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Understanding Organizational Identity in UK Charities

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by Mark Ward

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Understanding Organizational Identity in UK charities
Mark Ward

Abstract

There is a great deal of academic research around the topic of organizational identity in a corporate setting and an increasing level of interest in the area amongst practitioners. This study considers an under-researched area of identity scholarship in the UK charitable sector, specifically the degree to which internal stakeholders (employees) in two small to medium-sized UK charities, share an internally common understanding of organizational identity. An explicitly internal organizational perspective is explored to illuminate the communicated perceptions of employees in the participating organizations.

A qualitative methodology was employed, using sixteen in-depth, one-to-one, unstructured interviews with a purposive sample of employees from the two organizations. Interview data is explored via a thematic template comprising codes emerging concurrently with analysis. Secondary data is provided to add depth to research discussion and conclusions.

Findings indicated some interesting features in the ways that particular groups of UK charity employees understand organizational identity. Managers and non-managers expressed a broadly consistent group of themes, in articulating their understanding of organizational identity. One participating organization had a more internally-diverse understanding of identity than the other, which might suggest links between organizational

performance and understanding organizational identity. Employees with less than two years' service expressed their understanding in a clearly distinct manner from employees with long service.

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the study in terms of generalizability, the researcher proposes areas, around which practitioners might focus their efforts to develop, or improve, a shared understanding of organizational identity in their workforce, including induction and internal communication.

Understanding of organizational identity for UK charity employees is notably under-researched. This study makes a number of contributions to the field of academic knowledge: directly addressing a deficiency in the existing topic literature; making some observations on methodology; highlighting areas of interest for future scholarly activity; and suggesting areas of focus for practitioners, around approaches to managing organizational identity.

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Summary of Portfolio

The DBA has provided an introduction to doctoral-level thinking; rich and
diverse subject matter and a range of new skills and knowledge, which have
informed and actively directed the development of the major research
project. A background in different business disciplines was provided through
a range of action learning modules, including Corporate Public Affairs; Global
Business Issues; and International Markets & Marketing. The Corporate
Public Affairs module specifically offered an introduction to the related
concepts of organizational identity and reputation, which prompted and
directly informed the topic of the major research project.

Early in the DBA programme, a Personal & Professional Review was
completed, which provided an opportunity to develop key critical and
reflective skills, through consideration of prior professional and academic
experience. The module built an increased level of critical self-awareness
and supported the researcher reflexivity required to complete the major
research project.

Critical elements of the developmental process, in terms of doctoral study,
were the modules on Research Methods for Business Administration. They
provided rich contextual background to the approaches and techniques
required in doctoral research, whilst providing a further opportunity to explore
personal preferences, or strengths, linked to epistemological underpinning

and learning styles. These modules directly led to the development of a formal and assessed research proposal, which was the basis for the major research project.

At various stages in the DBA programme, there has been the opportunity to present on-going or completed work. Presentations have been delivered informally to colleagues, and formally at Research Colloquia. Such opportunities to assess one's own development with peers and 'test' ideas under development have aided greatly in the development of doctoral thinking.

Annual Progress Reviews provided opportunities to consider and reflect on the prior year's learning, whilst focusing attention on the next steps in the doctoral process. Support from programme staff, during reviews, has enabled consistent progress and a planned development process.

Ultimately, the action learning sets offered a range of topic areas to inspire, or inform, the major research project; the personal and professional review, annual progress reviews and presentations provided experience in and opportunities to use reflective skills acquired (Rowland & Hall, 2010); and the research methods module provided the philosophical underpinning and technical knowledge required to deliver the major research project.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

In the UK, a heterogeneous group of organizations exist, which are variously described as charities, not-for-profits, social enterprises, voluntary organizations, etc. Such organizations can and do take a range of legal forms (e.g. unincorporated charity, company limited by guarantee, community interest company, etc.) Despite the diversity, even in basic structure, UK Governmental policy tends to view these organizations as broadly homogeneous. This approach led to the creation of the Office for Civil Society, which has responsibility for charities, social enterprises and voluntary organizations within the Cabinet Office.

The Charity Commission (which regulates registered charities in England and Wales) stated that there were 180,000 charities registered in England and Wales, in 2010, and thousands of small charities, not required to register, as they are below the income threshold of £5,000 per annum (http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/media/92517/mp_factsheet2.pdf). In the same year, the total income to registered UK charities was £52.5 billion; 850,000 people acted as charity trustees; there were 780,000 paid staff; and a further 2.7million volunteers, across the sector.

Whilst the heterogeneous nature of the charity sector is apparent, there are some common factors, which might enable a broad understanding of the field:

- They do not distribute profits to shareholders;

- Positive financial performance is a means by which to further the organization's key purpose, not an end in itself;

- Charity Directors are (in the vast majority) unremunerated volunteers; and

- Incoming resources can be less tangible in the sector, i.e. not simply money and raw materials but volunteers, pro-bono support, time, in-kind contributions.

Many modern third sector organizations operate in a very similar fashion to for-profit businesses. Similar staffing and management structures are used; traditional business methodologies are in place; and financial planning, reporting and efficiency are rigorously utilised. Larger UK charities are generally structured as companies, as well as charities, which requires reporting to Companies House but offers a range of benefits to the organization, such as limited liability for Directors.

The researcher has been a Chief Executive of three different UK charities, over the past 12 years. There are two UK charities participating in the research and the researcher is Chief Executive of one organization (MSSTT) and has historically been Chief Executive of the other (NCRC).

