rather than theory at a higher level of abstraction with applicability to several substantive areas, such as identity work relevant to the whole of an individual's identity (Bryman, 2008: 544).

A case study approach is often considered particularly appropriate for building new theory because the theory is developed in close 'connection with empirical reality' (Eisenhardt, 1989: 532). Although my study comprised principally 50 interviews with individuals rather than a full case study approach, in developing the theory I was aware that I had benefitted in various ways from doing the interviews in the participating firms:

- Repeated visits to the offices of the participating firms enabled me to observe what was consistent and what was changing in the physical environment of the partners, for example, reallocation of offices/space;
- In all the interviews conducted in the workplace, not just the participating firm interviews, I could observe and compare the glamour or utilitarian nature of the building, location and interiors; where interviews overran we sometimes moved from meeting rooms to a partner's office/workspace, enabling me to compare the relative space and glamour of the 'public' meeting spaces against the 'hidden' engine room of the firm;
- In one participating firm I negotiated security clearance and was free to wander through the building to get a feel of the working environment;
- Even when I was waiting for delayed interviews I was aware I was soaking up the way in which people interacted with each other in these environments;
- The act of arranging the interviews gave me insight in to the extent to which each partner could control or not control their time;
- I read brochures in receptions, read promotions displayed in offices and collected various publications;
- Doing most of the interviews in person rather than over the telephone enabled interviewees to show me artefacts, for example, some tried to give me notebooks or pens, some showed me the value statement of the firm, some commented on the quality of coffee available in different areas of the office.

The HR contact in one of the participating firms has commented that it is helpful to run new projects past me because I seem to understand the organization. This affirmation that I have got under the skin of an organization is reassuring.

Individuals do not perform identity work in a vacuum (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) so I soaked up as much context as possible. To this extent my study is similar to a case study approach. Although I have focused my analysis on the 50 interviews, my experiences will have informed my interpretation of those interviews. I did not set out to collect data by observation but I am aware that conducting the whole of this study myself has in itself given me resources. This 'close connection with empirical reality,' seen as a strength in case study research generating new

theory, has improved the credibility (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) of my qualitative, interview-based study.

Given the similarities between my approach and a full case study approach, I have had regard to criticisms of such studies. One broad criticism is that context-independent knowledge is more valuable than context-dependent knowledge (Flyvberg, 2006). Flyvberg's answer is that this is an inappropriate criticism because "predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs" (2006: 224). As seen above there are calls in the PSF literature for in-depth studies to achieve greater understanding of PSF industries, particularly with regard to human resources. I sought to 'fill a conceptual category' (Eisenhardt, 1989) rather than aim at grand theory.

Another serious criticism of case study research which is also relevant to my study is that there is a bias towards verification which reduces the scientific value of the study (Flyvberg, 2006). Subjectivity can, of course, affect any research strategy. The roadmap to case study research by Eisenhardt (1989) draws together various writings on methodologies for case studies and provides a step-by-step guide for incorporating appropriate rigorous procedures. I incorporated some of Eisenhardt's (1989) and Silverman's (2005) ways of thinking critically about case study analysis to improve validity: by using stratified sampling the research lent itself to pattern searching for within-group similarities and inter-group differences; testing generalizations against all relevant data using the logic of replication provided comprehensive data treatment.

This study was conducted from a subjective constructionist position. In taking a constructionist position the researcher acknowledges the subjective nature of the concept. The constructionist position includes "the notion that researchers' own accounts of the social world are constructions." (Bryman, 2008: 19). The researcher presents their specific version of reality. I have previously worked as a professional in a PSF. While believing that this proximity to the subject matter was a valuable resource for the research (Rosaldo, 1993), I consciously sought to understand an interviewee's position, not impose my assumptions. My experience helped me to gain access because I had established relationships and knowledge of small details, such as, how to dress and talk in the professional firm setting; helped me to develop

relationships of trust with interviewees; and helped me to get the meaning and significance of the stories told by interviewees.

I aimed to build “good theory” well-grounded in empirical research and reported in a way that allows the reader to assess its value for themselves (Eisenhardt, 1989). I have shared developing ideas with contacts in the two main firms and at conferences (Cleaver and Empson, 2013) and aim to publish the results in a journal as well as in thesis form.

3.3 Presentation of data

Deciding how best to present the data was difficult. On the one hand, I want to give the reader all the data they need to assess the quality of the study for themselves. On the other hand I need to protect the interviewees and to preserve the willingness of those individuals to take part in other research studies in the future. Many of the interviewees, at some point during their interview, paused to ask whether what they told me would definitely not be attributable back to them or their firm. I am grateful to the interviewees for their openness in answering questions about sensitive matters, for example, thinking about leaving the firm. What is their concern? I think the main concern was the potential for the stories they told me to affect their careers. The audience about which they are most concerned is, therefore, within their own firm. Indeed it seems to me that the ability to identify any interviewee depends on the audience. Another interviewee from the same firm might find it easier to identify someone than a reader unconnected to the study. Since all the consultants come from the same firm, if I identify them as consultants in the data chapters, then anyone from the consultancy firm who knows that the firm took part is well on their way to guessing the identity of interviewees. I, of course, agreed to make the PhD available to the firms so I have to take this risk seriously. I therefore refer to interviewees by fictitious names and avoid linking them to their industry or firm. Does this matter for my purposes? I can outline relevant institutional norms of large managed partnerships without giving away firms or individuals; I can describe the performance by individuals of identity work relating to organization membership; I can consider the combination of different identity responses; and I can even acknowledge the importance of the concurrent performance of similar identity work by others, without needing to name those others nor give away the identity of the firm. In focusing on the developing theory, on the significance of the data, I do not

need to describe every aspect of the context in great detail; rather I need to describe the significance and relevance of it (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007) and give sufficient support for my assertions. In this way I hope to protect the reputation of academic researchers as respectful of the individual.

4 Identity Work Setting

In this chapter I describe the setting in which identity work on membership is performed by partners. I consider the journey through partnership, including:

1. Partnership as an aspiration
2. The partnership election process as a sense-breaking and sense-giving mechanism
3. Acceptance or rejection as a partner
4. Identity demands, identity controls and partners' influence in the firm
5. Interpersonal interactions in which identity work may be performed
6. Separation from the organization
7. Four themes from the journey

Throughout the description of this journey I draw out four themes:

- The expectation that partners should not leave for another firm
- The highly competitive atmosphere within the partnership group
- The expectation that partners will behave as united leaders
- The limited influence of partners in large, corporatized firms.

I focus on elements common across the firms which create the setting in which identity work is performed. The purpose of this chapter is not to describe the precise legal structures and reward structures of the firms. I am interested in the norms used by the individuals in their accounts of identity work. The accounts of identity work will be explored in the following two chapters.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 'partner' is an industry-recognised title. Due to the wide use of the title, however, it does not tell you very much about the holder of the title other than that the firm believes them worthy of a senior title. The partners interviewed for this study shared the title but varied in terms of their rights and liabilities in the firms. The following elements were common across the three industries.

4.1 Partnership as an aspiration

> "Before you become partner you do have that vision of partner as it's all going to be a lot easier ... And it can't be quite as hard as people tell you it is." Simon

Social identity theory suggests that individuals are attracted to groups that satisfy individual level needs, such as, self-esteem. There were four factors to which individuals attributed decisions ultimately to try for partnership in these PSFs. I say 'try' because partners in all three industries mentioned alternative paths. While within the firm an 'up or out' system would create pressure for an individual to try for partnership, these are qualified professionals with probably more than five years' experience so they see options outside the firm, as well as the path to partnership inside the firm. In addition, partners from all three industries mentioned the development of alternatives to partnership *within* the firm, making it possible to stay in the firm long term without going for partnership. The four factors were:

4.1.1 Control

Applicants sought greater control of their destiny, of the client work and of their working environment. Catherine said:

> "it would enable me to do certain things. So, drive certain changes... I wanted to be able to have a seat at the table to make changes in my own practice."

Hamish added:

> "When I was going for partner, I was satisfied it would mean being much more in control of my own destiny and financially more rewarding. And controlling my own destiny meant not ... having to go and get third-parties to do a figurehead role in jobs that I was selling, when I knew they didn't really have the knowledge of the client or the subject matter. It meant I could manage it myself."

4.1.2 Symbol of success

As a professional, being a partner is a sign of success. Edward noted that:

> "Externally, partner is an industry-recognised title, so you know that was important to me so it was a step up in that respect."

Ann sought that endorsement:

> "I thought it would give me a personal lift if I got elected. It was almost less that I wanted to do the job than that I wanted to - there's quite a lot of ... stuff coming out here about self-confidence... I just thought it would be really amazing to have the [partners] elect me and the kind of feeling of belief in me that that would have."

4.1.3 Reward

Although the mechanisms for calculating partner rewards vary from firm to firm, typically the partners take home more than other people in the firm. Fraser said:

> "It does give access to much greater personal wealth."

Rachel added:

> "We do earn a lot of money ... It's paid for private education for my sons and, you know, it means they don't have to have student loans and those sorts of things and we go on nice holidays."

One partner said that many colleagues have "ridiculously flash cars. How the hell can you spend £80,000 on a bloody car?" Remuneration of partners will be considered further in 4.4 below but the increase in pay on gaining partnership is relevant here. As Sarah said, the hike from senior manager pay to partner pay is "astronomical" and Hugh described the impact of this on the rest of life as:

> "it all becomes a lot more workable because you've got endless resources to pay for help."

The path to equity partnership in some firms was being stretched by the creation of salaried partner positions. Hugh observed that these enable the equity partners to charge you out at partner rates, while still not paying you an equitable share. There was still an increase in remuneration but salaried partners sought to gain equity as well as soon as possible.

4.1.4 To be a role model.

A smaller number of interviewees wanted to create a career path for others sharing the same individual characteristics, for example, the same ethnicity, or coming from the same part of the firm. Catherine observed:

> "some of it was actually about being a role model to others and people seeing that, you know, as a girl, you could make it and you didn't have to be a certain mould. So that was important to me."

Individuals were prompted to act on these aspirations by various events. As mentioned above, the levels below partner are not considered to be long-term positions, even if there are now paths alternative to partnership in these industries. Several interviewees described reaching a point at which they felt as capable as the partners for whom they were working. This gave them a feeling of being ready to take on the challenge. Ann said:

> "The partners that I was working for - increasingly I felt they weren't teaching me anything."

Ann recalled that "lots of people told me I could do it." Similarly Catherine "was strongly encouraged to go for partnership."

However attempting to become a partner is a long, hard and public process (see 4.2 below). At the point at which a senior professional is considering whether to try for partnership, they are likely to have other career options too, such as, going to work in the in-house legal/finance/strategy department of a large corporate, i.e. there are other memberships which might satisfy individual drivers such as self-esteem. Although the partner model is often described as an effective way to manage the production of highly bespoke services, this analysis relies on the professionals aspiring to become partners. Reasons given for delaying seeking partnership included:

- Lack of certainty
  Senior professionals perceived embarking on the path to partnership as risky because there is no inherent need to make up more partners. An applicant could put in a lot of effort only to find that the profits for the year were low and

the partners decided not to promote anyone to partnership after all, to protect the profits per partner. Barry felt:

> "there's maybe something about a partnership structure that takes away the ladder a little bit.... In a partnership you can kind of have as many or as few partners as the business requires."

Barry contrasted applying for partnership to applying for a specified post. Barry perceived it as more certain that one of a group of applicants for a vacant position, such as, director of human resources, would get the job, than that any partners would be made up in a given year. Barry is not in a lockstep equity firm but another partner made a similar point in relation to lockstep firms:

> "before I went in and put down my letter saying I'm resigning and I'm going to be a partner at [a competitor firm] and here's my letter of offer … there were … partners, who … were pretty much a waste of space … who … managed to get jobs elsewhere and announced that they were resigning. And because [the firm] is a lockstep equity that got me up [to partner]."

Further uncertainty is created by the competition between candidates. Simon commented: "the last partner round we did less than half got through." This uncertainty risk reduces the aspirational appeal of partnership.

- More of the same
  As a partner the professional will continue to do the technical professional work. As Fraser described, by the time you have done 6 or 7 years of a certain type of professional work, some people just do not want to do the same thing any longer. Liking the technical work is therefore a prerequisite in wanting to become a partner. If you do not like the work, getting partnership will not solve the problem, reducing its aspirational appeal.
- Personal reasons
  Catherine described deferring applying for partnership due to illness in the family. Applicants perceive the election process as hard work and time-consuming.

On balance gaining partnership remains highly aspirational in the firms from which interviewees were drawn. As Christopher expressed it:

> "getting in to the partnership was such a big deal....getting over the line into the partnership was the be all and end all."

In identity work terms, the aspiration of partnership encourages the individual to discipline themselves to adopt the behaviours of the organization in the hope of being rewarded with partnership. At this stage, outside the partner group, the individuals believed the partners to be powerful and in positions of control. As Catherine said:

> "you can push from the middle, but it's much easier to have a seat at the table."

There is little mention of any fierce competition between partners. As Hamish said:

> "I thought I was joining a club that I wanted to belong to."

4.2 Going for partnership

It is a choice to go for partnership.

> "You can't become a partner by accident." (Ann)

You have to want it. In both participating firms individuals would, with the support of existing partners, put themselves forward for consideration; partnership would not be awarded without the individual actively seeking it.

In identity work terms, there are three key elements to the partnership election process in both participating firms (similar sense-breaking and sense-giving mechanisms were mentioned by interviewees from all three industries):

- Disciplining the self to meet the formal criteria used to select potential partners
- An intense period of seeking and receiving feedback from the existing partners
- Acceptance or rejection in the election in which only existing partners can vote.

Technical ability is a prerequisite, as Christopher said:

> "To be a partner you need to have a certain minimum level of technical ability, but that's not what's going to get you the partnership."

The formal criteria typically include achieving certain targets over a sustained period of time and demonstrating specified skills, for example, business development and leadership. The criteria set a standard. "Everyone has the same criteria to meet," (Geoffrey). The criteria set out what the partners at that point in time are looking for in new partners. They are a written version of the prototype of the partner group. The criteria create a perception in the aspiring partners of what will be expected of them and valued by the organization. Without radical change, they operate to perpetuate the homogeneity of the partner group. It should be noted that not all PSFs set out the criteria as clearly as the firms participating in this study. Aspiring partners strive to outperform their colleagues. Ann said her utilisation level was something "ridiculous" and she "didn't have time to breathe." Sarah said she "managed it for a short period of time" and fortunately then made partner.

In both participating firms there is also an intense period of seeking and receiving feedback from partners. Alasdair:

> "had forty-three interviews over three years, one-on-one with various partners."

Louise recalls:

> "I had a lot of discussions and ...a lot of feedback and input in terms of the reasons why I most likely wouldn't get to partner."

Andrew, after more than 10 years as a partner, compared the approach to partner to being "in a goldfish bowl" and said:

> "I mean I suppose the time when I most closely examined whether my own attributes and skills most closely matched what the firm was looking for was the point at which I was approaching partnership. I mean that was definitely the time where you'd go through most self-examination because you are tested most rigorously by the firm "

The partners, seen as defining of the organization, are giving the aspiring partner frequent feedback on whether the aspiring partner 'fits', operating as sense-breaking on the applicant, and also giving advice about how to achieve partnership, operating as sense-giving. Applicants must learn how to sell themselves such that partners want to make time in their busy working lives to mentor the applicant. Ann said that you have to be able to persuade partners to "give *you* the time of day." Applicants define and refine their personal brand. Geoffrey explained:

> "when I was going through the partner election process I refined my brand … it's helpful for that elevator conversation when you meet someone who's a potential vote."

Applicants necessarily develop a network of partners which is seen as essential to operating as a partner.

> "It is very well founded I believe as a process because it is about saying you cannot succeed as a partner without a strong network around you," (Ann).

The requirement to interact with a variety of partners can also be an efficient way to learn about the organization outside your group.

> "[I] learnt more about the firm in those two years than I'd done in the previous ten years," (Fraser).

Third, aspiring partners must get through an election and for that the aspiring partner must find a number of supporters amongst the existing partner group. Even in the larger of the two participating firms, an interviewee reported that all partners still had a say in new partner elections, even though partners no longer had collective votes on any other matters. Whether by collectively electing a panel to elect new partners or by voting directly, all partners had a say. The aspiring partners need powerful supporters in the partner group who might be able to promote them or influence the panel if necessary, as Christopher says:

> "I think it's important that you convince people around you so you've got powerful support of people who might be close who are, you know, having words behind closed doors maybe ... it's helpful if somebody else behind the scenes is able to say, 'Actually, no, no, he does have this. This is where I've

seen it.' So I think there's no question that that was happening, certainly through my process."

None of the interviewees mentioned having a right to veto new partners but an older partner recalled a blackball system where a single partner could stop an individual being elected. This shows that the setting in which identity work is performed gradually changes over the course of an individual's time as a partner; I do not wish to suggest that these processes have been completely static for the last 35 years.

Overall the partnership track is considered by partners to have been the most intense period of personal growth and reflection in their journey through the organization. As such, the criteria at that point in time, and the partners who act as mentors/interviewees, will act on individuals to create an identification through which all future interactions will be filtered. The perceptions of the organization held at this point are important because this is such an intense period of identity creation. This creates a base identification to which future interactions are compared (Pratt et al, 2006). As such an intense process is not repeated over a 20 year career as a partner, what is the long term impact of this experience from one point in time on future identity work?

4.3 Acceptance/rejection

The impact of the partnership process on the subjective understanding of the self is captured well in the following quote from a partner who experienced both rejection and acceptance. It forces reflection about the self:

> "Because I've been through it twice, I've developed a very different view. So the first time that I went up I wanted to tick every box, I couldn't realistically, so I think my submission was quite weak in areas but I was trying to cover everything as best as I could. [The second time] I had a better idea of what I wanted to do and knew that there are some areas you're going to be strong in, some areas you're going to be weak in, and kind of took a view as if I didn't care." (Barry)

Acceptance may be marked with ritual and celebration. Nick recalled new partners in the past being given "a ceremonial key to the partners' drink cabinet," but commented that now:

> "they all get taken away to some resort somewhere in the world [and].... given a few days coaching and counselling on what does it mean to be a partner...And, of course, the odd drinks in the pub."

Acceptance at the end of the intense partnership process appears to continue to act as a disciplining mechanism for some time after entry in to the partnership. Two years after completing the process one partner said:

> "there's two or three things that I really take from that still and you know I'm in quite an intense period of self-reflection about my career,"(Ann).

Similarly Geoffrey has actively sought since election to adopt the advice received during the partnership process:

> "I've changed some of my personal characteristics on his advice ... in order to more fit the mould of what of what a partner should look like. So I would be quite - I wouldn't have thought so much about what I was saying is probably the best way of putting it. Over the past two or three years I've put an awful lot of effort into that. I'd have been more flippant, more sarcastic, more... So I have changed my personality to fit into a mould. ...It feels very natural now. I've conformed."

There appears to be an element of gratitude for being accepted which makes the new partner determined to live up to expectations. Iain says:

> "I recognise that [Firm] took a huge risk on me and recognise that I need to pay back for that."

Louise links this gratitude to seeking to meet expectations. She says:

> "I think the only thing that changed [on getting partnership] was in my head to say, you know, actually all the things that maybe I was told I wasn't doing before I really should try to do more of."

William links this gratitude to the expectation that partners will be loyal to the firm and not leave for a competitor:

> “hopefully I'm starting to pay them back for that faith. So … if I were in their position I'd be pretty disappointed if they got a letter from me saying 'I'm moving on to do something else and by the way I'm going to join the competition.'”

The conformity period does not last forever. Lisa explained it as follows:

> “I think then there's the piece that's sort of a year after where actually - ...the reality of partnership....hits home, and not in any sort of nasty way but in a way of you understand that a partnership is a partnership and, you know, people are there to be successful, as well as for the firm, for themselves. .... you realise you can't be aligned with everything in the firm.”

Fraser was shocked by the gap between the topics discussed in the partnership process sessions with existing partners and the content of the partner contract:

> “So when you sign, it’s a very short contract and it seems to mean pretty much you’re available twenty-four seven three hundred and sixty-five days a year and, you know, you think well, it can’t possibly be like that in reality, I’ll sign it anyway. And pretty soon on after becoming a partner you realise they actually really did mean what was in the contract.”

Fraser also assumed that partners must be somehow rising above trying to out-compete each other and was shocked to realise the extent to which he had to compete against other partners, that the collegiality did not run very deep. Even though that firm has a long and relatively open process to follow to become a partner, people still talk of finding out important details only after getting partnership. Fraser added:

> “When you sign the contract and you start you [are] suddenly ... in a whole new email loop ... you certainly haven’t been seeing [before] and you see a whole new set of information and set of new rules that you’re looking at and you think, well, it looks a bit odd, I didn’t really think I’d signed up for some of this.”

Lisa describes a point where she stopped thinking only in terms of the firm and started to think in terms of herself as well as for the firm. I suggest there is a period post-election when they think primarily of the firm and Lisa is perhaps describing a point at which the powerful disciplining effect of the partnership process starts to wear off. Another interviewee from the same firm talks about trying for the first couple of years of partnership to fulfil all criteria before reaching a point where the impossibility of that on a sustainable basis became apparent (similar to Michel, 2012) and he/she looked around to find that other partners were not doing the same. Individuals describe making great efforts to be collegial, to share leads and to support other partners, only to find that such behaviour is not always returned. For example, a relatively new partner said:

> "I've been very collegiate; I perhaps would be less collegiate next year."

The new partner feels that successful partners are maybe not as collegial as she expected.

In this early post-acceptance stage the expectation that a partner will stay is matched by a determination on the part of the new partner to fulfil every demand the organization makes. However the fierce competition between partners, at odds with the perceived collegiality of the club of partners to which the partner aspired, is first experienced at about this time.

4.4 Demands made of, controls on and influence of partners

Some perceptions held by aspiring partners are found to be inaccurate once partnership is achieved. Throughout partnership there continue to be identity demands to be negotiated, controls on performance and only limited powers to satisfy the individual's expectation of greater control.

4.4.1 Demands

The obvious identity demands in the data can be described in terms of the responsibilities partners feel to behave in certain ways. The dominant theme is the breadth of these responsibilities.

> “Breadth of responsibility is quite immense really. ... I always describe my job as sort of three dimensions. So I have a business that I run, so I run a practice, I have a P&L responsibility and responsibility for everything there from recruitment through to business strategy, service definition, sales, everything within that. Then I have client management responsibilities, so I have accounts, global account responsibility for a couple of accounts and some other smaller accounts which requires me to coordinate the client relationships with the [firm], ensuring we’re bringing the right ... people into there. And then of course with my selling and delivering [work], I have partner oversight responsibility for those jobs and I’m [doing the technical work] as well as part of the team. So it’s a very broad set of things. Juggling and prioritising is hard, is constantly hard.” (Delia)

Hamish described partner in terms of:

> “accountability for your piece of the business, for the welfare of your people, whether that's on the job or in your own practice, and for the results”; but “was comfortable that I was not on the hook should the firm go down.”

Hamish goes on to describe it as “an honour, I think, to be in this position where you've got all sorts of other hungry people's careers in your hands.”

The expectations are conflicting, for example, the expectations to prioritise client work and to be collegial. Isabelle, a relatively new partner, describes the difficulty in being collegial:

> “I will always put the client first. So the colleague who wants me to focus on the [client A] account, versus the one who wants me to focus on the [client B] account, they don't get what they need really. Just because I can't do it all.”

Isabelle describes therefore feeling “uncomfortable” because she is struggling to do the “right thing” by the other partners.

In both participating firms there are published values which the partners are expected to embody. While Nigel sees values as important for the successful functioning of a partnership they are also a source of disagreement between partners, for example, if someone prioritises one value over another value.

Interviewees talked of being taught about the importance of setting an example by living by the values.

Training courses are another way in which partners receive demands, for example, Barry, a new partner, said he had been to "the partner leadership training thing about three months ago" and talked about needing to "lead by example." As leaders they would influence the behaviours of others in the firm.

Being a 'leader' was mentioned frequently but what does 'leadership' mean for the partners? Adam said:

> "people look up to partners internally"; "you are the expert so they are looking to you for, you know, leadership."

Ann understood she had to be "available and accessible as a people leader" and also that partners should be "aspirational leaders so that people want to follow them." Kirstin agreed, saying as a partner you "have to be a leader of the next generation." Although she had now been a partner for over a decade, when she was a new partner she felt it as "an enormous responsibility to lead." Jack defined partnership as:

> "about leading, both in the market and leading our people. That's what partnership is. It's no more complex than that really."

Indeed Paul and Victor both mentioned having to demonstrate "thought leadership" to get partnership. Victor had shaped his submission around how he could lead client thinking. Kirstin said that as an aspiring partner "you had to demonstrate *you* were *more* of a leader" than the others. Similarly, in another firm, Lisa said:

> "as you go through to partnership, a lot of what is focused upon is softer skills; you know, ability to lead, showing you can grow in the marketplace."

However this demand to 'lead' includes a demand to conform to the policy of the firm. Adrian said:

> "I do have frustrations but I go back to that thing that I'm a leader so I zip it up."

Oliver, in another firm, also described having to "take the responsibility as leader" while having to "shut up" to be loyal to the "leadership system." He had been a partner for over a decade and had received feedback more than once to the effect that he should "have two ears and one mouth." He should listen to the *leadership*, and speak as one voice with it. Adam and Adrian also talked about being leaders while also talking about the "leadership" as a subset of partners, not including them. So it appears that when partners talk about the expectation to behave as leaders, they are talking about leading their teams and clients but also about maintaining the appearance of being in agreement with the senior management team policy.

However underlying all these express demands is a fundamental expectation: that partners will stay in the firm. Partners should stay loyal to the firm and not move to a competitor firm. It may not be printed in the value set or required by the contract but it is felt and understood by the members of the organization. I have already mentioned a link between the gratitude felt on receiving partnership and loyalty to the firm, for example, William felt the firm had put its faith in him, but the study revealed several other drivers linked to this phenomenon. First, partners in all three industries were critical of partners who switched firms. For example, one interviewee in a law firm had moved firms just before partnership but was critical of himself for having done so, even though he had been deeply unhappy in the previous firm: "I never really planned to leave. I'm not that kind of person." Lyle's current firm pursued him for over a year but he demonstrated great loyalty to his then employer which he believes made him attractive to his now partners. Charles expressed it forcefully:

> "how do I feel about people who have left the firm and gone to other firms? So, I've got no close friends who've done that and, in a sense, that's probably because I view it as an act of betrayal and therefore I would struggle to have those people as friends ... We've obviously had a number of people who have left just to go to firms, and each time the easy description would be traitor."

Some of the accountants contrasted the norm in their profession with that of consultants who they considered to be "tarts" for their lack of allegiance to firms. However in this study the same expectation was found in the consulting firm and was reinforced in that firm by the remuneration mechanisms for partners. Alice described it as "a real loyalty, an institutional loyalty." Anthony, Christopher and Arthur, all in

one firm, all described having a very strong sense of loyalty to the firm. Anthony felt that this might be changing for others in the firm. Talking about lateral hire partners joining from other firms, he said:

> "to me the loyalty aspect's gone, it's all about how much can I earn in this limited time that I have, because I don't have a pension, I've got to maximise what I'm going to generate."

This reaction to lateral hires is difficult to reconcile with the action of the firm in head hunting the lateral hires. Yet James believed that lateral hire partners could not have the same "emotional attachment" as he had developed:

> "I grew up as an adult with this firm … My journey with the firm is part of who I am … I spend more time with the firm than I spend with my family, so it is part of who I am … I get upset every day in this firm because it's mine."

If he went to a different firm, he believes he would not get upset about the same issues because:

> "I'd just be a … highly paid employee."

Indeed James talked about a fellow partner having left not long after gaining partnership, believing it might be "easier" to be in a firm to which the partner had less accumulated emotional attachment because it would be easier to accept certain behaviours from the firm. Adrian expressed concerns about keeping the "spirit of partnership" when people are brought in from outside. In Barry's experience not only do senior lateral hires cause more junior professionals to "lose ambition and motivation," but also outsiders "don't have an understanding or empathy for the way" the work is done in his firm and while he could think of a few successful lateral hires, many "fail" in the firm. Simon compared the failure of lateral hire partners to "tissue rejection."

Anthony went on to say how he tried to persuade younger partners that loyalty made sense for them as well as for the firm. Zac observed that the norm of the industry might be at odds with the norms in wider society:

> "You know, if you talk to somebody in their late-twenties and thirties now, or if you talk to a recruitment consultant now and they look at your CV and you've been somewhere for seventeen years, that's actually almost a negative."

Oliver, a partner for less than ten years, was aware that the approach of his firm is that if you leave for a competitor firm:

> "you play on the wrong team … if you're not on my team, I'll just fight you."

Although Oliver understood this he was not sure he agreed with it and thought it needed to change.

A second driver of this phenomenon is that partners perceived considerable difficulties in achieving success in a different firm, for example:

> "you've got to go and build a network of people in order to be able to sell and be effective. And also you've got to... build it up with clients, so I ... don't want to go through all of that again," (Paul).

This demand of allegiance and loyalty is absorbed by the individuals. In the participating firms only 11 of the 39 interviewees could imagine joining another firm. The following quote is typical of the remaining majority:

> "I've had calls from head-hunters frequently over the years and I don't think I've even taken it to a follow-up call; I might have done once, but that's it. ... I just think, if I was to choose [this profession], it would be [my firm]. I wouldn't go into another." (Jack)

Several interviewees suggested that somewhere on the path as a young partner they had stopped perceiving their membership of the organization as a job and potentially temporary and started perceiving themselves as defining of the firm and as defined by the firm. The concerns expressed about the collegiality of specific colleagues may counter this attachment to the firm, but the emotional significance of the firm to one partner is summed up in this quote: "this is ... my firm, and this is the firm I love," (Simon).

4.4.2 Controls

Formal controls on partners beyond selection to the partnership include financialized forms of control (Alvehus and Spicer, 2012), the annual review processes (Covaleski et al, 1998) and rules within the firm. Informal controls include the ability of partners to ostracize an individual. These controls can act as sense-breaking mechanisms prompting identity work.

- Financialized forms of control

I first describe the remuneration of partners before looking at how partners perceive the financialization of the calculation of reward and of other forms of control. In this section I do not attribute all quotes to named interviewees because this was a very sensitive topic for them.

The title 'partner' does not tell you whether the partner has some form of ownership (either equity in a legal partnership, or shares in a company using a partnership ethos). Not all 'partners' take their pay in the form of profits from owning a share of the business; some are salaried partners: "the fact that I'm not an equity partner doesn't actually make a difference." The use of the title across the professional industries was changing:

> "for example [Firm] have dropped their associate partner role which was a salaried role and they call everybody now partner."

There was variation even between equity partners; in some firms you are suddenly "showered with equity" but in others you build up an equity stake slowly over time. 46 of the 50 interviewees for this study had some form of equity ownership but the ways in which their remuneration was calculated varied, even though they were 'equity' partners. 39 of my interviewees came from the two participating firms. Neither firm uses a pure lockstep system, in which you are allocated units for your time served; both seek to take in to account various elements. Even within the same professional industry interviewees described variation between firms in the use of lockstep, modified lockstep, or "eat what you kill" systems. There was also variation between firms in the transparency of partners' remuneration to other partners in the firm, and in the use of elements of deferred remuneration which reinforced the expectation of loyalty.

Within a firm, remuneration of partners might vary between countries:

> “That's the model for EMEA - Europe, the Middle East and Asia. We have a sort of federated model with the United States.”

Remuneration had also varied within a single firm for some partners during their time as partners:

> “that has changed … the twelve years or so I’ve been a partner. Whereas when I first became a partner it would be much more that kind of step, you know, kind of, you start at the bottom of the rank and you slowly work your way up through to more senior partner positions. I think it is much more … role based now so somebody can come in as a partner and take on a very senior role and would be remunerated and recognised on that basis.
>
> Q: Right.
>
> So it’s much less about tenure than about what your responsibilities are, what your contribution to the business is.”

How does this variation affect my study? Different models of remuneration act as managerial controls in different ways. Although two interviewees described their firms as lockstep firms, the rest involved some element of performance related or responsibility related pay so would be a mechanism for reinforcing identity demands of members. Although these remuneration differences between firms were used by interviewees when describing their firm and distinguishing it from other firms, in the identity work accounts in chapters 5 and 6 remuneration mechanisms per se were rarely referred to in the identity work accounts. However remuneration did appear in two ways which I therefore now consider a little further.

First I consider the strength of the link between pay and performance reviews. The lack of effective managerial controls on high-earning partners appears in accounts in Chapter 6 and echoes the financialization of PSFs generally (Alvehus and Spicer, 2012). An equity partner in a lockstep firm, said:

> “The way that they conduct reviews here is it's a means by which you manage the expectations down of your fellow partners. So you turn up and get criticised for an hour. So your response, of course, is to say, "Well, I don't

> believe any of that and I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing." Because you've got to appreciate this firm is run by about [six partners at the top of equity] whose business it is and their job - even if you call yourself an equity partner, it doesn't make any difference; you don't get to vote on anything - their job is to pay you the minimum necessary for you to stay, commensurate with what you bill."

An equity partner in a *non*-lockstep firm, made a slightly different point:

> "as a partner actually there isn't that opportunity for you to balance out to your performance so you are … defined by the numbers you bring in and you know there's as many different ways of saying well actually we value you as an individual, your seniority, your experience, etcetera but ultimately you are rewarded on a set of numbers and a set of hard metrics and that dominates everything and I assumed I think quite naively from the conversations that I had that the other partners had risen above this, that [the metrics] didn't really apply, it was there to stop people behaving terribly. It's not, it's actually it's quite an interesting straightjacket around you as individuals. So you sign up for being a senior person taking responsibility for other people's careers, lives, times, you know, looking after all aspects of things; the reality is you step into a world where although you're closer to the top the view of you is actually narrower not broader and [the numbers become] the focus - the focal point and the driving point for the firm."

Various interviewees described people looking to "negotiate" their share of the pay. These quotes suggest that if you generate more profit than other people, you can negotiate your share of the pay and regard feedback as a cynical mechanism to pay you as little as possible; and that the calculation of remuneration, contrary to what might be said in a performance review, suggests that profit generation is more important than other behaviours mentioned in performance reviews.

