Managing and adapting organizational identity

A qualitative case study using a strategy-as-practice perspective to investigate an IT consultant organization

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Abstract

Evolution of IT has resulted in fundamental changes in society, changes that have affected the IT consultant industry and introduced challenges in how IT consultant organizations should adapt to a new, turbulent market. In order to investigate these challenges this study set out to understand the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations, aiming to address the following research question: How do IT consultant organizations manage and adapt their organizational identity? To answer this question a qualitative single case study has been conducted using Whittington's integrated framework for strategy-as-practice as a theoretical framework. The results show that the case organization of this study manages and adapts their organizational identity by adjusting its work procedures to the new market as well as their role in the relationship with customers. The results also indicate that the case organization manages and adapts their organizational identity by balancing the identity established by headquarter and the identity set by themselves in regard to their local context. These results demonstrate the possibilities of multiple organizational identities within an organization.

Keywords: Organizational identity, Integrated framework for strategy-as-practice, IT consultant organizations, multiple organizational identities

1. Introduction

The evolution of Information Technology (IT) has had fundamental impact on society, enabling new routines within all sectors of government, commerce as well as industry (Peppard & Ward, 2004; Lech, 2007; Merali, Papadopoulos & Nadkarni, 2012). This turn has resulted in economic, social and political changes and has taken humanity into an information age (Merali et al., 2012). Intangible aspects are frequently considered as more important than tangible (Campbell, O’Driscoll & Saren, 2013), making IT services one of the fastest-growing sectors in the service field (Eikebrokk & Iden, 2015). In order to manage the increased use of IT, many organizations outsource their IT functions to external actors such as IT consultant organizations (Yang, Fu & Zuo 2005; Magilo & Spohrer, 2013; Ko, 2014; Mann, Folch, Kauffman & Anselin, 2015). For IT consultant organizations the increase in IT outsourcing enables possibilities for profit and growth, however continuous development of IT results in an unstable market which might rapidly turn into new unpredictable directions. The consultant industry is by nature defined as intangible, heterogeneous and perishable, thus the ability to interact with this instability and to differentiate oneself from other actors on the market become crucial for survival (Chelliah, D’Netto & Georges, 2015).

In this challenging situation not only the matter of strategy needs to be managed and adapted but also organizational identity (Tripasas, 2009). IT consultant organizations might need to analyze and alter their organizational identity in order to survive on the market (Gioia, Shultz & Corley, 2000; Corley, 2004; Wang, Huang & Tang 2013; Koskinen, 2015). This includes investigating their relationships with customers, their knowledge and skill sets as well as their service approaches (Boudreau, Serrano & Larson, 2014). Extensive research
has been conducted on organizational identity over the past 50 years (Wang et al., 2013), despite this, IT’s role in organizational identity needs to be better understood, especially given the ubiquity of IT in workplaces (Tripsas, 2009; Boudreau et al., 2014).

This study aims to contribute to the field of organizational identity by investigating how the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations is affected by the rapid changes caused by the IT evolution. By doing this, challenges associated with the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations might be acknowledged and the results of this study might have implications for the practice of IT consultant organizations. Furthermore, the study uses a strategy-as-practice perspective as a theoretical lens when investigating organizational identity. Therefore, this study also investigates the interrelationship of organizational identity and strategy, a gap acknowledged by existing research (Tripsas, 2009). The research question that this study addresses is: How do IT consultant organizations manage and adapt their organizational identity?

To answer the research question we use Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice as a theoretical lens. The strategy-as-practice perspective regards strategy as something actors not only have, but also something that they do (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2014). We argue that organizational identity can be interpreted in the same manner.

The object of the study is a local office of a multinational IT consultant organization facing the same challenges as every organization in the current IT consultant industry. In order to answer the research question, a qualitative case study was performed where employees from the chosen case unit were asked to reflect upon different aspects of their own organizational identity. Before beginning the case study, a literature review was conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research field; the literature review will be presented in the section below.

2. Organizational identity in a turbulent market

Implications following the IT evolution affect more than just technology, for IT consultant organizations, it also result in new customer preferences, a shift in necessary assets, new business models, and different network constellations (Tripsas, 2009; Boudreau et al., 2014). Tripsas (2009) therefore argues that “a firm may ultimately need to develop an entirely new organizational identity whereby both organizational members and external constituents must alter deeply held assumptions and beliefs about what the firm represents” (p. 441).

2.1 Organizational identity

Albert and Whetten (1985), who first introduced the concept of organizational identity, define identity as “a classification of the self that identifies the individual as recognizably different from others” (p. 267). Boudreau et al. (2014) further explain that a definition of identity answers the question who am I? Or more importantly, at an organizational level; who are we? Organizational identity is thereby the collective understanding of an organization’s characteristics by its members (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2000; Corley, 2004; Wang et al., 2013; Boudreau et al., 2014).
However Tripsas (2009) argues that there are both internal as well as external identities, where internal identity refers to how actors within view the organization and external identity refers to outsiders’ views of the organization. Gioia et al. (2000) agree and argue that interactions and interrelationships between insiders and outsiders are involved in the creation of identity. Gioia et al. (2000) further highlight that insiders’ perceptions of outsider impressions affect an organization’s perceived identity. An organizational identity describes the essence of the organization and defines what the organization does, how it does it, along with strategies it adopts (O’Malley, O’Dwyer, McNally & Murphy, 2014; Koskinen, 2015).

Existing literature has suggested that organizational identities are stable, distinctive and enduring, however recent literature argues that it should be viewed in terms of an ongoing process: as something fluid, changeable, and less distinctive than defined originally (Gioia et al., 2000; Corley, 2004; Wang et al., 2013; Boudreau et al., 2014; Koskinen, 2015). Boudreau et al. (2014) use layoffs, mergers and acquisitions as examples of possible causes for organizational identity to change.

The core of organizational identity consists of values, goals, social codes, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; O’Malley et al., 2014). Organizational identities therefore serve as a coordinating role guiding development of capabilities, framing of issues, and evolution of routines (Tripsas, 2009). Both Boudreau et al. (2014) and O’Malley et al. (2014) emphasize how identity is critical for organizational guidance, stability, and ultimately its sustainability. However, due to how organizational identity is intertwined with routines, knowledge base and procedures within the organization and in relation to external constituents, changing organizational identity is difficult (Tripsas, 2009). Tripsas (2009) emphasizes how management is faced with barriers when adopting new identity-challenging technologies that go against core beliefs. Tripsas (2009) also points out that difficulties in adopting new technology are well established in multiple industries, including the IT consultant industry.