1.2 Specific purpose of the research

Given the large number of staff employed in UK charities

(780,000 paid staff and 2.7million volunteers - http://www.charity-

commission.gov.uk/Library/About_us/mp_factsheet2.pdf) and the increasing

tendency to operate in a similar manner to for-profit corporations (as

described above), charity managers should consider how they might better

understand and potentially influence employee behaviours and practices.

There is evidence that work-based research can positively impact the

performance of organizations (Raelin, 2008) and equally, that research,

reflexively led by company 'insiders', can have a beneficial effect on practice

(Nixon, 2008).

There is anecdotal evidence, reported to the researcher over many years,

that managers in UK charities might understand their organizations' identities

differently to non-managers. Whilst the field of identity studies in a corporate

setting is one of considerable scale and there is a lack of agreement around

common terminology (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Olins, 1978, van Riel & Balmer,

1997), the researcher was particularly interested in exploring the concept of

organizational identity in UK charities. Organizational identity has been

defined in many ways, by a variety of scholars. However, the researcher

chose to rely on the definition offered by Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten

(2006, p.102), who suggest that employees describe the identity of their

organization as "who [we are] as an organization".

There is a significant body of academic literature around the broad topic of

organizational identity and a strong inference, linking positive organizational performance to shared understanding of organizational identity (e.g. Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fryxell & Wang, 1994). The study explored the degree to which internal stakeholders in UK charities (employees) exhibit commonality in their understanding of organizational identity and suggests associations between that shared understanding and organizational performance.

1.3 Overview of adopted approach

The study draws on the individual perceptual understanding of staff members in the two participating organizations to gain some understanding of their collective sense-making and an appropriate approach and methodology has therefore been selected, "what one wants to learn suggests how one should go about it" (Trauth, 2001, p. 4).

The study aims to articulate the meanings that research subjects attribute to their understanding of organizational identity, to better understand and illuminate the process by which internal stakeholders 'make sense' of their organization. The researcher adopted an interpretive stance and a social constructionist paradigmatic approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), rejecting the notion that there is some absolute truth to be found but rather, valuing the contribution to understanding, which might be derived through learning from the meanings that participants express in their own terms. It is acknowledged that the interaction between researcher and research subject

must also have some effect on the research. Indeed, any findings must be the result of collective generation of meaning between researcher and research subject (Crotty, 1998, p.58) and therefore, the study is informed by the reflexivity of the researcher.

The research took the form of in-depth, one-to-one interviews with a range of staff from across the participating organizations, exploring individual participants' understanding of organizational identity at length. Interviews were unstructured, enabling participants to direct the discourse to a great degree, although the researcher utilized prompts, probes and checks (Denscombe, 2010) to maintain the flow and elicit clarification, as required. As a secondary line of investigation, participants were asked to briefly consider the usefulness, or appropriateness, of various personification metaphors (Davies, Chun, DaSilva & Roper, 2003), but only after they had explored and articulated their individual views in their own terms.

Interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription and transcribed interviews were subject to thematic template analysis. Template analysis, unlike many techniques, eschews the use of a priori codes. Instead, it enables a hierarchical system of conceptual codes (the template) to emerge through iteratively cycling back through each transcript repeatedly. This approach is highly congruent with a social constructionist approach and was subject to reflexive interpretation by the researcher.

1.4 Background on Participating Organizations

The two participating organizations might be seen within a broadly homogenous group known as small-to-medium charities. Both organizations have income of less than £10 million per annum; have broadly social objectives; are over 20 years old; and in structural and governance terms, are broadly similar. However, there are some critical differences between them, which are expanded upon below.

1.4.1 The National Communities Resource Centre

The National Communities Resource Centre (NCRC), is a charity registered in England and Wales (Registration Number: 1005555) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (Company Number: 02648892). The organization was incorporated in 1991, initially as the National Housing and Tenant Training Centre. It is commonly known as Trafford Hall, which is the name of its main and only premises.

The primary objects of NCRC, as described in its Governing Documents, are to provide training and support to all those living and working in low-income communities across the UK to develop their skills, confidence and capacity to tackle problems and reverse poor conditions. In essence, the charity offers a range of funded residential training courses at its Trafford Hall centre and in many cases, offers small grants, which enable communities to implement their learning having returned to their local area.

The charity additionally offers commercial conference and wedding facilities, to generate additional income and therefore, NCRC has a wholly owned trading subsidiary, known as Trafford Trading Company Ltd. (Company Number: 02781694). This enables the charity to trade commercially and to limit the liability, which might otherwise fall to the charity. Importantly, Trafford Trading Company Ltd. legally employs every staff member, not the parent charity NCRC. However, the researcher will primarily refer to the charity NCRC for completeness.

The Charity is governed by a Board of Trustees, who are also Directors in Company Law, and led by a Chief Executive, with a staff team of around 22 people. The most recently published accounts (to 31 March 2012) for the charity and trading company (consolidated) are provided at Appendix 1. The accounts for the Trafford Trading Company Ltd. (to 31 March 2012) are also provided at Appendix 2. Total income for the group has been broadly consistent for the past several years, at around £1-1.5 million per annum. For the year ending 31 March 2012, NCRC delivered a surplus of £72,701. However, the group's true financial performance was somewhat distorted by a multi-year capital grant of £200,000 from The John Laing Charitable Trust. Trafford Trading Company has seen falling income over successive years and crucially, it has also incurred financial losses in each of the past two years and is forecasting a further loss when the accounts to 31 March 2013 are completed. Through a series of redundancy rounds and restructures, staff numbers in the same period (2009-2012) have fallen by 50% (44 to 22). As company accounts can be difficult to interpret, a letter from the Chief

Executive of NCRC is provided at Appendix 3, to clarify the financial status of NCRC and Trafford Trading Company Ltd.