Second, in common across all three industries was the perception that being a partner "pays well". Being paid well was used as a support for self-esteem. I have already described the leap in pay on gaining partnership in 4.1.3. The link between higher pay and being a partner was even problematic for some partners, for

example, Anthony in 5.3 below refers to the level of partner pay in explaining why he disagreed with the firm's redundancy policy.

- Performance reviews

For several people the reality of partner reviews came as a shock. Consistent with work on financialization, Fraser said:

> "You know that you're personally responsible for bringing in business, that's fine, but how you're judged you would assume is a broader contribution to the firm given that you're a senior person. In reality you're probably judged more harshly and more on the simple numbers than any of the others things you can bring to the firm, which are now seen to be something that you're doing almost in your spare time."

Fraser feels that his efforts to meet a wide range of responsibilities are valued less highly than profit generation. This changed on becoming a partner. Similarly, in another industry, Lisa said:

> "As you go through to partnership, a lot of what is focused upon is softer skills, ability to lead, showing you can grow in the marketplace, and all of that sort of thing. When you become a partner, a lot of that stuff goes back to numbers. So you sort of draw a full circle of where you were many years ago when everybody was interested in what you actually delivered through to it's all about softer skill capability and showing potential, and then back to, I suppose, realising that potential is probably the reality of it but how does that actually come through.
>
> Q: So then its back to sales, is it?
>
> Some of it is sales. … It's not all number metrics, but there's lots of metrics."

Across the industries it was clear that continuing in one of these firms was perceived to be conditional on your "numbers" being satisfactory. The emphasis on profit generation is a source of fierce competition between partners. As will be explored further below in the section on interactions between partners, the reality of life as a partner can be more like "turf war" than like being in a club.

I mentioned above that the reinforcement of feedback by linking it to remuneration was weak for partners who generate a lot of profit. Although feedback processes are applied to partners, the impact of these seems to be far less than in the partnership process. Fraser explained that feedback as a means of control is "very easy to ignore as well, particularly if you are successful." Indeed highly profitable partners seemed to be able to ignore various rules. Ashley, who had been the highest billing partner in that firm, explained that due to the behaviour of a certain partner, "I don't go to partners meetings anymore." However Ashley also said that "If I had two years where I billed less than two million, I would go to the partner meetings." Greater profit generation increases what can be negotiated at the boundary of the organization and personal identities.

- Informal control

Informal controls on partners include ostracizing a partner for poor behaviour. Hamish describes the possibility of not sharing jobs with partners who exhibit poor behaviours but also recognises that the scope for doing this is limited:

> "Now, you could argue that, well, don't play with those children anymore. You know, go and find some nicer kids to play with. But sometimes that's not possible, either because there is, shall we say, a little bit of a push towards, you know, that's the nominated person, that's therefore who it is decreed you will play with, or because they have a store of knowledge that you need and they're leveraging it."

While partners are managed through various control mechanisms the impact of these for identity work purposes should not be overestimated because the controls seem to be relatively easy to ignore if you generate more profit than other partners. Nevertheless, partners were aware of the control of their subjective understanding of themselves. Adele describes:

> "if you're away on holiday and you see [the Firm's] office or something at that sort of level, or if I'm at a dinner party or at a social thing that's got nothing to do with work at all and there is somebody there who you know wouldn't mention [the Firm] but says something about their business or what they think

and I will in my mind it would have triggered 'what I say now you know even if it's on a Saturday night is in a sort of [Firm] context' -

…

- I then become rather than [Adele] on a Saturday night out for dinner I then become in my mind [Adele] a partner from [the Firm]."

Adrian describes not having understood the extent to which it would take him over:

"But my wife would say you know clearly work dominates my life I mean we've moved because of my job…I work long hours and I now only see my wife at the weekend because I'm a weekly commuter. So I would say - it's interesting actually because I remember [over twenty] years ago when I was being interviewed for the partnership by the panel they asked what does it mean to become a partner and how -

Q: Okay.

And I said rather naively and rather gushingly oh a hundred per cent I'm on the watch all the time and in many ways you are of course because whether or not you're at the golf club whether or not you're at a dinner party whether or not you're at a client you're always a partner at [the Firm]."

4.4.3 Influence

On the approach to partnership partners are perceived as powerful, not least because they have the power to elect or not aspiring partners.

"That's who you have to get votes from." (Geoffrey)

"They want me to vote for them." (Ann)

Partners do generally feel that their position brings increased control and autonomy, but that control is limited to certain areas. Fraser observed that when:

"you reach a senior position you're able to shape what happens ... you have the opportunity to create some of the ethos and the principles within your

team and arrogantly you can personalise that … since you generally chip off the bits you don't like and leave the things you do like."

However this feeling of control and influence does not appear to extend to the organization. A lateral hire expressed surprise at the lack of management responsibility of partners. This was echoed in the older partners' experience of an encroaching corporatism in a firm in another industry.

"One of the negatives is that whether we like it or not, people who are partners in partnership think that they've got power. And that they have a degree of freedom. Which the reality is, we don't.

Q: Now I often think of that as the autonomy element of a traditional partnership. Is that what - am I understanding you in the right way?

… if you're talking about the degree of autonomy that one individual partner has, then yes … And that has massively changed over my professional - so it starts well before I became partner. ...once you get to a certain scale you can't operate as a partnership. The concept of a partnership that all of the partners have equal decision making power and any important decision will go to the whole partnership and all partners are created equal etc. ...well before we got to going global we were starting to move in that direction anyway. But at least the partners still elected the managing partner. And at least they still had a vote every now and again on key decisions.

Q: So do you now not have?

No. No." (Andrew)

In the same firm Charles said that the idea attaching to partnership of 'one man, one vote' has never really worked:

"when you're a relatively new partner, you like the idea of partnership, I belong to this big body, we're all 'one man, one vote', 'one person, one vote', whatever, but you realise (1) as you become more senior you are heard more, you are listened to more, people seek your views more and (2) you realise that actually to get things done, you need to be more corporate."

He argues that taking away the vote has not changed anything:

> "I'm of sufficient seniority and confidence; I'll go to anyone and say anything. So actually, you've removed nothing, you will still know exactly how I feel; up to you to choose whether you choose to listen or not … we've taken away something, a formality, but nothing more, for me. Whereas if I was a five-year-partner, I might say something very different of, 'I feel much less able to influence the partnership than I did five years ago when I was a new partner and it was one man, one vote.' I'm not sure, actually they're right, but maybe they like to think they are.'

In a second industry Hamish commented "I don't think [partnership] necessarily means quite as much as once it did." In the same firm, even relatively recent partners have found they got less influence than they expected to get over the future of the firm, for example, Fraser says he thought "we got to steward the firm and do it in such a way as that you know it's a better working environment, …and the mistakes of the past are ironed out and fixed and thought about; and I am not sure there's a mechanism for that happening because the focus of the partner is purely on you as an individual succeeding." In the third industry, Alan likewise said:

> "Because you've got to appreciate this firm is run by about six people at the top … even if you call yourself an equity partner, it doesn't make any difference; you don't get to vote on anything."

In general across all three industries partners feel pushed to focus on the professional work, servicing the clients, rather than the future of the firm. This is contrary to the expectations held by lateral hires and new partners of the influence attaching to partnership. It has been experienced as a change by existing partners.

I mentioned in 4.4.1 above the expectation to lead but staying in line with the leadership of the firm, in the form of the senior management of the firm. This lack of influence for some partners over things decided centrally is described by Adele:

> "I have been desperate to distance myself from some of those [decisions].
>
> Q: So what can you do in that situation?

> Not distance yourself … the answer is you have to put yourself behind it and bite your tongue … and work out the bits you can change and the bits that you can't and - but for something like that … decided centrally then - that you can't influence - then I think the only thing you can do as a partner is stand behind it."

Some partners will seek to get the influence they expected by taking on management roles.

> "The people who really wield the decision making power are practice heads ... they sit on the management committees, they're the people who really drive the firm and their particular parts of the business," (Ashley)

but partners feel pushed to focus on professional work rather than the future of the firm. Even practice heads have to meet their numbers. It is as if the management part is to be done in your spare time.[3]

As regards autonomy in professional work, Geoffrey, in describing a partner training course, illustrated the autonomy partners continue to have to achieve their target numbers:

> "we had a training course about networking, I think it was and two of the most senior partners in the firm were there talking about how they do it. One said, 'Well, I like to invite my clients back to my house … for the weekend together and I love that because I know that is a fixed period of time that I have to spend with them and then I can turn them out the door and I can relax.' And the other one said, 'Oh no, I can never do that. Weekends are sacrosanct. They're just for me,' and for me that was a reflection that there's no right or wrong way of doing it, just find the balance that you're comfortable with. But at least those two people had deliberately and consciously chosen their different routes and they made that work for them."

[3] I cannot tell from my data whether the pressure on partners to focus on professional work rather than management issues has been exaggerated by collecting the data in a recession. It is in line with the institutional shift over the last 20 years towards more corporate models of management in law firm partnerships (Empson, Cleaver and Allen, 2013).

The demands made of partners, the controls which dictate partners' priorities and the limited influence that partners have over the organization often appear from interviewees' accounts to be understood by partners who then seek to rationalise this setting in which they find themselves, for example, Sarah who became a partner after 2000:

> "I think there's a generational change there. I mean certainly, actually when I made partner you pretty much thought, this is probably going to be your career [until retirement] … 200X, five years later I [was] sitting there going, I don't know if I'm actually going to retire from this firm, sitting here today I don't know if I'm going to retire from this firm, that is a fundamental mind shift and I said this in a partner forum and one of our head of markets and the senior partner was like, I need to have a conversation, he was absolutely shocked, I said, well why would you be shocked and life's very different, we work, I mean the way the partners work now, how we're measured, it's completely different I'm not even sure it is sustainable to work this way 'til you're 60, you know we don't have partner luncheons where we go off for two or three hours, we stand in sandwich queue with everyone else, so it's just about, and also because you have a lot more partner churn, you know partners are asked to leave the partnership so …. And I don't think, I'm what [less than ten] years this year partner it doesn't feel that long, in terms of overall time, yes I think there's a fundamental mind-set change where you kind of go, well I don't know what's going to happen."

Although Sarah is seeing it as a generational change, older partners talk of several culls in previous decades which suggest that perhaps Sarah's perception of the organization approaching partnership was in that regard inaccurate. Hugh, in a different firm, described a cull of less productive partners in the past:

> "At that point, a lot of partners in the [X] department - some, particularly in the [Y] area which was really just getting going, who were making a terrific amount of money for the firm - essentially clubbed together and said, 'Right, this is quite unacceptable. You know, we need to tighten the screws and there are a lot of people here who are not pulling their weight and, you know, are just sucking the money out of the firm and blocking up the paths of

> promotion for people who we would prefer to keep.' So [the firm] at that point was a worldwide partnership of about [number]. Within two years, they got rid of [number]. So, a 20% reduction … Which is a very, very big cut. It was done in a sort of firm but polite way where, if you weren't in the partnership - which of course I wasn't at the time - you had no idea what was going on but you could just tell that things weren't particularly happy."

Nevertheless Sarah's more recent experiences of demands and controls are being measured against that deeply adopted perception he/she held as an aspiring partner. She has had to reconcile the myth and the reality of partnership. This echoes the suggestion in 4.3 that new partners have a moment when 'reality' sinks in.

In summary the identity demands made of partners include the expectations that partners will behave as leaders and will stay loyal to the organization. The perceived power of partners is found to be less than expected, limiting the ability for partners to influence the future direction of the organization. The demands and limited influence are the background for identity work on maintaining the boundary between organizational and personal identities considered in the next two chapters. The controls contribute to often fierce competition between partners, contrary to the expected collegial, supportive behaviour of a partner club. This competitive environment is explored further in 4.5 below.

4.5 Interactions

Interactions with those around us are inputs to identity work as we receive signals of acceptance or rejection. In this section I briefly consider the often positive affirmative relations with juniors, corporate and clients before exploring in more detail the under-acknowledged fierce competition, or even sometimes hostility, of some inter-partner relations. Lastly I consider interactions with a spouse as an example of interactions outside the organization.

The following quote from Ann gives an overview of the groups of people with whom partners interact, namely clients, prospective clients, junior professionals, other partners, and the corporate side of the firm:

> "One of the things I absolutely love about it (I don't know whether this is about [the firm] or about [the industry] but you know when things are going well for me I absolutely love the fact that at any one time I'm juggling: running some important stuff for clients, you know, going and having really intimate discussions with senior clients and when I say intimate, you know, kind of business wise intimate around what are our strategic objectives and what are we going to be spending our money on and sometimes they are very personally intimate as well about what am I going to do with my career and how am I going to do that and you know there's a lot of coaching around senior people; going straight from that to a pitch where I go and meet somebody who I've not met before and talk to them about you know stories about what we've done elsewhere and get them interested in that; and I go straight from that to, you know, a coaching session where, you know, a junior kind of looks at me slightly starry eyed and says gosh I've never put it in that context before that's really helpful thank you very much; [and] straight from that to a practice management meeting where we look across the priorities of what we're doing across the practice and take it forward."

Ann is aware that interactions as a partner are different to those earlier in a career:

> "when you join as a junior I think you have very little relationship with corporate. Everything is about your seniors so I was a [assistant] and everything was about the [immediate senior] I worked for. I didn't even really [see] the [level above that] ... gosh the times I saw the partner, that was a very high figure up there."

While I said earlier that partners feel pushed by the controls to focus on professional work, they do have more interaction with corporate functions than before, in the sense that they are involved in marketing, recruitment, etc. as a result of running a group/team, even if they are not involved in the central management of the firm. I shall now look at the various interactions mentioned by Ann.

4.5.1 Interactions with juniors

Partners talk of enjoying their interactions with juniors. They find it rewarding when their efforts to coach juniors are appreciated and valued. However the quantity of

coaching can become too consuming. As well as finding it rewarding, partners talk of feeling a responsibility to be available as a mentor to junior professionals in their firms. Not being able to find the time for coaching juniors can trigger an emotional reaction in partners as they balance their conflicting roles as workers, managers and leaders in the firm.

> "If somebody feels they would get value from my time I always want to give it to them. Consequently my diary is constantly full of juniors wanting half an hour of my time for coaching. ... I become completely ineffective and then I let everybody down.... But the people who genuinely come back... and who give me the feedback which says 'nobody's ever said that to me before about my career' ... in some ways those are the things that I'll take to my grave far more than half the stuff here to be honest." (Ann)

The responsibility felt to juniors is also seen in partners' talk about protecting their junior staff:

> "if you're a good partner then you can deflect most of the rules from the people who work for you so they stay [and] you keep good people" (Fraser).

This feeling of responsibility to juniors is intricately bound up with the need as a partner to recruit and keep a team of juniors:

> "if you take being partner seriously ... You have to manage you know encourage, engage, bring other people on because ... as a partner in a people business you need to keep good bright people. Good bright people need money, ideas, interesting work too and given the nature of people that we tend to hire you know they're not necessarily here for the money, not the people who work for me.... you have to find interesting things for them to do … if we [told them to just get on with it] they wouldn't be here in a few weeks' time" (Fraser).

Partners are interacting with new juniors every year. Although people leave in the up-or-out system approaching partnership, the partners find that they are often interacting with new, enthusiastic young professionals who look to them as leaders of the firm.

4.5.2 Interactions with CEO/managing partner and the corporate side

> "It's funny because in my world now I have an awful lot of dealings with corporate people but I think it's quite a senior thing to do in a professional service firm." (Ann)

Corporate here includes functions, such as, facilities management, marketing and human resources, as well as management bodies, such as, management committees on which partners and professional managers work together. Some partners move in to corporate positions, such as, COO, so 'corporate' can include some of the partners in the firm. Interactions with corporate are generally described as annoying and time-consuming but acknowledged as important. They do not appear to be the source of much affirmation or rejection. To the extent that the corporate side has not conventionally been regarded as central and defining of the firm then this is not surprising. The exceptions are interactions in which partners are being managed by corporate, for example, complaints about a partner's behaviour. However in these instances the corporate individuals are generally seen as just carrying out orders and any frustration is directed at the professionals involved in management, such as, the managing partners. A complication in the relationships between partners and others in the firm is that as owners, the partners feel that they pay for various things, which can be as simple as the Christmas party (Ann) or as complicated as investing in the future of the firm.

4.5.3 Interactions with clients

Partners in some firms have sales targets which are sufficiently high that a significant amount of a partner's work time is spent developing and maintaining relations with clients and potential clients. From an identity work perspective there are two particularly interesting inputs from these interactions. First, the partners often report feeling valued by the clients. Second, in order to sell the firm the partners have to put in to words what is special about the firm and sell that to a potential client. In their interactions with clients as the face of the firm, the partners receive often positive feedback about the firm and also frequently have to reflect on the firm in order to sell the firm. While interactions with clients will not always be positive, many partners mentioned client work as the best part of their week:

> “When I get annoyed with things like having to deal with the processes and the systems of the firm, then what I'll do is I'll make sure that next Monday morning … I have a day full of client meetings so it will actually remind me why I'm doing this job. Because I think if you start a week with either being with a client or with a target of being out there and talking about business … you think, this is why I do the job rather than I'm filling in a system generated approval form. And then you realise that that is the infrastructure that supports the bit that you really enjoy.” (Lisa)

4.5.4 Interactions with partners

Positive partner to partner interactions include successful client work and partners feeling they can share the responsibility for the future of the firm and get support from peers. A lateral hire partner described the value of partners as peers:

> “The pros are you're not alone and that you are with a group of other people who you can call upon if you need to. Whereas before, I was completely on my own and any - I would share and discuss things with my team, but there's certain things you can't. So it was quite lonely... there's lots of people in the same situation as you.”

Similarly Victor said:

> “there is a sense of there being more than the sum of the parts, that the partners that I work with share the same values. I quite often talk at new members’ introduction courses and I host the gala dinner that we have when people join the firm, and what I say is it’s amazing, I can go to any country where [the firm] has a presence and walk into the New York office or the Dubai office or the Mumbai office and we will get the partner, the country head equivalent or something, will always be welcoming, they’ll always ask you how you’re doing, swap ideas, exchange stories. And that sense of belonging, of being more than just a collection of individuals is something I can’t really articulate and put a value to.”

Networks form of partners who can work together. Typically the strongest bonds are formed with those people throughout the firm with whom you have worked successfully on projects. Hamish feels:

> "the strongest loyalty to people with whom I've sweated blood on something. So regardless of whether they come from my practice, whether they're an [assistant] or a partner, I feel a tie to people I've worked hard with and delivered something. That, to me, is the test. I've been in the field with that person and not found them wanting, and hopefully vice versa."

From an identity work perspective this is interesting because these positive ties are not linked to rank or to work group but rather to constantly shifting client teams which span groups and ranks. These positive bonds cross sub-divisions of the organization chart and tie partners in to the organization as a whole. As Sluss and Ashforth (2007:10) said in relation to "more fluid team- and project-based work":

> "the identities and identifications flowing from role-relationships may provide much-needed cognitive and affective glue for organic organizations."

A second point to note here is that these multiple relationships possibly make any one relational-identification less significant than in a more vertical supervisor-subordinate role.

However:

> "I think the notion of a kind of cohesive partner group is a myth," (Hamish).

In stark contrast to interactions with clients and more junior professionals, the interactions reported with partners have to accommodate ongoing disagreement and continuous competition. This is perhaps not surprising given the variety of partners even within practice areas, for example, Hamish reports that;

> "within an individual practice, it varies a lot. In my practice, there are four partners altogether. We are quite different individuals and different in a number of ways. I am probably twenty years older than the youngest partner. ... Occasionally, there are bumps where we're both trying to do something similar, but by and large it works."

The interviewees in this study all come from firms with over 100 partners, all with their expectation of some influence over the future of the firm but all having been socialized in to the firm at different times. Andrew, in a firm in a different industry, said simply:

> "There are a number of partners who just want the old days back. There are a number of other partners who wonder why it's taken us this long to get to where we are it was so bloody obvious. And then there's every point in the spectrum in-between. It's a bit of a sweeping generalisation but it tends to go on age basically."

This reflects generational categorizing by organization members in other industries (Parker, 2007).

Another source of dissatisfaction in relations with other partners is due to partners often being insecure about how long they will get to continue as partners. At the end of 4.4 I set out Hugh's account of a cull of 20% of partners, forced by partners who were generating greater profits and felt that the 20% were not making enough of a contribution. Competition and disagreement arise in two ways here: first, differences between the partners in management and other partners about how the partners should be managed. As Delia relates:

> "I think there's a broad body of suspicion which is not healthy around the firm. People ... will immediately look to the negative ... 'We're going to increase partner sales targets.' 'Well that means you're doing that because you want to get rid of half the partner group.' 'Well no, we're doing that because the market's changing and it's a lot tougher'."

While in the past forcing a partner out is likely to have required a vote of all the partners, now being a partner does not mean that you are secure in your position within the firm. You are not trusted to turn your performance around; rather your performance is tracked and measured, occasionally even in real time. This threat of eviction is attributed to whichever group of partners currently has power in the management structures.

Second, there is ongoing competition between partners seeking not to be the worst performers in their firm, in other words, who are concerned not to be in the bottom 20% in their firm. Partners across all three industries in this study reported feeling that they get to continue only if they sustain the level of performance. You might be able to recover from one unlucky year but you would not see the end of a second poor performance year.

> "When you get to partner then there's the element of competition comes in with your partners so your behaviour now is driven by, wow, you know, if I don't get these leads in, if I don't do X, Y and Z, then someone else will ... and by the way if I'm working with this guy, you know, what's his angle on this, what's my angle on that. So ... you have to have sharp elbows, you have to be assertive and stand your ground which sounds great but there's a lot of energy just expended internally." (Fraser)

Rachel talks about "turf" wars in a firm in a different industry and had left a previous firm due to the level of internal competition. Alan said he:

> "tried to be partnerial and share and all that sort of thing, and the net result is you find that your clients are being cruised without you knowing. They're getting silly bills for things that they shouldn't get billed for and you're getting complaints."

Ashley said it was bad in a lockstep firm and could not imagine how much more exaggerated it would be in an eat-what-you-kill firm.

Finally, partners can and some do behave badly towards each other and then both continue in the same firm. One partner talks of feeling "vengeful" towards a partner who had treated him badly. Hamish has noticed "a certain amount of atavism" which is always dressed up as an "objective exercise" when certain partners seek to take a greater share of profit for their own group at the expense of another partner and their group. Isabelle echoes this view:

> "That's a moral boundary I think actually because I really just cannot believe that people are so self-serving and they are. But it means money to them so they're being entirely rational."

These disagreements and competitive behaviours are at odds with the collegial club perception held by many aspiring partners. Even if they are aware of some level of competition they seem to tell themselves that the partners must somehow 'rise above it'. Interestingly Hamish mentions perpetuating the 'myth' of partner cohesion to those at junior levels:

> "So this notion of partnership is a misnomer in many ways. You know, we are not all sort of arms linked. We might say we are to the troops or, you know, we might sort of go along with the messages that come out of corporate, but no."

Partners are aware that the functioning of the PSF depends to some extent on partnership being aspirational and understand part of their responsibility as leaders to be to perform as if the partnership is, perhaps, more collegial and supportive than their experience suggests. One lawyer talked of struggling with the hypocrisy of it and refusing to be involved any longer in HR presentations to juniors and potential recruits.

In summary the picture of partner-to-partner interactions was a complex mix of peer support and ongoing disagreements and continuous competition. These disagreements with partners with management positions and competitive interactions with partners, the defining members of the organization, act as a series of mini-rejections by the organization. It also appears that individuals distinguish 'good' partners from 'bad' partners, and the 'management' from other partners, suggesting that individuals identify with different subsections of the firm at different times.

4.5.5 Interactions with others

Identity work may be performed with people outside a work context. As an example of interactions outside the firm I use interactions with a spouse. Many partners derive support from talking to a spouse, for example, Delia:

> "I know the signals now... the most important thing is to know where to go for help and know what you can do ... sometimes it's as simple as my [spouse] saying, as we did on Sunday, saying, 'This week's going to be horrible'."

The support derived from talking to a spouse is an example of a 'refreshing tactic' (Kreiner et al, 2006a). Talking to the spouse supports the partner in performing the identity work at the boundary of organization membership and the self. Partners may talk to spouses about topics which they would not raise with coaches internal to the business:

> “I talk to my wife quite a lot. I use [pause] - I was going to say that I use my coaches, … like Y, but I don’t think I do in that sense actually.” (Geoffrey).

He felt that he spoke more openly with his wife about issues than with his coaches within the firm. Not all partners use spouses in this way:

> “My partner is not somebody who is naturally empathetic to things, so it's not like I'd do this at home either. “

Identity work relating to organization membership is not only performed at the boundary of the personal and organization identities; there is also a balance to be maintained with other social identities, such as, family. Not only do partners seek support from a spouse but also the demands of being a partner can have an impact on what a spouse can do with their own career.

> “I think if you look at the people who are highly successful in [this firm] ...I think that in general in their home life, their partner is taking a greater responsibility, which is giving them freedom to do a lot of other things. And it is inevitable, not for everybody, but I think for most people, there is the travelling, there are requirements that mean that you’re away from home for a period of time and it’s a sacrifice on your home life. Most of the other people I can think of, their wives might often work but it is quite a stable, local job that they have, that they can still manage the children, they can kind of manage the home.” (Barry)

In this section I have given an overview of partners’ interactions: with juniors, clients, those in corporate functions in the firm, people outside the firm, and with each other. These interactions are part of the setting in which identity work is performed.

4.6 Separation

Partners may resign before retirement, be forced out or leave at retirement. For those partners who progress through maybe 25 years as a partner, he/she may pass through a stage when their generation or their group of friends is occupying the practice head and managing partner positions and they feel aligned with the firm. They may then move in to a situation where they feel less central to the management of the firm and where they find it harder to meet the performance targets of the organization. Several interviewees described feeling as if they were

less important to the organization than the next generation. The path towards the centre of influence and out again is about letting the next generation have a go but it is a very difficult thing to do.

> "I will cease to be a group head and a practice head and I'll go and work in a practice that I touched ten years ago. And I'll be a senior partner working in the market." (Tom)

> "Sometime in the next few years this won't be my firm any more. It'll be somebody else's firm. ... that change has to be natural and the next generation have to take over ...definitely five years ago ...I would have been much more engaged in influencing things to the way I would have preferred them." (Kirstin)

Not only do the longest serving partners reach a point where they are at one extreme of the partner group, trying to share ownership with people socialized in to the partnership maybe 25 years later, but just as for partners at any stage, if they cannot meet the performance criteria, their continued position as a partner comes under threat. The performance target control mechanisms kick in as sense-breaking mechanisms and, as Kirstin put it, the partner has to somehow make the organization "matter less". Age-related identity challenges are explored in detail in 5.4.

4.7 In Summary

In this chapter describing the setting in which identity work is performed, I sought also to draw out four themes. Partners are performing identity work constantly subject to an institutional pressure to stay, fierce competition from within the partner group, aware that they should appear as figureheads representing the organization but feeling that they have increasingly little influence in the organization as a whole. These themes conflict with each other. Looking again at what Sarah said in 4.4.3 above:

> "Well this is a big thing … when I made partner you pretty much thought, this is probably going to be your career … five years later I would be sitting there going, I don't know if I'm actually going to retire from this firm … I said this in a

> partner forum … the senior partner was like, I need to have a conversation, he was absolutely shocked."

Saying out loud, even as a partner within a meeting just for partners, that she did not know if she would stay in the firm for her whole career, that she might be doing something else by the time she reached retirement which might be 20 years away, was shocking. Sarah was challenging the expectation of loyalty from partners and in doing so in front of other partners, found herself called for a conversation with the senior partner present. She explained her position by reference to the competitive atmosphere reinforced by "how we're measured" now and partners being "asked to leave the partnership." She can see that some competition between partners "might be good for the partnership" but goes on to position this as counterproductive for the creation of loyalty:

> "… but it also is quite negative, because it's buy in and loyalty and also for some people it might cause anxiety and fear, you know."

Identity work is performed throughout the journey I have described, but in the next two chapters I focus in on events perceived by the interviewees as challenging. The four themes from the identity work setting described here appear in the accounts of identity work performed in response to the challenging events.

5 Four Identity Work Events

In the previous chapter I considered the background against which partners in professional firms perform identity work relating to their membership of the firm. I now consider the identity work they perform in relation to four events appraised by them as challenging:

1. Public criticism of the firm
2. Decisions within the firm affecting only the individual member
3. Redundancy programmes as decisions within the firm affecting many members
4. Changes in the individual relevant to membership of the firm

These four challenges were reported by individuals in all three industries. For each event I describe the event characteristics and the interactions mentioned in the accounts, draw out the identity challenges and the responses and describe the outcomes. Through these descriptions I investigate two things:

- I assume an existing level of identification with the organization on the part of each individual. The individual starts with a perception of the organization, a perception of their self and a perceived overlap of the two. Existing literature accepts that individuals switch between multiple identities. When an identity is salient, the individual will behave more in accordance with the organization prototype. Does this extend to identity work? Is there identity work performed as a member of the organization, as "we", as well as identity work performed from a different identity position, or as "I"?
- Second, I ask about the outcome of the identity work. Has identity work been performed on perceptions of the self, the perception of the organization/ the perceived overlap of the two or elsewhere? Has an outcome satisfactory to the individual been achieved?

5.1 Public criticism of the firm

5.1.1 Event characteristics

The public criticism events raised by the interviewees involved coverage in the media of something which reflected negatively on the firm and triggered an

emotional reaction in the individual. Publication of a scandal in the media results in many people, both inside and outside the organization, being aware of the scandal.

> "Experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings or enactment of an identity" are identity threats (Petriglieri, 2011:644).

The self-worth derived from the identity is reduced when the identity is tainted by scandal.

The events mentioned by interviewees included:

- "press comment on a particular legal claim against the firm," Adele
- when we "got done by" a regulatory body; "we got into trouble and fined a lot of money," Adam
- "if there's been an article in the FT about how … we were the [professionals on X]," Andrew
- "if we're in the press for a poor [piece of work] or a firm that has failed is looking to blame us," Christopher
- "There was a big ... scandal … and 30 of our Partners were implicated ... That was having quite nasty PR implications. I remember going to a dinner ... with [Z] and a bunch of other partners and the headline in the Evening Standard that evening, '[firm] to collapse.' That was the headline our employees were reading." Alec
- "[Industry journal]... publishing articles saying [this firm] only has 8%, 3% whatever female partners," Hugh
- "a tribunal case that didn't reflect brilliantly on the firm. ... The [industry journal] writes a lot of garbage," Sam

Whether an event is a challenge is personal to the interviewee. The accounts used in this section were chosen because the events had been experienced by the individuals as challenging personally and/or as members of the firm. That challenge was often highlighted by reference to emotions experienced at the time. As Cascon-Pereira and Hallier (2012:130) observed, emotions can "prioritize awareness of identity issues that need attention."

Simon recalled:

> “I was the most senior person in the building when that hit, so I was the one that got briefed as we walked across the atrium and then hit it full on”

He recalled feeling:

> “this is being done to my firm, and this is the firm I love”

Delia recalled the “shock” of “suddenly seeing your company on the 10 o’clock news.”

Similarly Jack explained:

> “The reason I felt really uncomfortable was I felt that was my business. I have some ownership - it’s not something I could say [had] nothing to do with me... I felt personally really hurt ... It didn’t help that ... we had a dinner party that very evening when it broke and friends were less than supportive...until they realised my sense of humour had disappeared”

Jack also said the “feeling inside was different” at that time. Normally if Jack was asked where he/she worked, Jack would be proud to “big up” the firm but during this episode Jack thought that “saying I worked for [the firm] was just going to invite” teasing. Jack was experiencing the event as an individual and as a member of the firm.

There was no escape for Geoffrey:

> “So everyone I met from client to friends would mention it...and make fun of it. Because they were making fun of [the firm] it felt that they were making fun of me. It’s a really quite personal thing.”

Some individuals found it hard to describe:

> Adele: “I don’t like it. I feel something internally but I don’t... feel concerned about them knowing that I’m [the firm].”

Adele here does not say “I work for” or “I am at” but rather she says “I am [the firm].”

> Adrian: “I felt concerned but I mean I have never felt embarrassed to be a partner in [the firm] never absolutely never” and “I feel defensive and angry in my inner self about that article ... because it’s like the Saint Peter thing ...

> clearly somebody says you are another partner in [the firm]; then I'll get defensive about it."

Adrian is using the example of Peter in the Gospels denying being a follower of Jesus to explain feeling that other people assumed that as a partner in the firm he must be as culpable as others in the firm. Rick describes a similar experience:

> "around that time if you said, oh I work for [the Firm]. Oh yes, we know you, you're the [scandal] people."

In contrast to Adele above, Nick drew a distinction between the firm and himself:

> "I've been lucky enough that I've never had, and hopefully in the years I stay with the firm remaining I never will have, a case which has directly involved me. So therefore it has not been personal to me, although obviously of concern because, clearly, there's a reputation."

That concern was echoed by Catherine:

> "there was a concern at the back of mind where I thought, oh Christ, is this going to be one of those completely crazy things that's actually going to bring the whole [firm] down;"

And by Delia:

> "concern for the firm and fear of ...what is going to happen"

When a scandal first breaks the interviewee may not know the legal culpability or not of the firm. Whatever the truth, the interviewee is faced with many people having read/seen/heard a negative report of their firm.

5.1.2 Interactions

Clients would question the individuals as members of the firm.

> Catherine: "the clients were giving me a really hard time"

> Jack: "the main impact was that some clients, thankfully not many, chose not to keep *us* on big lists and things like that. But it was a small number. A lot

more of them were quite understanding and the middle ground were people that wanted reassurances that *we* had the processes in place."

The partners needed to be able to persuade this client audience to stay with the firm. The individuals, however, can also be in the position of the audience: Delia:

> "that happened on a [weekday] night and I would not normally have come in [the next day] but [X], my boss, was off, away, and so well actually I had to go in 'cause there's nobody there otherwise in our part of the organization. And actually coming in and then, you know, seeing how [the most senior partner] was dealing with it, proactively reaching out and talking to clients and telling them, being honest, about what had happened. And then just, not that I could say much, but being there to support the people and just tell them what was going on, you know, sort of suddenly made it a lot, lot better. You know, palatable. It wasn't easy."

Interactions with fellow members for Delia were reassuring, in contrast to the challenging interactions with clients. Information from fellow partners is important:

> Ann: "it was important to know that we were doing the right things... it was an informational thing really and it was a keeping the faith thing"

> Christopher: "I'd be uncomfortable with that situation and would want to know what had given rise to it. So if we're in the press for a poor [piece of work] or a firm that had failed were looking to blame us, I find it important to understand the background."