Furthermore Tripsas (2009) emphasizes that an organizational identity in some sense is “expressed through elements of strategy” (p. 456) and that identity change can be part of strategic thinking within an organization. However authors stress that organizations cannot only alter strategy or tactics without acknowledging the broader implications if the organization is in need of a new identity, efforts must reach beyond that and go deep within the organization (Corley, 2004; Tripsas, 2009; Koskinen, 2015). Koskinen (2015) furthermore argues that an organization’s strategy, which is complicated to analyze, often is closely connected to the organizational identity, “that is, a strategic intent can be thought of as a carefully articulated vision augmented by the organizational effort and commitment to bring it out” (pp. 630-631). Tripsas (2009) defines the differences between organizational identity and strategy by arguing that organizational identity refers to the theory of who an organization is, while strategy refers to the theory of what actions an organization might choose to execute. Furthermore Tripsas (2009) suggests that identity in relation to strategy offer promising future research.

In this study we define organizational identity as the collective understanding of an organization’s characteristics by its members as well as external actors. The organizational identity defines what the organization is, where values, goals, social codes, knowledge, skills,
and abilities constitute the core of the organizational identity. In agreement to recent studies (Gioia et al., 2000; Corley, 2004; Wang et al., 2013; Boudreau et al., 2014; Koskinen, 2015) we define organizational identity as a fluid, ongoing process. Organizational identity is connected to the strategies of an organization, and a change in organizational identity can be a part of the strategic thinking, however they are not the same.

2.2 A paradigm shift for IT consultant organizations

IT has evolved from being isolated within a function of an organization to becoming a proactive and strategic resource involving collaborations between multiple organizations (Galliers, 2009). This turn has made IT become an opportunity for value-creation and competitive advantage (Peppard & Ward, 2004; Kohli & Grover, 2008; Galliers, 2009; Grover & Kohli, 2012) and therefore expanded the role of IT within and between organizations (Campbell et al., 2013; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). As a result of this turn the use of IT consultant services through IT outsourcing has increased dramatically during the two latest decades (Yang et al., 2005; Luo & Liberatore, 2009; Magilo & Spohr, 2013; Ko, 2014; Mann et al., 2015). IT outsourcing is defined as the process that occurs when a service provider agrees to maintain all or parts of a client’s IT systems (Li, Jhang-Li & Liu., 2008; Galliers, 2009; Magilo & Spohr, 2013). IT outsourcing therefore enables organizations to focus on their core activities and business objectives while the IT consultant organization manages the IT (Yang et al., 2005). However, when an organization assigns their IT to an IT consultant organization uncertainty may arise, the constantly changing nature of IT environment as well as business environment increase this uncertainty (ibid.). In order to respond to this issue, IT consultant organizations need to create a relationship based on partnership where they integrate with their clients (ibid.).

Changing the relationship between customer and IT consultant organization from a buyer-seller relationship to a relationship based on partnership implies many challenges (ibid.). One of these challenges is a matter of value, in a buyer-seller relationship value is defined based on a value-in-exchange perspective; value emerges when the customer performs an exchange with the vendor (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo, Magilo & Akaka, 2008; Karpen, Bove & Lukas, 2012; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). In a relationship based on partnership value is co-created by the participating parties where the customer determines if value has been obtained (Skålén, Gummerus, von Koskull & Magnusson, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2008; Ford, 2010; Ballantyne, Williams, Aitken, 2011; Karpen et al., 2012; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

The changes in the IT service market illustrated in this section have affected IT consultant organizations who, as a consequence, have been compelled to adapt skill sets, service approaches, and relationships with customers (Gallivan, Truex & Kvasny, 2004; Boudreau et al., 2014). Changes of this comprehensive degree are bound to have impact on the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations.

As presented above existing research articulates how the evolution of IT has resulted in various changes for the IT consultant industry. The section above has described how organizational identity is affected by these kinds of changes and also that organizational identity is connected to strategy. However research distinguishes strategy from
organizational identity and while arguing that the two interrelate with each other, research emphasizes that they are not the same (Tripsas, 2009). Further research concerning the connection of strategy and organizational identity and how they affect each other has been encouraged (ibid.)

3. The strategy-as-practice perspective

In this study we use a strategy-as-practice perspective as a theoretical lens, we adopt this perspective in order to explore the connection between strategy and organizational identity (Tripsas, 2009). By using the strategy-as-practice perspective we aspire to explore the interpretation that organizational identity is not only something an organization has, it is also something that it does. For example an organization can possess certain knowledge or skill sets, but it also executes these possessions in their work processes. An organization can also possess certain social codes, however it also performs these codes in their social activities.

The strategy-as-practice perspective aims to investigate activities within an organization as well as to understand how these activities connect to phenomenon outside of the organization (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006). The practice turn in research has not only occurred in strategy research, the practice perspective has also been established in other fields, such as technology, learning, marketing, accounting as well as institutional change (Whittington, 2006). The practice researches in all of these fields share a united interest in human activity and the interrelationships between activity, actors and society (ibid.). Furthermore the strategy-as-practice perspective argues that strategy is not only a matter of ownership, it is also a matter of activity, in other words; an organization might have a certain strategy, but it also does this strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). “Strategy as practice is thus concerned with the detailed aspects of strategizing; how strategists think, talk, reflect, act, interact, emote, embellish and politicize, what tools and technologies they use, and the implications of different forms of strategizing for strategy as an organizational activity” (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p. 3). By focusing on the humans strategizing, strategy-as-practice enables a broader conceptualization, while other perspectives on strategy tend to focus on a top-down aspect, strategy-as-practice explores other options of who the strategist might be (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