Further information can be found at: http://www.traffordhall.com.

1.4.2 Groundwork MSSTT

Groundwork Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford (MSSTT) is a charity registered in England and Wales (Registration Number: 1124508) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (Company Number: 06543150). The current organization was incorporated in 2008. However, the existing organization is the result of a series of mergers, which began as Groundwork Manchester in 2005. The charity owns office premises in Castlefield, Manchester; offices and land in Ashton, Tameside; and a training centre, ecology-park and offices, in Trafford Park, Trafford.

Groundwork MSSTT is a member of the Federation of Groundwork Trusts (Charity Registration Number: 291558), which was established in the early 1980's as an experiment to engage government, businesses and communities in collective action to improve the physical, social and economic fabric of disadvantaged communities.

The charity has no connected, or subsidiary, companies.

The Charity is governed by a Board of Trustees, who are also Directors in Company Law and led by an Executive Director, with a staff team of around

60 people. The most recently published accounts (to 31 March 2012) for the charity are provided at Appendix 4. Since its incorporation in 2008, the total income to the charity has been broadly consistent and in the region of £6-7million per annum. It fell to around £4million in 2012, due to a change in the accounting treatment of capital receipts. This treatment will be amended in the 2013 accounts, which are anticipated to show income in the region of £9million. For the year ending 31 March 2012, MSSTT delivered a surplus of £257,704, although this is significantly inflated by a reversal of reserves previously made in respect of building maintenance and for new skills and staff provided for at the Trust merger in 2008. This reversal equates to £214,000 of the stated surplus. Staff number in MSSTT have ranged between 60 to over 100 during the period (2009-2012), although the primary reasons for this have related to the differing staffing requirements for the delivery of particular funded programmes.

Further information can be found at: http://www.groundwork.org.uk/msstt.

1.5 Summary

The research is presented in a series of chapters, establishing the epistemological approach, underpinning the study; describing the rationale and detailing the process used for the selected methodology. Results are presented and emergent findings discussed, drawing conclusions and considering any implications for practitioners. Finally, a reflexive evaluation of the study is provided and some suggestions are offered for the

contribution the research might make to knowledge.

The importance of organizational identity as a field is established in the academic literature, as is the suggestion of a link between organizational performance and organizational identity. UK charities are a significant employer and financial contributor to the national economy. There is therefore value in better understanding the way that different staff members understand organizational identity in charities. Equally, the research may offer indicative direction for further research that might further illuminate this under-researched area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Scope

An extensive review of academic literature, tracing the multi-disciplinary development of identity studies and exploring a range of different perspectives and approaches, was carried out. A comparative analysis of various theoretical models, or approaches, will be used to select an appropriate model through which to consider the findings of the study, focused on the embryonic research area of internal stakeholder perspectives on identity in UK charities.

Whilst existing models could be grouped in various ways, here they will be broadly characterized under three categories (drawing upon Balmer 2002): *Image models*, *Identity Mixes* and *Audit Processes*. In this context, *image models* are concerned with the process which creates an external corporate image; *identity mixes* simply codify the elements that comprise the corporate / organizational identity, or suggest a particular method, by which to categorise those elements; and *audit processes* seek to assess, or measure, an organization's corporate / organizational identity, or image. *Identity mixes* are the primary focus of the literature review and the appropriateness, or usefulness, of a 'corporate identity mix' for UK charities will be considered in greater depth.

The three differing categories utilized here clearly overlap in some areas. *Image models*, *identity mixes* and *audit processes* often contain similar

elements, e.g. organizational culture, internal communications, etc. *Audit processes* are intended to measure aspects often contained within *image models*, or *identity mixes.* This interrelationship might be described as shown in Figure 1 (below).

Figure 1: Categorization of Existing Models

Image Models

Kennedy, 1977
Abratt, 1989
Van Reil & Balmer, 1997
Markwick & Fill, 1997

Audit Processes

Hatch & Schultz, 2001
Balmer & Soenen, 1999
Balmer & Greyser, 2002
Balmer & Greyser, 2003
Balmer, 2005

Identity Mixes

Birkigt & Stadler, 1986
Olins, 1995
Balmer & Soenen, 1999
Balmer, 2001a & 2002a
Melewar & Jenkins, 2002
Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006
Davies et al, 2003
Fombrun et al, 1999
Aaker, 1997

The pictorial representation shown (above) is used, as a graphical cue below to clarify, or highlight, the focus of relevant sections in the literature review.

The review is not intended to be an exhaustive exposition of the whole range of scholarly thinking in the topic area but rather a focused exploration of relevant models and theorization to support the research objectives.

2.2 Context

There is an array of academic theory and research around the related topics of identity, brand, reputation, mission and personality, related to corporate bodies. Indeed, the body of available resources is as large and diverse as to be considered problematic by some (Balmer, 2001a; Chun, 2005; Hatch & Schultz, 2000).

A far smaller body of scholarly literature exists around the same broad topic areas in connection with not-for-profit organizations. These primarily focus on membership bodies, the health sector and educational establishments, rather than what might be considered the 'traditional' charity sector (Forbes & Seena, 2006; Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2012).

The breadth of work around identity, brand, reputation, mission and personality in the for-profit sectors provides rich background but directly comparable work, in the charity sector and UK national context, is severely limited.