Some of these events would have had financial consequences for individuals had judgments gone against the firm (at the time of this study both participating firms had legal structures limiting the liability of partners but the following story was recalling a time when the partner had unlimited liability for the mistakes of other partners in this particular firm). The individual might need to reassure a spouse:

> Nick: "as I said to my wife - because when it came about, I'd only been a partner for about a year and it was something like … billion lawsuit. So she was worried, as you might imagine, and I said, "Well, to be perfectly honest, whatever my share of this would be if it all went wrong, we can't afford it

anyway. So there's no point in worrying about it." It wasn't as if we had so much money and were going to lose half of it. It would be, whatever money we had, it would all go. So we'd be starting again. So therefore I said, "It's nothing to do with *me*. *I* wasn't involved. There's nothing I can do about it. Other people are dealing with it. We've just got to get on and hope it works out," which it did."

In the last section Nick is working to restore himself in the eyes of his spouse. He went on to say:

"it's terribly difficult for the partners and staff who get involved directly in this, but if you're on the real outskirts of it, you just have to sort of say, "Right, well *we've* got people who are trusted to deal with it. They've got to get on with it.""

Nick here is drawing on the plans put in place by the partners as a group of which he is a member, or as 'We', to reassure himself, as 'I'.

So while performing identity work in relation to these challenging events, individuals will be interacting as a partner and as an individual with clients, family and colleagues. Within themselves they experience the event as identified members but also as individuals. The interactions vary in nature; some are with other people facing the same identity challenges as the interviewee while others are with audiences.

5.1.3 Identity challenge

Edward: "there was actually there was no blame or fault from [the firm's] part. If people think there is then you've got to deal with it haven't you? And then that's just getting the facts out. Once the facts are known then you're fine. But as I say why would the media just hold back in the, on that front, so yeah so I think that's probably the only time I've ever had sort of, Ooh, a slight uneasiness but I think that's just *knowing then what a party line is on it* and *knowing the truth* actually."

In these public criticism challenges, the individual appears to be feeling defensive as a member of the firm but also to be feeling criticised as an individual by family and

friends as a result of association with the firm. For each individual there is “I” and there is “we”. “I” and “we” have slightly different identity challenges. If “I” develop a new perception of the organization identity, perhaps as less attractive if the future is uncertain, “I” may reassess the overlap of the personal and social identities. I can distinguish myself from the firm to reassure myself “it is not me”. For some continuity, “I” might need a narrative to link together the changing perceptions of the firm and/or of the self and /or of the overlap between the two. “We” need a narrative to repair any damage to perceptions of the firm held by clients and to provide some continuity of organization identity. However a narrative which appears to work for others may not be enough to persuade the self:

> Arthur: “So you kind of explain that it's not quite what you think it is and the [professional work] doesn't quite do what you think it does. There's definitely an expectation gap in people's minds … outside of the profession, so I try and help the expectation gap. But I also explain how difficult it is when you're up against management who are trying to defraud the business and pull the wool over [our] eyes. .... So it's a defensive process, *even though I can sit there and say, "How on earth didn't we pick that up*?"”

The need for multiple narratives for different audiences is consistent with Ibarra and Barbulescu’s (2010) proposed narrative repertoire for flexible presentation of the self. Here, however, the flexible narrative repertoire is explained by the different challenges faced in multiple identity positions. Ibarra and Barbulescu said successful narratives would meet both “internal (authenticity) and external (validation) criteria” (2010:145). These criteria appear to vary slightly in the different identity positions. Both may feel satisfied when the organization identity is salient; one or both may not be when the organization identity is not salient.

It is interesting to note that even people who become members after an event may need a narrative to meet an identity work challenge too: William:

> “I wasn't here when [scandal hit] years ago**...** [but] one person's mentioned it to me, maybe one or two people.... There is a fairly easy thing to say, here's what happened here's how we dealt with it. We're actually praised for our response to it now.”

If association with the firm is to continue, the individual faces challenges in two identity positions:

- As “I”, explaining away the event to friends and family and assessing for the self the impact of the event on the overlap of self and organization;
- As “We”, explaining away the event to clients, the media, regulators and employees.

5.1.4 Identity work responses

However an individual’s identity challenge in such a large partnership is complicated by the limited ability of the individual to influence the future identity of the organization. Anthony comments:

> “I do get to a situation where I think, ‘Oh, God.’ You know, stuff now, this latest thing ..., I just can’t believe it’s actually happened.**...**frustration because it’s *not that I can do anything* about it... we employ [thousands of] people globally, so *we are however many partners* as well.”

In addition partners have to defend the firm but also have to toe a corporate line:

> Adam: “I read the information that we provided and we provided a fair amount of information coz we need to talk to our clients, explain it …I knew the partners on the [scandal] so I knew they were you know good professionals they weren’t you know cowboys or you know irresponsible or you know - so no I always felt I got enough information”
>
> Andrew: “sometimes you can't tell them what you know because it's confidential....So you can't defend the firm. So it's a sense of frustration. Or the party line you have to toe and you have to toe in public is weak because you're not allowed to disclose the real facts.”
>
> Anthony: “when the whole [scandal] was going down I got very defensive about that but I’ve learnt not - I’ve learnt to take the blows and make some, sort of, calculated comments around it. I’ve learnt not to go out saying, ‘Definitely these are the facts, it’s what you need to understand,’ because then what happens, the insurers move to get settlement and the minute there’s a settlement then people always imply, ‘Well, you know, you must have been

guilty if you're looking to settle.' So I tend to try and give a balanced view and leave it at that."

These restrictions can in turn create identity conflict:

> Hugh: "I have got to a point where people [in the firm] say ... that's something we can't really project because we have lost that argument, to which my answer is 'the **** we have'. It is just starting."

Hugh is describing a situation in which the management of the firm has decided it cannot say certain things in defence of the firm's position and this in turn potentially limits Hugh's options if he is going to toe the line. Indeed Hugh goes on to describe this restriction on what he can say as a member as the time at which Hugh feels most at odds with the organization. In this case having to toe the line as a partner is preventing Hugh from derogating the source of the criticism and proclaiming the merit of the firm's actions, which are both forms of identity-protection (Petriglieri, 2011).

- Work on the perceptions of the firm and the self

> Alec: "I felt that we were being criticised for stuff that other people were doing as well; we were being singled out. I felt that good friends of mine ... were being singled out particularly ruthlessly by the ... authorities, almost being made to seem like criminals and they weren't criminals. So I felt sorry for the firm, that it was unilaterally going through this when I felt that our competitors were getting away scot-free with just doing exactly the same things. So, how did I feel about it? I didn't feel ashamed, I didn't feel ashamed."

In this quote Alec as "I" takes first the firm as the object to be considered and then the self. Alec casts the authorities as bad, casts the firm as the underdog and restores positive perceptions for himself of the firm and of the self. Similarly Adam:

> Adam: "if we'd done something you know really reprehensible and bad …but ... even when we got done by the [authorities] it was, you know, it was a silly thing ... wasn't particularly secret ... the [authorities] didn't like it and we got into trouble and fined a lot of money but ... [at that time] it was all the

heightened focus on firms and what they did. That was one [where] you thought, 'I don't think it's bad, but it wasn't clever'."

Even though judgment went against the firm in this case, Adam personally evaluates the firm's behaviour and restores a positive perception.

Sam, like Alec, makes the firm and then the self the object of consideration. In this case, the media is cast as bad. However the self is protected by reference to the size of the firm:

> "there was a tribunal case that didn't reflect brilliantly on the firm. It wasn't anything specific to the firm. We are not the only firm to suffer that. It is not about the firm. You inevitably get a few incidents that don't reflect well on the firm ... Also you have to realise that half of what is written in the press is garbage. The [industry journal] writes a lot of garbage. As you get older, you get more thick-skinned to these things. There are well over 1000 [professionals] here, [over 250] partners so one individual is not the firm."

- Work by members together

As seen in 5.1.2, some interactions are with people facing the same challenges; others are to an audience who are not experiencing the same challenges.

> Simon: "I instantly set up an incident room and grabbed a clock off the wall and [said] right, let's do this, ... I stuck with it and dropped everything to do it, ... we had like administrators who were due to go to weddings and everything else, this is it, you know, everyone just pulled together ... We had people who'd left the firm ten, fifteen years ago, phoning up to see what was up and how could they help ... amazing."

I have already mentioned Delia going in to the office the morning after that scandal broke, even though it was her day off. Simon also recalled the members of the firm coming together in the face of public criticism. The members are all facing the same threat at the same time so can share the identity work.

Some identity work among members may be suitable for one audience but not another, for example, if the character cast as 'bad' by the group is connected to a client:

> Nigel: “it was sort of slow times for news ... we should not have [done it], but the fact that [person connected to client] gave a bunch of lies to ... the press ... you can’t do much about”

Shared information and experience may help individuals develop effective identity work responses which then appear in the speech of lots of individuals talking about the same event:

> Nick: “it’s a hazard of the business”
>
> Lisa: “this happens to everybody.”
>
> Andrew: “The only other thing I can think of that's more unique to [the Firm], *well it's not unique to [the Firm]* it just *impacts different firms at different times* is if something's gone wrong in the public domain. So you have a client collapse or a regulatory public issue *which all the firms have*”

In a similar vein, responses might be developed through frequent interactions in particular settings:

> Alec: “When you went to dinner parties and people would say, “Who are you from?” and I’d say, “[the firm],” and they’d say, “Oh, yeah, the … problems,” and you would defend the firm. You’d say, “Yes, but *everybody’s doing the same stuff*.” “

Of course identity responses are only effective if the audience is receptive to the response:

> Charles: “Well, *we could broadcast it, but just no-one was listening* ‘cause...No, ‘because they’d say, ‘you would say that wouldn’t you? Why would you choose anything different to say?’”

Overall there is some overlap in the identity responses being used as “I” and as “We”, in convincing the self and convincing the clients, particularly in the use of suggesting this is a hazard of the industry and in casting an outside body as bad.

5.1.5 Consequences for organization/individual

First, the outcomes for organizations and individuals are complex and develop over time. When identity work is being performed on organization membership, there may be work performed by the individual seeing themselves as separate to the organization, taking the self and/or the organization as the object of that work. There may also be work performed by the individual when their organization identity is salient. Multiple identity aims may not all be achieved simultaneously. For example, as a member you may with others have developed for clients a narrative which appears to have been accepted by clients, but you have some lingering discomfort about the way your association with the firm reflects on you personally. There may be some identity aims arising from one event that are more easily achieved than others.

Jack's account of one public criticism event suggested a development of improving identity work responses over time:

> Shortly after the event: Jack: "there was a response, a perfectly correct response to give, it's just the feeling inside was different"
>
> Later: Jack: "I knew it was a very specific, not systemic, failure of a process that was well-defined and should have been followed and wasn't. I knew it wasn't representative of an organization that was slap-dash or didn't care about these things ... I was always confident that this wasn't representative of [the firm], it was just - ... one of those things, really unfortunate things, not helped by the way that certain areas of the press behaved and things like that."
>
> Even later in the account: Jack: "it's almost one of these discontinuities though; if you take that out of the equation, everything else is, you can give a consistent picture [of the firm]"

Charles also described a sequence of responses:

> "when [the Firm] were being sued by [client] and knowing the impact out there ... - in terms of the man in the street because so many people were in [client]... - more than just a few men in the street were being affected ... - but

> ... actually, we [had not] really done anything wrong, [that] was a huge dilemma. So you felt very uncomfortable.
>
> Q: Talk me through your journey through the [client] experience?
>
> So [client] experience - ... picked up the newspaper - not quite because we were informed it was likely to happen - fall in a heap, huge embarrassment factor in terms of, 'Christ, how can I look anyone in the eye and say 'I work for [the Firm],' and they say, 'Therefore you are the people who allowed [client] to fail.' ' So initial shame, for want of a better way of describing it, and then replaced by deep frustration by knowing, actually at the end of the day, we hadn't done anything wrong, it was a consequence of circumstance, but unable to get that across because people say, 'Well, you would say that, wouldn't you?' So it went from, I suppose, shame to frustration and then, when it was all resolved, relief, would be how the six years ... went."

Charles appears to have restored his/her perception of the organization before the public could be persuaded to restore their perception of the firm. A consequence of this sequence of events may be some internal incoherence:

> Arthur: "Let's pick [scandal] because it is quite recent. I don't know much about it and I get the occasional bulletin come through from someone saying something about it, but on the face of it you look at it and you go, oh my God, that is dreadful. I mean, how could we have done that? How could we have let that happen? ... But that's personally. I'm doing that internally. But if someone was to come up and start asking the same questions, I would answer them. You know, they'd say, "How could you let that happen?" My immediate response would be something along the lines of one of the biggest problems as the [adviser] is the extent to which you have to rely on representations from management."

Indeed Arthur says of himself: "I will challenge harder when I'm doing it to myself and won't necessarily accept the answers quite as readily."

This complex identity work which develops over time takes effort at each stage.

> Geoffrey: “I think *I tried quite hard* to laugh with them actually. So I tried to say, you know, ‘We made a huge mistake there. Aren’t we stupid?’ I’d just take the hit.”

At least for Tom the shared identity work in itself helped him/her restore a positive perception of the firm and a perceived overlap of personal and organization identity:

> “I was proud of the way we responded ... In fact there were some big positives, we entirely, we just said we goofed and this is already in to fix it. So I felt that ... actually displays my values very strongly.”

Second, as well as complex work for the individual, there are consequences of the identity responses beyond the firm and the individual. As described above, common responses were to restore a positive view by criticising something else, such as, the media or a regulator; and to see the event as not defining of the firm because the same things happen to all firms in the industry.

> Adam: “it comes with the territory of being a…you know a firm like ours you’re going to get sued. ... It’s not nice but you just have to deal with it but I’ve never felt embarrassed about the firm.”

The consequence of both of these responses involves criticising something else to avoid criticising the firm. As Rebecca experienced:

> “I was more angry at the press coverage than what the firm actually did”

The recipient of the criticism suffers. In the following case, the profession suffers:

> Arthur: “The only thing is: do you want to tell everyone that you're a [lawyer/accountant/consultant]? Do you want to tell everyone that you're an [industry professional]? But I'm very happy to tell them I'm [the firm].”

The consequence of defending the firm by saying the same issues affect all the firms in that industry, is the impact on your identification with the professional industry.

5.2 Decision within the firm affecting only the individual member

5.2.1 Event characteristics

These events originate inside the organization and primarily impact only the individual interviewee. Examples include:

- Rejected application for promotion, Oliver;
- Individual feels unfairly treated by firm: belief that pay was affected by one senior person influencing decisions behind the scenes, Adrian; belief that recognition went to person who shouted loudest rather than person who did the work, Lisa; taken down a remuneration band when performing highly, Charles; lack of clarity in evaluation process, Peter;
- Rotated out of prestigious position, Arthur, Alec;
- Senior members of firm disagreed with his professional opinion on a client matter where the law could be interpreted in more than one way, James;
- Formally disciplined for a regulatory mistake to which the individual had owned up, Nick.

These events may not be visible to many people but they have been received by the individual as unwelcome. These events were raised by the interviewees as having triggered strong negative emotions in them towards the organization and having affected how they felt about themselves. Peter said “I beat myself up about it for a while.” Alec felt something happened “in my mind” and it was “a big shock to the ego.” The element of shock is reflected in Oliver’s account too. Oliver said “I remember it like it was yesterday.” He felt less loyal, he asked the most senior people in the firm to explain why he should stay and he disconnected himself from the firm for 24 hours. He compared the feeling to divorce. It was *not what he had expected* the firm to do.

Several individuals described perceiving a mismatch between the self and the firm. Adam described it in terms of no longer seeing a match between his approach to life and the firm’s values. He saw himself as highly rational and logical and objected to the events as illogical and irrational. For Adrian his “belief systems in the firm get damaged if I don’t believe I’m being treated fairly.” Nick said that “it was more around the values” because the purported values of the firm were being ignored in this

event. It made Lisa “feel disillusioned with the firm” because she felt unable to stay true to her own morals and integrity while behaving in the way the firm appeared to expect. Similarly James felt a mismatch of his integrity and the values exhibited by the firm in that event and recalled events he had witnessed on the approach to partnership which had led him to believe the firm would behave differently. Peter contrasts his perception of himself as “very process focused” against the evaluations as “not clearly defined.” For Peter it was "massively disappointing and annoying and upsetting and disengaging from the organization.” Peter felt a “tension” because there were “things which I think are important in this organization which they aren’t necessarily valuing.” For Charles the behaviour of the firm was impossible to “understand” and felt “like a big slap in the face.”

For Charles the feeling lasted six months and for the first time in a long career Charles questioned whether this was the right firm for him. It is the only time that Peter has thought “what the hell am I doing here.” Adrian described feeling so angry that for the first time he took, rather than ignored, calls from head-hunters and went to interviews. Suddenly “literally everything mattered” that had perhaps not bothered him previously. Nick also considered whether or not to continue in the firm. James “found another job.” Arthur “felt there was a decent chance that I’d be kicked out” when he had always seen himself as having a longer career in the firm. These references to thoughts of leaving or anticipating being kicked out demonstrate the severity of the damage to any existing identification. It is also in stark contrast to the public criticism events in response to which members gathered together. Here the impact is on one partner, rather than the whole firm.

5.2.2 Interactions

Where there is hope of getting the decision reversed, persuading the decision maker may be a goal. Adam recognised that ‘we’ have a process; he followed the formal process in the partnership to get the decision reviewed but was unable to get the decision changed. He felt that the process led to the wrong result, but also recognised that ‘we’ cannot spend too much time on individual issues because he is just one of many, many partners. Due to the personal nature of the events, conversations within the firm are typically awkward private discussions, with only a very small number of people, for example:

> Arthur: “if someone comes up to me and says, "Look, we've got an issue. The growth of the business isn't happening. We still need to bring new partners in. We're trying to find a way of doing this and what we'd really like to do is have someone like you stand back and let the young guys have a go. You know, we'll give you some money to do it. Is that all right with you?" I'd have bitten their arm off and gone like a flash. Right? What I didn't want was someone to say, "This is going to be an awkward interview. Here's your Head of Service Line. Here's the enforcer guy that every firm has ... and we're going to march you out of the building." I said this to someone, the guy I reported to, "If that point is coming, can I ask you that you do it [the first] way rather than [the second] way? Because [the second] way I will think, [over thirty] years and you're treating me like shit. [The first] way, I will feel that I have been allowed to step back and let someone else come in."”

Arthur is seeking to be granted the agency in his exit from the organization, if it is coming.

I noted in 5.2.1 a link to taking moves to find another job. The individual is more open to interactions with, for example, head-hunters. These are a substantially different set of interactions to those mentioned in the public criticism events.

Unlike the identity work in response to public criticism, this identity work is not shared in the sense that other people are going through the same experience at the same time. There may be individuals with whom the individual can discuss the issue, but they will be an audience rather than struggling with the same problem. So while performing identity work in relation to these challenging events, individuals mentioned interacting as a member and as an individual with gatekeepers in the firm and with a few trusted people outside the firm who might give them advice, for example, James’ spouse and Peter’s father. Within themselves they experience the event as identified members but also as individuals. However the use of “we,” for example, by Adam above, in these events is rarer than in the public criticism events. There are very few references to a sense of unity with other partners; predominantly individuals have lost that sense of unity.

5.2.3 Identity challenge

Adam saw the choice at moments like these as “simple: you either move on or you walk out the door.” Continued membership of the firm is at stake. The individual’s feelings of authenticity and self-worth are at stake and the primary audience for the identity work in these events is the individual. I noted above that individuals were typically shocked by the behaviour ‘of the organization’. If an individual’s perception of the organization changes, the individual will necessarily reassess the perceived overlap between their personal identity and the perceived organization identity. Indeed, I set out above how several of the interviewees described the challenge in terms of a mismatch of values or characteristics. Being treated unfairly by the organization challenges your perception of your importance and value in the organization. This part of the identity work challenge would be to restore self-esteem. For a sense of continuity, identity work would be needed on a narrative to bridge these old and new perceptions. If the individual wants the decision changed, the identity work aims include persuading the decision maker to reverse the decision.

When the organization identity is salient, theory suggests an individual would seek to restore a positive perception of the organization. Adam recognised that ‘we’ have a process and used it. However in other cases could the damage to the identification be so significant that the individual falls into a downward spiral of de-identification? Adrian suggested suddenly “everything mattered”, even things which had not bothered Adrian before. If an existing identification continued, then I would expect a clash between “we” saying the organization decision processes are good and “I” saying the decision made regarding me is unfair. Identity work is required to reduce the internal conflict. If the individual starts to de-identify, that clash is removed. “I” think the decision was unfair and “I” no longer see an overlap with "us”. The easy identity response would be the gradual switch to de-identification, in other words, reducing the value attaching to the identity (Petriglieri, 2011).

If the individual is to stay in the firm the identity challenge faced:

- As “I” is to persuade the firm to reverse the decision, to persuade the firm the policy is bad and/or to change the view of the self to reduce conflict between “I” and “We”;

- As “We” is to preserve a positive perception of the firm, defending the policy of the firm as good.

It is worth noting here that, unlike in 5.1.3, there is no identity challenge faced by the partners as a group. “We” do not have clients to persuade that the firm can be trusted. The identity challenges in this event are for the individual.

5.2.4 Identity work responses

Oliver restored a positive perception of the firm through interactions with senior people in the firm. Oliver had been “told to go forward” for promotion; had questioned his seniors because he believed he did not fit the criteria but had been told he would sail through. He portrays himself as the object of others’ action. He demanded that senior people engage with him about the matter. “A lot of people talked to me when I came back”; senior people admitted it had not been handled well and a plan was agreed to reach the goal. The participation of a few senior people in conversations with Oliver helped repair the damage. This handling was perceived by Oliver as good and helped restore a positive perception of the firm.

Adam does perform identity work on the self and draws on his understanding of how a firm partner should make decisions.

> “We have a formal process”. “I did raise [this decision]”. He had a discussion with a senior partner but the decision was not reversed. “I still feel there was unfairness”; “I’m a partner but really I’m a small cog in the [firm] and the reality is [senior person] has got much bigger things to deal with; he listened but he wasn’t... [going to] change somebody else’s decision...I can’t say [senior person] made the wrong decision at a corporate level... so in that sense I didn’t feel it was personal against me [but] I didn’t like it... at the end of the day I don’t want to be bitter”.

Adam explains the senior person’s behaviour as in line with the priorities of the organization. Adam has a sense of both ‘we’ and ‘I’. Adam’s reference to “I’m a partner but really I’m a small cog” suggests identity work on the self and the meaning of the social identity. The lingering feeling of unfairness suggests unresolved identity work. The identity work responses are limited by the limited influence of any one partner over the organization, for example, to reverse a policy.

In the next two stories, the individuals use changes in the organization to justify restoring a positive perception:

> Adrian: “I felt angry because you again had all these processes ... but you knew it was pointless because once it got up to the smoking room you realised actually Billy and Bobby would remember something from a couple of years ago again and that was it”; “that made me angry about the firm and the processes because that’s where the golf club [comes in]... notwithstanding what other good things ... you’re doing. ... *We’re through that now and there’s a change of management and there’s a new management in and it’s a different order*.” He had felt he was “shouting in the wind” because the old management was so cliquey and was not listening.

Similarly Nick:

> “we have this process... when they brought the new system in, I populated it, but ... I didn't populate it correctly. ... the second year, I changed some of my ... arrangements and -partly I was to blame as well - there were a couple of names on the new arrangements which didn't align with what they held on the database. So I was struggling and I was busy, so I put it to one side and I thought, I'll come back to that. ... the firm decided that this warranted a rap on the knuckles. And the rap didn't come directly. It came indirectly. ... I said ...“maybe you would have done the same. You know, it was a genuine mistake. It wasn't a deliberate intent to get round the system. It was just a mistake which I never got back to dealing with.” *I did actually speak to some other partners about it and they said, "Oh, don't make too much of a fuss about it." ... I did say to one of the guys* who wrote me a letter, and he didn't get it either, I said, "You know, you saw me during the day. We ... talked at the coffee machine. So the next day I get a letter from you telling me." I said, "So I don't think that really applies the values that I attach to this firm." And he said, "It's nothing to do with the values." And I said, "Well, of course it is. ... You may have still wanted to write the letter, but you could have spoken to me about it." ... If I have an issue with a client, I don't write them a letter. I go and see them... so I was pretty aggrieved at that and *I used to think*, well, do I

need all this hassle? *Then I thought*, well, let's put some context on it really and move on."

Later in the interview he says that the managing partner had raised it with him but not with any details, and the risk manager had been trying to contact him by telephone. He believes face-to-face interaction would have helped. He adds that the event "might say more about the individuals than the firm of course". He goes on to say "we've had a change of leadership...our previous managing partner was... I think they've changed the rules around this now."

As for Adrian, the change in management is a resource in Nick's identity work. However given the limited influence of partners to bring about management change, the identity tension exists for potentially a long time before this mechanism is available. The change in management is used in the narrative connecting the negative and positive perceptions of the firm.

Archetypes are also drawn on in response to these decisions. Lisa:

> "Whereas I, obviously being a female, will live in a meritocracy in my head, which obviously doesn't exist, and therefore people are getting more recognition for doing less because they shout about it more. And that can be very frustrating and make me feel disillusioned with the firm.... But I think that probably is quite gender specific, even though I don't like to say things are gender specific."

Lisa preserves a positive perception of the firm by being willing to blame herself as a female for allowing the absence of a meritocracy in the firm to matter. The archetype receives the blame.

Arthur, as 'we', draws on culturally accepted ideas about succession in senior posts but as 'I' struggles with the loss of the role:

> "I had a real let down when I came out of my [senior] role and I understand, retrospectively, in hindsight, that it was probably a sensible thing to do. ... I did it for five or six years and that's a decent time and, actually, you've had a good [innings]. I felt that the people going in and taking over from me afterwards were not any better at it. If anything, I would say they didn't have

the same focus and weren't as good at it. ... But *you have to stand back and let other people have a go.* And I understand that. It just wasn't easy at the time. And I don't remember anyone doing it very easily. You know, I don't think I was let down very gently."

He ultimately follows the firm policy as right but difficult for him personally.

In the next few accounts the interactions are critical in bringing the individual back from the point of leaving.

James: "my *wife* ... I *wanted to rehearse with her* … what I was going to do."

"So I went *to meet [managing partner] and talk about my resignation"*... "I changed my mind and I decided to stay. Because of some of the values that [the managing partner] represents, and probably something about his charisma." "His values, how he wanted to change some of the things, the way we do things." "You know, if I look back, did I make mistakes? Oh yes, I made loads of mistakes. Was I … right? ... I was right. Did it matter so much that I should make such a biggie about it? That's debatable. But you know, back to the integrity issue and the compromise issue. I just couldn't do it." "you grow up; ... And then you ask yourself well, will it be different somewhere else? And in the main I think we're probably - it probably doesn't happen very often in this firm; it does happen 'cos we're running a business. It doesn't happen too often or so often that it - it becomes a big problem." "Then you think, well, okay. Does it say something about the firm at that time or about the firm now, or does it also say something about ... you as a partner. Why did [another partner in a similar dilemma] attract so much support and you didn't? .... I need to make sure that if it happens again, I get the support the way [they] did."

James moves from considering severing his connection with the firm. James works on his perception of the firm and of himself, supported by key conversations with his wife and managing partner. James works on his perceptions of "we" and of "I." He reaches a point where he says that it might not be any better in a different firm and maybe he needs to change something about himself anyway. The managing partner has hinted that the firm is going to change. He is combining responses to answer

different challenges for ‘I’ and ‘we.’ The values exemplified by a very senior figure and the time given to him by that senior figure are key to James’ restoring a positive perception of the firm and of himself. James’ response is considered further in Chapter 6.

Peter has conversations with just a handful of people but that support allows him/her to restore a better sense of self-esteem. Interestingly one of the coach/counsellor figures was a senior figure inside the firm so Peter, like James, had received one-to-one attention from a powerful figure in the firm.

> Peter: “I beat myself up about it for a while, had some *really honest conversations with my coach and my counsellor* ... about it... Those were both internally and externally. I did a lot of *discussion with my partner* - my personal partner and actually my - *and my father*, who's an ex-partner as well, not here but somewhere else.” “I thought to myself actually, and this is being honest, I'm being paid a hell of a lot of money anyhow and what we're talking about here is purely a recognition point and not really a financial point, but for me that's still really important. And I laid some very clear lines down with my coach as to how I felt the whole process had been dealt with and that going forward my expectations were … “ “I reengaged when I'd mentally worked out - *had my conversations*, let off my steam, mentally worked out actually I'm financially still ... well rewarded.”

Peter uses the pay to restore his self-esteem. He also seeks to influence how the firm will behave next time.

Third, Alec:

> “I think it comes from my father. He was very much, ‘don’t let the masters get you down,’ type. At various points *he talked me out of leaving*. ... My father was a big counsellor against doing stupid things like jumping when you should hang on in there and make them change rather than jumping.”

These interactions with one or two key individuals appear important as a resource for identity work in these events. The key trusted people help the interviewee develop a plausible narrative.

5.2.5 Consequences for organization/individual

There are a range of outcomes from the identity work responses to these decisions. Identity work may have been performed on the perception of the self, perception of the organization and/or on the perceived overlap of the two. As in 5.1.5 the identity work develops over time so the outcomes for the individual and organization evolve over time. In 5.1.5 that was closely related to the multiple positions of 'I' and 'We'. Here 'We' play a less prominent role in the accounts. Rather than the challenge for 'We' being resolved and the challenge for 'I' being outstanding, the identity work for 'I' is slow and time-consuming. Rather than consequences outside the organization, such as distancing from the professional body, here there is talk of 'scars' on the social identity. Adrian's account includes several outcomes.

> Adrian': "I went along with the interviews ... and I was going to be offered [an industry] job but at that moment there was a change within the firm and *I stayed*"; "under the new management team *all this stuff about secretaries doesn't really matter*; everything mattered then" "I probably *never felt quite the same* since"; "I'm now more calculating in what I'm doing"; having been through that it [is] now "*more about me*... making sure I was being recognised and dealt with"

Adrian has renegotiated the balance at the boundary of the personal and organization identities. Not feeling quite the same again is echoed by Nick and Charles.

> Nick: "it's like a little scar" as opposed to a lingering sore.

> For Charles the decision was reversed, but: "the relationship isn't quite what it was before and I'm really struggling, Imogen, to find what words describe the change in the relationship. But it's definitely - If you put me on the spot and say, 'Okay, are you sure you feel absolutely the same now as you did before then?'... I probably feel even more comfortable about not being here, as in

physically here. ... I don't feel quite the need to be as attached to the organization as I did before ...there is definitely a subtle shift of something."

At one level the identity work appears to be successful in that the individuals are still in the organizations, but the experience has clearly been difficult and time-consuming. Their perceptions of the firms have changed, i.e. they have worked on the meaning and/or value of the social identity attributable to the organization. They may have worked on perceptions of themselves as well, for example, James' comment that he had needed to grow up a little. The identity work is challenging because the challenge comes from the organization itself and is experienced by the interviewee alone. Given the limited potential to change the organization, these events often involve changing perceptions of the self and the firm if membership is to continue. If the interviewee struggles to change either or both, the identity challenge remains unresolved. Peter has set out his expectations to a senior figure in the firm but does not yet know if they will be met. Will the firm change?

Peter: "as we go into this financial year end ... unless things are different, I'm probably going to have a massive frustrating moment again, which will be a shame."

5.3 Redundancy programmes in the firms

5.3.1 Event characteristics

The redundancy events raised by the interviewees involved decisions taken by the management team in the firm. As partners the interviewees were expected to stand by these decisions, regardless of their personal views.

Anthony: "I felt management was, we just weren't tackling something in the way we should have been tackling it ... around retrenchments where I feel we are earning well above the average … as a partnership, we should be changing that. We should be more community [minded] ... I'm quite disappointed in that"

Rick: "we then said ... wouldn't it be more civilised and better if we just had a redundancy programme like everybody else? So I was one of the people who did suggest it. But I was horrified [at the way it was executed by

management] ... So that was a time when definitely I felt negative and probably embarrassed about what we did."

The redundancy programmes did not necessarily attract media criticism and the attention of people outside the firm in the same way as the events in 5.1.1 but they were still experienced simultaneously by many people inside the firm.

> Delia: "the morale impact on a much broader set of people in the firm was just not anticipated. And for a number of people I think it almost broke their trust with the firm. It did, with a number of people it did and for a number of people there's still residual pain there."
>
> Simon: "a lot of people lost faith in the firm at that point"
>
> Geoffrey: "… I just felt that all the energy was leached out of the whole organization"

The redundancy events were raised by interviewees as sometimes at odds with previously held perceptions of the core values of the firm and/or as something at which the interviewee believed the firm could improve.

> Simon: "I guess in my twenty years ... we've had quiet periods when people have sort of been let go, but never a hard redundancy round, ... we had a round of redundancy and I, that really got my goat ... we've always prided ourselves, we don't pay the best... but what it always enables us to do when there's a down turn we can carry on, keep our good people here, and therefore we don't have to off load. We went very quickly to off load, and I think the way we managed the process was not great"
>
> Delia: "we made people redundant and that was something that cut right to the core of people, because we don't do that. We don't do that, you know, and it was an unwritten rule that we just don't do that."
>
> Rachel: "there are times in recession where partners who've been here for a long period of time are asked to leave and we don't deal with that very well at all. … There is a danger that we have a load of enemies out there ... So that is not dealt with well."

> Fraser: “there was a redundancy programme … and if you could sit down and think about what is the worst way to make people redundant and what is the best way to demotivate a professional services firm and you looked at all the different options you’ve got and you choose the one that would optimally maximise both of those aspects that’s the one *we* choose to do.”

Whether an event is a challenge is personal to the individual. The redundancy events used in this section were chosen because they were raised by the interviewees as having affected the interviewees’ sense of oneness with the group and/or having prompted emotional responses in the interviewees.

> Rachel: “and that makes me feel very cross about the organization because, you know, we should do the right thing”
>
> Fraser: “And you cannot bring yourself logically to feel proud, not logically”
>
> Simon: “I was at that point of, rather than being part of the firm, i.e., we, we, we, it was them, them, them at that point, ‘cos it was not very good. ... yeah, there was a re-evaluation at that point.”
>
> Geoffrey: “it felt like the firm ... was following a process and didn’t have any empathy. That made me disengage actually”; “I felt angry towards the firm about the redundancies in-house; it wasn’t handled very well and I got angry with myself because I didn’t stand up and do something about it.”