Although the strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on strategies we argue that it may also offer a lens to understand other activities and processes within an organization, such as the management and adaptation of organizational identities. We argue that organizational identities can be understood in the same manner as strategy; an organizational identity is not only something that an organization has, it is also something that it does. As presented in the section above the core of organizational identity consists of values, goals, social codes, knowledge, skills and abilities (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; O’Malley et al., 2014). Thus our aim is that the use of strategy-as-practice as a theoretical lens will grant us the insight that Jarzabkowski (2005) argues that the perspective offers; an insight in the thoughts, conversations, actions and interaction of IT consultant organizations, how they use tools and how they emote, embellish and politicize the organizational identity.
3.1 Defining Strategy-as-practice

The practice perspective origins from social theory as well as management sciences, lately the practice turn has come to be acknowledged in the strategy field (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Arvidsson, Holmström, & Lyytinen 2014). The strategy-as-practice perspective emerged from a growing frustration within the strategic management research, existing strategy theories tended to focus on a few variables and performing an industry level of analysis (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). “With their implicit assumptions of rational choice, they reduce actors to, at best, simplistic figures represented by a few demographic variables that may be questionably linked to firm performance” (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p. 2). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) argue that strategy-as-practice aims to humanize organization and management research. Strategy-as-practice can be understood through the concepts of practices, praxis and practitioners (Figure 1), a conceptual framework that aims to provide different angles of strategy to explore (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2014).

![Diagram](jarzabkowski2007figure1.png)

*Figure 1. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 11*

In the strategy-as-practice perspective practices are defined as the tools and artifacts used when strategizing. Practices consist of planning mechanisms such as budgets, control systems and performance indicators as well as discourse of strategy, tools and techniques for performing strategy. Practices should therefore be understood as mediators between strategic practitioners and strategic praxis. (Jarzabkowski, 2005).

Strategic praxis is defined as daily activities that people actually perform, both when formulating and implementing strategy (Whittington, 2006). Praxis includes not only the formal strategizing that occurs in official meetings and presentations but also the informal such as “a flow of organizational activity that incorporates content and process, intent and emergence, thinking and acting and so on, as reciprocal, intertwined and frequently indistinguishable parts of a whole” (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p. 8-9).
The practitioners acknowledged in the strategy-as-practice perspective refer not only to top management but to all actors that take part in planning, performing and changing strategies (Whittington, 2006). It is in the interaction between people that the strategizing occurs, both between people inside and outside the organization (Jarzabkowski, 2005). The strategy-as-practice perspective aspires to understand the practitioners’ point of view by focusing on how the practitioners perform strategy (ibid.).

3.2 An integrated framework for strategy-as-practice

Strategy-as-practice emphasizes the connection between a micro and macro perspective of strategizing, claiming that micro-actions performed by actors cannot be isolated from the social contexts in which they exist (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Arvidsson et al., 2014). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) illustrate this connection by explaining how social infrastructure (technologies, discourses and tools) has macro properties that enable micro-actions, and these actions might be adapted differently within micro-contexts. However Whittington (2006) argues that research in the practice field tends to separate micro and macro perspectives and focusing on one or the other, ignoring the interrelationship between the levels of micro and macro. Whittington (2006) has responded to this gap by creating an integrated framework for strategy-as-practice where the interrelationships between intra (micro) - and extra (macro)-organizational levels are acknowledged (Figure 2). Whittington (2006) defines his framework as metatheoretical, arguing that the framework offers a coherent whole by connecting different theoretical units and theories about them.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2. Integrating practices, praxis and practitioners (Whittington, 2006, p. 621)**

In his integrated framework for strategy-as-practice, Whittington (2006) separates internal practitioners (A-C) from external practitioners (D), where the internal practitioners
represent actors from within an organization while the external practitioners represent actors that affect the strategizing from the outside, such as customers, inspectors or investors.

Whittington (2006) argues that the practitioners should be regarded as “the critical connection between intra-organizational praxis and organizational and extra-organizational practices that they rely on in this praxis” (p. 620). The practitioners engage in intra-organizational praxis (i-v), such formal meetings and informal communication, Whittington (2006) describes these activities as “artful and improvisatory” (p. 620). While engaging in this praxis the practitioners rely on intra-organizational (1-3) and extra-organizational (4) practices. The intra-organizational practices consist of agreed organizational practices for the particular organization, while the extra-organizational practices exist outside of the organization, such as laws or trends (ibid.).

The timeline of the framework represents that no practice, intra or extra, is permanent, new practices will occur and practitioners will alter existing ones in order to adjust them to praxis. The arrows in the framework represent how practices impact praxis (arrow down), however praxis might change settled practices (arrow up). Whittington (2006) emphasizes that the practitioners are not to be seen as powerless puppets controlled by the practices, rather the practitioners will adapt the practices in their praxis (ibid.).

In this study we draw upon Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice when answering the research question. We argue that Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice offers a framework to explore organizational identity. The framework acknowledges and explains how strategy changes over time, an aspect that we relate to organizational identity and its dynamic nature. We argue that the constructs of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice are wide enough to allow an alternate interpretation were instead of strategy the phenomenon under investigation is organizational identity. The constructs of Whittington's (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice are summarized in the table below (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal practices</td>
<td>Routines and procedures within the organization that affect the strategizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External practices</td>
<td>Systems outside of the organization that affect the strategizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal praxis</td>
<td>Formal meetings and work activities where strategizing is performed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal praxis</td>
<td>Informal communication and work activities concerning strategizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal practitioners</td>
<td>Actors within the organization that take part in the strategizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External practitioners</td>
<td>Actors outside of the organization that take part in the strategizing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Theoretical constructs based on Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice
4. Design of study

To answer the research question we have chosen a qualitative research approach, the qualitative approach aims to investigate behavior, culture as well as society by analyzing and synthesizing the words and actions of people (Bryman, 2008; Hogan, Dolan & Donnelly, 2011). We argue that the choice of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice as a theoretical framework made the use of a qualitative approach rather indisputable since the strategy-as-practice perspective advocates the importance to study the actual activities, communication and reflections of human actors (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2014).

In this study we adopted a single case study approach with an exploratory focus, an approach often used in qualitative research (Gerring, 2007). This approach aims to understand, describe as well as predict a phenomenon, such as an organization, a process or an individual (Gerring, 2007; Woodside, 2010). Furthermore the case study approach investigates the phenomenon within real life context where the borders between phenomenon and context are unclear (Yin, 1994).