2.3 Terminology

Before considering the existing literature, models and constructs relating to the topic areas described above, the commonly used language must first be considered. There is a wide variety of terminology used across the academic literature. Terms including corporate reputation, corporate image, corporate identity, organizational identity, corporate brand, organizational reputation,

corporate personality, etc. are used by different theorists, in differing contexts. By way of example, a selection of proposed definitions is provided at Appendix 5.

There is not only a great variety of terminology in use; but such terms are also frequently used interchangeably (Wartick, 2002) and equally often, as diametrically different concepts. Such differences in terminology and the lack of clear distinction between them have, in the view of some, "stunted the recognition of the strategic importance, as well as the multidisciplinary nature, of business identity" (Balmer, 2001a, p.248).

Despite the diversity and occasional confusion, researchers and theorists have developed frameworks and models, aiming to clarify the complex inter-relationships between the various concepts. Differing schools of thought have emerged along paradigmatic lines, e.g. functionalist, interpretive and post-modernist (Gioia, 1998); along disciplinary lines, e.g. public relations, graphic design, human resource management; as well as some apparent divergence along linguistic and cultural lines, such as the emergence of the 'French school of thought' (e.g. Moingeon and Ramanantsoa, 1997). Consequently, the broad group of concepts referred to above, has slowly gained prominence amongst academics and to some extent practitioners.

Here, the focus will be on organizational identity, around which there has been a "veritable discursive explosion" from scholars with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds (Hall, 1996, p.1); and will draw on the definition

offered by Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten (2006, p.102), which suggests that organizational identity can be understood as, "who [we are] as an organization".

Brown et al's definition of organizational identity is selected for its focus on the internal stakeholder's standpoint, which the study explicitly sets out to explore; and particularly, on the perceptual understanding of such stakeholders, as opposed, for example, to the definitions of Olins (1978): "Corporate identity is about appearance", which has a clear focus on visual identity and imagery; or on that of Gray and Smeltzer (1985): "The impression of the overall corporation held by (its) various publics", which is concerned with the collation of multiple stakeholder perspectives, rather than internal stakeholders alone.

In an effort to rationalize, or bring consistency to, the use of diverse terminology, Brown, et al (2006) identified four organizational viewpoints and labels, which can be seen on the diagrammatic representation in Figure 2 overleaf: 1) identity, 2) intended image, 3) construed image and 4) reputation.

Figure 2: Key Organizational Viewpoints

1. "Who are we as an organization?"
2. "What does the organization want others to think about the organization?"
3. "What does the organization believe others think about the organization?"
4. "What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?"

Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006

2.4 Academic Literature on Corporate Identity

A diverse range of models have been advanced in academic literature to illuminate the various elements, or concepts, associated with organizational / corporate identity. These are explored below, under three broad categories: *Image models*, *Identity Mixes* and *Audit Processes*.

A range of approaches are presented in the narrative below and a selected subset is subsequently displayed in tabular form, providing a more critical, comparative perspective, exploring the core characteristics of the models against key criteria.

2.4.1: Image models

Amongst the earliest *image models*, related directly to the concept of corporate image formation, is that of Kennedy (1977), shown in Figure 3, below. Although Kennedy herself suggested that the concept of corporate image had been in development since the 1950s.

Figure 3

Kennedy (1977)

Kennedy's (1977) work is classified as an *image model* as it sets out the various elements, which she argued, had a role in the formation of corporate

image, rather than corporate identity per se. She suggested that all external people would perceive the image in the same fashion, which they would primarily receive through interaction with company employees. Due to her particular focus on the organization's employees, as the nexus of the image-forming process, she argued that company policy, effectively communicated, played a more significant role, in presenting a positive corporate image to external stakeholders, than advertising, or other consciously external-facing campaigns.

Internal stakeholder perceptions sit at the heart of Kennedy's model and whilst she acknowledges the potential impact of external groups, in the image formation process, this is seen as less impactful than the influence the company's managers might have, through their control of policy. Interestingly, Kennedy also noted the potential for what she termed extraneous influences (government policy, the prevailing economic conditions, etc.) to directly affect company policy and thereby, indirectly affect employee perceptions and thence the formation of corporate image.

Many early writers focused on corporate image, as distinct from corporate identity, as they were primarily interested in marketing, or public relations, and were exploring the external presentation of the organization, "The corporate image is composed of all planned and unplanned verbal and visual elements that emanate from the corporate body and leave an impression on the observer" (Selame & Selame 1975).

Partly inspired by Kennedy, Abratt (1989), who argued that the terms

corporate image and corporate identity were often used interchangeably and

incorrectly, claimed to have developed the first conceptual model of a

process by which corporate image could be managed, as opposed to merely

codifying the process of image creation (Figure 4, overleaf). Corporate

identity management is specifically considered on page 60 but one definition,

which can be seen to contain aspects of Abratt's work, is provided in the

Strathclyde Statement on Corporate Identity Management (Appendix 6).

Abratt's model suggested a phased transformational process in which

corporate personality is devised by management; converted via a range of

communication processes into corporate identity; and thence to corporate

image and he argued that this process should, or could, be actively managed.

As will be seen in numerous other theoretical models, a range of broad,

abstract conceptual notions, e.g. corporate philosophy, corporate culture, etc.

are advanced in Abratt's model but not clearly defined. Subsequently,

interactions between such concepts are posited without clear explanation.

Abratt specifically argued that his model offered a process for managing

corporate image. However, the abstraction of reality and reductionism of

complex concepts inherent in conceptual modelling of identity, appear to be

highly problematic in terms of practical implementation.