When a redundancy programme is introduced it affects many people in the firm at the same time. As a partner the individual has to stand by the decision with other partners as the policy of the firm, regardless of how he/she feels about it personally.

5.3.2 Interactions

The interactions are slightly different to those for the public criticism events because people outside the firm are not mentioned in the redundancy event accounts other than as follows:

> William: “We had a round of redundancies ... That wasn't really public knowledge, so whilst internally within the firm people took a different view on whether that was the right thing or the wrong thing to do and how we were

> handling it and all the rest of it, it wasn't something that externally caused any issues."

None of the interviewees in this study had been made redundant in these events but some had as individuals thought about why they would or might not be safe. Ashley explained that "there was a process and I was on the inside which was very lucky for me." Ashley went on to explain:

> "I feel [secure] only because I've had a very good year. So I've billed over [X] million already since May ... I'm very very busy. So if they were to push me out now I would sue and I would win. But also they probably wouldn't because they know I would sue and win."

Ashley expresses her identity work in terms of being able to sue successfully. With regard to the process of partners selecting other partners to make redundant and Ashley's role in it within Ashley's department:

> "Well we lost wasn't it [X] per cent of our partners - I can't remember it was a reasonably big chunk of partners we lost I mean broadly speaking [over 100 partners went firm wide]."; "and we had, [the department management] team, had a meeting and discussed and ... it was broadly fair ... it was done in such a way that it wasn't really about individuals it was about practice areas … it was quite laborious, we had a day's meeting, but I think on the whole it was fair within [the department]. I don't think - I suspect it was not fair everywhere. ... People dug in as I would."

As an identified member the individual describes the process as fair but acknowledges that as an individual you might fight back to be safe from redundancy. As an individual and as a member of the firm the interviewee may have sought discussions about the policy.

> Delia: "there are things that you think 'why on earth are we doing that', but I'd like to think that I have enough, I feel that I can go and talk to anybody in the firm about that."

Rick said, "I just thought, why are we doing that?" because "instead of creating a good feeling, at least the firm is doing this in a civilised way, it created a really, really

bad feeling." Rick was not going to be made redundant but as a member of the firm wanted to know the process would do as little damage as possible. Similarly as an identified member Rachel was concerned that:

> "from our growth perspective, it's very bad to have people out there feeling badly about you because it's a very small community, particularly if you look at the PLCs."

As an individual Anthony thought about "those people and their families" and asked, "am I really in the place that I want to be when we're acting like that?" Anthony went on to say, "So, you talk to management because effectively, it's people in your peer group," to work through this issue. Any interactions with the partners in management positions will contribute to the interviewees' identity work as an individual and as a member. When people are made redundant, a subset of 'we' is separated out. The composition of 'we' necessarily is changed and that change may feel wrong.

Partners will also interact with their juniors about the redundancies. As Rachel observed:

> "it's not just how we as the partner group feel about that. It's also how, you know, the teams feel about that. [They are] working with somebody and suddenly that person is not there."

Delia explains: "we can't have them feeling like that, we've got to rebuild their trust."

Rebecca, the only senior associate interviewed, had:

> "sat on a consultation committee, representing the [accountants/consultants/lawyers] ..., not the partners ... because I had been there for a long time and because of my age and everything else, the partners were kind of my friends. You know, they were the people that I ... went out for lunch with."

She went on to explain:

> "even though [the associates] kind of understood that this was something that was going to happen anyway and was inevitable, they really wanted more justification for it. They wanted to know what were the alternatives to

redundancy. Had we thought about letting people do a four-day week and only paying them for a four-day week? Had we thought about giving people six-month sabbaticals?"

Rebecca served a 'go-between' role, taking questions to the partner group and persuading the partners to address the associates' concerns. Rebecca's use of 'we' suggests that Rebecca identified more with the partners than with the associates but Rebecca was also able to observe the partners and noted:

"it probably was a time where I also saw the partners in my group a bit at odds with central management … And I suddenly really saw that, actually, some of these guys were really having to toe the party line against their will, you know."

The interactions in these accounts show the partners concerned as 'we' to do the best thing for the firm, interacting as 'we' and 'I' with each other and interacting as 'we' with juniors. In addition within themselves the partners experience redundancy events as both identified members of the firm and as individuals.

Interactions act as resources where the concurrent performance of identity work by others in the firm facing the same challenge enables the interviewee to share the identity work. Other interactions can be resources in the sense that interviewees can test out responses on an audience, but that is different to sharing. In this event, the audiences referred to are inside the firm. The main audience for 'our' identity work is the employees.

5.3.3 Identity challenge

The interviewees in this study were all survivors of the cuts so the following identity challenges in redundancy programmes are only those of survivors. They experience the redundancy event as individuals and as identified members of the firm so for each individual there may be identity challenges as 'I' and as 'We'. If the redundancies seem to the partner to be at odds with the core values of the firm, 'I' may develop a new perception of the organization identity and 'I' may reassess the overlap between the personal and social identities. 'I' might need a narrative to link together my old and new perceptions of the firm and my changing overlap with the firm. As individuals, their perceptions of the firm and how it would treat partners may

have been shaken. The individual might be concerned about his/her security as a partner in the future and the consequences for self-esteem if the next redundancy programme hits them.

Yet assuming a prior identification with the firm, social identity theory tells us that these same partners will seek to restore a positive perception of the firm. 'We' need a narrative to repair any damage to perceptions of the firm held, in this case, by employees and ourselves. Sometimes the challenges for 'I' and 'We' are closely related:

> Delia: "I can't stand up and articulate something that I don't believe in. So, you know, if there are these things that don't feel quite right, I do have to work quite hard to understand them and contextualise them for our business"; "usually what I've found is things are getting lost in translation. [Laughs] And, you know, they're not necessarily barmy decisions but they're perhaps not being as well executed as they could be."

However the reasoning which 'we' may use to persuade ourselves that we are conducting the redundancies fairly may not be enough to persuade the self:

> Jack: "we had to make some redundancies ...we'd never had to do large-scale redundancies... attending those meetings, understanding in lots of respects these were very good people … but for the criteria that we'd used ... they were … at a role cycle in their career at a wrong time. ... That's when I felt that perhaps I am [the firm] rather than myself as an individual."

A slightly different conflict is described by Geoffrey:

> "I was incredibly confident that I would be safe. And so the fact that it was all effectively happening to other people meant that I just went, 'Oh,' which I felt very guilty about."

Geoffrey is taking his own behaviour in the situation as the object of his attention and finding fault. Geoffrey toed the line and went along with the plan, but that does not sit comfortably with his perception of himself.

The identity challenges faced by partners varied and are personal to the individual. For some partners it was the first time they faced identity challenges relating to

redundancy programmes. Others were old enough to have seen it before and to have performed identity work relating to such an event before. However they were all going through similar identity challenges at the same time. There was concurrent performance of similar identity work.

5.3.4 Identity work responses

All of these identity challenges are faced in the context of a large professional services firm. Several accounts of redundancy events included references to the powerlessness of individual partners to change the direction of the firm.

> Geoffrey: “There wasn’t a feeling of energy, there was a feeling of - well, resignation’s not the right word, but stuff was going to happen and there was nothing you could do about it.”
>
> Rick: “I think there was basically nothing I could do because we'd set up a formal process and it was all being carefully managed by HR and legal and so on. I think there really wasn’t much anybody could do by the time it got to that point.”

These partners’ inability to change the policy of the firm, even though they are presented as owners and managers of the firm, restricts their options for identity work. As partners they are figureheads of the firm, but they have to appear to comply with the policy as set out by the management.

- Work on the perceptions of the firm and the self

> Simon: “the way we ran that, and that’s probably ‘cos we’re always whiter than white and we run the process as it should be”; “I think, I think because [firm] had never done it before, it was quite alien, ….so the gut feel was it was wrong and, but I didn’t, I think a lot of us just felt this was normal and this was the way you handled this kind of down turn.”

Here Simon considers the action taken by the firm in the context of his existing perception of the firm and finds it to be consistent. Simon then makes his own reaction the focus of attention and seeks to explain the behaviour as normal. The redundancy programme was out of character therefore it was handled poorly. Simon develops a narrative linking the perception journey together:

> "And certainly if we ever went through that position again there's enough of us with memory of how bad that was and there still will be, that we would go kicking and screaming, this is not how you're going do this.... So, so I feel we, we, you know, as a firm I think we've probably gone more back to our values, 'cos we probably realised actually that was not the true [firm]."

The redundancy programme and Simon's part in it have been explained away as aberrations, attributed to the firm in the past, enabling Simon to restore positive perceptions of the firm and the self. While Simon parked the problem with the firm in the past, Catherine pushed the blame outside the firm, on to the 'financial crisis':

> "we made a couple of people redundant … that didn't fit right with me... it was in the middle of the financial crisis, and I think had it been not in the middle of the financial crisis, I think my perception might have been different."

Simon also attributed some of the blame to a subset of the firm:

> "I think some of the anger I guess with the redundancies is …anger with a lot of my colleagues who had a lot of under- performance in their practices and had never addressed it, ... that was a frustration, so an anger, yes at the process, but also some of my colleagues for not managing poor performance."

Although the recipient of the blame varies, in all these examples the blame is attributed away from the perception of the firm as it is now.

- Agency

Aspects of this appear in the use of 'I' and 'We' in the accounts of the redundancy events.

> Delia: "So it wasn't a decision that *I* took but *we* … *we* made people redundant."

Here Delia can limit the negative impact on herself of the action 'we' took by referencing her limited influence. Delia turns her limited influence as a partner into a resource for identity work as 'I'. As a partner Delia still says that 'we' made people redundant, conforming to the expectation that partners will stand by the decisions of

the management team and appear as united leaders of the firm. In contrast Jack recalled having sufficient influence with the management team at the time to influence events, but suspects that influence is diminishing now he is not part of the management team:

> "I think I influenced the outcome of it ... I was uncomfortable because of the position I was in and had the influence to change it to a place where I felt more comfortable and yes, I can remember one example around the ... terms of redundancy they were offering ... I was deeply uncomfortable with our starting position on that and we moved away from that ... I was quite vocal about that and I was probably in the minority.
>
> Q: Okay, so when you say you were quite vocal, who were you vocal to?
>
> [X] and the rest of the management committee.
>
> ...
>
> Q: Yes and do you generally feel, if there's something that you're uncomfortable with, that you can speak up?
>
> Oh yeah. The only thing I'm not - I've noticed a subtle change since I moved away from that role ... [X] still tells me they're always interested in what I think about something, however what I'm not confident in is if I fundamentally disagreed I'm not sure I would have the same influence to change it as I had before."

Jack, faced with an unsatisfactory perception of the firm to which Jack belongs, responds by seeking to change the behaviour of the firm. Even if the behaviour is only slightly improved, Jack can use this reform to restore a positive perception of the firm and of his own agency in that reform to minimise any negative impact of membership of the firm on Jack's perception of the self. A similar response is seen in Rick's account:

> "And in terms of how I came to terms with it, I guess I just felt that *I would do more good by* trying to help the people that were left than by throwing my toys out of the pram."

Rick feels uncomfortable about the direction of the firm and how that reflects on him and seeks to do "good" to preserve a positive perception of the self. Similarly Anthony talked to his/her peers in management to "try and get to a point where hopefully we can minimise" the redundancies but then within the group, where the partner does have power:

> "I'm actually quite direct within our group ... to make sure that we were giving the support to the weaker individuals because I knew they were going to be the first to be attacked. So, if they were struggling, making sure that they were given every opportunity to improve their lot, make sure that they'd get back to the expected performance as opposed to being below."

The struggle to do the right thing can lead to conflict with other partners, particularly those in management:

> Jeremy: "Well there is the one incident of active distaste over the way *management* dealt with the redundancy programmes … That was an active and positive dislike. Poorly judged, poorly done. That is the only incidence.
>
> And how did you resolve that?
>
> I made sure that my group was protected from that programme and *I had to fight very hard* for it so that I didn't have to put anybody in my team through it. *That was all I could do*."

The potential responses available to the partner who stays in the firm are limited. This short account from Jeremy shows Jeremy attributing blame to the management team, demonstrating both the potential hostility between partners in the firm and the inability of most individual partners in a group of hundreds of partners to bring about any change in direction of the firm. Jeremy goes to war, but by attributing the blame to a management team (who in this firm would rotate out of power within a few years), Jeremy may have minimised the potential conflict between 'I' and 'We'. The management team are not 'We' and 'I' did all I could.

What does the focus on what 'I' did tell us about the identity response? The partner in question in theory could choose to leave the firm. However, even if a partner is headhunted by another firm, he risks experiencing "tissue rejection" (Simon) in the

new firm if the existing partners distinguish lateral hires, and faces the hurdles associated with starting again to build a network in a new firm (see Chapter 4). The norms of the industry make leaving the firm very unattractive. The identity responses left to Jeremy when a single partner does not have enough influence to change the course of 'We', are limited to what 'I' can do when 'I' positively dislike the course of action agreed by 'We'. The focus on what 'I' did illustrates the identity responses being limited by the institutional norms of the limited influence of a single partner and the disapproval of and barriers faced by partners who switch firms.

In this section on agency, Simon cast the event as an aberration and attributed it to the firm in the past; Delia used her limited influence as a resource for identity work as 'I'; Jack, unusually, managed to influence the policy, but recognises that he may not have the same influence to do that again; and Rick and Anthony 'do good' within their groups, to ameliorate the taint from what 'we' are doing.

- Shared responses

In describing the identity challenges in redundancy events I mentioned that Geoffrey, not being in the line of fire, felt guilty about just saying 'oh' when the redundancy programme happened. Geoffrey followed that in his account by commenting that he "observed [the same reaction] in others as well"; Geoffrey had expected people, including those being made redundant, to "be more passionate and aggressive and do something" but instead they all seemed to be resigned to the inevitable. Geoffrey expressly referenced the simultaneous responses of people within the firm in explaining his own reaction. Another reference to a shared response is Simon's suggestion that "everyone accepts" the redundancies were wrong. The redundancy programmes affect many people at the same time so identity responses can be developed together with other people in the same situation. This concurrent performance was a resource for Geoffrey and Simon.

- Restorative interactions

The final aspect of responses to identity challenges here is the role of continuing positive interactions within the firm. While Rachel might despair that the partners in management were making the same mistakes again and again and that there were no real ways to influence the decisions, leading to Rachel leaving the building to put

some distance between Rachel and the firm, Rachel went on to explain that after that:

> "you come in and you've got your team of people who appreciate you. You've got clients who, you know, appreciate you. And you realise, therefore, in your little area of your teams, your clients, your network and your alumni, you know, you're greatly appreciated and you're, you know, making a difference, you know, and are valued. And so you keep your arms around that bit"

Rachel here suggests the positive interactions with various people throughout the firm are restorative of the feeling of belonging in the firm. The response is to focus on those aspects of membership. Rachel was struggling with the taint by association as a partner with the management policy, but held on to aspects of her role as a partner which appeared to her to 'do good'.

5.3.5 Consequences for organization/individual

The identity challenges faced by partners as 'I' and 'We' may be all resolved, partially resolved or continuing. Resolution was achieved by Jack:

> "because of the position I was in [I] had the influence to change it to a place where I felt more comfortable."

In the rare cases where a partner feels they have been able to influence an unwelcome policy and get it improved, the individual can restore a positive perception of the firm and of the self. Even if only a small change is achieved, 'We' learned and 'I' did all I could, even if the policy was improved only a little.

At the other extreme is Anthony who tried to talk to his/her peers in management and to protect his/her group but has not seen any change in policy:

> "I just think as a partnership, we should be changing that. We should be more community [minded]… so I'm quite disappointed"

At the time of the interview Anthony was using the present tense, suggesting that Anthony continued to feel disappointed. It should be noted that Anthony was a relatively new partner and was very frustrated generally by the lack of influence of partners over the business.

Partial resolution can be seen in Simon:

> "I *think* everyone, even though they might not admit it themselves, I *think* everyone accepts ... we bungled that, we did not do a good job and I *think* we've learnt from our mistakes.... Even though you talk to [HR] here and other people you've talked to….and they probably say, no it was perfect and the right process."

'I' am probably persuaded that this will not happen again because I *think* 'We' have realised we made a mistake. As noted above, Simon can contemplate that 'they' might try it again but there are enough of 'us' who would stop it happening. Simon now excludes those who were involved from Simon's view of the core firm. The consequence may be division between groups in the firm. As mentioned above, Simon manages to criticise colleagues in the firm for not having addressed under-performance in their groups and preserve a positive perception.

These outcomes are complex and may be temporary as the partner moves through a sequence of identity positions. Rachel described a sequence of outcomes:

> "I deal with that by physically getting away. So I literally leave the building. And it might be the middle of the afternoon, it might be the middle of the morning, but if it's something that I think, God - and obviously, in my career, it's probably happened three or four times - I just go home and switch off.
>
> Q: How long does it take?
>
> Instantaneous. Yeah, almost as soon as I get home. But as I say, it's such a waste.
>
> Q: That's interesting. So you physically separate yourself?
>
> Oh, yes.
>
> Q: From the place where you have to perform [the Firm], you physically separate yourself?
>
> Yeah, hmm, it's the easiest way.
>
> Q: And coming back in again?

> Yeah, you sort of – it takes a bit of the Firm out of you.
>
> Q: Okay. Can you just explain that a little bit, please?
>
> Well, it sort of makes you think, actually, you know, I don't feel as good about you as I did twenty years ago. You know, you've done it once and now you've done it again and again."

Rachel felt so at odds with the firm about the redundancy programme that she went home in the middle of the day, breaking the expected behaviour code of partners. Rachel came back, but the perception of the firm and the perceived overlap of the self and the firm have been reassessed. The immediate reaction to separate from the firm is followed by a reassessed identification with the firm. As described in the previous section, Rachel was aware that subsequent interactions with clients, alumni, network contacts and team members gradually restored a positive perception of the firm, albeit slightly reassessed.

Delia also goes through a sequence but rather than ending up with a reassessed perception of the firm, appears to return closer to the previously held perception of the firm. As mentioned in the previous section, Delia has "to work quite hard to understand [things that do not feel right] and contextualise them for our business." By saying that things are "getting lost in translation" and that these are "not necessarily barmy decisions," just poorly executed, Delia, like Simon, is seeking to fit the event within a perception of the firm as an entity that makes good decisions. For Delia the sequence is moving from seeing the event as at odds with Delia's preferred perception of the firm to seeing the event as consistent with a positive perception of the firm, and with what feels "right" to Delia. This sequence takes time and effort. Then "there are things that *we* can do locally to sort of explain [the decisions]." For Delia once *I* have been persuaded that *We* are going in the right direction, Delia is on board and reverts to using 'we':

> "the good people that we have in the firm, we can't have them feeling like that, we've got to rebuild their trust."

Delia is aware that the perceptions of the firm held by others may have been damaged and as 'we' Delia is now concerned to restore the perceptions held by others.

The consequences for the organization are varied. If group phenomena are a result of group identification, then when the partners have found a sense of balance with the firm again, the partners are likely to perform the exemplar of 'we' to some extent. As Delia said, Delia was concerned that 'we' should rebuild the trust of the good people in the firm. However at the point where there is identity conflict between 'I' and 'We', not only is there internal conflict for the individual caused by continued association with the firm, there is also potential conflict within the organization as partners behave less as 'we' and more as 'I'. When the partners are protecting their juniors rather than applying the redundancy programme intended by the firm, the unifying effect of organizational identity has fallen away and the divisive effect of categorising and identity (Parker, 2007) is more obvious. As Jeremy said, "I had to fight very hard." This is particularly the case for partners who feel they have absolutely no influence over the direction of the firm.

5.4 Changes in individual relevant to membership of firm

These accounts of identity work combine role and organizational identity in tightly interwoven narratives. Even though my focus is on organizational identification, I nevertheless include them because they contribute to the detailed picture of the types of identity work performed by individuals relating to membership of the organization.

5.4.1 Event characteristics

In this section I look at age-related challenges. There were four perceived challenges relating to aging:

- First, what *you* want changes as you get older. Jack describes a mismatch between the expectation of the organization and what he now wants for himself:
  "to stay longer I would have to continue to go full tilt at this. And then, thinking about that in the round and in the balance, I don't want to do that."

Jack does not want the “background of expectation” any longer: “that’s *not something that fits with me going forward*”. Jack’s perception of the organization is perhaps stable, but Jack’s perception of himself has changed. “I’m not getting any younger and I just want to take time to do some other stuff.” Similarly Paul is considering giving up being a partner and taking a different role. Paul is looking at the next 10 years as the last 10 years of his career and does not want to continue with the “greasy pole” of partnership, on which “even if you’ve climbed up it, you still have to keep climbing to stay where you are.” Paul is “actively thinking” of changing roles within the organization:

> “I’m at that stage where maximising earnings isn’t as important as it was. In some sense it is important because it’s the last earnings you’re ever going to get...but at the other side of it... kids have finished school, going to university, etc.”

Arthur agrees:

> “there's a lot of pressure on you to perform, to deliver, right? And that is fine up to a certain point.”

However this challenge varies by firm.

> Lyle: “if you have lockstep ... you have 10 years from the bottom of the equity to the top and let’s say you make partner at 34 which is reasonable these days. Now you’ve got to be really killing it to then sit at the top of the equity until 70 ... for 15 or 20 or 26 years ... in fact you won't do it. You get to 50 and someone gives you a gentle tap on the shoulder and says ‘I say old man, time you thought about doing charitable work’ ... you get your pension ... and your pension will disappear if you go to another [accountancy/consulting/law] firm. ... which means people in their 40’s and 50’s are paranoid ... because with a lockstep you can’t really drop down it [because] it’s so shameful ... whereas in my firm ... we have a modified lock-step which means actually there is scope if you're doing gentler work and maintaining your relationships and migrating your clients over a number of years to a range of associates you can drop down, there is no shame in it.”

Lyle sees the treatment of older partners by his firm as attractive and different to other firms.

- Second, it gets harder to keep up as you get older. Fraser sees changes in him/herself affecting his/her ability to meet the performance expectations of the organization.

  Fraser: “you know you can always just about come up with something bright and interesting to say? As you get older it gets harder. It’s harder to find that. You have to read more. And ... it gets harder to be original and it takes longer for the inspiration to turn up. ... there’s a day I’m sure in the future [when] it just won’t be there but at the moment it’s still there ... That requires a vast amount of time and the stress in your personal life is that [it] *completely eats into time away from work*.”

Fraser reported that over the last four or five years he has had to work almost every weekend, either late at night or on a Sunday afternoon. Fraser sees this as “unhealthy” and “wrong fundamentally”.

- Third, aging affects the way others perceive you. Hamish is aware of being treated differently due to his age:
  “you're very conscious that there's a point at which you feel you're being slightly parked because of your age.”

First, as your client network gets older, they may move into less influential, non-executive positions and no longer be able to award you work. Second, Nigel suggests the next generation of CEOs and senior managers may relate better to professionals of their own generation. Nigel sees himself as lacking “the capability, energy and drive to go and rebuild” himself within the organization now his/her client network is less useful. Nigel adds: “I think I’ve reached a point where I want to do something different.” In a similar way Charles describes industry practices that make the end of a career difficult to plan.

Charles: “I am getting towards, preferably close, to the end of my career, and therefore there are a couple of challenges. (1) There is the pull from the firm to say, ‘How do we get more years out of you?’ [But] with the fact that if you’re down to a certain number of years left, your usefulness declines exponentially. ... If I’m

only here for another two years, the firm can hardly put me on a big pitch. Because if you're the other side of the table and I'm pitching to you and you turn round and say, '...are you actually going to be around for five years?' Well, either I lie to you, which isn't terribly clever or you don't put me on the pitch because you know I've only got a finite period and it's not going to meet the expectations of the client. ... The other one is, ... me trying to work out what working life after [the Firm] is and how one bridges to that ... four years ago I went ... flexible time ... So I essentially have an additional four week's holiday a year, to be taken at times that suit my client or clients. ...That was my attempt to start the bridge and it's interesting 'cause I've literally, this morning, had a discussion with my line boss, ...- he approached me, would I consider staying longer if they were prepared to be more flexible? ... what would I think if I went to 50%? And literally, this was this morning so I haven't a clue, so I can't give you an answer, yet."

- Fourth, the organization changes as the critical mass of partners shifts to the next generation.

Looking at the organization Paul does not see many people "over fifty five". When Nigel looks at the organization he/she can see "only a couple of people of my vintage... left." Tom also describes the firm changing, rather than Tom changing. Tom does not see him/herself as typical of the new critical mass of partners who are younger than Tom. The new generation are "more collegiate" and have "different life values". The changing work practices are "fundamentally going to change the firm". However;

> "I could walk out the door tomorrow and I've got more than enough money to enjoy the rest of my life."; "I don't quite know when I'll retire but … I was very keen it wasn't a sort of an abrupt stop."

Tom is coming out of a management position and returning to being a senior partner, partly due to the firm having a policy that younger partners should get a chance at management rather than partners sitting in these positions for decades, so Tom is facing a change in power and influence in the firm. Someone in Tom's position needs to convince clients and juniors to accept him as a full-time client-facing partner again and will be driven to address the self-esteem issues associated with loss of a senior management role.

5.4.2 Interactions

The individuals perceive themselves as getting older and are aware that those around them can see they are ageing. Hamish suggests other people in the professional context need to be persuaded that he/she still has the energy required and the "capacity for the fight":

> "people ask you how old your children are and you think, okay, I wonder why you're interested in that in a professional capacity. Let me guess. And so you're conscious of the fact that there are assumptions sometimes made about your energy."

At the same time Hamish notes that in the workplace conversations about age are rare:

> "nobody dare talk about age now because, you know, there's a lawsuit waiting to happen."

Tom sees the practices of the younger generation changing the firm away from the firm that Tom grew up in. The choice he sees is to change with the firm or not. At stake are the last few years of his career. Tom would need to persuade the new critical mass partner group of his plan to adapt to stay. Similarly Nigel sees a choice: either find the capability to "reinvent" himself for the "third time" or to retire. Paul is thinking about changing role for the last 10 years of his career. If he wants to change roles within the organization to remove some pressure, he will need to convince a gatekeeper to give him that role.

For Jack continued membership of the organization is balanced against a concern to preserve a positive reputation within the organization until the end:

> "when they finally show me the door and give me my leaving card and things, [they could] say, 'Well, he really went off the boil, didn't he in the last few years?' I don't want that".

A good exit early might preserve the self-esteem he has gained from membership of the organization but at the cost of physical separation now. One of them wanted to be paid to 55 and then any exit to be done "right". He describes himself as having

been on a downward trajectory which has been a difficult experience. He would need to persuade “them” to work with him on his continued career or preferred exit.

Assuming a prior identification, the individual will be interacting as “I” and as “We”. The interactions mentioned in the accounts of identity work relating to ageing primarily involve sense-breakers, ‘gatekeepers’ in the firm and peers. The needs of ‘I’ and ‘we’ are different.

5.4.3 Identity challenge

Fraser seeks to feel that he still has something to offer the organization. Part of his identity work will be working out what that will be. The organization needs to be persuaded of the value of keeping the individual. As the self-definitions change with age, the individual may reassess the overlap with the organization identity. The individual will need a narrative to bridge new and old definitions of the self and of the organization. The identity work may be novel to the individual and may not be shared with others in the organization.

Assuming some identification with the organization on the part of the individual before these age related challenges arise, the individual will have an organizational identification which may be salient at some times and not at others. There is potential for various scenarios here. As “we”, the partner may reason that encouraging older partners to leave to allow new partners to be made up is good for PPP. If the older partner also wants for personal reasons to step down, then there is alignment on this subject. However if, for example, the partner needs to keep earning a bit longer, there will be tension between the “we” and the “I” in the partner. “We” think the policy is right for the firm; “I” see myself as working in the firm for years to come.

5.4.4 Identity work responses

- Audience participation.

Hamish suggested that it is difficult to talk about age in the work context. Developing a narrative about age is therefore hampered because the audience with which there is the highest stake is reluctant to engage in conversation. Hamish however can use analogies:

> “I can't play that game by running at hundred miles an hour with the guys in their twenties. I can play that game by reading it much better and being in position, whereas they've gone charging round the pitch. And I think it's the same here. You think, I've seen this before. I talk to our [associates] and I say, "This is my fourth depression. I know how this pans out, so just hang in there. You don't have to panic.”

Interactions are also difficult because partners in their 40s and 50s are concerned to avoid the tap on the shoulder described by Lyle. They may fear being ushered out of the firm more quickly than they would like if they discuss age. However at some point the risk becomes worth it. Jack has already reduced his hours to 4 days a week. Jack made the request and the managing partner said that he preferred Jack to do reduced hours than to leave the firm. The managing partner’s agreement with Jack’s plan allowed Jack to enact that desired identity. Interactions here are complicated by the contract governing the terms on which the partner works for the firm.

Charles had also approached the firm and said that he wanted to reduce to 90% if he was going to stay in the firm and had been granted a 90% deal. In a new development Charles’s line manager had asked Charles just before the interview for this study if Charles would consider staying longer in the firm if he was able to work 50% time. The line manager and Charles’s conversation is the development of a potential new narrative for Charles within the firm:

> “I never thought the firm would even contemplate 50% so I would never have gone to them [with that].”

The difficulty for the partner in discussing age is attributed to dealing with uncertainty. There seems to be a fear of appearing to deviate too far from the exemplar partner. They do not want to continue on the ‘greasy pole’ of partnership but are wary of appearing not to be driven, because they fear no longer being accepted by the other partners. If you want to continue to take a share of the equity then the other partners have to continue to allow you to be a partner, rather than giving your space to a young, highly-ambitious, new partner who wants to make as much PPP as possible. It is difficult for the partner to develop and test identity responses due to this competitive atmosphere.

Charles, etc. are concerned to keep up with the other partners, concerned that if they even mention wanting to slow down, they will be seen as "just sucking the money out of the firm" (Hugh).

- Archetypes

Fraser says it is "my generation" working unhealthily hard. By suggesting that the next generation of partners are reaching a better balance, Fraser preserves a positive view of the organization and suggests it is just one generation, rather than the organization doing the "wrong" thing. It appears to me that he tries to suggest that the organization going forward will be fine by attributing a problem to an outgoing generation. He distinguishes himself from his generation.

Nigel, as 'we', draws on an organization stereotype: the partner who does "the right thing" by letting the next generation come through and take on the client relationships with their generation who are now running the clients. Tom, as 'we', also uses the idea that it is "right" to give up management roles and let the next generation have a go. Nigel suggests this transition is "natural" due to the generational change in client contacts. This use of archetypes helps Nigel bridge from a position of influence with many clients to a path towards retirement.

- The development of new self-definitions

> Paul: "I don't know if … what I want to do for the last ten years. ... I do a lot of stuff with the press because I'm kind of quite good at that ... the PR department have discovered that if they want something - if they want a two hundred word article written in three hours, I'm actually a pretty good bet for it."

Paul is starting to see himself in a different way and the PR department is involved in the development of this new narrative.

Tom, however, is working on self-definitions that align Tom with the new critical mass of partners:

> "Well I've probably been more collegiate than most of my...generation ... So the way I succeeded here, and many people haven't succeeded here, is by being quite generous and collegiate and then agreeing what was going to happen and then making very successful what I do. Those who have set out

> to be selfish have largely fallen by the wayside and deserve to do so. ... So I think I'll just adopt [the next generation] style which is probably just a slight extension of the way I work."

Tom works on his perception of the firm, seeing it as becoming more collegial. He also considers himself and, like Fraser, distinguishes himself from the older generation associated with the firm in the past. Tom is aligning him/herself with the archetype of the new partner work model in order to stay in the firm.

5.4.5 Consequences for organization/individual

Ultimately the consequence will be retirement, voluntary or encouraged. However on the way to retirement there are identity work challenges. Fraser, in saying that his generation are all behaving the same way, suggests that his behaviour is normal but is not solving the tension between the demands of the organization and other parts of his life, even if he preserves a positive view of the organization. That tension has been resolved arguably more successfully in accounts where the individual and a senior member of the firm have managed to interact about age.

> Arthur: "I know quite a lot of the more senior partners in the twilight of their career have been put on deals that have kept them interested and kept them there. So I got a phone call in February saying, "Would you like to go to [city]?" I said, "You do realise that I'm finishing in two years' time?" And the guy said, "Two years is a bit tricky. It'll do, but three would be better." So I said, "Well okay, let's call it three and I'll do it." So he's done me a three-year deal that means that *I don't have to worry too much about performance*. But I worry about performance out of pride as opposed to because someone is standing over me with a big stick, or taking carrots away."

This is an example where the "we" in the individual is aligned with the "I" in the individual. We are accommodating the needs of people like Arthur. By approaching Arthur, rather than waiting for Arthur to approach HR or a senior partner, this firm has supported Arthur in identity work which is hampered by the competitive atmosphere.

However aging continues and so will identity work related to it. As Charles's journey to 90% and now possibly to 50% shows, there may be an ongoing negotiation of

what the firm wants from you and you want from the firm requiring frequent identity work over those last few years.

This negotiation may be particularly disruptive where it is internal to the individual. If "we" in the individual, following the organization policy, believes that older partners should move out of powerful positions to allow younger partners to progress and develop, but the "I" in the individual wants to continue with as much power as possible, the identity conflict in the individual will be disruptive.

Finally, again we see a sequence of identity responses. This sequence is complicated by the contract covering the terms on which the partner works for the firm. Convinced that the contract cannot be changed to suit the partner, he/she might prepare for identity exit. However changes to that contract can open up the possibility of changing the partner's relationship with the firm. The identity work associated with ageing can then be gradual.

6 Difficult identity work

In Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting I considered the identity journey over the course of partnership and drew out four recurring themes. In Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events I looked at accounts of events raised by the interviewees as challenging and for each described the nature of the event, interactions related to the event, the identity challenges from the event, the identity responses and finally outcomes for both the firms and the individuals. In this chapter I will focus in on certain elements of identity recoveries.

The most dramatic recoveries will be those from a point of low identification with the firm. As a proxy for low identification I use the taking of steps towards leaving the firm. Often in interviewees' accounts of moments when they considered leaving, they attributed that behaviour to an event. I take the event as the start of the recovery journey. In this chapter I consider:

- The nature of events which prompted interviewees to take steps towards leaving;
- Identity recoveries: interactions, challenges, responses, consequences;
- The identity recovery position.