4.1 The research case

The research case of this study is one office of a multinational IT consultant organization with several local offices in Sweden. The organization has existed for more than 30 years, it has more than 20,000 employees working at more than 200 offices around the globe. The national headquarter is located in Stockholm, in this study we investigate an office with approximately 50 employees. The multinational nature of the organization is enabling opportunities for co-operation, however it also implies challenges for the organization when it comes to managing and adapting their organizational identity in a coherent manner. The organization has not been isolated from the paradigm shift of IT consultant organizations illustrated in previous sections. Like other IT consultant organizations the organization of this study faces the challenge of managing and adapting their organizational identity to the new structures established by IT. The organization has a tradition of offering resource consultants to customers, however due to the rapidly changing market of IT consultant organizations, the organization is continuously introducing new services in order to keep up with new customer demands. Furthermore the organization is evolving their relationship with customers aiming for a relationship based on partnership. The challenging situation of the organization makes it an interesting case to investigate in order to gain a deeper understanding of how IT consultant organizations manage and adapt their organizational identity and to define challenges associated with this process.

The scope of this study is restricted by focusing exclusively on one local office of the case organization, aiming to gain an understanding of the micro perspective of the organization’s organizational identity. In our study we also aim to gain an understanding of how the micro perspective interrelates to the macro perspective. We do this by asking the respondents of our study to reflect upon how they and their activities are affected by the structures managed by the headquarters, as well as how the headquarter is affected by them. Due to time constraints we have not been able to follow up our interviews with observations in order to investigate if the respondents’ perceptions of their activities co-relate with the activities that
are actually performed. However we argue that by interviewing respondents from different levels we gained an understanding of the discrepancy of the respondents’ perceptions of activities and actually performed activities. By investigating how the organization manages and adapts their organizational identity we aim to provide the organization with insights of the opportunities and challenges it faces.

4.2 Data collection
Collecting our data we performed six in-depth qualitative interviews, the interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility and detail (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative research interviews aim to understand the world from its respondents’ perspective and to generate meaning from their experiences (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The respondents in our study were selected with the research question in mind through a goal-oriented sampling strategy (Table 2) (Bryman, 2008). We chose to perform interviews with respondents from all three levels of the office in order to broaden the result (ibid.), as well as to acknowledge the encouragement from the strategy-as-practice perspective to not only focus on top management (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The three selected levels were delivery, operation and management. The interview guide was created based on the constructs of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework.

In order to protect the integrity of our respondents we applied the Swedish research council’s ethical principles for scientific research: the information demand, the consent demand, the confidentiality demand, and the usage demand (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.). These ethical principles were explained to and approved of by the respondents prior to each interview. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the respondents, the interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes and were later transcribed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional position</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project manager &amp; team leader</td>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Respondent A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project manager &amp; UX designer</td>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>Respondent B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director consultant</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Respondent C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project manager &amp; administration manager</td>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Respondent D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant, tech architect</td>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>Respondent E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant manager</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Respondent F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. List of respondents

4.3 Data analysis
In order to analyze the collected data we chose to use qualitative content analysis, a systematic method for analyzing and interpreting texts (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Lundman & Hällgren-Graneheim, 2012). Qualitative content analysis emphasizes focus on identifying differences and similarities within texts in order to interpret the material on different levels
(Frejes & Thornberg, 2009; Lundman & Hällgren-Graneheim, 2012). The challenge of conducting a qualitative content analysis is creating meaning from a large amount of data, the benefits of the method are that it allows the researcher to sort between the significant and the mundane and thus finding patterns (Frejes & Thornberg, 2009). The aim of qualitative content analysis is to summarize data into codes in order to divide the data into content-related categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Our qualitative content analysis followed five steps; step one involved making the data available for analysis by transcribing the recorded interviews (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). During the second step we carefully read the transcribed interviews with the Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice in mind, in order to identify units of meaning. These units of meaning were in step three condensed, without losing their essential meaning. In step four we provided these condensed meanings with a code describing the content of each unit of meaning (Lundman & Hällgren-Graneheim, 2012). The last and fifth step during data analysis was merging the codes into categories. Due to the use of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice as a theoretical framework we performed a deductive approach of analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Lundman & Hällgren-Graneheim, 2012) where the categories emerged from the constructs of the framework. Therefore the core aspects of organizational identity (values, goals, social codes, knowledge, skills, and abilities) were manifested in the constructs of Whittington’s framework (Table 3).

When the data analysis was completed the categories were divided into three themes in order to create a coherent thread in our argument (Lundman & Hällgren-Graneheim, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>Internal practices</td>
<td>Internal routines, procedures, values, goal and visions within the organization that affect the organizational identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External practices</td>
<td>External structures and systems outside of the organization that affect the organizational identity, such as demands set by customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>Formal praxis</td>
<td>Formal work activities that affect the organizational identity, such as performed activities that demand knowledge, skills and abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal praxis</td>
<td>Informal work activities that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>Internal practitioners</td>
<td>Actors within the organization that affect the organizational identity and possess knowledge, skills and abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External practitioners</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actors outside of the organization that affect the organizational identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Compilation of categories and themes*

### 4.4 Method discussion

When performing a case study there is one major criticism to address: the result cannot be statistically generalized to the whole population. However this is not the objective of qualitative case studies, rather it is to probe theory (Woodside, 2010) and to generalize these theories, not to achieve statistical generalization (Yin, 1994). Moreover, phenomena of a certain case study might be diffused across other fields and contexts and the results in one context can be used to inform and compare other contexts (Bourdeau et al., 2014).

Focusing on the organizational identity of one office of a large multinational organization gives our study a micro perspective where actual day-to-day activities are investigated (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Peppard, Galliers & Thorogood, 2014). By using Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice macro perspectives such as external practices and external practitioners were also acknowledged. However a deeper understanding of these external aspects would have been gained had we included external respondents in our study. Unfortunately we were prevented to widen our respondent selection due to a strict time limit. Despite this we argue that by including both internal as well as external aspects of organizational identity in the interview guide we encouraged our respondents to reflect on a micro as well as macro perspective, enabling us to investigate all aspects of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice.