Figure 4

He argued that this 'management' process began with the formal articulation of a corporate philosophy which should be explored "at the highest level in the organization, because it is only at this level that the necessary breadth of vision exists" (p.70). He believed that the corporate philosophy would inform and embody the organization's core values and assumptions - what Schein (1984) referred to as corporate culture - which would subsequently cascade down through an organization's strategic planning and implementation cycle.

Abratt attributes great significance to the articulation of a corporate philosophy, values and assumptions, which he associates with Schein's (1984) model of corporate culture (Appendix 7). Corporate culture is notoriously difficult to define, although numerous scholars have tried (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006) and it might be argued that Schein too, simply codified a number of abstract

concepts, or elements, which offer limited immediate scope for practitioner-led change. Schein (2004) himself suggested that culture was the most difficult attribute to change in any organization.

Abratt placed significant emphasis on the articulation of the corporate philosophy in his management process, although somewhat incongruously (in a purported management model) suggests that, "How it is articulated is immaterial" (p.70). He goes on to suggest that a "distilled form of that corporate philosophy, the corporate mission, shapes the strategic management of the business" (p.70). Abratt is essentially continuing to describe, rather than define, or explain, abstract elements, which might be associated with the identity formation process, and adopting an overtly managerial perspective, suggesting that only managers had the breadth of vision required.

Another element, which Abratt considers significant, is that of communication, proposing a "total communication game plan, which cuts across functional boundaries" (p.72), as a method to transform corporate personality to corporate image. He argues that management of communications, in an integrated and cross cutting manner, will ensure that objectives relating to the corporate image can be achieved. However, it is unclear how communication management might guarantee such objectives when image is surely held in the perspectives of each individual, or collective, audience. It might be argued that communication, in a range of forms, would appear as

an element in almost any model of corporate identity, although there is insufficient clarity around the practical use of communication by managers.

In the final facet of his model, Abratt describes a 'corporate image interface', representing a metaphorical point of contact between the company's stakeholders and the company. He suggests that stakeholders' experiences and therefore the corporate image are shaped by this interface. Consequently, he argues that by controlling, or managing, this interface, for each stakeholder, we can truly control the corporate image. Again, it is unclear what a metaphorical interface might consist of in reality, or consequently, how it might be controlled, or managed.

Abratt acknowledges a need for further practitioner research acknowledging that his approach requires testing. The model suggests many elements, which play a role in the formation of corporate image, but the degree to which it offers practitioners an effective approach for managing corporate image is unclear. As the model is essentially concerned with the formation of corporate image, it is categorized here as an *image model*.

Abratt's work has also been criticized for adopting a largely 'outside in' focus (Balmer, 2001): concentrating on the perception of the organization by external stakeholders and publics, based on corporate image, rather than an 'inside out', focus on corporate identity. Other researchers (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 1997) have suggested that we cannot learn enough, simply from

considering the relationship between stakeholders and the corporate identity as a unidirectional and therefore, eminently manageable function.

Nevertheless, Abratt's work is seen as a seminal piece in the field of corporate identity; inspired a great deal of further research; and the notion of a corporate image interface has particularly formed the basis for numerous future models (e.g. Stuart, 1998; Balmer & Soenen, 1999).

Increasingly, scholars have sought to develop *image models* of a more holistic, or multidisciplinary nature. This approach has been supported by, for example; attempts to articulate, rather than define, the nature of corporate identity, such as the revised 'Strathclyde Statement on Corporate Identity' (see Appendix 8). In this context, van Riel and Balmer (1997), proposed an *image model* (see Appendix 9) that attempted to integrate a range of theoretical constructs from other writers, which they argued might more effectively conceptualise what they referred to as 'corporate identity management'. They suggested that corporate identity management could promote a positive reputation with an organization's stakeholders, which might, in turn, increase the likelihood that those stakeholders would buy the organization's products, or services. Similarly, they argued that stakeholders would be more inclined to work for, or invest in, the organization (Balmer, 1995; van Riel, 1995). Other scholars have also linked positive corporate reputation with competitive advantage (e.g. Caves and Porter, 1977; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Wilson, 1985).

Van Riel & Balmer incorporated notions from the French school of thought (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997), which takes into account an organization's historical roots; emphasized the importance of a clear and focused corporate strategy in rigorous reputation management, based on a German study of corporate reputation management (Wiedmann, 1988); and featured the core aspects of Birkigt and Stadler's (1986) Corporate Identity Mix (behaviours, symbolism and communication), which is considered in the following section (*Identity Mixes*).

Van Reil & Balmer presented a corporate / situational perspective that locates corporate identity management within a broader business strategy process. Critically, what they refer to as corporate identity management is overwhelmingly concerned with improving corporate reputation and thus organizational performance (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Fryxell & Wang, 1994). Chun (2005) suggests that, "All management…is concerned with what creates reputation" (p.97) and Whetten and Mackey (2002) note that the terms reputation, image and identity are often used interchangeably. Like Abratt (1989), the functional management proposed in such models relates to areas around marketing, communications and public relations, etc. and it seems clear therefore, that van Riel & Balmer's approach to corporate identity management was primarily concerned with the elements associated with formation of corporate image, or reputation. Again therefore, their model is classified as an *image model*.

Markwick & Fill (1997), like earlier scholars (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Schein, 1984), attributed a great deal of importance to differing forms of communication, planned and otherwise, in their framework of corporate identity management (Appendix 10). They emphasized the need to see strategic management (largely via communication) as a separate element within corporate identity management. Like Abratt, they saw corporate strategy as an element of corporate personality but argued specifically that the strategy process, rather than its content, was the element linked to corporate personality and that strategy content (not process) changed relatively frequently (similar to Mintzberg (1985)). On the basis that strategy would therefore be distinct in every organization, they perceived a clear need to see it as a separate element in their framework. Again, the primary intention, behind Markwick & Fill's work, is to influence the elements, which contribute to the development of corporate image.