I use the word recovery to move away from 'work' or 'response' which have a narrower focus on efforts of the individual. In using the word 'recovery' I do not mean to suggest that recovery *should* always be in the form of re-identification; it is appropriate here because my examples are of partners who have reached a tipping point and then re-identified. To some extent they have recovered an almost lost social identity. I also do not mean to suggest that partners restore the same social identity as before the event; re-identification will be to a new version of the social identity.

6.1 Event characteristics

Although from the 50 interviewees I had a total of 64 accounts connected with thoughts of leaving, in this section I use only the accounts in which the interviewee mentioned taking action towards leaving before the point of retirement. I have

eleven accounts containing action towards leaving the current firm, where the action was taken after being made a partner and before the point of wanting to retire. I have many accounts of people switching firms or nearly leaving before getting partnership but I am interested here in the identity journeys of partners, those people who have accepted the offer of partnership, have the privileges of partnership, are subject to the expectation that partners should be loyal to their firms but have still reached a point of trying to leave.

There were many challenges raised by the interviewees in this study and in Table 6.1 below I list the challenges and divide them by whether the interviewee faced that challenge alone at that time or not. While some challenges may be common, they may still be faced by interviewees at different times so the identity work is not coinciding with other people doing the same work. The challenges to which the 11 accounts were linked are highlighted.

Events appraised as challenging and simultaneously experienced with other individuals in the organization	Events appraised as challenging and not simultaneously experienced with other individuals in the organization
• Feeling like outsiders, for example, in an overseas office, in a failing team • Financial crisis • Firm expectations of level at which will perform, for example, sales targets, volume of work • Frustrations with parts of the organization, for example, IT • Impact of long hours, for example, no time to go to the gym to maintain physical health • Public criticism of firm • Redundancies of people not well known to you in the organization • Refreshing value statement of organization/other organization wide changes • Reputation, for example, prominence or not of brand, wishing firm would grow faster • Stopping not-for-profit initiatives • Stopping pension scheme • Switching off from work, for example, continuing to use business phrases at home • Travel short term, for example, frequent travel overseas • Treatment of people who are encouraged to leave the organization	• Age related challenges, for example, being a different generation to rest of team, finding it harder to keep up due to age • Clashes with other social identities, for example, insufficient time to meet expectations of family, unpredictable hours affecting caring responsibilities • Client approaches you with job offer • Close friend is forced out of the firm • Close friend/your junior chooses to leave organization • Criteria for an evaluation/promotion change just as you are about to do it • Criticism of your professional work • Formal disciplining of you for a mistake • Failing to meet performance criteria • Family crisis • Feeling like an outsider due to individual characteristics • Feeling uncomfortable about the firm taking on certain clients, for example, a company that tests products on animals • Having to give your client unwelcome advice • Holiday plans disrupted by work • Lack of personal development, for example, feeling you have a lack of role models, lack of opportunity, not being given responsibility by seniors • Not liking the profession any more • Ongoing unkind behaviour towards you apparently tolerated by organization/you object to the behaviour of a person inside the firm • Promotion decisions/other decisions of firm affecting only you • Religious affiliation, for example, conflict between expectations of client/firm and religion on particular days • Travel long term, for example, moving country for a few years for work

Table 6.1 Challenges relating to organization membership

Challenges linked with taking steps towards leaving the firm are highlighted.

All 11 instances of taking action to leave the firm were related to challenges faced alone in the sense that they were not faced at the same time by others in the firm. None of the challenges faced with others were linked to action to leave the firm, even where those events appear to change the prestige of the firm or the financial benefits from working there. In the Discussion chapter I will consider how this sits with studies such as that of the Roman Catholic church by Gutierrez et al (2010) in which the bad publicity received by the church led to identity work by its members. While I agree that such events can lead to identity work, the potential to unite and share that identity work may mean that group challenges are not the hardest identity work challenges faced by individuals in relation to organization membership.

Two of these eleven accounts also appear in Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events section 5.2 'Decisions within the firm affecting only the individual member': Adrian's account of believing that behind the scenes a senior person was damaging his performance reviews and remuneration; and James' account of disagreeing with senior people in the firm on a technical matter. In that section there were many accounts in which interviewees thought about but did not take any action towards leaving. Here I draw together accounts containing action towards leaving, from a wide variety of events, and ask what, if anything, is common to these events.

The eleven accounts are summarised in Table 6.2 (at the end of the chapter) to allow the reader to see these stories as whole accounts, as well as broken in to elements in the sections following.

6.2 Interactions

Here the interactions are important in two senses: interactions as part of the event; and interactions as part of the recovery. The eleven accounts can be divided as follows:

- 5 were caused principally by a single problem person: Catherine: "a specific colleague"; Delia: "it just didn't work as a line relationship"; Adrian: "a senior partner"; Iain: "I cannot deal with this person anymore"; Ashley: "the partner that … said pretty offensive comments." Where the problem person was not directly senior to the interviewee, they were in positions of influence in the

firm, often having longer tenure than the interviewee and perceived by the interviewee as "embedded" (Iain) in the firm.

- 4 were attributed to a problem group of people in management: Paul (1)[4]: "the firm had lied to me"; Sarah: "they were, we really need you … you're the right person … sure enough they screwed up my holiday [again]"; Charles felt that the senior people in the merged firm made him earn partnership all over again; James: "immense pressure from important people in the firm."
- 2 were attributed to other issues: Paul (2): "I went through a very difficult period sales-wise"; Zac: "I'm not 1000% enamoured with [the profession]."

Comparing the two attributed to other issues against the nine attributed to interactions with a problem person/problem people in the firm highlights the greater emotional upheaval in the nine than in the two. Within the nine there are interviewees at different points on a journey, from a place where "everything mattered" to a "far better place" (Adrian). Charles talks about it being "the biggest shift" in his partner journey. The following focuses on these nine journeys to find out what these extreme cases can tell us about identity relating to organization membership. These nine include individuals from all three industries. In all of these nine accounts, as well as the event being faced alone at that time, the source of the threat is also inside the firm.

The interactions in the recovery journey are a mixture of negative and positive messages. The interviewee may be aware that the way they are perceived by others in the firm is being negatively affected by the issue, for example, James became aware that peers were starting to say that he must have got something technical wrong and Ashley was aware that nobody was standing up for Ashley. Talking with peers may come at the cost of damaging their reputation with their peers. The interviewees are, however, talking to rival firms, head-hunters or clients about leaving the firm. Otherwise the interactions appear to be just a few one-to-one conversations within the partner group. In these accounts there are only a couple of references to other people (a coach, Delia; and a spouse, Sarah and James).

[4] Paul gave two accounts of having taken steps towards leaving the firm.

As well as these conversations with people outside the firm, I noted a link to physical separation from the organization. If an individual starts to withdraw from the firm there will be fewer opportunities for interactions with other members inside the firm in which identity work might be performed.

> Ashley: “because of the increasing influence of this partner who made the comment ... - I mean this is a very relevant point - he had a management position ...and I was told by two senior partners that that was because he was considered to be poor at management ... I’ve stayed at home [more] for the last three years, I’ve retreated from the group in that sense. ... I don’t go to partners meetings anymore.”

6.3 Identity challenges

In Paul (1), there is a shift from Paul using “they” and “I” at the start of the account to using “we” at the end. What are the identity challenges faced by “I” and “We” in these accounts? There is no use of “we” at the beginning of these accounts. Although the interviewee, being a partner, may have had some sense of “we” during the working day, in relation to this issue the interviewees did not use “we”. “We” has become “they”. Sarah, Iain, Charles and Ashley make no use of ‘we’ at all; Catherine, Delia, Paul and Adrian revert to ‘we’ towards the end of their accounts; James makes no use of ‘we’ in his account but in the middle of his account he refers to a previous event and uses ‘we’ while explaining that, reverting to ‘they’ once he starts talking about the identity challenge again; also, James, once he has told the full story to the point of resolution, then goes back over the events again, this time using ‘we’.

Their understanding of the position of “they” was influenced by interactions. Where, as in Ashley’s case, nobody intervenes or sympathises when another partner is offensive to Ashley in partner meetings, the message is that “they” are not concerned enough to do anything about this. Is inter-partner hostility something “they” see as a low priority? Charles, a lateral hire, and Paul (1), in a merger situation, were both relatively new to the partner group. Both could understand why “they”, following a commercial rationale, did as they did, but both thought “they” were wrong. Iain concluded from the lack of action that “they” would stand by the problem person because that partner was so “embedded” in the firm. Adrian concluded that

there was a shady golf club clique, that the inner circle of “they” would stick together. Reading through these accounts together I would suggest that “they” did not experience an identity challenge collectively at anything like the intensity of the identity challenge being faced by “I”. This is one unhappy partner out of more than a hundred partners. Toeing the line and presenting a united, collegiate partner body to the rest of the firm and the outside world in this situation meant the interviewee “sucked it up because there was nowhere I could go with it” (Ashley).

“I” am feeling “unfairly treated” (Adrian), or “betrayed” (James), or not “valued” (Delia), or “disillusioned” (Paul). “I” no longer have a positive perception of the firm. When asked to describe the aspects of the firm that had prompted Sarah to turn down a job somewhere else, Sarah, who at the time of interviewing had very recently threatened to leave if a few things did not change, said:

> “it concerns me that I can’t answer that question.”

Paul, in the middle of talking about how the firm had lied to him, then started referring to other things that had bothered him at the same time, such as, certain limits on the autonomy of the professionals:

> “in those days … I found all that stuff really very difficult.”

These positions are perhaps summed up by Adrian’s “everything mattered.” If the interviewee is going to stay in the firm then the interviewee needs to reach a position where membership of the firm does not cause turmoil within the interviewee. The interviewee may need an identity narrative to link together changing perceptions of the firm and/or of the self.

6.4 Components of recoveries

I now consider the recoveries. To what do the interviewees attribute their recoveries? What agency was involved? Within the group of nine, Ashley and Sarah appear to be still in the middle of the journey. The others are no longer taking action towards leaving. The following elements of recovery appear in the accounts. They do not necessarily occur in any order or any particular combinations.

6.4.1 A change in the firm

As Catherine said, “my circumstances changed” because the problem person left the firm. For Adrian there was “a change within the firm” when a new management team came in. Such events enable a positive perception of the firm to be restored. In their accounts of these challenges, Catherine and Adrian could use these events to explain their subsequent behaviour and therefore could link their changing perceptions.

As described in Chapter 4, individual partners have limited influence to make changes in the firm so this is largely beyond the control of the individual. The change also needs to be relevant to the challenge; in Catherine’s example the resignation of a different partner would not have had the same effect. However a new management team is used in a narrative to argue that the ethos of the firm is changing.

6.4.2 Comparing the firm to other employers

Catherine, before the problem person left the firm, had already explored other options and decided there was “nothing to be gained” by moving. In comparing the firm against the competition, Catherine realised some of the positives about the firm. It should be noted, however, that Catherine’s account ended only when the problem person had left so that the problem within her existing firm had gone.

Obviously the comparison may convince the interviewee to leave. Adrian was at the point of accepting a job in industry when the management within his existing firm changed and in Adrian’s account it is only that change which enabled him to stay.

6.4.3 Personal success within the firm

Paul (1) landed a large piece of work so felt successful and secure; even if he still felt very angry, there was no “need” to leave. Paul was still angry and challenging senior people in the firm face-to-face, but the personal success was enough to keep him in the firm. In his account, as in Catherine’s, it is not until a change occurred in the firm that the account was complete. In Paul’s case:

> “*they’ve* finally abolished that actually. It’s taken ten years but *we’ve* done that.”

Paul can unite “I” and “we” again in the account. Ashley cannot unite “I” and “we” and at the time of interviewing was still taking steps to leave. However Ashley drew a distinction between getting to the stage of talking to other firms and actually making the move:

> “that doesn’t mean I would necessarily move.”

Ashley several times mentioned having very impressive billings and having the room to manoeuvre as a result. Ashley had stopped attending meetings to avoid the problem partner but knew that if her billing figures fell, she would have to toe the line to stay. That personal success within the firm, like a change in the firm, could be used plausibly to explain Ashley’s behaviour. For Charles, personal success was critical as he sought to regain the partner title.

6.4.4 Communicating with senior people in the firm

Delia, Paul, Sarah, Iain, Charles, James and Ashley all make reference to significant conversations with senior figures in the firm. This may be initiated by the interviewee (Delia) or the senior figure (James). Ashley, who at the time of interviewing was still taking steps to leave, appeared dissatisfied with these interactions:

> “If you raise any issue of unhappiness you only dig yourself in deeper.”

As a result Ashley also felt:

> “if a partner behaved incredibly badly to me there would not be anyone I could go to, to complain to.”

Ashley did refer to conversations with senior figures about the problem person but maybe is in a similar situation to Adrian who felt it had been like “shouting in the wind” before the new management had come in.

The others had more productive interactions with senior figures. Delia went beyond the immediate manager figure to other senior figures. Delia was eventually moved to a new role but even before that “somewhere in the back the machines started whirring”; the conversations themselves allowed Delia to feel:

> “I was listened to … I felt able to articulate … why I was unhappy … which made me feel valued.”

The conversations helped. It was, however, only the move itself, away from the problem person, which enabled Delia to say:

> "I was suddenly in a different space again."

Iain also eventually bypassed the problem person and sought the help of other senior figures. Paul reported far more heated conversations. One senior figure "nearly hit me" and he was "quite a mild mannered man" but Paul had "got the point across."

Sarah's account is interesting because chronologically the offers from clients came first, she declined those offers, and then felt that the firm was treating her poorly and she had just recently sat down with a senior figure to say things needed to change. Sarah links all of these together. Rejecting the job offers from clients to be loyal to the firm is the backdrop for presenting how "they" have behaved recently as particularly poor.

Charles describes senior figures having explained the reasons for their decision to make him go through the partner election process again in the merged firm. Charles still went to the job market but in this account several years later, that explanation from senior figures of the reasons still featured. For Paul and James, conversations with senior figures featured prominently. James went in to the meeting with a job offer in hand planning to resign and came out having decided to stay. The senior figure has "the Bill Clinton effect; makes you feel good about yourself." This comment is interesting because in many of these accounts, the interviewee is feeling knocked by perceived unkind or unfair behaviour and their self-esteem may be low. In James' account, the decision to stay is attributed entirely to this 2 hour conversation.

Note that most of the interactions with senior figures occur after a job has been sought elsewhere; by the time the partner feels able to raise the issue internally, an alternative is in place.

These four elements are found in multiple accounts and in various combinations: a change in the firm; comparison to other firms; personal success within the firm; and communication with a senior figure. However there are some elements of recoveries which occurred in Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events and are notable by their

absence here. As Rachel said in relation to deeply disagreeing with redundancy programmes:

> "you've got your team of people who appreciate you. You've got clients who… appreciate you … in your little area of your teams, your clients, your network and your alumni … you're greatly appreciated … and are valued."

These positive interactions may well be continuing in the background but the 'problem person' or 'problem people' events are so emotional for the individual partner that these small positive interactions get obscured. The interactions mentioned in the nine difficult identity work accounts are with key figures that are undeniably powerful in the firm.

By definition, shared identity work is absent. There are no other people going through the same thing at the same time mentioned in these accounts. This is an absence of a resource. The individual cannot observe how others are responding or develop responses in the safe environment of interactions with others facing the same challenge.

Finally 'agency', in the sense of doing good things to counterbalance the taint associated with being a partner in the firm, is absent. The person who has been 'wronged' by the firm in the individual's opinion is the individual themselves.

As I mentioned above, a few of the nine appeared still to be facing difficult identity work challenges. For the others, the recovery elements had been combined and the individuals felt that they had come through the difficult period.

6.5 The Identity Recovery Position

In those accounts where recovery has been achieved, what does recovery look like? Adrian moved from a position where "everything mattered" to saying:

> "for example, under the new management team, all this stuff about secretaries doesn't really matter."

Looking at the data as a whole, I can see this tolerance manifesting in the accounts given by people who are not in the "everything matters" state. How do they make "stuff about secretaries" not matter? A dominant theme was attributing blame

elsewhere. This links to Dutton and Dukerich's, (1991) work on preserving a positive perception.

Broadly the data on preserving a positive perception of the firm by parking blame away from the firm fell in to four tactics:

- protecting their perception of the organization by parking problems outside the organization, for example, suggesting that certain problems are profession wide rather than organization specific:

  James: "would it be different somewhere else?"

  Paul: "it's also just partly the way the market works"

- protecting your perception of the organization by parking problems on one or more individuals within the organization; for example, attributing a strategic decision to a particular management group who will be rotated out within a couple of years:

  Adrian: "it was … that management team"

- protecting your perception of the organization by taking problems on to yourself, for example, when the management group reaches a decision you believe to be wrong, telling yourself that you would have reached the same conclusion if you had spent more time on the matter, or:

  Delia: "it was all about me"

  James: I was too "emotional" and needed to "grow up a little bit"

- protecting your perception of the organization by parking problems in the organization in the past, believing the organization had now changed:

  Paul: "it was just stupid thinking which I'm pleased to say we've got over … I'm pleased to say we've changed."

These four tactics are seen throughout the data I collected, not just in the extreme cases:

- protecting their perception of the organization by parking problems outside the organization:

Andrew: “it's not unique to [my firm]; it just impacts different firms at different times ... So you have a client collapse or a regulatory public issue which all the firms have”

- protecting your perception of the organization by parking problems on one or more individuals within the organization:

Oliver: “I’ve been here long enough to see that these partners will disappear out of the system. ... justice will ... hit them. … if you’re not a good guy ... ... the system will isolate you”

- protecting your perception of the organization by taking problems on to yourself:

Christopher: “I still see that it's really me that - I can drive my behaviour and do what I want...I'm not convinced that it's [my firm]. You know, [my firm] … sets a framework of expectation… And it's probably a little bit more than I'm prepared to give a lot of the time … I just think it's … naturally how partnerships work. "

- protecting your perception of the organization by parking problems on the organization in the past, believing the organization had now changed:

Simon: “I think everyone accepts we, we bungled that, we did not do a good job and I think we’ve learnt from our mistakes...if we ever went through that position again there’s enough of us with memory of how bad that was ...that we would go kicking and screaming, this is not how you’re going do this.”

It is worth noting that in Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events I mentioned parking blame elsewhere as an identity work response yet in this chapter I am mentioning it as linked to the position reached on resolution of the identity challenges. The interviewees use the expressions only at the end of the more difficult identity work accounts.

6.6 A note on the use of the blame tactics

Early in the collection of data I started to think that different generations of partners were using different blame tactics. Although this study does not lend itself to findings of prevalence, in the analysis I sought to start to explore whether groups of partners were tending to use similar tactics in response to events. Interviewees were split by age group, tenure in the organization and tenure as a partner. Organization-tenure ranged from less than a year to 36 years. Partner-tenure ranged from less than a year to 27 years. It is not intended to suggest that attributing blame elsewhere is the only way partners worked on their perception; there are also examples of partners blaming the firm. These can be split in to blaming the firm and including the self in the firm; and blaming the firm but excluding the self from the firm. To challenge my hunch I coded blame quotes in to six types: to the past, outside the firm, to a subset of the firm, to the self, to the firm including the self and to the firm but excluding the self. Using co-occurrence tables, counts of the quotes for each type of blame in each age group, tenure group and partner tenure group were generated. The most frequently used blame tactics were identified for each age group, each organization-tenure group and each partner-tenure group. The groups in the two participating firms were compared.

Overall tenure in the firm

When the use of blame tactics was split by tenure in the organization, for the most recently recruited interviewees, i.e. those who had been through welcome socialization programmes most recently, blaming yourself appeared in the top 3 tactics in both firms (19%, 12 of 64 blame quotes). Partners with the longest tenure in each firm used placing the blame outside the organization more than they used the other tactics (29%, 10 out of 34 blame quotes).

Tenure as a partner in the firm

When the use of blame tactics was split by tenure as a partner there were again some patterns across both firms. Blaming the self appeared in the top three tactics for those most recently made partners in both firms, albeit not disproportionately (17%, 20 out of 118 blame quotes) but it was hardly used at all by those with over 15 years tenure as a partner (9%, 5 out of 55 blame quotes) i.e. those who had been through the partnership election process most recently made greater use of blaming

the self. The main tactic used by those with the longest tenure as a partner in each firm was blaming forces outside the firm (33%, 18 out of 55 blame quotes). As mentioned above, they rarely blamed themselves.

This is a very basic challenge of the data and I did not design this project for quantitative analysis but I was struck that just as Snow and Andersen (1987) suggested there might be a link between types of identity work and tenure as a homeless person, on a simple count basis, there appeared to be a possible link between tenure as a partner and types of identity work. Without a longitudinal study I cannot tell whether partners learn to place the blame outside the firm or partners who use that tactic are the ones who manage to stay.

As I mentioned above, the most striking feature of these parking blame tactics is the absence of their use early in the more difficult identity work accounts, given the frequent use of them in the other identity work accounts.

Table 6.2 Eleven difficult identity work accounts

What happened	How felt plus action took	What happened next	How felt next	Final position
Nine extreme cases				
Catherine Needed to be in certain geography but person in that office to whom really objected	Deeply unhappy. Spoke to other firms	Decided nothing to be gained – but problem still existed. I asked if 'nothing to be gained' meant other firms 'as bad as current firm' or 'not as good as current firm'	"I think it actually made me more positive about [the Firm]. And I think some of it was about realising some of the good things."	Objectionable person then left so "my circumstances changed."
Delia Line management relationship was not working.	"a period where I didn't feel valued, I didn't feel that my career was going to progress, I didn't feel that I was being developed" "I did actually start looking externally … I reengaged with a coach that I'd used before"	Then "I came back and talked to … a handful of people that were in senior positions … and told them how I was feeling." One of them subsequently found a new role for her. NB looked externally before spoke to seniors	"I was suddenly in a different space again."	"I was listened to which made me feel valued." "That's the only time I've got to a point where I thought well do I stay here or not"
Adrian Perceived a more senior partner blamed him for something and behind the scenes held his earnings and prospects back	"At that moment in time when that management team was in I felt at my most angry." "Everything mattered then because I thought the world was unfair I wasn't recognised literally everything mattered." "at that moment … a couple of head hunters phoned me and I went along with the interviews" …	"there was a change within the firm and I stayed" "there's a change of management … and it's a different order"	"So say for example under the new management team all this stuff about secretaries doesn't really matter. Everything mattered then." "personally in a far better place"	"We're through that now"; "I'm less naïve"; "I'm now more calculating in what I'm doing… in terms of influencing the partnership." It's "more about me."

What happened	How felt plus action took	What happened next	How felt next	Final position
Iain Problem with senior partner in local office.	"I cannot deal with this person anymore and thinking there is no way I can win this battle because he is too embedded in [the Firm]." Approached by rival firm. Nearly left.	Iain finally reluctantly went over problem partner's head. Got some support from top of firm. NB looked externally before spoke to seniors	"[The Firm] had been very good to me, they'd taken a risk with me … given the support … I need to give it back in return." Persuaded to stay by combination of this support and concerns about loss of market reputation if left.	Interviewee reached a point where top management and colleagues in office realised what was happening and supported him. Iain was vindicated. He feels obliged.
Ashley Problem with another partner who is now in a management position. Nobody standing up for Ashley when problem partner is offensive to her	Has stopped attending partner meetings due to problem partner being in management position. Considering options and spoken to immediate senior about possibility of moving. Now questioning everything: "I don't think I'm ever going to be what I call a big beast here." "It's mainly because I'm female."	Has raised other issues now with senior people in firm.	Feeling disappointed with the answers. "If you raise any issue of unhappiness you only dig yourself in deeper." Meeting another firm later in the week "I would talk to any of [the most prestigious firms] but that doesn't mean that I would necessarily move" Asked what Ashley had decided to tolerate if she stays: "bad behaviour"	"if a partner behaved incredibly badly to me there would not be anyone I could go to, to complain to." Talks expressly about feeling secure due to being one of the highest profit generating partners in the firm and being able to change behaviour in terms of not attending partner meetings but still actively seeking to leave

What happened	How felt plus action took	What happened next	How felt next	Final position
Paul (1) Had been partner elsewhere. Understood on recruitment would have full partner title after a couple of months. Full partner benefits in place already. Felt strongly that it turned out to be more than a formality. Firm 'lied' to me.	"I felt very disillusioned about that and also just some of the [limits on partner autonomy] in those days… I found all that stuff really very difficult and questioned, you know, why I was here" "So I was talking to other people about, you know, I was planning my escape route"	Won some work so "there was no need to go anywhere, I was being quite successful" but told could not stay as associate partner. Did not need to move because he could satisfy the full partner criteria but objected to the process to become full partner.	"I wasn't going to bloody well go quietly"; challenged the most senior partners face-to-face. Tolerated policy in sense stayed in firm but refused to tolerate it in the sense pushed for change.	"They've finally abolished that actually. It's taken about ten years but we've done that." Note shift from 'they' to 'we' once finally abolished.
Charles Lost partner title in merger and had to earn it again.	That was "the biggest shift" in the partner journey. "I actually went to the job market. It's the only time… where I have actively … responded to head-hunters."	Within 3 years earned partner title again anyway.	Attracted by opportunities for working abroad with the firm.	Since been with the firm for over 15 years.
Sarah "a couple of times I have been actually offered jobs … and I've had to be careful because [they were] clients"	"Part of me … thought, I don't think I could do that." "For all the annoyance and tensions you get … I do think [the firm is] collaborative." "I think a board of directors is a very lonely place to be." Declined offers. Decisions were partly due to events in personal life. "So I've actively chosen to stay with the firm twice as a partner. I don't think the firm knows that."	"But they then put you on a transaction and send you to [overseas] for 3 months" and you question your decision. In particular: "well it's my holiday, I'd booked it and they were, we really need you to do a pitch, you're the right person, and I'm going, no, no, and that was, actually that probably was my lowest point, I just felt, this is ridiculous, I have no control over my life."	"Sure enough they screwed up my holiday and that's why I told" them I am going to leave unless a few things change. When I ask about the aspects of the firm that made Sarah actively choose to stay, she says "it concerns me that I can't answer that question."	Has put the firm first, believing the firm would remember her sacrifice, but now "what I need to be able to do is honour some of the arrangements I have with my family." Not prepared to tolerate lack of control any longer. Has to be able to take holidays as booked for "mental space."

What happened	How felt plus action took	What happened next	How felt next	Final position
James Disagreed with senior people in the firm on interpretation of technical point in a grey area. Another partner in the firm gives the desired opinion to the client.	"I felt betrayed by the firm" for not supporting his technical opinion. Aware that colleagues thought he had made a mistake. Told the team that "had nothing to hide." "Decided to leave the firm and I found another job."	Had a long talk with charismatic senior partner.	"You grow up… will it be different somewhere else? … it doesn't happen very often in this firm." Reached a position of tolerance again. Started "taking things a bit less emotionally."	Tolerating firm by suggesting it would be the same in another firm. Believes he technically was correct but accepts he possibly made too big an issue of it. Actively seeking a change in working conditions.
Two less extreme				
Zac No event. General feeling of wanting to do something different.	"I'm not 1000% enamoured with [profession]" "frequently phoned up by head-hunters … sometimes I go and talk to them"	"I'm constantly left thinking, well, I'm just going to do the same thing again. Why would you do that? I like it here. The people are good. You know all those good things."	"I don't perceive myself as a [professional in this industry] … it would be for a job doing something completely different." It "might be quite good for me, it might be quite good for the firm."	Not resolved. In a position of tolerating the firm – but still feeling the profession is not what he wants in life.
Paul (2) Patch of poor revenue generation	Paul anticipated performance would be questioned so prepared to leave. "If you're being judged on … record, you need to keep it intact."	Suddenly landed a huge piece of work and stayed.	Able to stay. Accepted by firm.	"So that's partly the firm but it's also just partly the way the market works really." Tolerating firm by blaming market for emphasis on revenue.

7 Discussion

In this chapter I look first generally at the identity work relating to organization membership performed by partners in professional service firms and then consider what appears to be more difficult identity work. In the difficult identity work accounts I sought to understand how people came 'back from the brink'. DiSanza and Bullis (1999) suggested that once individuals are in cycles of de-identification, it is extremely difficult to recover identification. I use this extreme category of repair and restoration of a social identity to explore how partners perform a range of maintenance identity work relating to organization membership in the setting of a professional service firm.

7.1 The performance of identity work

The comparison of the difficult identity work accounts with the various accounts in Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events revealed eight aspects of the performance of identity work. These are: subject of identity work, salience of organization identity, object of identity work, identity challenges, the concurrent performance of similar identity work, the setting for the identity work, the tactics available and the success or not of the identity work. In Figure 7.1 below I summarise these elements of the performance of identity work. In the rest of this chapter I address each in turn.

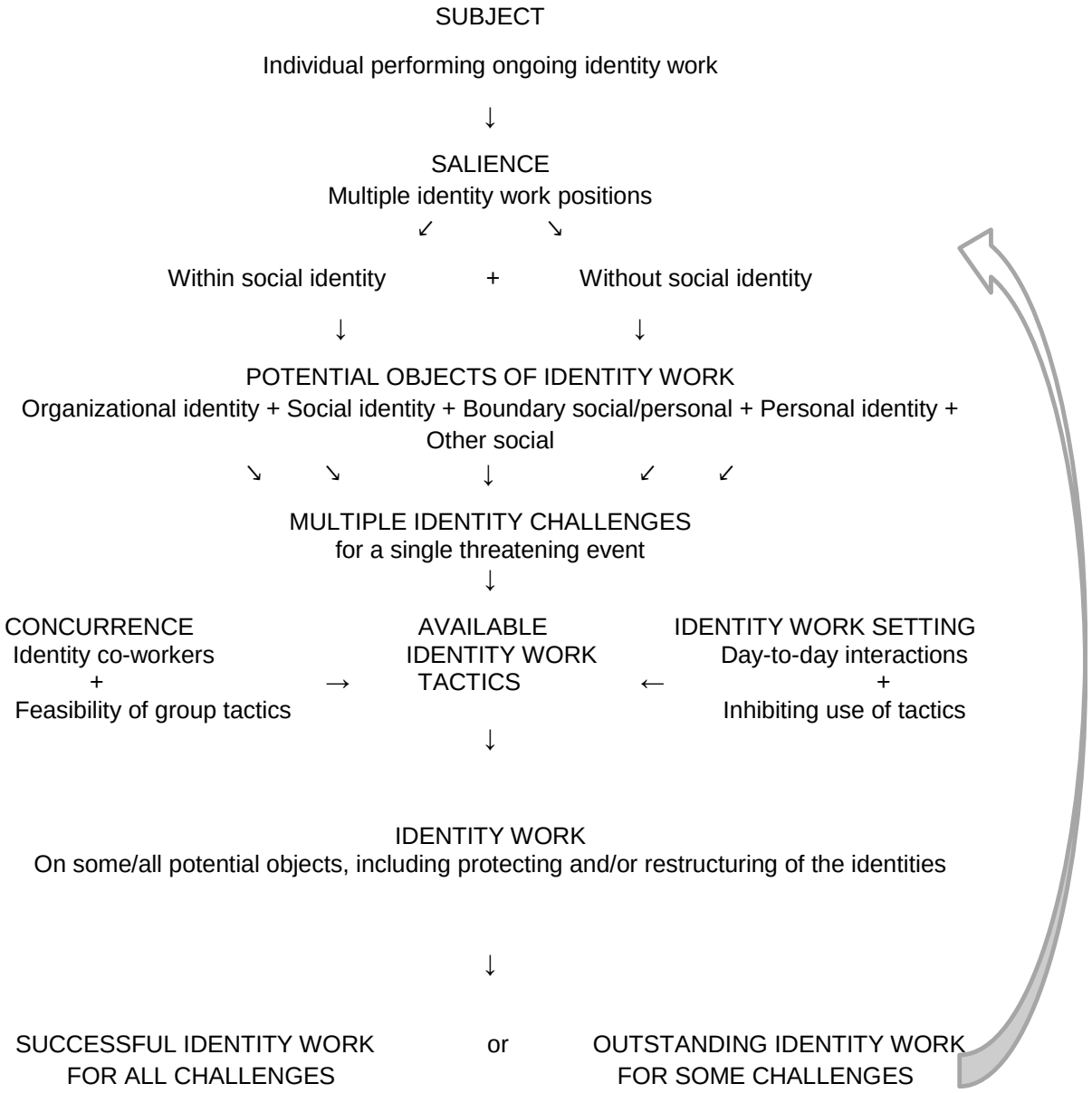

Figure 7.1 A diagram to summarise the performance of identity work triggered by a threat to the social identity relating to membership of the organization.

7.1.1 Subject

The subject performing the identity work is always the individual. Others may seek to influence one's identity work but I use identity work to refer to work performed by the individual on the various aspects of identity. The concurrent performance of similar identity work by several individuals and the influence of interactions on identity work may give the appearance of a group performing identity work. However an individual's perception of the identity of an organization may or may not align exactly with the perceptions held by other members so in asking how partners perform identity work relating to organization membership, the micro level of how is in the individual because the social identity relating to membership is based in perceptions held by the individual.

However the individual is not simple. In the public criticism events, partners described wanting to reassure clients but also wanting themselves to be reassured, for example, Catherine had to answer clients' concerns but also 'had a concern at the back of *my* mind.' Partners described both having a feeling of unity with the firm: making fun of the firm is making fun of me (Geoffrey); but also feeling that as an individual they did not want to be tainted by the firm (Adrian). I noted the shift in identity work accounts between 'I' and 'we' where 'we' referred to the individual as part of the firm and the individual was seeking to speak as a member of the firm, voicing something the individual believed to be shared to some extent with other members, for example, 'we are good at …. .' 'We' is used in various ways in the accounts of identity work but of particular interest here is the shifting between 'I' and 'we' in the accounts. Statements such as 'and that fits with me' or 'and I like that about the firm' show the individual distinguishing two positions: organization member and individual. 'I don't think we should be doing that' shows the partner having a sense of membership of the firm, but making the firm the object of criticism.

As I mentioned in the literature review, the agentic ability to make yourself the object of your attention is what unites many streams of identity theory. In their identity work accounts the partners not only take themselves as individuals and as a group as the object of their attention, but they also appear to do so from within different positions within themselves. 'I,' as a partner in the organization, can make myself the object of my attention; 'I' can also make myself the object of my attention without wearing the

partner hat. As I said in Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting, Arthur commented that you have to stand back and let the next generation of partners have a go at management, but Arthur found it was irritating to see new people having a go and not being, in Arthur's view, as good in that management position as he had been. Arthur, wearing the partner hat, understands the need to let younger partners get in to management, but as an individual, Arthur found it difficult to retreat from the centre of influence.