When it comes to data analysis the use of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice provided us with the categories for data analysis, and the use of a different framework might have affected our results. It is also important to acknowledge that the choice of qualitative content analysis involves an interpretive process, meaning that the researcher’s analytical competence and personal history will affect the results of the study (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Another factor affecting the study was the potential language barrier due to the study being written in English while the interviews were held in Swedish, however we argue that
the choice enriched the data because this prevented insecurity and other barriers for the respondents if the interviews would have been performed in English.

5. Findings

When performing our interviews we explained our interpretation of the term organizational identity to the respondents in order to enable a conversation where everyone involved were on the same level of interpretation. As presented above the data was divided into categories based on the six constructs of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice. Instead of examining how an organization does strategy we examined how an organization does organizational identity. As already presented organizational identity is often mistaken for strategy and vice versa, and while the two interrelate we remind the reader that strategy and organizational identity are not the same. Organizational identity refers to whom an organization is while, strategy refers to what an organization does, which means that an organization’s identity might be expressed through its strategy.

As already mentioned we divided the categories into three themes to ensure a line of argument as well as to enable a coherent presentation of our findings. In this section we present the findings of our study and the respondents reflections about the organizational identity of their organization. The nature of integration in the theoretical framework used in this study will be palpable through the presentation of our findings, the interrelationships between practices, praxis and practitioners will be acknowledged in the last part of this section and further discussed in section 6.

5.1 Practices

During the interviews the respondents were asked to define and reflect upon internal as well as external practices of organizational identity. In this section we illustrate the respondents’ reflections about the explicit values and visions set by the headquarter of the organization, as well as demands, expectations and structures set by actors outside of the organization.

5.1.1 Internal practices

Reflecting upon values and visions within the organization all of the respondents expressed knowledge about company values, although most of the respondents expressed different values and visions. Two respondents, one of them representing management, pointed to one value more important than others, “above all to deliver commitment (...) we always give 110% when we work with something” (Respondent B) and “in our value vocabulary we have something that is incredibly important to us, and that is commitment” (Respondent F). The other respondent from management also provided a clear answer arguing that the organization stood for values that others might not stand for since it is engaged in society, supporting events outside of its industry. However remaining respondents gave general descriptions of different values and visions, mainly acknowledged that there are a lot of different values. The respondents agreed that these values and visions originate from the headquarter, whose “values spreads within the company and are used as a foundation methodology” (Respondent C). Respondent A and E agreed and confirmed that the headquarter had an idea right from the start concerning identity, and that the headquarter
tries to strongly influence the whole organization in order to build on a winning concept. Furthermore it was argued by Respondent A that the headquarter is extremely concrete concerning what they want.

Asking more about strategies concerning organizational identity within the organization, a majority of respondents referred to a framework consisting of values and instructions on how to act and what to do (hereafter referred to as the The framework): “it [the strategy] is controlled from the owners and everything is documented in The framework, you could say it is like our bible” (Respondent C). Respondents D and E referred to The framework as a big map of different processes, a bundle of best practices and a book of wisdom. One of the respondents from management reflected over the reason of The framework, emphasizing that the organization is a value guided organization with a clear belief that everything is connected, “everything is like a circle” (Respondent F). Another respondent agreed and stated that The framework is their whole identity.

Finally we asked our respondents about whether there was a need or wish to change the organizational identity, and answers differed. Half of the respondents believed that there was no need to change the identity. One respondent argued that the organization was set in its visions, while another respondent expressed that the organization already has the image that they want it to have. However, two respondents argued that identity is an ongoing process, believing it is a work in progress.

### 5.1.2 External practices

We asked our respondents to reflect on whether the industry has changed over time and all of our respondents agreed that the industry has turned radially and that it will continue to change. Furthermore all the respondents stressed the need to adapt to these changes. Respondent D pointed out how IT is advancing everywhere and said that there is no return. Respondent A believed that the industry was evolving to becoming a staffing industry instead of what they used to stand for, which was expert competency. Furthermore Respondent A argued that a lot of processes are about to change, that making business deals no longer is confined to a meeting between two people. Respondent B made a clear statement saying that “if you are not focused on the end-user then you will be dead as a dinosaur within five years”. Respondent F concurred, claiming that organizations cannot survive with only resource consultants. Respondent A also reflected upon the future of the industry saying that it will be hard to be traditional much longer, arguing that all industries have to adapt. What all respondents emphasize above was summarized by Respondent E: “a lot of people must rethink, you cannot work the way you used to, and a lot of peoples’ bubbles will burst in the near future”.

Another factor that affected the industry is the customers, we asked the respondents about whether customer-demands are changing and if so, how. Respondents agreed that customers expect more today, such as more fixed prices, more commitment and more personalized and adapted services. Respondent F reflected over these changed demands and gave an explanation: more mature customers. Respondent B highlighted that:

> Since the iPhone came customers have been more and more aware that technology actually can be simple! It’s not like before when you could release
anything to the customer and they would agree, now it has to keep a certain user quality. That is the big difference! (Respondent B)

The findings show that the local office of the research case is controlled by rules and guidelines set by headquarter, something that has a deep impact on the organizational identity of the local office. Furthermore the organizational identity of the office is affected by external practices such as an ongoing change in the market, which has resulted in new customer demands. The major discovery regarding practices of organizational identity is that a majority of respondents believe that the organizational identity is in no need of change, however all respondents agree that the industry is changing radically and that the organization needs to change with it. Respondents seem to believe that the organizational identity is not affected by the change of processes, routines and strategies.

5.2 Praxis

When talking about internal and external practices the respondents were asked to reflect upon how these practices affect the praxis of managing and adapting organizational identity. The formal praxis of organizational identity refers to explicit praxis performed by the respondents while the informal praxis refers to unspoken actions and reflections.