The *image models* of corporate / organizational identity have become increasingly complex and multi-disciplinary over time but remain primarily focused on the formation of a corporate image. The designation of concepts and the relationships between them remain largely abstractions of reality, which give a 'false' impression of the ease with which they might be accurately assessed, measured, or managed.

2.4.2 Identity Mixes
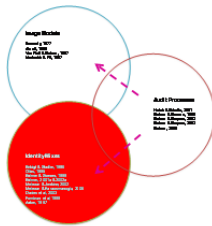
Identity mixes codify the component elements of corporate, or organizational, identity. Whilst the interest of those that propose *image models*, is primarily on the formation of corporate image, there has been an increasing level of assertion that "…corporate image is more than the product of the phenomenon of mob psychology" (Gray, 1986). It is argued, by such scholars, that corporate image is less dependent on a single understanding held by the public but more on a blend of outlooks, held by those in close contact with the organization, particularly its employees. Early researchers (e.g. Kennedy, 1977) acknowledged the importance of internal perspectives and an increasing focus in this area has led to the emergence of a particular school of thought, with foundations in the work of Albert and Whetten (1985), often preferring the term organizational identity.

Organizational identity, as a management research term, has a complex history. Balmer (2008) described two "dominant disciplinary traditions and literatures" (p.880), suggesting that *corporate* identity has an overt focus on external stakeholders, rooted in marketing scholarship and management. *Organizational* identity is, by contrast, more internally and employee-focused, enjoying a "hegemonic status" (p.881) in the work of organizational behaviourists (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985; Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

The development of corporate and organizational identity research is far richer and more diverse that can be understood by Balmer's claimed identification of two dominant disciplinary schools of thought. The terminology used by different authors does not necessarily, or consistently, designate the focus (internal, or external) of their work, although there has been an increased focus on internal understanding of identity over time.

For some (particularly early) scholars, corporate, or organizational identity has been (and is) seen as merely visual identity: the overall look of an organization's communications, logo, branding, etc., "Corporate identity is about appearance" (Olins, 1978, p.9).

For researchers, focused on marketing, or graphic design, the understanding of organizational stakeholders is sometimes subordinate to their involvement with visual cues, "Corporate identity then…is the sum of the visual cues by which the public recognizes the company" (Bernstein, 1984). Even with such a focus on visual image however, there is acknowledgement of the importance of communicating and managing the identity (e.g. Abratt, 1989) albeit with a focus on impacting the formation of corporate image.

For a majority of more recent authors, understanding of identity is broader and understood to encompass a corporation's, or organization's behaviours and communications, as well as symbolism (van Reil & Balmer, 1997). Broader understanding of organizational identity and the recognition that it

might be impacted by what members perceive, or feel, has in some cases led to the use of yet another term: corporate personality. The model in Figure 5, below, first described by Birkigt & Stadler (1986) was an attempt to represent the relationship between the concepts of corporate image and corporate personality.

Figure 5

Birkigt & Stadler, 1986

Essentially, the model (above) suggests a three-dimensional perspective of corporate identity, arguing that the broad visual identity (symbolism); the means by which those symbols are shared (communication); and the way the organization behaves, in its communication and in other actions, collectively comprise a corporate personality: the internal recognition of identity. The external 'presentation' of this corporate personality, formally and informally, contributes to the formation of a corporate image for those outside the corporation.

This is an early and simplistic model of corporate identity, which has received criticism (e.g. Balmer, 2001a) for its highly abstracted and reductionist approach, relying on conceptualization of complex and undefined terms. Later models have proposed a greater diversity of factors, or intangible characteristics, such as the nature of the industry, or organizational culture (e.g. Balmer & Wilson, 1998; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002), although such matters are also difficult to define, or quantify in practice. However, it does perhaps mark a shift away from the notion of corporate identity as purely visual identity and a tool for marketers, or corporate identity consultants, alone. Birkigt and Stadler's corporate *identity mix* has played a significant role in inspiring, or informing, the array of models and frameworks that have been proposed by subsequent theorists, (e.g. Olins, 1995 (Appendix 11)).

As noted in the previous section (2.4.1 *Image models*), van Reil and Balmer suggest that Birkigt & Stadler's corporate *identity mix* (CI Mix) might be seen as a single element, which (in their model) directly impacts on organizational strategy and performance, via the formation of the corporate image. However, it is not clear how conflating elements of an already reductionist model might support practitioner application of such models and the notion of a causative relationship between corporate image/identity and organizational performance has also been questioned by some researchers (e.g. Krohe, 1995; Mosner, 1995), as there is little practical evidence to support it. Despite the lack of evidence, numerous other scholars support the suggestion of a link between organizational performance and image/identity

management: "History is littered with the wreckage of once great corporations that did not define their mission, or that defined it incorrectly" (Hill & Jones, 2001, p.31); "A firm's intent and mission become the glue that promotes integration" (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, Rowe, & Sheppard, 2002, p.343); "A well-conceived strategic vision is a prerequisite to effective strategic leadership" (Thompson & Strickland, 1995, p.23). This supposition has increasingly led scholars to suggest models that include, or claim to enable, identity management. The notion of managing corporate identity is explored further on page 60.