7.1.2 Salience and identity work

In Chapter 6, Difficult Identity Work, I described the recovery position of those individuals who reached the tipping point but managed to perform identity work to re-identify in some way with the organization. Once re-identified, they were willing to park the blame for things they did not like about the organization on causes or sources other than the organization again.

While that shows the presence or absence of a social identity when a social identity is lost and regained, it does not fully explain some of the data in Chapter 5, Four Identity Work Events. For example, Arthur described how as a member of the firm he needed to persuade the public that when management in a client are seeking to hide something from the adviser, it is possible for the adviser to have done a good job and to have satisfied all their professional obligations but for the client company to fail and let down investors. Yet Arthur also described how "*I*" sat down and asked himself/herself "How on earth didn't *we* pick that up?" At different points Arthur appears completely convinced by the explanation and not convinced. Arthur was aware of this and felt he challenged answers harder when it was himself, than as a partner in the organization. Similarly in the public criticism events, Jack described wanting as a partner to defend the firm but also, when asked where Jack worked, not wanting to name the firm when normally Jack would be proud to "big up" the firm. In the redundancy programmes Ashley wanted the process to be fair for the sake of the firm but equally knew that she would dig in to protect her own membership. Jack was aware during the redundancy event of feeling that he had to be the firm and could not be himself.

I talked in Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, about the powerfully disciplining process of election to partnership, with sense-breaking and sense-giving mechanisms. I

reported partners trying to meet all the demands of the organization in the period immediately post-election and then describing a moment where they pulled back and sought more of a balance with their own interests; a point at which they stopped putting the interests of the firm first at all times and tried to follow their own agendas as well within the context of the organization. The salience of a social identity helps describe this effect of seeing things only from the point of view of the perceived exemplar, and then becoming aware of that.

The reason for using salience is that it describes the state in which the partner is thinking as a partner of the firm and feels at one with the answer of the firm. When the social identity attributable to the firm is salient, the partner can feel convinced that the firm is, for example, not to blame. When that social identity is not salient, the partner finds: "I can't quite help asking myself whether we should have …." It is about how the individual performs identity work when the identity is relevant and when it is not. This is different to having an identification/not. This is about switching between different social identities. Salience is more than fluctuating strength of identity; Jack had an identity related to firm membership all the time – but sometimes it was salient and sometimes it was not. This switching may be frequent and unconscious but unpacking the identity challenges in this way sheds light on the complexity of the identity work because we can ask about the challenges faced in the two positions, and how the social identity may affect the responses.

One of the themes in Chapter 5, Four Identity Work Events, which supports the utility of salience here, is physical proximity to the group/workplace. Oliver in 5.2 talked about physically leaving the office and also disconnecting electronic links for a period of time (the inclusion of electronic links in Oliver's story of separating himself from the office is consistent with recent work on spatial boundaries in 'high commitment' organizations which encourage the performance at home of activities associated with being inside the organization, Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Rachel had to physically get away from the firm when the redundancy programme was so at odds with how Rachel thought the firm should act. Yet in 5.1, the public criticism events, I have multiple stories of individuals wanting to be in the office/with other members of the firm and finding that comforting. If the physical environment of the office is likely to prompt the firm identity to be salient because it is situationally relevant (Ashforth et al, 2008), then when the identity response as 'I' and as 'we' is similar, physical

proximity is fine because salience is not prompting conflict. However when the identity responses as 'I' and as 'we' are irreconcilable, physical proximity is a problem because it is making the social identity of the firm salient, creating a position of conflict in the individual. However this argument is not straightforward. Would conflict not be reduced while the individual is taken over by a salient identity? What does this tell us about salience? Salience does not mean that an individual is completely taken over by the social identity, only that when the identity is salient, the individual behaves *more* in accordance with the perceived prototype of the organization member. Similarly if a social identity is not salient for an individual, but the individual is physically in a high identity demand environment, the individual may experience conflict in terms of resisting those demands.

In talking about the salience of the organizational identity to a partner I am assuming the partner has a social identity attributable to organization membership. I reflected on how best to determine when interviewees were talking about identity. In Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I described the ongoing identity demands in the partnerships and the emotional significance of the firms to some partners: "this is … my firm, and this is the firm I love" (Simon). In Chapter 5, Four Identity Work Events, I included only accounts in which the event had triggered an emotional reaction in the partner and where the partner felt that something had been done to them personally. I excluded accounts where membership of the firm appeared to have no value or emotional significance to the partner in the telling of the account. Given that these accounts are mainly of events in the past, it was not possible to 'measure' the identification of the individual at any point in the course of the event. Therefore to judge whether identity work was involved I sought to be sensitive to the presence or absence of talk about the event affecting how the individual understood themselves or talk about the event creating strong emotions relating to membership. Previous research suggests that emotions can signal aspects of identity needing attention (Cascon-Pereira and Hallier, 2012).

While the subject performing the identity work is always the individual, the identity work is performed through different social identities. Ashforth et al (2007) recognised that managers in dirty work occupations have multiple inconsistent identity positions and that these might be made salient by different contexts. In relation to normalizing, they called for future researchers to examine the dynamics

between particular multiple identities. If the individual has multiple social identities and these may or may not be salient at different times, how might salience be relevant to the performance of identity work? If an individual can tolerate some inconsistency between social identities, what are the implications for how they perform identity work?

7.1.3 Implications of salience

Given that a social identity is based on the perception held by the individual, the implications for each individual will be slightly different because the content of the social identity will be personal. There are examples in the accounts of identity work where the social identities can be seen in action.

I noted in the section on decisions affecting only the individual member, 5.2, that the individuals changed their opinions and behaviour. Adrian was no longer prepared to tolerate things which previously had not been big issues. Peter said it was the only time he/she had thought "what the hell am I doing here." I suggest that some events are so shocking and upsetting that they are difficult to resolve quickly at an identity level. These 'slap in the face', crashing into a wall', big shock events appear to make the social identity fall away. The individuals see things in a different way for a substantial period of time. Has the identification gone or is it just not salient frequently when the individuals are in shock? The answer may not be either/or; it may be a combination of both. I noted in the section on decisions affecting only the individual that the use of 'we' in these accounts was markedly less than in the public criticism event accounts. Asking about salience highlights the position from which the individual conducts the identity work.

Adam in the decision affecting only the individual section does use 'we'. 'We' have a process and he can see that the senior person to whom he took his complaint had more important things to deal with. Adam can see that the senior person's behaviour is correct at a corporate level – but he still feels there was unfairness. In the section on changes in the individual, Charles can see both sides of the aging problem: as he gets to within two or three years of leaving, his usefulness to the business declines but as an individual Charles wants to bridge to retirement. Looking through the partnership identity, Charles can see the firm should not invest in Charles but without the partnership identity, Charles sees the situation slightly differently. As I said in

Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, Arthur commented that you have to stand back and let the next generation have a go, “and I understand that” but it was irritating to see new people having a go and not being, in Arthur’s view, as good as Arthur had been at it.

If the view through the social identity is difficult to reconcile with the other position, it might be easier if one social identity becomes completely dominant. However how would this operate for a partner continuing in the firm? Michel’s (2011) nine year ethnographic study of bankers looked at the powerful effect of socialization in a knowledge-intensive organization, giving evidence of the disadvantages for organizations when individuals enact the socialization to the exclusion of protecting their own physical health. The bankers’ bodies could not be completely socialized so, after several years, the cumulative impact on their health of enacting the socialization forced the bankers to rebalance the personal/organization boundary. Michel argued the organizations benefitted from the bankers exercising improved judgment when there was greater resistance to the socialization. Allowing one identity to dominate to the exclusion of others, in the long term, will create problems for both the individual and organization unless an optimal balance can be achieved. Suggesting that the social identity has ‘gone’ completely on a regular basis does not fit easily with the data; salience accommodates the continuing importance of the social identity and the temporary relevance of it.

However, even if the social identity is salient for members of a group, they may not be aligned. The social identity is sometimes out-of-sync if the individual’s perception of the firm has drifted from the dominant organization identity. For example, in the age-related challenges Charles never imagined the firm would contemplate 50% part time but was pleasantly surprised when the proposal was put to him. I noted in Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting that the election to partnership process was presented by the interviewees as an intense period of reflection on the self and learning about the firm. I also noted that individuals who are partners at the same time may have been elected 25 or 30 years apart. This raises questions about the degree to which the social identities can ever align. As Pratt et al (2006) observed in relation to role identities, subsequent learning of new roles took place against a background of socialization in to an initial role. Working on the perception of the

organization will feed back in to the social identity and I turn now to look at the 'objects' on which the identity work can be performed.

7.1.4 Objects of identity work

I am using the word 'object' in its grammatical sense to refer to the object of the verb.

- Working on the content of the social identity and/or the organization identity to which it relates

There are two aspects to this. First, the individual's perception of the organization identity may have drifted and the individual then perceives gaps and works to update their perception of the organization. This is similar to Petriglieri's (2011) meaning change work on a social identity. Second, identity work might be directed towards changing the organization identity, to make it match the perceptions in the social identity.

With regard to altering the perception to fit the experience of the organization, or meaning change, in Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I noted the intense period of identity work in the election to partner process. Some partners commented on how much they learnt about the firm during that time, and some commented that once granted partnership there was access to a whole new set of information as well. Combined with the fairly widely held view that the election to partnership had been the most intense period of self-reflection and learning about the firm, I suggest that the identity work on the social identity attaching to the firm is conducted against a backdrop of that election period identity work, as well as earlier socialisation in to the firm (in a similar way to Pratt et al, 2006). I also noted in Chapter 4 that partners frequently have to represent the firm to clients or pitch for work. In their professional capacity they have to take the firm as the object of their reflection in order to describe it and sell it. However there can be misalignment here. 'We' wish to project a certain identity to clients and 'I' am looking to gain self-esteem by association with the firm. The clients and the individual may be looking for different things. Protecting the positive perception of the firm by parking blame elsewhere may enable the individual to feel sympathy for the firm (Alec), and may be easier than identity work on the social identity itself, but it could increase the gradual drifting of

the perception, increasing the need for this identity work on the meaning of the social identity itself.

Second, in Chapter 5 I drew attention to the data in which 'we' perform identity work and sought to distinguish it from the performance of identity work by 'I'. 'We' appear to feel able to do some identity responses which 'I' would not attempt alone. I am thinking particularly here of the object of the identity work. Whereas we as a group might take part in a consultation about changing some aspect of the organization identity, 'I' do not see this as a feasible option available to me. I can make my opinion known, but I might be just one of several hundred partners. It is interesting to compare this with published work on identity work on roles, such as, Kreiner et al's (2006a) work on infusing aspects of the self in to the role, which in that study is conceived as something an individual could do. What is the equivalent when taking organization membership rather than role as the object of identity work?

Ashforth et al (2008) described organizational identification as an amalgam. What did I see worked on and what was not worked on? As Anthony and Sam commented, the individual cannot do much about some aspects of the firm because the firm employs thousands of people globally and there are over a hundred partners. That limited ability to change the organization identity makes Anthony frustrated. Sam says you have to get "thick-skinned" to these things. With regard to the redundancy programme, Rick felt "there was basically nothing *I* could do because *we* had set up a formal process." Similarly in organization-sanctioned decisions affecting only the individual, section 5.2, there is typically a lot of work on the boundary and the self, rather than reforming the firm. However as already mentioned above, Alec explains that his/her father had several times talked him/her out of leaving in such situations:

> "My father was a big counsellor against doing stupid things like jumping when you should hang on in there and make them change rather than jumping."

For Alec such conversations encouraged work on the firm itself, rather than taking separation as the easier route.

And there are examples in the data set of groups of partners cooperating to change aspects of a firm, for example, in Table 6.2 Paul says "we've done that" in relation to

abolishing a recruitment practice in the firm. They have worked on the practices in the firm to bring them in to line with their perceived identity of the firm as a whole. Similarly in the redundancy events, some individual partners sought to influence the implementation of the redundancy programmes to bring them more in to line with the individual's perception of the organization identity. Such change is slow and so is not available as an immediate tactic in identity work. It is, however, still happening in the firms, albeit very gradually.

If disciplining the self to meet identity demands of the firm is a form of identity work, then perhaps seeking to reform the shared identity of the firm in which you are an owner, manager and worker, to meet identity expectations of the individual, is identity work too. Whereas Petriglieri's (2011) model accommodated restructuring of a social identity through meaning change, value change or identity exit, I suggest that attempts to influence the organizational identity on which the individual's social identity is based should be included too. In my Figure 2.1, this would be working on the circles outside the individual identity.

- Working on the boundary

I include the boundary between the social identity and the personal identity as an object of identity work because this work may or may not accompany changes in perceptions of the firm or the self. An individual could perceive a change to the content of the social identity attaching to membership of an organization, but that change may have no impact on the perceived overlap with the personal identity. Equally an external threat may not alter an individual's perception of the organization identity, but may nevertheless devalue the social identity for the individual, affecting the perceived overlap. Petriglieri (2011) takes a similar approach, distinguishing value change from meaning change. Obviously meaning change and value change will often be combined in identity work at the boundary, but could be separate.

I noted in the public criticism events, section 5.1, that Tom found the pulling together of the firm in the face of criticism was itself a positive and "actually displays my values very strongly." In the decisions within the firm affecting only the individual member, section 5.2, the challenge at the boundary and the work on the boundary are more obvious, for example, Adam no longer seeing a match between his approach to life and the firm's values. In the decisions affecting only that member,

the decision unavoidably comes from the organization and is irreconcilable with the individual's expectations of the organization. Either the organization or the individual is 'wrong.' Work on the content of the social identity and the boundary of it with the personal identity is likely.

There is a link here to both the identity work setting and interactions relating to identity work. In Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I described the expectation of loyalty to the firm, i.e. that partners should stay. I also, however, noted that some partners feel this has changed in the last few years (Sarah). With the increased management and measurement of partner performance, partners feel less secure in their positions within the firms. Yet when Sarah expressed this out loud in a partner meeting, a more senior partner was stunned and shocked that Sarah could even be thinking that. Sharing identity work on the boundary is therefore complicated by the expectation that even discussing separating from the firm could bring criticism from colleagues.

- Working on the perception of the self

Here I want to ask in which events the individuals changed their perceptions of themselves. I distinguish being aware of a threat to feelings of self-esteem (the potential of a public criticism event to reflect taint on to the self) from events to which the individual responds by changing the perception of the self. Alec felt the need to say that he did not feel "ashamed" by association with the firm when it was hit by public criticism. The identity challenge for him had been to decide whether association with the firm continued to satisfy his self-esteem drivers. By parking blame elsewhere, he could argue that continued association with the firm did not affect his/her perception of their self. However in the accounts of changes in the individuals, such as aging, as the individuals changed over time, there were consequential questions about the "fit" with the firm going forward. Finally in the immediate months post-election to the partnership, regulation of the self was common.

- Identity work on other parts of identity

It has been shown in existing literature that members who identify with a group will seek to preserve a positive perception of the group (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As

set out in Chapter 6, Difficult Identity Work, in the current study a dominant theme was that this was achieved by parking problems elsewhere, for example, Adam's suggestion that the regulator was just making an example of a firm and that what Adam's firm had been doing had not even been a secret.

As noted in Chapter 6 it is not intended to suggest that all interviewees reacted in the same way to each trigger; in response to the same category of trigger some might blame themselves, some an outside body and some a sub-group of the organization (similar to identity splitting, Gutierrez et al, 2010). In 5.3.4 I showed some of the responses to redundancy programmes to show that a variety of 'blame' tactics were used by individuals in relation to a single threat to the social identity. 'Preserving a positive perception' perhaps puts the emphasis on the perception of the organization, at the expense of considering the other location of the identity work: the recipient of the blame.

So who are the recipients? Broadly the data on preserving a positive perception of the firm by attributing blame away from the firm fell in to four tactics:

- protecting their perception of the organization by attributing problems outside the organization, for example, suggesting that certain problems are profession wide rather than organization specific;
- protecting your perception of the organization by attributing problems to one or more individuals within the organization; for example, attributing a strategic decision to a particular management group who will be rotated out within a couple of years;
- protecting your perception of the organization by attributing problems to yourself, for example, when the management group reaches a decision you believe to be wrong, telling yourself that you would have reached the same conclusion if you had spent more time on the matter; and
- protecting your perception of the organization by attributing problems to the organization in the past, believing the organization had now changed.

The objects on which identity work is performed are definitions of the self, the industry, or a subset of the firm. In Petriglieri's (2011) terms, these may be identity protection tactics (see further on tactics below), but if, for example, the individual has a social identity attributable to the professional industry, in placing the blame on the

industry the individual may be restructuring that social identity by changing the meaning and value of it, in order to protect the social identity attributable to the firm.

However I do not mean to suggest that partners never work on the social identity attributable to the firm. These avoidance tactics also appeared in conjunction with criticism of the organization. As well as suggesting a problem was industry-wide, a partner might still see a need for change in the firm, to reach a tolerable coherence between 'I' and 'We'.

In my Figure 7.1 I recognise the effect on identity work of the social identity being salient. In a given identity challenge, my view of each of these potential objects and the work required may be slightly different when the social identity is salient. The resulting identity work challenges need to be accumulated to understand the full identity challenge experienced by the individual partner.

7.1.5 Identity work challenges

In the public criticism events, the challenge as both 'I' and as 'we' is explaining away the negative criticism directed at the firm. The challenges of persuading the self of the probity of the firm, persuading friends and family that you and the firm are innocent and persuading clients, the media, regulators and employees that the firm can be trusted all overlap. Answering one of these is likely to help answer some of the others. Disseminating the identity response that 'everyone else is operating to the same standard' could help restore a positive perception of the firm for the self and improve the construed external image. Alec used that response to justify not feeling "ashamed" personally, to defend the firm and to explain feeling sorry for the firm.

In the redundancy programme events, I mentioned that Rick and Anthony talked about disappointment and embarrassment. As partners they were standing by the management but as individuals they had to answer their own feeling of shame. In some cases partners were shocked because their previous perception of the firm had been that it would seek to stand by its people to a greater extent. As a partner you might expect the process to be fair, to fit with your perception of the firm, but as an individual you are concerned not to lose your membership of the firm, and might

believe that you would “dig in” to protect yourself (Ashley). In redundancy events partners faced problems with guilt and shame about being figureheads in an organization that was getting rid of ‘good’ people. As partners they faced challenges from employees within the organization about what the firm stood for, and the partners had to make the decision to implement redundancies fit with their perception of the firm:

> “if there are things that don’t feel quite right, I do have to work quite hard to understand them and contextualise them for our business.”

However making it fit with the identity of the firm may not answer the individual identity challenge of shame. Analysing the challenges in this way sets out all the identity issues to be addressed.

My focus here on the challenges in different identity positions reflects Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly’s (2014) depiction of work-related identity loss and recovery. Their proposed model of identity work in the liminal period between loss and recovery distinguishes identity work with a loss orientation and that with a restoration orientation. This use of orientation draws attention to the challenge being answered by the identity work: the challenge of adjusting to loss or the challenge of restoring equilibrium. My approach is different in that I split the subject’s identity positions and ask about the identity challenges in each. The restoration challenge and loss challenge may be slightly different in each identity position, so breaking down identity work in this way adds to our understanding of the complexity of the identity work raised by different events.

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010:150) point out that for many people:

> “a job or occupation is a central component of their understanding of who they are” and “as a result they must be able to tell a good story about how they came to do what they do for a living.”

In relation to organization membership for partners who are owners, managers and producers, from my data it looks as though not only do they need an explanation of how they as an individual are associated with this organization, but also as a figurehead of the organization they need an explanation of how the firm came to be where it is too.

The implications of the different challenges facing the partner as 'I' and as 'we' include: one challenge may be met before another; the identity work on the social identity may then in turn affect the rest of the identity work; and several different identity work tactics may be required, as illustrated in the recoveries of those partners who came back from the brink in the difficult identity work accounts (see 7.2).

7.1.6 Concurrence

- Solo

Decisions affecting only the individual are by definition an event triggering an identity challenge in one person at that time. For example, Nick makes no mention of anyone else getting a rap over the knuckles at the same time. Nick actually spoke to some other partners who just thought Nick should not make a fuss. This is an example of an identity challenge faced solo.

- Shared with most individuals in the firm

Public criticism events are the obvious example of an event triggering similar identity challenges in most members of the firm at the same time. Simon talked about not only current members of the firm but also former members of the firm pulling together and offering help. The accounts mention lots of interactions between members facing the same challenge.

- Shared with a few individuals in the firm

The redundancy events are slightly different. Rather than the whole organization being under attack from public criticism, here the organization is forcing a significant number of people to leave the organization. The accounts include lots of references to interactions within the firm but very few outside the firm. The identity challenge is concurrent in the sense that it is a topic of conversation in the firm. Partners talk to colleagues, attend meetings about the process, interact with each other in implementing the programme, etc. However there is less alignment of identity challenges, for example, some partners knew they were completely safe but others could see the cut-off line drawing closer and closer. Some partners had been involved in proposing redundancies. However similar identity work is being

performed by others in the firm at the same time and, crucially, there are lots of interactions about the event. These interactions are referenced in the identity work accounts, i.e. they are used in the narratives. Mentioning them at all suggests they were significant in some way in the performance of the identity work.

7.1.7 Implications of concurrence

- Identity co-workers inside the firm

In the public criticism events many people inside the firm wanted to defend the firm. The identity work relating to this defence is shared. The other members of the firm are working *with* the individual. Everyone is talking about the event and, within the firm at least, the partner can get the interactions to support the identity work he/she is doing, both as a partner and as an individual. In the public criticism events I described how helpful some partners found it to be in the office at that time, observing and taking part in those interactions. They "made it a lot, lot better" and were a contrast to the challenging interactions with clients, (Delia). Even the risk of people leaving the firm can be discussed openly at such a time, (Alec). Discussing the risk of losing employees could contribute to a partner's own identity work around continuing membership of the firm.

To some extent the partner group itself provides a sympathetic audience all the time. A partner who had worked in both corporate and partnership structures described the value of being able to share and discuss things with peers, where in the corporate structure Isabelle had felt completely alone at the top. However the picture of partner interactions was overall tainted by the fierce competition for work and long-remembered hostilities between partners still continuing in the same firm. An audience does not need to be the opposition to be unsympathetic. Even a potential friendly audience could be short of time, not interested or simply not around. When the audience are identity co-workers, they are more likely to be interested and to make time for such interactions

Petriglieri (2011) predicted the availability of social support for an identity will mediate the identity response. My empirical study suggests that social support is more effective when the colleagues are facing the same identity challenge at the

same time, rather than when the colleagues are in the position of an audience for solo identity work.

In addition in the public criticism events I described how some partners not only wanted to defend the firm and reassure clients, but also wanted themselves to be reassured. In the interactions contributing to identity work the partner can be the audience as an individual, as well as the defender of the social identity as a partner. In the redundancy events, Geoffrey talks about other people's reactions to redundancies as resigned, normalising Geoffrey's compliance with the decision of management. The concurrent identity challenge provides this identity work resource of being able to observe how others are dealing with it.

- Feasibility of identity work tactics

As I mentioned in 7.1.4 in relation to organizational identity as an object of identity work, some identity work tactics appeared more feasible as 'we' than as 'I'. Seeking as one partner to bring about changes in the organizational identity is a daunting project; if lots of partners are experiencing the same challenge concurrently they may all be interested in working on the organizational identity to relieve tensions in their own individual identities. Concurrence is therefore not just about support for the same identity work tactics as used in solo projects; it is about the feasibility of a wider range of tactics.

Finally, there appears to be a link of some sort between the events which are faced solo and the behaviour of physically separating from the firm, whether completely for a short period or by reducing the amount of time spent physically in the office, or ceasing to attend some meetings. The interactions within the firm may be reduced. Even those that do happen are not between two people facing the same identity challenge, but rather between the individual and someone representing the organization that has made the unwelcome decision. The individual is also more open than previously to interactions with head-hunters or potential new employers. Conversely there appeared to be some link between events faced as a group and wanting to be physically in the office. This may be linked to the support from identity co-workers.

7.1.8 Identity work setting

In Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I suggested the partners are performing identity work constantly subject to a pressure to be loyal to the firm and not leave for a competitor, subject to competitive behaviour from within the partner group, aware that they are seen as representing the organization but feeling that they have increasingly little control over the organization as a whole. The expectation of loyalty from partners is more than an identity demand from the firm; historically within the industry partners have stayed with their firms. I found a similar expectation in all three industries in this study, reinforced by a variety of mechanisms. Does this mean it cannot be part of the identity of the firm? In practice the partners who described their colleagues as more loyal to the firm than partners in competitor firms were distinguishing firms on the basis of loyalty and claiming it as part of their organizational identity. For the purposes of this study, loyalty is seen as a relatively stable aspect of the setting in which identity work was performed.

The highly competitive atmosphere between partners was felt as rejection in interactions with fellow partners. These interactions are sense-breaking as members of the partner group withhold affirmation from fellow partners. At the same time there is an ongoing demand from the organization for the partners to appear as united figureheads of the firm. The example set by partners is a powerful symbol for more junior members of the firm. Yet partners increasingly find they are not 'in charge' in the sense they expected to be because they have little influence in the strategic management of their firm as these firms become more corporate.

During the course of this study, the very nature of this large, corporatized firm setting was the object of attention from both the judiciary in England and Wales and the legislature. HM Revenue & Customs considered the conditions that should be used in determining whether an LLP member is in fact an employee, not a partner, and should not be benefitting from the tax regime for partners. One of the conditions to be satisfied in the new legislation in 2014 is that of "significant influence over the affairs of the partnership," (HM Revenue and Customs, 2013:12), matching one of the themes which had been so prominent in my data. The Government expects the impact to be primarily on "large professional" partnerships (HM Revenue & Customs, 2013: 26). Separately in 2014 the Supreme Court ruled partners are 'workers' for

the purposes of certain employment legislation (The Law Society, 2014). Previously partners were excluded from, for example, unfair dismissal protections, because they were classed as self-employed. Does this setting of the large, corporatized partnership still look like self-employment? So not only were these individuals in high identity demand organizations, making this a rich context for research on identity work relating to organization membership, but also the study was conducted at a time when the nature of the setting was prominent, providing a rich context for exploring the interrelation of setting and identity work.

The first point to make about the identity work setting is that it is relevant to ongoing identity work. In considering the accounts of events perceived as identity challenges, looking only at the account of that event loses the background setting described in other parts of partners' interviews. For example, in Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting I described the categories of interactions that make up a partner's working day. I noted Ann's feeling of being valued by these different constituencies. These interactions have the potential to provide frequent answers to individual-level needs. The grateful client and starry-eyed junior make the partner in the firm feel valued. While this environment may not be expressly referenced in accounts of identity work events, this setting in which individual level needs are repeatedly satisfied in the organization will feed in to ongoing identity work.

In Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting I also commented on the shifting composition of project teams. Partners work with people across the organization at a variety of levels. As new client or project teams are put together, there is the potential for new relationships tying the partner in to the organization. These are not contained within the practice area or within the partner group but are distributed throughout the firm, tying the partner in to the whole organization. Being valued by juniors and clients and continuing to develop new connections throughout the organization could be supporting restorative identity work.

Second, I propose that the identity work setting influences the performance of identity work by pushing partners to prefer certain identity work responses. Petriglieri (2011) divided responses to identity threats into identity protection responses (in which the individual deals with the source of the threat) and identity-restructuring responses (in which the individual works on the identity). Due to the

identity work setting, de-coupling their identity from the firm (an identity-restructuring response) may bring criticism from the community. However partners' lack of influence in the management of the firm means they have little power to change the identity of the firm (unless they have identity co-workers). They can make changes to their own perception of the organization and the value they attach to it, but if they need to stay in it and cannot easily change it, the identity challenge is not resolved. Identity protection is therefore more attractive. Petriglieri (2011) proposed that an individual's first response would be identity protection because the individual seeks to maintain positive identities. I extend this by suggesting that in larger professional service firms, in the absence of identity co-workers, the identity work setting may also push them to prefer identity-protection responses.

Other aspects of the identity setting may restrict identity work too. Confidentiality requirements can mean that partners are unable to defend the firm by revealing the facts of an event (Andrew). This can lead to frustration. It restricts the identity work tactics available to the partners because the partner cannot seek to improve the perceived image of the organization by publishing the truth to the public. The involvement of insurers in all these firms (indeed law and accountancy firms are forbidden from operating at all without professional indemnity insurance in place) also complicates the performance of identity work. The insurers have their own business agenda to follow which may involve settling a case against the firm, even when the firm has done nothing wrong (Anthony).

In the redundancy events the powerlessness of an individual partner was a significant issue for those who felt personally uncomfortable with the execution of the programme. The combination of the convention of staying in one organization as a partner for maybe 25 or 30 years and the limited influence of individual partners over the firm, itself adds complication to the identity work. To stay, the partner has to incorporate the event in to their narrative. As Rachel noted on redundancies:

> "Well, it sort of makes you think, actually, you know, I don't feel as good about you as I did twenty years ago. You know, you've done it once and now you've done it again and again."

The expectation is that partners should stay but the longer the tenure in the organization becomes, the greater the likelihood of repeat identity challenges.

As loyalty is expected of partners it is also difficult to discuss reviewing the boundary of membership. Where this is the challenge faced, for example in the events where a decision in the firm has affected only the individual, even if there may be a small sympathetic audience in the firm, the risk of breaking the expectation of loyalty is such that the identity work setting inhibits the use of certain identity work interactions, such as, the narrative identity work of Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010).

Third, the identity work setting may itself be affected by the identity work of individuals. Partners who were frustrated with their lack of influence in the firm were seeking to bring about change to redress the balance. Partners who find it easier to leave than to perform the identity work required to stay contribute to changing ideas and expectations about loyalty.

The identity work setting is relevant in three ways: as a source of sense-breaking and sense-giving messages which may not be included in accounts of particular events; as an inhibitor in the performance of identity work, thereby restricting the identity work options available to the individual; and potentially as the object of identity work. Bearing in mind the potential inhibitor effect of the identity work setting, I now consider the tactics which I did find in this setting.

7.1.9 Identity work tactics

In this study of multiple individuals facing multiple identity threatening events one of the earliest themes to emerge even from just reading the interview transcripts was the predominance of parking tactics, or pushing blame away from the social identity attributable to membership. I described these in 6.5 and 6.6 above, noting that while partners did also see the need to reform certain aspects of the organization, this was often still accompanied by parking the problem away from the social identity. The parking spots included the firm in the past, a subset of the firm, bodies outside the firm such as the regulator or industry as a whole, and even the self. Parking problems on the self was barely used by partners of longer tenure in the firm and of longer tenure as a partner and is unlikely to be a satisfactory long-term identity work response for meeting individual level needs. It is also worth noting that parking problems on the firm in the past cannot plausibly be used repeatedly for the same problem.

Blaming yourself restores a positive perception of the demanding organization, but is unlikely to satisfy the individual's need for self-esteem, and as a narrative strategy, it seems unlikely to elicit validation from an audience (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Petriglieri and Stein, 2012). The election to partnership is a powerful socialization process and the award of partnership is a strong message of affirmation. The identity setting favours identity work to restore a positive perception while withholding real influence over the future identity of the organization. I cannot tell if the longest survivors in these firms had adapted their identity work to optimise the outcomes of self-esteem and validation, given the peculiarities of the identity setting, or if individuals who do this survive longer in the setting.

I have already mentioned the inhibitor effect of the themes in the identity work setting on the availability of certain tactics and parking a problem at the door of the industry is an effective tactic in this setting. Petriglieri (2011) divided identity protection tactics in to concealing, derogating the source of the threat and proclaiming the positive distinctiveness of the social identity, and identity restructuring tactics in to value change, meaning change or identity exit. Individual partners have little control over the firm so, in the absence of identity co-workers, value change and meaning change are going to be disruptive for the partner. Identity exit is unlikely to be satisfactory for the partner in an industry which expects loyalty to a firm from partners; continuing in a firm with which you feel no identification will not satisfy individual level needs or be likely to lead to behaviours benefitting the organization. Concealing your identity as a partner in a firm, while it may be possible in some social settings, is not a solution within the firm on a daily basis when you have to appear as a figurehead of the firm. Proclaiming the positive distinctiveness of the firm can be effective but relies on the audience being receptive. Derogation of the source of the threat was effective in this setting and was seen in accounts where the regulator was described as having made a scapegoat of a firm. Parking blame away from the firm is similar to Ashforth et al's (2007:150) social weighting, where dirty workers "condemn those who condemn them." However the parking tactics I saw included more recipients of the blame than just the perceived source. Indeed sometimes the apparent source was the firm but the individual might describe the problem as a feature of the industry. Parking the blame away from the social identity

avoided restructuring the identity. This was derogation of a wider category of recipients than just the source of the blame.

My focus on the impact of salience on identity work sheds light on the apparent absence of these parking blame tactics in the most difficult identity work accounts. As will be discussed further below in 7.2.7, if a social identity is not salient for a length of time, protection tactics disappear. Once successful restructuring has been achieved, only then does identity protection pick up again.

In relation to all the tactics, there is a contrast to be drawn between work on individual identity and work on the collective identity. In addition there is a contrast to be drawn between identity work as a collective and identity work as an individual. Identity work to change a collective identity is more achievable as a collective. Splitting supports maintaining identification with valued aspects of an organization while splitting part of the entity from the target of identification (Gutierrez et al, 2010). In their study, when reform of the original entity was not forthcoming, the individuals then maintained the split identification. Gutierrez et al (2010:693) saw parallels to employees of Arthur Andersen who were "distancing themselves" from those who had behaved badly while still "embracing their attachment to the firm itself." In the redundancy events I have partners splitting from the management of the firm (rather than splitting the normative aspects from the organizational aspects) and I saw repair of identification with the firm when the offending management team had gone. The individuals were splitting a handful of individuals from the rest of the partner group, blaming management at the time of the redundancy programme. This did not appear to be so feasible when the identity threat was faced alone. Whereas the execution of a redundancy programme might leave enough of 'us' determined to bring about change, threats faced alone are different. Asking in this study about the objects of identity work in each type of challenge showed that the tactics in this study can also be divided in to those feasible as an individual and those requiring co-workers.