5.2.1 Formal praxis

During the interviews we asked our respondents how the internal as well as external practices affected their daily work procedures. One topic that seemed to generate a lot of thought and reflection was The framework and how it affected the organizational identity. Respondent B firmly stated that processes in The framework were mandatory, an argument agreed upon by Respondent C who said that if The framework was not followed, they were not doing their job. Some respondents expressed challenges associated with The framework, arguing that it feels quite extensive and results in a lot of paperwork in small projects and by that means can be a barrier. However it was further elaborated and argued that the paperwork might come in handy during difficulties within a project. Management defended The framework and explained that even though the structure is massive, the purpose of The framework is meant to enable a value-adding leadership and a support for the employees. The respondents also emphasized that although The framework affected how organizational identity was managed it was also required of them to adapt the praxis in order for it to fit the local market and the particular context for each customer:

The framework should be regarded as a toolbox and we need to interpret the meaning behind it. What is true in India is not necessarily true in Sweden or in any other country. You need to adapt these procedures to something that the customers HERE understand, or that the employees understand (Respondent C)

Respondent D emphasized the importance of a local office to be allowed to make its own decisions based on its own contexts. These reflections were agreed upon by Respondent F who explained that different cultures do business in different ways:
It wouldn’t work if the headquarter said that we should do it a certain way, it would not fit. (...) Still we need to lead with organization’s visions in mind (...) it is easy to become local, and we are supposed to be, but we need to be local from the perspective of the organization. That is one of our strengths, we are the small company with a huge fund of structure behind us (Respondent F)

When it came to external practices of organizational identity Respondent B and C argued that delivering their own products as a complement of delivering IT related services affected the organizational identity in a positive way. Respondent C explained that offering their own products to the market, made the organization an unusually wide IT consultant organization. All of the respondents expressed similar reflections upon how external practices affected the praxis of organizational identity and they were forced to adapt their praxis based on this. The respondents expressed coherent reflections about how the changes in the customers’ expectations affected how the organization should do business, and thereby also the organizational identity: “I think that something entirely different is required in the future if we are going to be able to make it” (Respondent A), and: “The most important is the customers, that we know what the customers want. (...) We need to focus on the changed requirements that the customers are demanding, we need to get better at following the customers’ wishes” (Respondent C). Respondents C and E expressed challenges associated with the changes in customer demands, saying that it makes them have to work harder with more quality, which in turn requires more testing that takes more time.

Even though there were challenges associated with managing and adapting the praxis of organizational identity in order to fit the customers’ requirements, Respondent D expressed how some processes had become more easy “now we need to keep a dialogue [with the customer](....) earlier we almost fought each other, now it is more collaboration”. Respondent A further reflected on the fact that the collaboration with customers had affected the role of the project leader. The respondent explained that in this new kind of relationship based on partnership the project leader role had become more fluent. This change affects the organizational identity since it changes how internal practitioners title themselves; who they are. It also changes their work activities and what external practitioners expect of them.

5.2.2 Informal praxis
During the interviews the respondents expressed informal opinions and reflections about how they and their colleagues adapt praxis when managing the organization identity. Some of the respondents from operation and delivery referred to the organization’s values and visions as empty words that did not affect the organizational identity. One respondent elaborated and argued that values and visions seemed to be common in many organizations and that they existed without any actual reason. One of the respondents explained that the management talked about values and visions but was not certain how many actually listened. The respondent referred to the values and visions as corporate bullshit and explained that after a while in the business everybody knew that values and visions always changed. Respondent F reflected upon the reason for why the internal practices of organizational identity were not carried out into praxis by everybody within the organization: “You get caught in your job and your everyday routines with a high workload a lot of times. You do
not always have the energy to take it all in”. Respondent A reflected upon the number of employees within the organization arguing that a shared vision or target established by actors outside of the local office were difficult to apply in praxis. Respondent E argued that the internal practices for organizational identity were nothing new, that the values and visions established were common sense, Respondent E had always worked in such a manner: “Most of the times you deliver in the same way as before, it’s in the backbone, I am not sitting down to read documents and remember all the things in it. It is an established routine, it is not a big deal”.

Even though many respondents expressed familiarity with internal practices, it is evident that praxis is managed and adapted to local context and that headquarter encouraged this adaptment. However the findings acknowledged challenges with this adaptment: the organization needed to act based on the local context while still keeping the organizational identity established by headquarter. Furthermore the findings show that while the respondents acknowledged The framework as a foundation of their organizational identity and that it directly affected how they managed and adapted their praxis of organizational identity, they also indicated an informal praxis where this was ignored. The organizational identity established by headquarter was referred to as both empty words and corporate bullshit that did not affect the organizational identity of the local office. This finding indicates that the local office of this case study through their micro-level actions had established their own local organizational identity.

5.3 Practitioners

In the section below the respondents reflections upon the people that participate in managing and adapting the organizational identity are presented. During our interviews we asked the respondents to define who affected internal as well as external practices of organizational identity and who performed the praxis of organizational identity.

5.3.1 Internal practitioners

When talking about the internal practitioners and how they affected the management and adaptation of organizational identity some of our respondents reflected on how their colleagues affected their own perception of the organizational identity as well as the customers’. The respondents agreed that the internal practitioners affected the organizational identity and two respondents emphasized that a lot depends on the people you have around you, good colleagues and a good flow were two reasons for why the respondent wanted to work for the organization. Respondent B elaborated by emphasizing the importance of recruiting the right people; “we cannot hire just to get more people, it needs to fit, that is a part of the identity and the culture. Then we know that the people we are sending to our customers are great and capable”.

Respondent F, representing management, also emphasized the importance of internal participants being satisfied, and how dissatisfaction affected the organizational identity since dissatisfied employees most likely would not speak well of the organization, resulting in fewer customers. Respondent E agreed with this opinion, saying that the colleagues were one of the main values of the organization. Furthermore Respondent F explained that the organization
conducts annual polls and interviews in order to measure the employee satisfaction and the perception of the organizational identity, arguing that “I can feel if you are with us or not”.

When asked about the responsibility of managing and adapting the organizational identity all of the respondents shared the opinion that the responsibility belonged to everybody within the organization. It was emphasized that one part of the consultants’ job descriptions was to be ambassadors for the organization and promoting the organization to the customers. However, in contradiction to this, Respondents C, E and F agreed that the managers should carry a bigger responsibility than other employees. Respondent F, from management, elaborated this opinion:

Everyone has a responsibility but obviously the biggest responsibility falls upon us leaders. We need to communicate how we should prioritize and how important it [managing and adapting the organizational identity] is. It is us [the leaders] that have the biggest opportunity to get into it [the organizational identity] and to create an understanding. To get it all the way from the founder to everybody, what we are, what our dream is and our vision. How this is connected to why we are measured as we are and what the thought behind it is (Respondent F)

Some of the respondents reflected upon the challenges of being an organization offering IT consultant services where some of the consultants remained with the customer during a long period of time. Respondent B reflected upon the question; “if you are a resource consultant you do not work at the office, how do we get them to feel that they belong to this organization when they are with a customer?”