In 1999, Balmer and Soenen began development of a series of models, beginning with an *identity mix*, consisting of three facets, which they referred to as the soul, the mind and the voice of the identity (Appendix 12). They suggested that the 'soul' was made up of the subjective aspects of the corporate identity; the 'mind' was made up of the conscious decisions an organization makes; and the 'voice' concerns the range of ways by which an organization communicates. Like most models, there is a great reliance on abstract and conceptual elements. It might be argued that practitioners could have great difficulty in defining, assessing, understanding, or implementing such concepts.

Balmer & Soenen asserted that their model was the first to clearly distinguish between those elements, which comprise the business identity and the elements necessary for its management. To support this assertion they created what they referred to as an Identity Management Mix (Appendix 12),

arguing that environment, stakeholders and reputations were factors that need to be understood and controlled, to effectively manage corporate identity. However, if one accepts the claim that, for example, managers, "need to take cognizance of environmental forces" (p.261), it is far from clear how this might be achieved. The Strathclyde statement on corporate identity management suggests, for example, "Corporate identity management is concerned with the conception, development, and communication of an organization's mission…" It is unclear how practitioners might conceive, or develop an organizational mission with reference to a fluctuating environment. Again, the use of multiple conceptual and abstract elements in identity modelling creates a lack of clarity around the practical usefulness of the models. Balmer acknowledged (2002) that practitioners seek simplicity in identity modelling, whilst academics celebrate complexity.

Balmer (2001a) devised a New Identity Mix, which he subsequently combined with elements from the Identity Management Mix (Balmer & Soenen, 1999) to create his New Identity Management Mix (2002). Both are shown in Figure 6, overleaf.

Figure 6

Balmer, 2001a   *Balmer, 2002*

With each iteration, Balmer argued that he was moving towards a more

holistic model, blending elements from earlier models with a more structured

management approach. This attempt to corral a more diverse range of

elements can be seen as Balmer's response to what he describes as, "the

multidisciplinary nature of the domain" (p.263). He argues that whilst there is

division amongst theorists, based on differing research paradigms (Gioia

(1998) suggests the differences between them may be irreconcilable), their

diversity can be seen to provide richness; and the increasingly holistic nature

of Balmer's modelling, reflects his desire to embrace and incorporate that

diversity.

One of the ways in which Balmer adds 'richness' is to conflate elements,

previously seen as distinct, into broader concepts. For example, over 15

separate elements, which were expressed in the initial 1999 identity mix, are

conflated as 'culture' in the new identity management mix (2002). The lack of

clarity, in terms of meaning, and difficulty in measuring elements such as

culture has already been noted. However, when the term culture is understood to also contain such broad and similarly abstract concepts as, e.g. 'core values', or 'employees affinities', it is difficult to understand where practitioners should focus their efforts. Balmer argues that practitioners adopt a 'process' view, seeing identity management as a means to communicate identity, whilst academics adopt a 'structure' approach that focuses on the characteristics that make an organization distinct. It is difficult to reconcile the acknowledgement that practitioners eschew the academic approaches to modelling corporate identity management whilst arguing that such models offer tools for actively managing organizational identity.

As implied above, the focus, or description, of research around organizational identity has often, historically been defined by the different paradigms from within which its authors perceive it (Gioia, 1998). Functionalist authors see identity as social fact: something that can be measured, or observed; post-modernists focus on the way in which organizational members view themselves and the power relationships within their organizations; whilst interpretivists see identity as a socially-constructed phenomenon, with 'actors' seeking meaning from their work.

Personification

There is also a tendency amongst scholars (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Davies, et al, 2001) to imbue organizations, or their identity, with human characteristics, or personality traits. However, it is not clear what effect such personifying of organizations might have on research subjects.

The benefits of such an approach might seem apparent, as research subjects are perhaps more likely to readily understand, interpret and compare human characteristics, which they can recognize, rather than abstract and 'difficult' concepts, such as organizational identity. However, organizations are not human; they do not literally have personalities; nor is it likely that one single characteristic might accurately define every individual, team, or department in a given organization. Gioia (2000a) suggests that using personal identity characteristics, as metaphors for organizational identity could mask important ontological differences between people as individuals and as social participants. Academic researchers cannot be certain that research subjects understand the use of personification in the same way, nor that they are using the same points of reference when assessing identity through metaphor. Nevertheless, the use of such approaches is widespread.

Perhaps the first to use such an approach, in describing the 'character' of an organization, was Newman (1953). Steidl and Emory (1997) called the corporate identity 'the body' of a company and somewhat contrastingly, Lee (1983) claimed that the corporate identity is the 'personality' and 'soul' of the corporation.

For some theorists, identity has been viewed as a "character, a partner, or a person"; 'Someone' that stakeholders might know (Aaker and Fournier, 1995, p. 393), whilst for others (e.g. Davies, et al, 2003; Balmer & Soenen, 1999) elements of organizational identity can be described through human

characteristics. Identity is described as having personality: "the set of human

characteristics associated with it" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Whilst clearly

metaphorical, many authors believe such personification to be the best way

to conceptualise, or communicate, the complexity of an organization

reflected in brand/identity personality aspects (Chun and Davies, 2001;

Davies et al., 2001; Keller and Richey, 2006). As noted earlier in this section,

Balmer & Soenen (1999) clearly utilized a human metaphor to describe a CI

Mix, with reference to the soul, mind and voice of the organization, although

in that particular case, the terms were used primarily as descriptors, enabling

the authors to group a range of more traditional (although similarly abstract)

corporate terms under a heading, more accessible to a lay, or non-

management, audience.