Even in the absence of co-workers partners might make some attempt to see if the firm might change to fit the partner's perception of it in the social identity. In trying to change the implementation of the redundancy programme or to get a decision affecting just one individual reversed, a partner might seek out one-on-one

conversations with senior people in the firm, although change is not always forthcoming. They seek out these conversations and they are significant in their accounts of these events.

Asking about the objects of the identity work verbs highlighted the work on the self, rather than work to protect or restructure a social identity. Seeking to do good to balance out the shame felt as a partner in a firm implementing redundancies (Rick, Jeremy), is work to support the personal identity, rather than the social identity. Separating the self by saying you were not there at the time, or you were not involved, is work to protect the self, not the social identity. This focus on what *I* did is consistent with the powerlessness of partners to change the direction of the firm. Partners trying to subvert redundancy plans when feeling very strongly that it was 'them' and 'me', illustrates the change of behaviour when an identity is salient less frequently. This is in stark contrast to the public criticism events where some partners described wanting to be in the office to support and be supported by colleagues.

Finally physical separation from the organization was an interesting feature of some identity work accounts. Leaving the building or switching off all electronic devices can provide temporary relief from the identity challenges and the high identity demand environment. Although it bears some similarity to the differentiation tactics, this physical separation primarily operates in a similar way to Kreiner et al's (2006a) refreshing tactics. The partner needs some breathing space before taking on the identity work to respond to the challenges.

7.1.10 Successful identity work

Petriglieri (2011), with reference to the consequences for organizations and individuals, focuses on whether the threat continues or has been eliminated (either by changing the views on the cause of the threat or by working on the identity). I found this helpful in considering when each identity challenge relating to an event had been resolved; but even when a threat has been eliminated, there may be consequences for future identity work.

In the public criticism events I noted the sequence of responses described by Jack and Charles as they recounted such events. I suggested Charles appeared to

restore his perception of the firm before the public could be persuaded to restore their perception of the firm, so the construed external image was at odds with the perceived organizational identity for a period of time. I have also mentioned Tom finding that the response of the organization pulling together in the face of public criticism itself in turn helped with the personal identity challenge: "so I felt that … actually displays my values very strongly."

Successful identity work can therefore have been achieved in relation to the challenges faced in one identity position but be ongoing in relation to another. When the social identity is salient, the identity challenges may be solved, but when it is not salient, other identity challenges may surface. Successful identity work does not mean restoring the same social identity as before; rather it means reaching a new tolerable balance between the social identity and the personal identity. Successful identity work is getting back in to the range of tolerable identity incoherence. Rachel is aware that a bit of the firm has been taken out of her but that is acceptable; Delia works to reach a point where the event is consistent with her previous perception (and then is willing to persuade others of this too). With regard to decisions affecting only the individual, Nick talked of "a little scar" on how Nick felt about the firm; Charles said something had definitely shifted and he/she feels less of a need to physically be in the firm. The relationship has changed and a new tolerable position has been reached. Although it is tolerable, it is still a 'scarred identity'.

In the sequence of responses it appears that sometimes some identity work has to be done before the individual is willing to defend the firm to the troops again. I suggest in the following section that in relation to the most difficult identity challenges successful identity work is marked by reaching a position of willingness to push the blame away from the organization again. This step between convincing the self and then being willing to persuade others is similar.

Successful identity work may also have long term implications. For example, in the redundancy events, blaming a subset of the firm results in a split: they did it; we won't let it happen again. From the firm's perspective, a workable level of alignment as 'we' needs to be reached; from the individual perspective, a tolerable balance needs to be achieved. Firm and individual needs are not necessarily consistent. The partners fighting their corners in the redundancies were not pulling together as a firm

but the partners in question needed to do what they could to redeem their views of themselves.

Petriglieri and Stein (2012) defined successful identity work in terms of sustaining both self-esteem and social validation in the role. I see this as a partial definition of successful identity work because these are included in the potential identity challenges but are not in themselves a complete list of the identity challenges faced in multiple identity positions by the individuals in my study.

I now consider the most difficult identity work accounts.

7.2 Difficult identity work

In this broad study of identity work relating to organizational identification I have drawn together many identity work challenges. In Chapter 5 Four Identity Work Events I described four identity work challenges faced by the PSF partners in my study. In analysing the data it became clear that for these individuals some identity work challenges were more disruptive than others. Preparing to leave the firm suggests de-coupling of identities, which I use as a proxy for a last resort identity work tactic in this identity setting. Nobody mentioned having taken steps towards leaving the firm after public criticism of the firm yet there were accounts of taking steps to leave in some of the other challenges. The maintenance and repair identity work relating to organizational identification in these accounts where steps have been taken towards leaving the firm is difficult. In Chapter 6 I gathered together these accounts of 'difficult' identity work. By comparing and contrasting these with the other identity work challenges I have identified several aspects of these difficult identity work challenges relating to organization membership.

7.2.1 Organization sanctioned communications/signals.

As set out in 6.1, of 11 accounts in which steps were taken towards leaving, 5 were caused principally by a single problem person within the organization and 4 were attributed to a problem group of people in management. One concerned anticipated failure to meet the performance targets within the firm. These 10 all clearly relate to the organization: the senior people within it and the expectations made by it. Only one account was not attributed to the organization but rather to a growing disillusion with the profession and I have no other examples of someone taking steps to leave

due to the profession. So I focus here on the 10 accounts in which problem interactions were either clearly organization sanctioned (the setting of performance targets) or sanctioned by omission (the behaviour of the problem person/people was allowed to continue within the workspace).

I noted in 6.2 that the 'problem person' is often in a supervisory position to the individual, suggesting that particularized relational identification (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007) may be relevant here. Sluss and Ashforth suggested future research might investigate when a particularized relational identity might exercise disproportionate influence. If relational identification will tend to generalize to identification with the collective shared by the individual and the other (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007), the effect of these 'problem people' on the individual's relational identity will in turn influence the social identity attributable to membership of the organization. Where the objection is to the person rather than to the role they perform, the rejection is directed at the person-based identity. Even though the objection is to the person-based identity, it is still affecting the organization membership social identity.

Petriglieri (2011) suggested the source of an identity threat may predict how a person will respond to the threat. In my data events beyond the control of the organization had not triggered the interviewees to take steps towards leaving, for example, public criticism of the firm or the impact of the financial crisis. The most difficult identity work challenges after which the partners had managed to continue in the organization had come from within the organization. Petriglieri (2011) considered the source of the threat in terms of its frequency and magnitude. My empirical study suggests that for organizational identification, whether the threat comes from within or outside the organization is also relevant in predicting the response.

There appears to be a link here between identity threats and sense-breaking. Identity threats have been defined as:

> "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011).

Sense-breaking has been defined as involving:

> "a fundamental questioning of who one is when one's sense of self is challenged … [creating] a meaning void that must be filled." (Ashforth et al, 2008:342, using Pratt 2000b:464)

Ashforth et al (2008:343) observe that sense-breaking is often seen in organizations in tandem with sense-giving (Pratt, 200b) but that studies such as Karreman and Alvesson (2004) have described organizations focusing on sense-giving and downplaying sense–breaking. The difficult identity work events here are appraised as threats and trigger sense-breaking. Sense-giving is less obvious early in these accounts.

7.2.2 Solo identity challenge

I extend this literature by proposing that the impact of the identity threat may also predict the response. The threats in my data linked to leaving responses not only come from a source within the organization but also impact only the interviewee at that time. I suggested the impact of this is the absence of identity co-workers. All interactions are with an audience. The personal impact of the identity threats linked to preparations to leave suggests a link to studies emphasising the importance of social interactions in the performance of identity work (group identity work in Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville and Scully, 2010; the audience for a narrative in Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; the respondent to an identity claim in Beech, MacIntosh and McInnes, 2008). In contrast to the wide impact of threats such as the removal of a pension policy across the firm, the narrow impact of these difficult identity threats means that colleagues are unlikely to be performing similar identity work at the same time. I propose therefore that this narrow impact of the identity threat predicts a greater degree of difficulty for the partner in repairing and maintaining organizational identification, prompting the thoughts of identity de-coupling and leaving. While the identity claim/response (Beech, MacIntosh and McInnes, 2008) and audience for a narrative (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) may still be available in the repair identity work, the ability to share identity work with others in a group facing the same challenges (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville and Scully, 2010) is not available. Not being able to share the identity work makes an identity challenge more difficult to address.

7.2.3 Implication of solo identity challenge

As well as the lack of co-workers on the challenge as a resource, when an identity challenge relating to organization membership was faced alone, work on changing the identity of the organization was not seen as an achievable option. The implication is that the individual must take their self or the boundary/overlap with the organization as the object of the identity work, perhaps changing the emotional significance or value attached to membership, updating the perception of the organization identity and working all of that in to their narrative, or changing the self to better fit the new perception of the organization.

7.2.4 Identity work setting: High risk of withdrawal of affirmation from colleagues in interactions

I noted in Chapter 6 Difficult Identity Work that in 9 of the difficult identity work accounts the problem in one way or another started with interactions in the office. In terms of Ashforth et al's cycle of identification, the individual in enacting their identity as a member of the firm has faced a sense-breaking response from one or more people perceived to be embedded in the firm. In this sense the individual has already faced the withdrawal of affirmation from colleagues.

However cycles of identity work, incorporating cycles of identification, continue. I noted in Chapter 5 the value attached to communications and interactions with others when facing identity work challenges. The individual as part of their repair identity work may want to discuss an identity challenge with colleagues or trial a new self. In these difficult identity work accounts, however, these forms of identity work are problematic in two senses.

First, the partners rely on their colleagues for referrals to clients and the partners are aware that they must appear to their colleagues to be successful and at the top of their game to keep being included in projects. I described in Chapter 4 the continuous competition to be amongst the better performing partners. Talking about having been disciplined by the firm, or having your application for promotion to senior partner refused, would risk further withdrawal of affirmation from colleagues. The interactions which might support performance of identity work in these challenges are therefore high risk in terms of the potential further withdrawal of affirmation from

colleagues (James's awareness that peers' were starting to say he must have made a mistake made James feel it was untenable to stay; Ashley realised that no colleagues were standing up for her when the problem partner behaved poorly to her and it might be better to keep quiet than end up with a bigger problem). This is close to Ibarra and Barbulescu's (2010) proposal that narrative identity work will be more prevalent the more a work role transition is 'high stakes'. However I am not persuaded that narrative identity work is more prevalent here; rather the narrative identity work which would be helpful here is inhibited by the high stakes.

Second, I noted that the problems originated with a problem person/people inside the firm who, if not immediately senior to the individual, were perceived to be embedded in the firm. I would characterise them as perceived to be the in-group. Although the partners interviewed all came from large firms, within the firm some partners will be perceived as closer to the centre of power and influence than others, whether through management positions, heading prestigious client accounts or through being big fee generators. To repair their social identity relating to organization membership, the individuals in theory seek acceptance in the cycle of identity work from these same people. If the problem person withholds affirmation the partner needs to go, possibly outside their normal interactions, to find other in-group partners who can satisfy the need for affirmation in repair identity work cycles (Delia, Iain).

Sensemaking is inhibited by the setting, in a similar way to Weick (2010:547):

> "To understand enacted sensemaking, an investigator needs to assess at least two things: (1) the malleability of the setting (how readily can actions change it); and (2) the extent to which the setting locks people in to what they did and provides a limited set of acceptable reasons for why they did what they did and why they should keep doing it."

In contrast to less difficult identity work challenges in which interviewees reported many conversations with colleagues, in these difficult identity work accounts the interactions with other members of the organization are very few and restricted to a handful of people. Interactions which appeared significant in these accounts included career counsellors outside the firm, family members, potential new employers and head-hunters.

The themes of the setting (loyalty to the firm, competitive atmosphere, requirement to present a united partnership and limited influence within the firm) inhibit the performance of identity protecting and restructuring tactics, as defined by Petriglieri (2011). As set out above, the requirement to present a united partnership body inhibits derogation of the source of the problem (inside the firm), as well as concealment of the social identity. Asserting the positive distinctiveness of the social identity is difficult when the threat has come from within the organization to which it relates. Identity exit while remaining in the firm (to meet the expectation of loyalty) would leave the partner spending the majority of their working time in an organization which was not satisfying their need for self-esteem. Meaning change was predicted by Petriglieri to be harder for long-held social identities, leaving value change, or entry in to a cycle of de-identification, as the predicted response.

7.2.5 Tipping point

Charles talked about this difficult identity work experience being "the biggest shift" in the partner journey and Adrian described coming back from a point where "everything mattered" to a "far better place." Rather than seeking to preserve a positive view of the organization (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991), Adrian found things which Adrian had been tolerating to now be problematic, suggesting Adrian was no longer performing identity work from a position of high identification with the organization. With reference to management issues within the firm, such as, the allocation of secretaries, Paul said that although such things do not normally bother him much, at that point he "found all that stuff *really difficult*." I suggest the salience of the organization identity fell away and the practices of the organization became problematic for the individual.

Typically this was the only time in the partner journey that the interviewee had considered seriously head-hunter calls or offers from clients. Ashley stopped attending partner meetings. In other words, not only did their perception of the organization change but their behaviour changed too. There is little use of 'we'; the early identity work response is done by 'I'. It is as if the social identity relating to membership of the firm has been stunned and is hardly ever salient. The partner has passed a tipping point. The identity challenges are seen mainly as an individual,

without the salience of the social identity, and that stunned state of 'we' contributes to the challenges as 'I'.

7.2.6 Identity responses to difficult identity work challenges

In 6.4 I drew out 4 elements which were common to several recovery accounts: a change in the firm; looking at alternative employers; personal success within the firm; and interaction with one or more senior people in the firm. How were these elements used in the identity responses?

7.2.6.1 A change in the firm

A change in the firm enabled the individual to tell a plausible narrative linking together the point at which he/she was seeking to leave the firm to still being in the firm at the time of the interview. The individual can explain restoring a positive perception of the firm. In some accounts the change came some considerable time after the action towards leaving. In Paul's case the relevant practice changed 10 years after it had impacted him, yet his account was not complete until that had been mentioned. Paul recounts that he had been seeking the abolition of the policy during the intervening period. In Paul's account we see a change in talking about the partnership from 'they' to 'we' at that point in the account. This aspect of the organization identity had been driving a wedge between 'I' and 'we.' I find this account interesting because other elements enabled Paul to stay but Paul continued seeking change in the organization itself. I would suggest that until the change took place, Paul continued to perform identity work relating to the challenge.

7.2.6.2 Personal success

Personal success comprised meeting the performance requirements of membership, for example, by winning a big client or selling a piece of work. As mentioned in Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting, the financial rewards associated with partnership in the firms in this study are significant. Successfully servicing a client or winning a new client gives access to the financial rewards. While I do not suggest that the value of a social identity can be explained entirely by financial reward, the money contributes to the value the individual attaches to membership. Meeting the performance requirements and receiving the reward counterbalances the problem in the firm. It will not perhaps restore a positive perception of the organization, but it might enable the individual to attach value to the membership. Second, personal

success allows the individual to counter the message of rejection with knowledge that he/she is capable, in other words, he/she can satisfy the criteria for membership. The individuals used personal success to counter the rejection by saying that it was inaccurate and unjustified, to show that in fact the individual belonged in the organization.

7.2.6.3 Looking at an alternative job.

First, looking at an alternative job, like a change in the organization, supported a narrative explaining the decision to stay in the organization and the restoration of a positive perception of the organization. Clearly in some cases the alternative looks more attractive but where the alternative looks no better, or actually makes the individual appreciate some positives about the current organization, the step of gathering more information by looking in detail at an alternative allows the individual to explain their changing perception of the current organization. However this is high risk. One interviewee had come very close to taking a job with their main client. While the experience ultimately supported the identity work required to stay, the individual risked alienating the client. It was also emphasised to me by interviewees that their stories of considering leaving must be kept confidential; they believed that if other members of their firm found out, their continued membership of the firm could be at stake. Likewise they had had to be very careful in taking steps towards leaving. Looking in detail at an alternative job is not, therefore, a straightforward identity work step compared to, for example, the discussions with colleagues in the office about a public criticism event, because looking at an alternative job has to be secretive. I noted that interactions with senior figures generally occurred after an alternative job had been secured; possibly the expectation of loyalty from partners inhibits them raising deep unhappiness with senior figures. If they express how unhappy they are they may fear being managed out of the firm and needing the alternative.

Second, looking at an alternative job complicated the identity work. In terms of the sequence of events, Catherine, Paul, Iain and Delia looked externally before speaking to senior people internal to their current organization. In terms of my multi-coloured narrative thread, a new colour is under consideration as a new social identity is possibly being added to the narrative. Thinking about Ashforth et al's (2008) cycle of identification, as a new social identity is developed there will be

sense-breaking and sense-giving messages from both the old and new organizations. Comparison identity work is taking place as the individual interacts with old and possible new and receives combinations of demands, affirmation and rejection from both. In which organization will Kreiner et al's (2006a) optimal balance between personal and social identity be attainable and maintainable? How could each path be incorporated in to the individual's narrative (Ibarra and Barbulescu's, 2010, repertoire of identity narratives)? Is it an option for the individual to de-couple their identity from their current employer and seek to replace it with a new social identity with a new employer, or work at restoring the social identity with the current employer? These interactions with a potential new employer were not presented as part of the original identity challenge. The interviewees had looked elsewhere due to the identity challenge, asking, "would I feel better somewhere else?" However, as well as supporting a restorative narrative, it may be that these interactions can compound the difficulty of the identity work by introducing new complications in the form of comparisons between possible social identities. The attention from a rival employer fills the self-esteem gap left by the stunned social identity.

7.2.6.4 Interactions with senior people in the firm

Interactions with senior people in the firm were important in restoring the social identity relating to the organization. I noted above that these difficult identity work challenges were almost all triggered by a problematic relationship with a senior person or people in the firm. These problem people are also partners but they might be perceived as more embedded by the interviewee because they had been in the firm longer (Iain), were close to the current management team (Adrian), or had some management position over the interviewee (Delia, Ashley, Sarah). Within partnerships there are constellations of influential leaders (Empson, 2013). As a partner, the individual is a figurehead of the firm, but the other party is a figurehead too. Given that partners described not feeling secure in their partnership positions (see Chapter 4 Identity Work Setting) partners still need affirmation (Brewer, 1991) for their membership of the firm to continue to satisfy their self-definition needs. If an embedded person is rejecting the interviewee as a partner, in other words, withholding affirmation, and the other partners are tolerating this behaviour, then the social identity will feel less valuable and less emotionally significant to the interviewee. What is interesting in these accounts is that some of the interviewees

sought out other senior people; the partnerships are sufficiently large for there to be other figureheads to go to. Being listened to by these people made the interviewees feel “valued” (Delia, James) and allowed them to get their point across, even if nothing changed immediately (Paul, Sarah). These conversations were out of the ordinary, very small in number (sometimes only one person) but were mentioned as significant and I suggest they counterbalance the feelings of rejection enough to keep the individual in the firm while the rest of the identity work is performed to reach optimal balance and a plausible narrative.

The importance of these interactions possibly picks up on the neglected interpersonal level in identity studies (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). However rather than contributing to relational identification, these interpersonal interactions with significant people in the firm, outside the normal day-to-day interactions of the partners, are one-off significant interactions.

The fundamental problem experienced by the individual facing the difficult identity work relating to organization identification is the message of rejection from the interaction with the problem person/people, which is perceived as directly or indirectly sanctioned by the organization. The identity challenges are difficult partly because they are faced alone, and the identity work responses are limited.

Returning to my Figure 7.1, I asked how challenges might require identity work on different objects when viewed from different identity work positions. In a cycle of de-identification the social identity will be salient increasingly rarely. ‘I’ am no longer finding my self-esteem needs adequately met by membership of the firm. Interactions with rival firms may improve my self-esteem, but will not restore a sense of membership of the firm or value of that membership. Conversations with rival firms support work by ‘I’ on the personal identity. A conversation with a senior person inside my own firm can not only help restore self-esteem, but may also contribute to identity work performed by ‘I’ on the social identity (perhaps the members of the firm are not all bad after all). ‘I’ can take the social identity and the overlap with it as the objects of identity work supported by these interactions. Personal success within the firm similarly supports work on the boundary of the social and personal identities. A stronger overlap appears to increase the chance for ‘we’ to be salient again. Once ‘we’ is salient, the concerns as ‘I’ are balanced by

benefits from ‘we’. When behaving more in accordance with the prototype of the firm, the events are seen in relation to the priorities of the firm (‘I’ am a small part of the firm; the managing partner should not be spending any more time on me). A change in the firm, even years later, can be used by ‘I’ to support the decision to continue in the firm. Once ‘we’ is salient frequently, the individual is willing to try to recast this and other events as attributable to something other than the firm. The individual is back to an identification in relation to which the individual will seek to restore a positive perception.

I noted in 6.4 that these 4 elements did not necessarily occur in any particular order but I suggest these elements are common because they relate to different identity work challenges related to the event. Petriglieri (2011) suggested future studies might clarify whether individuals exposed to an ongoing threat might change their response over time, for example, moving from protecting the identity to restructuring the identity as the threat persists; or habituating to an ongoing threat, making it easier to sustain a protection response. My data suggests that responses do evolve over time but my data is better explained by looking at the different identity challenges raised by an event. In my data I was interested to see that individuals in these most difficult identity work challenges in at least four instances investigated alternative jobs outside the firm before having conversations with a senior person internally. These are both steps towards identity restructuring; it was only later in the accounts that identity protecting was used. I suggest that some restructuring work by the individuals enabled a re-igniting of the social identity, which then supported identity protection. The restructuring and protection are seen in a complex sequence and combine to answer the identity challenges. There is no ‘We’ at the height of these events. The identity challenges are for the individual, no longer having self-esteem needs met by membership of the firm and still being in the high identity demand environment of that firm. Receiving attention from a rival firm can fill the self-esteem gap but could lead to exit from the firm. Personal success within the firm plays in to the HRM mechanisms which provide the sense-breaking and sense-giving messages for control of partners through their subjective understanding of themselves. However even if a sense of ‘we’ is restored, the event still needs to be accommodated in the narrative of the individual as a member of the firm. A relevant change in the firm can reduce this ongoing identity challenge. Then the dominant

tactic of members deflecting problems away from the organization by parking the blame elsewhere reappears, further reducing the identity challenges. In this way the responses combine to meet the challenges.

I also noted that for the partners who seemed to be still going through a difficult identity challenge, at least one of these aspects had not yet been met. No one element alone restores all aspects. From a practical point of view, when an individual partner falls in to a cycle of de-identification when faced with this type of identity challenge, it may be possible to support the identity work of the partner by paying attention to these different aspects of their social identity relating to their membership.

7.2.7 Recovery position

Various individuals contrasted their perceptions of the firm at the height of the identity challenge with their perceptions now. Aspects of the firm, which they would normally tolerate, mattered when they fell in to de-identification spirals. There is a cause and effect problem here, in that the aspects of the firm which bothered the individuals when they were in cycles of de-identification, may also have contributed to reaching the tipping point. However of interest here is how these problems are subsequently suppressed again. How is this tolerance identity work performed? I noted in Chapter 6 Difficult Identity Work that a strong theme emerging from all the accounts of identity work was the practice of 'parking', or placing the blame for problems anywhere other than on the organization. In the recovery position there is a willingness to say that a problem is attributable to the profession rather than the firm, to the firm in the past rather than the firm now, to a subset of the firm which is not truly representative of the firm and even to suggest that the perceived problem is actually attributable to the interviewee rather than the firm. I have already considered this practice in relation to objects of identity work (7.1.4) and identity work tactics (7.1.9) above. In the nine extreme examples, it appears that some combination of the identity work responses mentioned in 6.4 have to happen before the interviewee reaches a position in which they use these expressions to preserve a positive perception of the organization. The blame tactics deflect threats away from the organization to which the social identity relates. When there is no sense of 'We', the individuals will not be using blame tactics to protect the social identity. As a sense of

'We' returns, then there is an identity challenge as a partner in the firm to incorporate the event. Deflecting the problem away from the perception of the firm helps reduce tension between the identity challenges as 'I' and as a partner in the firm.

Given the difference in scale between the individual and the firm, it is not straightforward for an individual to change aspects of a firm's identity. Placing the blame elsewhere is easier and supports the maintenance of a positive perception of the organization, supporting the performance of the expected loyalty. This links back to the beginning of this discussion of difficult identity work for partners in these firms. At the beginning of this section I suggested that the events which led to these difficult identity work challenges were typically perceived to be organization sanctioned. Petriglieri (2011) noted that while preparing taxonomy of identity threats is pointless because identity threats have to be evaluated as such by the individual, it is worth considering the source of a threat because it may predict the response to it. In my data, when the identity work problem originates unequivocally from the organization itself and is experienced alone, it is difficult to park the blame outside the organization. In other words, in these difficult identity work situations, the everyday identity work tactic of parking blame elsewhere is no use.

Gutierrez et al (2010) described splitting as a mechanism for repairing identification because split identifications enable coping and allow continued involvement. Blaming a subset of the firm for unwelcome aspects of an organization while maintaining identification with the 'true' firm is very similar. However in Gutierrez et al splitting was a collective activity. My data suggests this can be difficult to use as a mechanism for repairing identification when no other members are facing the same identity challenge at the same time and discussion of your challenge is inhibited by the identity work setting.

These individuals who managed to reverse the tipping point, to come back from the brink and climb out of cycles of de-identification, were not building a social identity from scratch. Rather than starting with a clean slate, they started from a position in which they had been rejected by fellow members in the organization. The threat to this highly valued and emotionally significant social identity had come from within that social identity, and operated like a stun gun on the social identity. The combination of events in the recovery accounts allowed the individuals to come back

from the brink, and successfully restore a social identity attributable to membership. The social identity might be scarred but it was operational.

8 Conclusion

Becoming a partner in one of the larger accountancy, consulting or law firms is a big deal. These people are technically excellent, can inspire teams of professionals and clients, and have won the confidence of their peers to be elected to partnership. Once elected, equity partners will receive a share of the profits of the firm and in return are expected not only to put the firm and their clients first, but to remain loyal to the firm. However staying in the same firm as a partner for up to 25 years brings its own challenges as the partner and the firm change. This thesis is about challenges relevant to a partner's identity as a member of the firm, and how to meet them.

Due to the bespoke nature of professional work in these industries, professional firms rely on their members defining themselves by their membership of the firm and what the firm stands for, in order to maintain a high standard of work and cooperation in the firm. The governance and HRM mechanisms are geared towards achieving this. While recent studies have focused on increasingly discontinuous professional careers and the journey from trainee to partner, little attention has been paid so far in the literature to the identity work of these senior members of professional firms, the partners seen as themselves defining of the firm, but also subject to the changing identity demands of the firm.

This thesis looked at events that rocked the boat for partners in terms of their membership of the firm. Rather than looking at a single type of event, such as, a merger or a scandal, this study provides accounts from 50 individuals of identity work on multiple events perceived by the individuals to have been challenging in some way to their identification with a firm. Many studies of identity relating to organization membership have focused on a single event likely to provoke identity work, for example, the response of the Roman Catholic Church to allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests (Gutierrez et al, 2010). While such a study provides a detailed account of the responses of multiple people to that event, it does not ask about multiple events faced by those same people. How might their responses to different challenges compare? This study compared the responses from a set of individuals

to multiple events appraised by them as challenging, comparing the challenges in this context and what makes them difficult.

Over 25 years as partners individuals may experience some or all of the following: their firm, of which they are part owner, being publicly accused of failings, such as happened to Arthur Andersen over Enron; programmes of reform taking place in the firm with which they, as an individual partner, disagree, pitching partner against partner over how the firm should be run; being bullied by another partner; another partner claiming the credit and an unfair share of profits for a piece of work; making a mistake in your professional work and the consequences of it; frustration with another part of the firm which you feel is not pulling its weight; believing one of your own partners is trying to steal your client; the work in your area of professional expertise drying up; feeling that you as a partner are falling behind your peers; feeling that you cannot cope with the travel/expected performance level; and you as an individual changing, perhaps getting ill for a period of time or your priorities changing as you age. Failing identification with the firm could result in a loss of a sense of validation for the individual and leave the individual less likely to behave in accordance with the identity of the firm. Leaving the firm might remove the identity conflict. However switching firms after becoming a partner is still frowned upon in parts of these industries, so partners need to maintain some identification with their current firm which will be difficult to achieve if they feel rejected by the firm. How do partners manage to continue in the firm? Despite the growing interest in identity work in social identity theory, little attention has been paid to how multiple social identities, salience and the effects of existing social identities on perceptions, might combine to affect the performance of identity work. Would such events provide different identity challenges for the partner when the identity of the firm is salient and for the partner as an individual? If, when the social identity is salient, the individual adopts some or the entire firm prototype, how might that combine with identity work? Would the salience of a social identity be linked to the identity work responses to an event? If so, what happens in a cycle of de-identification?

Large accountancy, consultancy and law firms are likely to be high identity demand organizations. Within these industries the HRM practices associated with partnerships are mechanisms by which control is exerted over individual partners through their subjective understanding of their selves. The 50 individuals in this

study came from these three industries and were all members of firms using human resource management practices associated with partnership.

I asked: how do members of high identity demand organizations perform identity work relating to their organization membership?

I found that the events perceived by partners as challenging to their organization membership fell in to categories, relating to their source inside or outside the organization and to the number of partners affected at the same time. The responses to events combined to answer identity challenges faced as a member of the firm and identity challenges faced as an individual. The difficulty of challenges was linked to the availability of responses, but the availability of responses was intricately tied up with not only the source of the event and the number of partners affected, but also the setting in which the identity work was being performed: a large, managed professional partnership. I found myself addressing Ashforth et al's call for investigations of the impact of context on identification (2008:347):

> "more pressing for the field are larger questions (and commensurate research designs) that attempt to capture the ebb and flow of multiple identification episodes while simultaneously assessing the impact of the context."

As Brown (2014:12[5]) observed:

> "There is much we still do not know about how contexts – particularly organizational and national cultural settings – affect individuals' identities and identity work. Studies on organizations as 'identity workspaces' (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010) and 'meaning arenas' (Westenholz 2006) indicate that different organizational contexts vary in the scope, resources and encouragement they offer people as they fashion their identities. Yet, we are almost wholly ignorant regarding whether, for example, consonant identity work topics or strategies are drawn on and shared generally by members of similar-type organizations, e.g. management consultancies or public sector institutions. "

[5] This is the page number from the early access online version of the article.

Four aspects of the partnership context appeared repeatedly in the accounts of identity work in all three industries: the expectation from other partners that a partner should be loyal to the firm; the level of competition between partners; the expectation that partners will behave as leaders; and the limited influence of an individual partner in a large, corporatized firm. These were common across the larger, more managerial firms in all three industries. The timing of this study was fortunate for gaining insights in to the impact of the setting on identity work performed by individuals because during the course of this study, the very nature of this large, corporatized firm setting was the object of attention from not only the judiciary in England and Wales but also the legislature, for example, one of the conditions to be satisfied in the new regime for partners of LLPs is that of "significant influence over the affairs of the partnership," (HM Revenue and Customs, 2014:12), matching one of the themes which had been so prominent in my data. So not only were these individuals in high identity demand organizations, making this a rich context for research on identity work relating to organization membership, but also the study was conducted at a time when the nature of the setting was prominent, providing a rich context for exploring the interrelation of setting and identity work. Individuals expect as partners to run the firm but in these large, corporatized partnerships, their experience was of having to appear to be a united leadership while individually having little influence over the direction of the firm. They understood they should be loyal to their partners but in the large, corporatized firms they experienced a high degree of competition from these same partners. The contradictions in the setting are live and current issues for the individuals in this study.

Within this identity work setting there were similar challenges raised by partners in all three industries. Four common events described by them as challenging were: public criticism of the firm; decisions within the firm affecting only the individual partner; redundancy programmes; and changes in the individual relevant to membership of the firm. I found the best fit with the data was to analyse the identity work accounts from within two social identity positions: when a social identity attributable to the organization is salient; and when it is not salient. This juxtaposition of two identity positions shed light on the combinations of responses to different categories of event. Travelling between theory and data I found that identity challenges presented by a single event varied when viewed from within or without a

social identity. Some events presented similar identity challenges in both identity positions and the same identity response might repair the challenges in both identity positions. For example, the public criticism events (which I had expected to present difficult identity challenges, Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) were actually straightforward, when contrasted with events where the challenges in multiple identity positions required combinations of responses or even inconsistent responses, for example, the age-related challenges. This is different to studies looking at the orientation of identity work, for example, Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly's (2014) distinction of identity work with a loss orientation from that with a restoration orientation. My study is one step back: understanding the challenges in multiple identity positions would help predict the orientations required. The difficulty of the identity work appeared to increase with the complexity of the challenges.

The difficulty of the identity work also appeared to be affected by the source of the event and the number of people affected in the organization. Public criticism events had a source outside the firm and impacted many members of the firm at the same time in the same way. Members could push back against the criticism in a united way. Redundancy programmes in the firms had a source inside the firm and impacted some, but not all, members at the same time in the same way. There might be division within the firm, the very firm of which the individual is a partner, but members disapproving of the redundancies would have some sympathetic colleagues. Changes in the individual, by definition, had a source in the individual rather than the organization. Although the associated challenges might be faced alone at that time, the organization might turn out to be supportive. However unwelcome decisions of the firm affecting only the individual not only had a source inside the firm but also impacted only the individual at that time. The design of my study, allowing comparison of identity work on multiple events, showed the extreme nature of the challenges in unwelcome decisions of the firm affecting only the individual: the links to thoughts of leaving, the emotional impact and the amount of time taken to recover from them. This prompted me to go back to the data again, looking specifically for the most challenging identity work events.

In relation to role transitions, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) proposed that narrative identity work would be more prevalent for non-institutionalized and socially undesirable transitions. Public criticism events are not progressive for the firm within

normal conventions and are not socially desirable. Yet the source of the criticism outside the firm and the potential to share the identity work with colleagues facing the same identity challenges at the same time inside the firm, appear to have softened the blow. The most challenging identity work moments for the partners in this study were the opposite: they had a source inside the organization and impacted the individual alone. It is tempting to suggest that studies of single categories of event have missed the importance of the source and impact of the event in predicting the identity work response. It was in these accounts that I saw the spirals of de-identification described by DiSanza and Bullis, 1999. As a result of the event affecting only the individual at that time, the potential to share the identity work with colleagues is removed. An additional implication of the solo experience was that identity work to change the organization identity did not appear to the interviewee to be viable. I propose that the smaller the number of people facing a similar identity threat at the same time, the greater the difficulty in responding to the identity threat.