None of the respondents believed that all of the internal participants shared the same perception of the organizational identity. Respondent C believed that the perceptions of the organizational identity differed between countries as well as between cities. Respondent F explained how the organization is working towards a coherent perception of the organizational identity while in the same time also acknowledging the impact of context. Respondent D argued that there was a connection between a coherent perception of organizational identity and the amount of employees, claiming that it is harder for a large organization to “keep it all together”.

5.3.2 External practitioners

When asked about how they think external actors perceive the organizational identity many of the respondents described a shift that the organization is going through where the perceived organizational identity has begun to change over time. Respondent F argued that the organization is still quite anonymous on the local market and that the average citizen does not know about the organization’s existence. Respondent D claimed that the organization has made itself more present on the local market, going from being unheard of to establishing an identity of being progressive, “it has been a bit of an identity problem for me, working at a company that does not exist, now it feels better for me to tell people where I work”. Respondent C reflected on the consequences of being unknown by external actors,
explaining that they are keen that potential employees should think of the organization as a good place to work.

During the interviews the respondents were also asked to reflect upon how they thought that external stakeholders such as customers perceived the organizational identity. Respondent B believed that customers had positive perceptions of the organization, referring to a high score of customer satisfaction. Respondent D believed that the customers perceived the organization as experts, making the customers feel safe. Many of the respondents referred to the size of the organization, arguing that a part of the perceived organizational identity was that customers thought of the company as large, settled and reliable. Respondent D argued that this perception was important to the organization, claiming that the organization would not have been assigned large contracts, had it been perceived as a small company. When asked about the perception of external actors Respondent B, being recently recruited to the organization, described the change from being an external practitioner to becoming an internal: “Before I started working here I regarded the company as a monolith, boring IT with old people that could not think in new ways”.

Reflecting upon the external practitioners’ perceptions of the organization, Respondent F described this as a crucial aspect since how customers and shareholders perceive the organization will determine whether or not they will stay with the organization. Respondent E reflected upon the relationship between the organization and the customers, arguing the importance to avoid a feeling of “us versus them (...) the customers are becoming better at expressing their requirements, the customers have become more professional”. Respondent E connected the customers’ perceptions of organizational identity to employees’ perceptions, arguing that the way external actors perceive the organization will make the employees feel more or less proud, affecting how they perceive themselves.

The findings show that practitioners are an important part of organizational identity, which in turn indicates that identity is something an organization does, not only something they have. Important to point out here is the contradiction of responsibility concerning organizational identity; all respondents emphasized that managing and adapting organizational identity were everybody’s responsibility. However half of the respondents also expressed a belief that in the end it was the responsibility of management. One major challenge when managing and adapting organizational identity found here is the discovery that internal practitioners do not share the same perception of the organizational identity. Another important finding is the effect external practitioners have on the organizational identity.

5.4 Summary

The findings of our study showed that the organizational identity of the case unit (a local office of a multinational IT consultant organization) was under challenge due to ongoing changes of the IT consultant market, which affected the demands of customers. Furthermore the findings indicated challenges in finding a balance between respecting the organizational identity established by headquarter (The framework) and adapting the organizational identity to fit the local context.
The results of our study confirmed the interrelationships between the aspects of practices, praxis and practitioners that Whittington (2006) defines in his integrated framework. That not only internal but also external practitioners participate in managing and adapting the organizational identity. Also that while internal as well as external practices affect praxis it is also the other way around since changes of praxis over time might result in altered practices. In the section below we will discuss the findings of this study, presenting implications for research and practice.

6. Discussion

The purpose of our study was to investigate how the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations is affected by the turbulent market that the IT evolution has resulted in. The evolution of IT has enabled faster communication and new kinds of business processes, affecting social, economic and political structures (Merali et al., 2012). This turn has brought opportunities to the IT consultant industry since IT services are one of the fastest-growing sectors in the service field (Eikebrokk & Iden, 2015). However it has also resulted in challenges for IT consultant organizations due to fundamental changes in the market. In order to investigate these challenges this study set out to understand the organizational identity of IT consultant organizations, aiming to address the following question: How do IT consultant organizations manage and adapt their organizational identity? Our study aspires to contribute to the research field of organizational identity. The study also aims to offer an insight to IT consultant organizations by suggesting that organizational identity can be interpreted as something their organizations do and that organizational identity is connected to their strategy. Our study has investigated a local office of a multinational IT consultant organization, making it a single case study where the results cannot be statistically generalized, however the findings of our study can be used to generalize theory.

The findings of our study show that the case unit manages and adapts their organizational identity by balancing requirements established by headquarter and demands set by customers on their local market. Through this finding we acknowledge three major discoveries: Firstly, the IT evolution has fundamentally influenced external practices and participators on the local market of the unit. Second, these changes have affected internal practices as well as praxis for the unit. Finally this has resulted in the unit struggling with a number of challenges when managing and adapting their organizational identity.

In our study respondents highlighted several challenges following the evolution of IT. It was emphasized that the changing market means that IT consultant organizations have to change since customers are becoming more understanding and knowledgeable of IT. This means that roles have to change and relationships between organizations and customers are affected, arguments, which are confirmed by existing research (Tripsas, 2009; Boudreau et al., 2014). As presented in a section above this change leads to a turn where value is considered to be co-created by providers and customers together (Skålén, Gummerus, von Koskull & Magnusson, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2008; Ford, 2010; Ballantyne, Williams, Aitken, 2011; Karpen et al., 2012; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). As illustrated in our findings this affects the organizational identity of the case unit,
making it manage and adapt their organizational identity in order to fit the new kind of relationship with their customers.

Our study showed that the case unit is aware that new trends and demands are important to acknowledge in order to keep up with the development, and that it has to change its activities due to this change. However a majority of the respondents expressed a belief that while they had to change their activities, the organizational identity was not in need of changing. We find this contradictory and argue that adapting to a new market and making major alterations in activities involve altering the organizational identity. We connect this finding with Gioia et al. (2000) and their argument that organizations must change in order to preserve their identity. The authors define this concept as paradoxical and further argue that organizational identity “is not, and indeed cannot be, enduring in any strict sense, even though it apparently retains continuity in its essential features” (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 65).

This finding further indicates an explanation of the discrepancy in research of organizational identity, where some researchers argue that organizational identity is static and unchanging, while others disagree and argue that they are dynamic and fluid (Gioia et al., 2000; Corley, 2004; Wang et al., 2013; Boudreau et al., 2014; Koskinen, 2015). Furthermore this finding emphasizes the interrelationship of organizational identity and strategy argued by Tripsas (2009). Our findings suggest that the respondents did not connect organizational identity to strategy and therefore while encouraging changes in their strategy they were reluctant to change their organizational identity. However we discovered that the respondents from management level tended to be more interested in and take more responsibility for organizational identity than respondents from delivery and operations. We argue that this finding connects to the already mentioned interrelationship between organizational identity and strategy. Strategy is traditionally considered as a task for management (Galliers & Leidner, 2009), we argue that since organizational identity is often regarded as strategy, individuals within an organization might reflect on questions regarding organizational identity as the management’s responsibility.

Another challenge for the case unit that was evident in our study is that the respondents did not mention the same values and visions for their organization, two core elements of organizational identity (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; O’Malley et al., 2014). We argue that this discrepancy emerges from the respondents acknowledging both values and visions established by headquarter as well as values and visions set by themselves and their colleagues at their local office. The respondents representing the case unit described how while they were controlled by the internal practices set by headquarter they adapted their praxis to fit their local context. This finding agrees both with the concept of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice as well as in research concerning organizational identity, where Pratt and Foreman (2000) argue that while organizational identity affects the behavior of individuals, the behavior of individuals might also affect organizational identity. We argue that our findings indicate the possibility of having multiple organizational identities since our study shows that the case unit was balancing organizational identity established by headquarter and identity founded by themselves, which was based on the demands of their local context. Respondents also expressed a belief that internal practitioners of the organization had differing ideas about the organizational
identity, both in terms of national and international levels. Pratt and Foreman (2000) strengthen this argument by explaining that the answer to the question who are we? Is usually not a single answer, “within any single entity there may exist multiple answers and multiple identities” (Pratt & Foreman, 2000, p. 18). Moreover Chelliah et al. (2015) point out that a convincing majority of consulting organizations show multiple identities, making ambiguous statements as a consequence of intangible services.

Another challenge distinguishable in our findings is that external image is viewed as important for the organizational identity, the respondents wanted to believe that external practitioners have positive perceptions of the organization, and that their organizational identity is being regarded as good, secure and stable. Gioia et al. (2000) confirm this finding in their argument that external image is important to identity, because if a comparison between the two perceptions show no discrepancy there is no need for change. In other words: “that the way “we see ourselves” corresponds with how “others see us” - then identity is affirmed, and no apparent need for change exists” (p. 68). Our study shows that the respondents from the case unit were striving to reach this unity of internal and external image, while also acknowledging that this was a continuous process since the requirements and wishes of the customers would always continue to evolve.

All of the challenges illustrated above demonstrate the complexity for IT consultant organizations when managing and adapting their organizational identity. As demonstrated in this study, the concept of identity is complicated and multi-layered. As emphasized in existing research changing organizational identity is difficult due to the intertwined concept of identity within values, goals, social codes, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Tripsas, 2009; O’Malley et al., 2014). However, research also stresses that organizational identity is crucial to acknowledge since it affects organizational guidance, stability and therefore ultimately the organization’s survival (Boudreau et al., 2014; O’Malley et al., 2014). Our findings encourage the idea of an organization being able to execute multiple organizational identities, a finding we argue should be of interest for the field of organizational identity as well as for IT consultant organizations struggling to manage and adapt their organizational identity in a constantly changing market.

When reviewing existing literature within the research field we did not encounter any study that had used the strategy-as-practice perspective when investigating organizational identity. This circumstance brought challenges since we did not have any preconceptions of how the framework would suit our study. However our attempt to use the strategy-as-practice perspective when investigating organizational identity enabled possibilities of a genuine contribution to research. The major discovery concerning the use of Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice in an organizational identity context is that the processes of organizational identity is similar to strategy in many ways. In the same manner as strategy, organizational identity can be understood by investigating activities performed by actors within an organization and connecting these activities to phenomena outside the organization. Based on the results of our study we argue that the strategy-as-practice perspective in general and Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice in particular is a well-suited framework for investigating the organizational identity of an IT consultant organization.
7. Conclusion

The main contributions of this study are summarized in the following conclusions: In regard to the research question the findings of our study indicate that IT consultant organizations manage and adapt their organizational identities by adjusting their internal work procedures and customer relationships to fit changes in the market and in customer demands. Furthermore our study demonstrates how the case unit struggled to balance the organizational identity established by the headquarter and the local organizational identities established by themselves. The findings also show that the respondents within the case unit did not share the same perception of their organizational identity. These findings indicate the possibility of multiple organizational identities. Furthermore our study acknowledged a number of challenges for IT consultant organizations associated with managing and adapting the organizational identity.

The strategy-as-practice perspective in general and Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework for strategy-as-practice in particular proved to be a suiting theoretical framework when investigating organizational identity. The use of this framework in our study shows that by interpreting organizational identity as something an organization does, a distinct connection between organizational identity and strategy can be confirmed. Furthermore the use of Whittington’s framework demonstrated an interrelationship between practices, praxis and practitioners in organizational identity. Based on our findings we recommend the usage of the strategy-as-practice perspective in general and Whittington’s (2006) integrated framework in particular when investigating organizational identity.

Furthermore we recommend future research to further study the concept of multiple organizational identities. Moreover, we recommend a deeper investigation of the interrelationship between organizational identity and strategy. Due to time constraints this study was not able to investigate this further, we argue that a study focusing mainly on this interrelationship might discover interesting insights that would have implications for research as well as practice. The time constraints also affected the possibility of performing observations in combination with the interviews in order to strengthen the findings. Therefore we suggest that future research combine these two data collection methods when studying organizational identity to investigate both the perceptions of activities as well as actually performed activities.
References