When colleagues are facing the same identity challenges in relation to an event, the identity work performed by others can be a resource for the individual and responses to identity challenges can be developed in the low-risk context of interactions with those facing the same challenges. Interactions with colleagues are less about testing out identity responses on an audience and can be more about co-development of responses. When no one else is facing the same identity challenges at the same moment, all interactions are with an audience. For example, the identity work tactic of 'splitting' described by Gutierrez et al (2010) appeared in my study to be more useful in challenges faced as a collective rather than as an individual. To ascertain whether there is potential to share identity work, the identity challenges faced within different identity positions need to be understood. I expand previous studies of identity work by breaking down both the identity work challenges and the use of responses from within these two positions: with and without the social identity.

In the literature review I pulled together three studies of identity work cycles: Ashforth et al, 2008; Kreiner et al, 2006a; and Dutton et al, 1994. Ashforth et al's model included the idea that affirmative feedback from a group will reinforce identification. An implication of the identity event originating from within the organization is that it is difficult to see how affirmative cycles of identity work can take place to restore a feeling of acceptance by the group. In contrast to the interactions reported in

Chapter 5, Four Identity Work Events, interactions within the firm about difficult identity work challenges were few and were awkward. I identified four elements of the recovery stories in these difficult identity work accounts: a change in the firm; personal success within the firm; looking at an alternative job; and interactions with senior people in the firm. I propose that these four elements of the recovery accounts are seen in combination because they address different identity challenges. However in these extreme events the initial challenges are all for 'I'; 'we' are missing in the early stages of reversal. Rather than inconsistent challenges for 'I' and 'we', there are multiple challenges for 'I'. Petriglieri's (2011) model for predicting responses to identity threats, by its very nature as a predictive model, encourages the user to look at various conditions at the time of the event. However the four elements of these recovery stories unfolded over months, and even in some cases, years. Interactions with a senior person and getting a job offer from an alternative firm provide social support for the old and for a possible new identity. That social support is not, however, clear at the outset of the identity work. Indeed a change in the firm and personal success within the firm are unpredictable at the time of the event. This unfolding sequence of resources and responses is not reflected in Petriglieri's model. Attempting to predict the response in these most difficult identity work events is futile; models should take account of evolving challenges and responses to each identity challenge raised by an event.

In considering the contribution of this study it must be remembered that in asking about moments when the interviewees took steps towards leaving their current firm, I was talking to people who had managed to stay in the firm. So, these difficult identity work moments are the most difficult moments from which my interviewees had recovered. It should also be noted that the apparent difficulty of the identity work events may be affected by the sophistication of the firms at supporting partners through certain types of event, for example, the provision of information to partners by the management of the firm in public criticism events was highly useful to individuals in the performance of the relevant identity work. Similarly the pro-active support for partners nearing retirement supported their identity work.

A further outcome of this contrast and compare analysis of identity work accounts was the observation that parking blame tactics were often used in response to less difficult identity work challenges but not often used in the most difficult challenges. I

suggested in the discussion chapter that once individuals had recovered from a cycle of de-identification, they reached a recovery position in which they were willing to use blame tactics again. In the events in Chapter 6, Difficult Identity Work, there was an absence of willingness to preserve a positive perception of the firm. Rather seeking to preserve a positive perception was a feature of the recovery position, so Difficult Identity Work contributes a study of identity work required to climb out of a spiral of de-identification. This is substantially different to the identity work studies which have looked at many members of an organization facing a challenging event together (Gutierrez et al, 2010; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). In addition the blame tactics observed in this study fall outside Petriglieri's (2011) classification of identity-protection responses: concealment of an identity, derogation of the source of the threat, and proclaiming the positive-distinctiveness of the threatened identity. The closest category is derogation but the blame tactics in my study can be split by the recipient of the blame, which is not always the source of the threat. When this is the case, the blame tactics operate to deflect, rather than reflect, the threat. These difficult identity work accounts were also at odds with Petriglieri's (2011) model because rather than seeing identity-restructuring or identity-protection, I found identity-restructuring followed by identity-protection. Once the social identity had to some extent been repaired, the individuals might attribute some of the blame away from the organization.

Finally I return to how the setting of a PSF partnership restricts the identity work responses available. Linking back to Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, throughout the accounts of identity work I show that partners referred to the perceived expectation of loyalty, expectation to be a leader, competitive atmosphere and limited influence of individual partners in large partnerships, in describing their identity work responses. These references show the importance of the setting in the performance of identity work. The setting influences the tactics which are likely to be used. Petriglieri (2011) predicted that an individual's first response would be identity protection because an individual seeks to maintain positive identities. I, however, found the setting complicates this prediction, by inhibiting various identity-protection or identity-restructuring tactics. In addition, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) predicted narrative identity work in work role transitions would be more prevalent the more the transition is high stakes. However in a large, corporatized partnership setting and

where the identity work relates to organization membership, the high stakes appeared to inhibit the use of narrative identity work. The identity work tactics recorded have been observed in other settings in previous research, but the link with the setting for identity work was not highlighted in those studies.

I collated these ideas in a diagram to summarise the performance of identity work relating to organization membership by a partner in a PSF. Although my illustration of individual identity (Figure 2.1) and diagram of the performance of identity work (Figure 7.1) are too mechanical properly to reflect the sophisticated performance of an individual's identity work, the benefit of this mechanical approach is to support the researcher in separating the challenges within the identity work, and how different responses combine to make successful identity work for an individual facing a challenge from within multiple social identity positions, and how the setting influences the responses available.

Future research

In describing the journey through partnership in Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, my focus was on the themes linked in my data to the performance of identity work. I did not set out to do an exhaustive description of the experiences of partners subject to various forms of governance or differing HRM practices. However some governance issues raised by partners appeared to be at odds with existing PSF literature, for example, changes to voting rights mean that managing partners in some firms are no longer elected by the partnership. Younger partners in particular felt that continuing in a senior management post was no longer subject to the continuing approval of the partner body. While partners of longer tenure and/or greater seniority did not deny the change, some of them questioned its impact, challenging the degree of influence of individual partners through the voting systems typical in the past and arguing that making your views known in conversation with partners in management could be just as effective. In addition the extent of the competition between partners (as opposed to those aspiring to partnership) in managed partnerships was more prominent in my data than the existing literature would predict. This combination of a competitive environment imposed by senior management and the difficulty of influencing the senior management has potential implications for the performance of inconsistent organizational and professional demands. The concern not to be in the bottom 10%

of partners at any time could drive partners to compromise professional standards to meet client demands in order to generate fees. Future research could explore the impact of the changing nature of the partner experience on the decision-making of partners.

Second, in Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I described the expectation of influence attaching to being a partner in one of these firms. This background may make the partners more likely than individuals in other organizations to seek to change the identity attaching to the firm. By choosing to investigate identity work relating to organization membership in partners in PSFs I sought to find a context in which identity work relating to membership over a long career in one firm would be manifest. A comparison with a structure in a professional setting not using the title 'partner' would be an interesting future study. Further, as well as the expectations attaching to 'partner', the combination of owner, manager and worker found in a partner may affect the performance of identity work. If roles are part of the amalgam making up the organizational identification, then a comparison between partners and those combining fewer roles in their organization membership would shed light on any differences in the performance of identity work relating to membership of the organization.

In looking at the solo or concurrent performance of identity work taking the social identity as object, there is a question to be asked about when identity work is also institutional work. As Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) have set out, one form of institutional work is identity work which facilitates the removal or establishment of an institutional norm. Empson, Cleaver and Allen (2013) looked at the identity work in interactions between managing partners and professional managers in PSFs which contributed to institutional work on the professional partnership. The emphasis there was on the creation of role identities to support a new institution however elsewhere in that paper we considered simultaneous inconsistent institutional work on an evolving institution; for an individual simultaneously to do institutional work to disrupt an institution and institutional work to maintain it. If the salience or not of an organizational identity creates different identity challenges arising from a single event, and affects the performance of identity work, how might it affect the performance of institutional work?

A similar point arises in relation to conceptualising the four themes in the identity setting which were linked to the performance of identity work: the expectation that partners should be loyal to the firm; the level of competition between partners; the requirement to appear as united leaders; and the limited influence of an individual partner in a large, corporatized firm. These might be excluded from a definition of an organization identity which sees the identity as the unique features of the organization, the features which set it apart from its competitors, because these were common across all three industries. They are perhaps better seen as institutional norms creating a setting for the performance of identity work. Yet the partners presented, for example, loyalty to the firm, as something distinguishing a firm from others, even though I found almost all my interviewees saying similar things about their respective firms. Similarly for the individual partners, comparing their firms to others, the degree of management restricting influence of individuals over the firm and/or the degree of competition between partners were aspects of the firm identity. At the risk of appearing to conflate institutions and organizations, I think there would be considerable value in further research exploring the implications of Ashforth et al's (2008) portrayal of a social identity with an organization as an amalgam, whether institutional norms might overlap with parts of that amalgam and the consequences for our understanding of identity work: identity work would be conducted from within the social identity, an individual could take the social identity as the object of the work and might differentiate between parts of the social identity as parts that could be worked on easily or only slowly over time.

Another future study could compare the identity work prior to leaving of former partners with that of partners in the same setting who had managed to come back from the brink. For the most difficult identity work challenges faced by PSF partners I identified four elements occurring in multiple recoveries. However my focus was on comparing the challenges and identity work responses of partners to different categories of event, rather than comparing the identity work of partners who stay with that of partners who leave. While over a third of my interviewees had left one firm to join another before reaching the level of partner, and/or been through collapsed firm/merger situations, I had only three accounts of individuals voluntarily switching firms after being made a partner and these were not spread across all the three industries in my study.

More generally, there are implications arising from the finding that the setting for identity work can inhibit the availability of identity work responses. The identity work prompted by similar challenges needs to be investigated in multiple settings, to learn more about the impact of settings on identity work. A comprehensive understanding of identity work responses can be achieved only through detailed studies of not only the events prompting them, but also the settings in which they are performed.

Practical implications

The research yielded insights in to the most difficult identity work moments relating to organization membership of which firms need to be more aware if they are to support the identity work of professionals which could potentially help both firms and individuals. As Lorsch and Tierney (2002:92) say:

> "Partner-level stars are a professional service firm's scarcest and most valuable resource. Whether the firm succeeds or fails depends on their performance and leadership … in short, on the degree to which the firm's goals are these stars' goals – and vice versa."

I mentioned the recent focus of the PSF literature on the increasingly discontinuous nature of professional careers. The successful performance of identity work by the pioneering partners who broke institutional norms to move to other partnerships will have contributed to the institutional change which is the changing nature of partnership as a secure position for life. Identity work in discontinuous careers is no doubt difficult, but the identity work of those who stay can also be difficult. The partners in my study were most vulnerable to being poached by competitors after a surprisingly narrow range of events: those originating inside the firm and having an impact on the individual alone at that time. Not all unwelcome events affecting only the individual have this effect. The most challenging ones presented identity challenges where the identity work to respond was made harder by the setting, the context for the identity work. The partners were vulnerable to being poached for sometimes months, partly because the identity work was so difficult.

The identity responses required a combination of some or all of: a relevant change in the firm; attention from a figure perceived to be defining within the firm; personal success within the firm; and the comparison of the firm with an alternative. Firms

that have rotations in the most senior management posts have regular moments when the individual can believe it will be better under the new regime. When partners are complaining of events in the firm affecting only them, or announcing their intention to leave perhaps without explaining the events leading to that decision, the most senior figures need to be in one-to one interactions with the individual. There can be no substitution using figures perceived as less central to the firm when the alienated individual needs to feel accepted by the firm.

While the third element, personal success, cannot be manufactured, firms can perhaps reflect on whether their existing management systems compound the downfall of partners who hit hard times. For example, if you can see in a transparent system that a partner has not generated much profit in the last 12 months, but perhaps cannot see an explanation, will you risk bringing that partner in on your project? Could the transparency make it harder for that partner to experience personal success? Finally, if one of your partners talks to a competitor, balancing that with attention from the perceived centre of the current firm may persuade the partner that their self-esteem needs can be met inside the existing firm. That attention supports the construction of a plausible narrative for deciding to stay.

In seeking feedback on my study it transpired that there were points of resonance. One of the themes in my study was the limited influence of partners in the partnership. The limited influence of partners over the management of the firm, rather than over the management of their practice, was commented on by the Director of partner development in one of my participating firms when I went back to give my results as they stood towards the end of 2013. The firm had already recognised it had reached a point at which leadership had become concentrated and was seeking to move towards a semi-distributed model. He wondered whether the expectation of control might be a greater issue in their firm than in the largest firms because they see themselves as slightly smaller than the largest firms. The prominence of identity work setting themes will vary from firm to firm.

Also, in terms of being aware of partner challenges, Lorsch and Tierney (2002) advocate performance reviews not only as a means of control but also for maintaining contact with valuable partners. In Chapter 4, Identity Work Setting, I suggested that performance reviews are not fulfilling the second of these in practice.

They are seen as cynical mechanisms for managing down the share of profits received by a partner; and/or as cynical mechanisms for trying to make a partner feel valued for their wider contribution when the share of the profit is often determined by the profit-generation of the partner. Given these views on performance reviews, they may not be supporting maintaining contact with partners; firms may need alternative mechanisms for 'staying in touch' with partners.

Contributions

In conclusion, my contributions have been:

- First, to suggest that identity work challenges are best viewed from within multiple identity positions, to understand the identity responses required to meet all the challenges presented by a single event. The challenges faced as 'we' in response to an event may or may not match those faced by 'I'; in other words, the identity challenges from any event include those faced when a social identity is salient and when it is not. The difficulty of the identity work is increased when multiple, possibly inconsistent, responses are required to meet the challenges. Examining the identity work accounts in this way appeared partly to explain the surprising finding that public criticism events presented easier identity work challenges than, for example, decisions within the firm affecting one individual. In the public criticism events the identity challenges as 'I' and as 'we' could be addressed with the same responses. Fewer responses, coherent with each other, require less effort.
- Second, the most difficult identity work challenges for partners in professional firms originated inside the firm and created a challenge for the individual alone at that time. The implications of the solo impact of the event is that the concurrent performance of identity work by others facing the same challenge is not available as a resource for the individual and that identity responses involving change to the organization identity become less achievable. The concurrent performance of similar identity work by colleagues possibly further explained the surprising finding that public criticism events presented easier identity work challenges than decisions within the firm affecting one individual. In the public criticism events the responses could be developed together in low-risk interactions and work to change the identity of the firm was feasible.

- Third, in the two medium/large, more managed partnerships I studied I focused on the experience of partners and identified themes in the setting affecting their identity work. Not only do partners feel they have very little influence over the management of the firm, they are expected to present to the troops a united leadership. The perpetuation to the lower ranks of the myth of a more united, collegial style of partnership means that new partners experience a gap between their expectations and reality in the first few years of partnership. The demand for loyalty to the firm is high, but the competitive atmosphere between partners is counteracting the value of collegial support.
- The enduring themes of an identity work setting affect the availability of identity work responses, in turn affecting the difficulty or not of different identity work challenges. These themes from the identity work setting influence the performance of identity work by reducing the attractiveness and/or feasibility of some identity work tactics, effectively promoting the use of other tactics. To continue in the firm as a partner for 20 years requires the individual to perform satisfactory identity work using a limited range of tactics. This is most obvious when the social identity attributable to membership of the firm is threatened, and the threat comes from within the organization itself and affects only the individual at that time. The demand for loyalty and the competitive atmosphere between partners inhibit the development of identity work narratives. The requirement for partners to present a united leadership to the troops inhibits the use of concealment of the social identity and of derogation of the source of the threat (both identity protection tactics, Petriglieri, 2011). The response of proclaiming the positive distinctiveness of the social identity (Petriglieri's, 2011, third identity protection response) appears to be unavailable when damage has been caused by a threat coming from within the social identity itself. The lack of influence of individual partners over the firm, even though they are owners, inhibits work to change the identity of the firm, so identity restructuring tactics appear to be the only options. Petriglieri, 2011, argues that changing the meaning to the individual of the identity is unlikely when it has been held for a long time, as is typically the case for those who are partners; the expectation of loyalty to the firm from partners inhibits identity exit; so reducing the value of the social identity to the

partner looks inevitable, leaving a dissatisfied partner in the midst of the figureheads of the firm.

- This apparent inevitability highlights the value to the participating firms of the final contribution: an exploration of reversing cycles of de-identification. In their identity work accounts, partners who had come back from the brink used a combination of: attention from a partner perceived to be defining of the firm; a relevant change in the firm; personal success within the firm; and comparison to an alternative. These support the work of 'I' in rekindling a sense of 'we'. Distinct from initial socialization in to an organization, or learning and adoption of a social identity, these individual partners had performed successful identity work to rekindle a sense of 'we' with a reconstructed social identity attributable to continued membership of the firm.

Appendix I

Appendix I contains the Mael Scale questions, individual level difference questions and interview protocol. Please note:

- I include a code book for the survey questions. This is how I initially designed this first part of the interview before I started collecting data. I was seeking to heed Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) warning that a researcher cannot assume that organizational identification is part of an individual's identity. I subsequently decided not to use it.
- In the consultancy firm I agreed to use only Section 1. I was supplied in advance with sufficient data for me to be able to group interviewees in categories for my analysis, without being supplied with exact dates of birth, etc. This satisfied my purposes and kept the interview as short as possible to minimise the amount of partner time spent in the interview.

Survey

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The survey comprises 12 questions split between two sections. Participation is voluntary. If you would like a summary of the results for yourself, please ask the interviewer. Please do not write this information on the survey itself. Thank you for your assistance.

Section 1

Section 1 contains 6 statements. Please select the box which best describes your reaction to each statement today. *For each statement in section 1, please tick one box.*

Q No	Question	Strongly Agree			Neither	Strongly Disagree		
1	When someone criticises [Firm], it feels like a personal insult.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2	I am very interested in what others think about [Firm].	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3	When I talk about [Firm], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
4	[Firm]’s successes are my successes.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
5	When someone praises [Firm], it feels like a personal compliment.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
6	If a story in the media criticised [Firm], I would feel embarrassed.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Section 2

7 In what year did you start working continuously for your current firm? *Please write the year in the boxes.*

Don't know. *Tick here.* ☐

8 In what year did you qualify as a ……?

Please write the year in the boxes.

Don't know. *Tick here.* ☐

9 In what year did you become a partner in your current firm? *Please write the year in the boxes.*

Don't know. *Tick here.* ☐

10 What is the name or title of your main job at [Firm]?

Please write the name or title here: _____

11 What is the name of the department in which you work at [Firm]?

Please write the department here: _____

12 In what year were you born? *Please write the year in the boxes*.

Don't know. *Tick here.* ☐

Please return the survey to the interviewer. Thank you for your time.

To be completed by researcher: Survey No. ; Date

Code book

Question number	Variable label	Variable description	Type of variable	Code	Value label
1-6	OI = the sum of the scores on questions 1 to 6 in test 1	Strength of organizational identification	Ordinal	For q. 1-6: 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	For q. 1-6: Strongly agree Agree Weakly agree Neither agree nor disagree Weakly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
7	Birthyr	Year of birth	Numerical	N/A 9999	1935-1993 Don't know
8	Startyr	Year began current continuous employment at Firm	Numerical	N/A 9999	1953-2009 Don't know
9	Qualyr	Year qualified as solicitor	Numerical	N/A 9999	1955-2009 Don't know
10	Ptnryr	Year made up to partner at Firm	Numerical	N/A 9999	1965-2009 Don't know
11	Jobtle1	Job title	Categorical	1 2 3 4 5 etc.	Senior partner Managing partner Junior partner TO BE COMPLETED WITH FIRM
12	Dept	Department	Categorical	1 2 3	Corporate Tax Litigation TO BE COMPLETED WITH FIRM

Age variable (in years): Age = Year in which survey completed – Birthyr

Tenure variable (in years): Tenure = Year in which survey completed – Startyr

Partner tenure variable (in years): Partner tenure = Year completed - Ptnryr

Interview questions

Developed from Kreiner et al (2006a)

Career in firm to date

1. What led you to join [firm]? Did you consider any other firms? Would you describe your path through the firm from joining to partnership please? What are the headline dates for you on that path?
2. Did you do your traineeship in [firm]? Have you worked in any other [accounting/consulting/law] firms?

The people in the firm and how the firm is distinctive

3. Would you give me a few characteristic qualities of what you would consider to be a typical [firm] member? (Allow interviewee to narrow that question to just professionals/partners if asked) Is there anything distinctive about what the firm does or how it does it? What is distinctive about how your organization is managed? (If interviewee has worked elsewhere, can they compare the firms?) What in your view does the firm stand for? Can you explain what makes you say that/how you learned that/give me an example? How do you think the firm is seen by others?
4. Have your perceptions of the firm and/or the people changed over time? In what way?

How the individual sees their self in relation to the firm

5. How would you compare yourself to those qualities? Do you think you are a fairly typical [firm] [accountant/consultant/lawyer]? Can you give me an example of a situation where you felt that?

6. How much does your firm define you as a person? That is, is the working here something you DO or is it something you ARE? If, for example, you meet someone new and need to describe yourself, how do you see yourself?
7. Are there times when being a [firm] lawyer feels more like who you really are than merely what you do? When does that occur?
8. Have your attitudes about this changed over time? (From what to what?) What kinds of things prompted that change?
9. To what degree do you feel you can "be yourself" within [firm]? Are there times you can't be the "real you?"

Any challenges/synergies both inside and outside the firm today

10. Can you describe the things you find most challenging in your membership of the firm at the moment? Is there anything you find challenging in combining your membership with other aspects of your life? Do you see synergies between your membership of the firm and other aspects of your life?
11. Are there times when the firm asks too much of you as a person? Have you had to give up anything about yourself to be a good [firm] [accountant/consultant/lawyer]?
12. Can it be too consuming? Has that happened to you? Are there ways to prevent it from happening, or is it okay? What are the pressure points for you? Can you give me an example?
13. What would you recommend to a brand new [firm] [accountant/consultant/lawyer] about managing the separation between him/herself and the firm?

Relationship with firm over time; about times when they had felt various emotions in relation to the firm; about moments when they had considered leaving

14. Are there times when you less comfortable with people knowing where you work? When? Are there times when you feel proud of where you work/where you want to tell people where you work? Can you give me an example?
15. Have you ever felt apathy or neutrality toward the firm? When? Do you still feel that? Have you resolved that? How did you resolve that? Did anything make you want to resolve it?

16. Are there times when you've wanted to distance yourself from the firm? Have you been embarrassed by the firm? Have you felt angry towards the firm? The other partners? When? What happened next? Do you still feel that? How did you resolve that? Have you resolved that? What made you want to resolve it?
17. Have you ever had mixed feelings about your choice of firm? Have you ever regretted your choice of firm? When? What happened next? Are there times you wish you had gone to a different firm? When do you think about that? Have you ever thought about leaving the firm either temporarily or permanently? When? What would you do if for some reason you could no longer work here?

Groups of value to them within the firm

18. If you left the firm, which groups of people in the firm would you miss the most? [Would you give me a few characteristic qualities of what you would consider to be a typical [group named in first part of question] member? What is distinctive about this group? How would you compare yourself to these qualities? How much does your membership of this group define you as a person?] *Repeat for each group mentioned*

19. Is there anything you wanted to add? Is there anything you think I should have asked? Is there anything you think I need to know/understand better about you/the people here/the firm?

Appendix II

The following is an assignment submitted during the MRes in 2009.

Survey methods in management research: Assignment.

A critique of the methodology in 'Defining who you are by what you're not: organizational disidentification and The National Rifle Association' Elsbach, K. and Bhattacharya, C. (2001) Organization Science 12(4): 393-413.

The critique will assess the methodology used by Elsbach and Bhattacharya ("the Authors") for item development, scale development and scale evaluation by comparing it to the guidelines set out in the literature on best practice in these areas and to other scale development studies from top academic journals in management. The Authors sought to develop the literature on social identities and organizational identification by looking at a type of connection of individuals to organizations: where "individuals' social identities and self-concepts are defined by the groups or organizations from which they perceive their identities to be *separated."* (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001:394) They defined the concept as organizational disidentification. They drew on the literature speculating about the role of disidentification when an individual separates their identity from a group (and the group's values) and applied the idea to individuals disidentifying with organizations with which they disagree. They set out to test empirically the notion that "in models of social and organizational identification, maintaining perceptions of self-distinctiveness by cognitively separating one's identity from an organization's identity may be an important part of the process by which individuals maintain positive social identities." (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001:395)

Their literature review covering both disidentification and identification is commendable as a first step (Clark and Watson, 1995) but the concepts in this notion each have more than one interpretation. For example, organizational identity is a metaphorical compound of 'organization' and 'identity' which each have several interpretations (Cornelissen, 2005, 2006 and 2007) and the concept suffers from having been adopted by various research traditions which have used it to refer to different conceptual objects. In this case the Authors present their work as the results of two studies and part of the project in Study 1 was to clarify the theoretical

concept of organizational disidentification. We shall now consider the methodology in Study 1 before returning to the clarity of the concept definition.

Study 1 comprised three parts: informal data collection from in-class discussions, student projects and a student-run focus group; formal data collection from three separate focus groups (a total of 11 men and 16 women); and analysis of archival data from Lexis/Nexis of all (238) stories from 1994 to 1999 about the NRA and people's connection to or separation from it. The first of the formal focus groups was conducted to define the concept of organizational disidentification and to collate a list of organizations from which participants perceived themselves to be separated. The Authors advertised in the university in Atlanta, Georgia for volunteers who felt separate from a particular organization and paid the eleven respondents $25 each for the one hour focus group. The other two formal focus groups (two groups of eight) were conducted using the same methods but were used to look at the antecedents, indicators and consequences of individuals' disidentification with a particular organization, the National Rifle Association ("NRA"). All the formal focus groups were recorded and transcribed. A weakness with Study 1 is that the formal focus groups, due to the recruitment procedures used, only included people who were aware of their cognitive separation from an organization and as the Authors later acknowledge, this might lead to a narrower understanding of disidentification than a wider selection of participants might reveal. The Authors took an iterative approach to the analysis of the transcripts and archival data. They found over 300 distinct statements that suggested indicators, antecedents and consequences of organizational disidentification (at least 80 of each type). Let us now return to the clarity of the concept definition.

Using the indicators found in Study 1 the Authors define organizational disidentification as "a self perception based on (1) a cognitive separation between one's identity and one's perception of the identity of an organization, and (2) a negative relational categorization of oneself and the organization." (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001:397). (For a detailed discussion of the attributes of this definition see pages 397-398.) Interestingly the Authors still do not address the variety of ways in which organizational identity has been interpreted by different research traditions even though their concept definition refers to it (other than in oblique references to "siding" with Dutton) but they do explain their own interpretation of the

disidentification concept clearly: they see disidentification as a self-perception (not a perception about the organization) and a purely cognitive construct that may vary in degree. While their definition after Study 1 may appear very similar to the speculative theoretical definition with which the Authors started, the Authors have now a "precise and detailed conception of the target construct" (Clark and Watson, 1995:310), critical for assessing content validity and face validity in the creation of the items process, to which we now turn.

In Study 2 we are told that an initial pool of items for a survey measure was based on a thorough review of the literature and the focus group transcripts i.e. a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. A purely inductive approach might have been preferable since the Authors reported that the existing literature contained no empirical studies of disidentification and the Authors had now developed a clear grounded definition. However this study benefited (with regard to face validity and multiple latent constructs) from the Authors use of existing theory to clearly distinguish antecedents, indicators and consequences from the outset. We mentioned above that during the analysis of the data from Study 1 the Authors found over 300 distinct statements that revealed indicators, antecedents and consequences. For Study 1 the Authors themselves compared those 300 statements to related constructs and deleted items that seemed to relate to other concepts e.g. noncommitment. We are not told how many statements survived the Authors' cut. From the remaining statements they developed a series of four hypotheses about the antecedents and two hypotheses about the consequences of organizational disidentification (later used to test construct validity). Then we are referred to Appendix A to see the items for the survey for Study 2 where we find that, contrary to Clark and Watson's (1995) advice to be over inclusive, they developed just three items for each of organizational identification and organizational disidentification, three items to test each of the hypotheses about consequences and the first hypothesis about antecedents, and only two items to test each of the final three hypotheses about antecedents. From 300 statements we are down to just 21 items. It is surprising that from at least 80 indicators we are left with just three items for organizational disidentification. This compares poorly with the number of items used by Tian et al (2001) in their measure even after they refined their measure. In the Author's favour is Hinkin's advice that "keeping a measure short is an effective

means of minimising response bias" (Hinkin, 1995:972; Schriesheim and Eisenbach, 1995) and that occasionally three items can be enough.

The lack of explanation of how these items were chosen, although not unusual in scale development articles (Hinkin, 1995) is a weakness of this study. While the inclusion of the items in Appendix A at least allows the reader to assess the face validity for themselves, the face validity and content validity procedures followed in this study could have been better. With such a wealth of material from Study 1 the Authors could have followed stronger content validity procedures, such as the judging processes used by Tian et al (2001) or Butler (1991) and commended by Hinkin (1995). In the absence of such face and content validity procedures there is a risk that the measures include items that are not appropriate for the concept and that the items do not sufficiently well represent the domain of the concept.

The items that were included had a 5 point Likert type scale which is generally considered adequate (for example, it was used by Tian et al (2001) and by Butler (1991); see also Hinkin (1995)) because the 5 points will give variance among respondents and having a neutral central option avoids the potential problem of poor quality data due to forced answers (Clark and Watson, 1995). The Authors tested the format using two pilot studies of evening MBA students (recommended in Clark and Watson (1995)). In line with Hinkin's (1995) guidance, the scales for individual factors do not include negatively worded items. The sampling procedure followed is described clearly. The survey was sent to 500 males and 500 females in Atlanta Georgia, systematically selected from a sample of 3000 individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 residing in Atlanta, randomly generated by a private list company. The inclusion of a question asking about the respondent's knowledge of the NRA enabled the Authors to exclude responses from people "not at all familiar with the NRA" (126). The Authors achieved a usable sample of 405 respondents.

They checked for non-response bias by comparing the demographic information of the respondents and non-respondents. The respondents contained a predominance of male, high income residents but the Authors argue that even though their sample is not representative of their population, the important thing is that it contains people who "know and care about the NRA and its values to a great enough extent to identify or disidentify with the organization." (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001:404)

A weakness of this study is that this non-representative sample is used for the scale development (Clark and Watson, 1995; Hinkin, 1995) and another weakness is that the same sample is then used for the construct validity tests.

Having achieved a usable sample of 405 the Authors had enough usable respondents for exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, highly recommended for checking the stability of the factor structure (Hinkin, 1995), Clark and Watson, 1995). It is good that the Authors used factor but it is not clear why the Authors used exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis. We are not given the detailed results of the exploratory factor analysis but are told that on the basis of a scree plot and an eigen value cut-off of 1, the eight factor scales in Appendix A survived and the items loaded cleanly on the eight factors, and that the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the model as proposed had an acceptable fit. We do not know the details of what competing models the Authors considered. They find support in existing literature for using an RMSEA of 0.10 as the upper limit of an acceptable fit. Looking at the RMSEA results obtained by Tian et al (2001), where they considered several different models and achieved RMSEA of 0.053 for the best one and 0.105 for the model with the worst fit, it is suggested that the RMSEA of 0.09 obtained by the Authors in the current study (for all eight latent constructs) is a less than excellent result. A little later in the article the Authors give more detail on the model fit procedures followed when describing their hypothesis testing. At this point they are looking at the seven measures used in their disidentification model (all the antecedents and consequences and the indicators of disidentification but not of identification). They used LISREL (an approach commended by Hinkin (1995)), they set out both the strong and weak results and the path scores are depicted on p.406. They are thorough, using a variety of goodness-of-fit indices and reviewing LISREL analyses published in three top academic management journals to find benchmarks, but the RMSEA is slightly worse at 0.092 and one of the paths is only marginally significant ($\rho<0.12$, 2-sided).

According to MacKenzie et al's (2005) criteria, the seven disidentification related sub-scales are a reflective measurement model (within each sub-scale the items are manifestations of the constructs, appear to be conceptually interchangeable and likely to co-vary with each other). The organizational identification scale is also reflective. Internal consistency reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha was

therefore appropriate. The results for Cronbach's alpha are set out in Appendix A where we can see it was performed for each of the eight scales. All the values of alpha were acceptable at greater than or equal to 0.70 (Hinkin, 1995; c.f. Clark and Watson (1995) recommending 0.8**)**. The three worst alpha scores are for the three scales with only two items each. As was mentioned above, to improve internal consistency reliability it might have been preferable to generate more items for each scale from the 300 statements found in Study 1. They supplemented these results by also using LISREL composite reliabilities. There is no attempt to measure stability of the measure over time, for example, using test-retest reliability. For theorists who conceive individual identities as relatively stable over time (for example, Dutton et al, 1994) the absence of test-retest reliability checks is a weakness.

The Authors expressly address discriminant validity and convergent validity. Before examining the procedures followed, it is worth noting that there is no discussion of social desirability bias, which is perhaps surprising given the organization on which the Authors chose to focus. The Authors describe the NRA, however, as having both many public supporters and public opponents in the chosen population so this may mitigate the need for social desirability bias testing although that explanation is weak given the non-representative nature of the sample. The discriminant validity tests used correlation and variance analyses (Hinkin, 1995) and were applied to all pairs of latent constructs but particular attention was paid to the results for the identification indicators and disidentification indicators pairing because the Authors were interested in checking that disidentification was an independent construct, not just the opposite of identification, and the results support their theory (for example, see the 95% confidence interval test). The Authors could have been even more thorough in investigating convergent validity by examining the relationships between disidentification and a closely related construct, such as disloyalty or non-commitment (Clark and Watson, 1995), in addition to comparing it to the negatively related identification measure.

In conclusion, the Authors should be commended for their approach to clarifying the concept definition and the rigour applied in addressing scale evaluation. Unfortunately the omission of best practice procedures in the development of items and scales at an early stage in the methodology affected the quality of the measures

developed. While the scales were adequate, it is possible that a more rigorous approach at the item development stage would have enabled them to achieve greater internal reliability and better fit scores. However, these criticisms should not be taken as suggesting there is no value in the Authors' research. The Authors made a very valuable empirical contribution to theories on social identities and organizational identification and have received deservedly wide recognition for their work (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004).

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