Organizational Culture

The concept of organizational culture is widespread in the literature and

many existing models (e.g. Kennedy, 1977; Abratt, 1989; Balmer, 2002)

include it as an element in their theorizing. Melewar and Jenkins (2002)

illuminated this idea somewhat in their *identity mix* (Figure 7, overleaf).

Figure 7

Melewar & Jenkins, 2002

Like Balmer's (2002a) model, Melewar and Jenkins have taken a holistic but equally abstract and conceptual approach, attempting to include aspects from across a variety of disciplines and paradigms. An interesting feature is their treatment of organizational culture, which they suggest is comprised of nationality; organizational imagery and history; and organizational goals, philosophies and principles. The difficulty in defining culture has been noted previously. Such concepts lack precision and it would be difficult to argue that they could be measured in any practical way. Without the ability to

measure, or effectively 'benchmark' a current 'state' for such concepts, it is difficult to understand how practitioners might reliably measure, or confirm changes, or improvements, through management. However, on a fundamental level, an *identity mix* seeks only to identify the component parts of identity - to reveal the constituent elements - and therefore, Melewar & Jenkins' model does not propose a corresponding framework for management.

In later work, Melewar & Karaosmanoglu (2006) described practical limitations of the Melewar & Jenkins *identity mix* in a paper, which sought an "approach [that would] enable us to operationalize the concept and its components" (p.847). Whilst such challenges are not exclusive to the model of Melewar & Jenkins (2002), it is acknowledged elsewhere that any conceptual argument needs to be tested in actual application (Allen and Janiszewski, 1989).

Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006) itemized further components within the notion of corporate culture in their *identity mix* (Appendix 13). They suggest that there is "A dynamic inter-relationship between culture and communication" (p.852) (although they offer no support, or evidence for the assertion and no effective means by which to assess, or measure the abstract concepts) but also that there is an interaction between corporate culture and more tangible elements, such as design (visual identity) and even the nature of the premises occupied by the organization. Whilst Melewar and Karaosmanoglu suggest that corporate culture is a vital and

complex element in constructing a corporate identity, others (e.g. Dowling, 1986) argue that corporate culture is instead a consequence of corporate identity, or (Downey, 1987) that identity is the source of corporate culture. This diversity of understanding, amongst scholars, highlights the difficulty practitioners might find in practical implementation of any approach intended to manage such abstract concepts, as culture.

Creating a richly nuanced framework for organizational, or corporate, identity that attempts to be inclusive in terms of different philosophical paradigms and in terms of diverse functional approaches is highly challenging. The proliferation of models and crucially, the number of elements within them, is one consequence of this challenge.

Business leaders seeking to actively manage an organization's identity can be faced with a dizzying array of elements to consider and a degree of uncertainty, with regard to which they might prioritize, "Many executives confessed to having little knowledge of how to manage, control or even explicitly define the concept" (Melewar, Karaosmanoglu & Paterson, 2005, p.847). Melewar & Karaosmanoglu also acknowledged confusion amongst practitioners, in their study, who suggested for example that marketing, management and organizational communication could be highly intertwined and therefore difficult to practically separate. Balmer (2002) argued that practitioners generally require more tangible, more easily manipulated elements. The practical value of Melewar & Karaosmanoglu's work is somewhat limited. It has an advantage, over purely theoretical models, in

having been derived from empirical research. However, it provides little guidance as to its usage by those seeking to manage organizational identity; no real sense of how the multiple elements might relate to one another; and the elements it describes remain largely intangible. Whilst their taxonomy fulfills the requirements of an *identity mix*, in that it reveals the elements of organizational identity, it offers little to the practitioner seeking to manage that identity.

Reputation

Corporate reputation is often considered an allied construct to theoretical and practitioner exploration of identity (Chun, 2005). There is no clear, unambiguous and universally accepted definition of corporate reputation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006), although numerous scholars have proposed them. For example, Smythe, et al (1992) suggested that corporate reputation was, "a corporation's values" (p.9); whilst Fombrun (1996) referred to "…a snapshot that reconciles the multiple images of a company held by all its constituencies" (p. 72). Such definitions are not diametrically distinct from definitions of organizational identity offered by other authors, e.g. "…The impression of the overall corporation held by (its) various publics" (Gray & Smeltzer, 1985) and therefore, corporate reputation, like corporate brand, or personality, can be seen as highly relevant within the broad subject area of organizational identity.

Davies, Chun, DaSilva & Roper (1999-2003) investigated corporate reputation across a range of organizations, in different sectors, using a

survey-based methodology, supported by more interpretive workshops, to develop what they refer to as their Corporate Personality Scale. The scale is explored further in Chapter 3 but can be seen as a development of a range of prior attempts to measure reputation, or identity: e.g. The Fombrun Reputation Quotient (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever, 1999) (Appendix 14); The Rotterdam Organizational Identification Test (van Riel, Smidts & Pruyn, 1994); and the Aaker Scale (1997) (Appendix 14).

Fombrun, et al (1999) proposed twenty elements, under six broad drivers of corporate reputation: emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, financial performance, and social responsibility. These drivers are used to evaluate stakeholder perception of an organization, through surveys, providing organizations with quantitative data that can be used, it is argued, to deliver greater value to their stakeholders, or simply to compare their perceived reputation with other organizations. Again however, abstract elements, which are largely unverifiable and difficult to quantify, or measure consistently raise questions about the usefulness of the Reputation Quotient, as an effective tool for managers to impact their organizations reputation.

Some authors have also criticized the Reputation Quotient with regard to its usefulness in different countries, or cultures, as national cultural characteristics, or contexts might change the understanding, or interpretation of the questionnaires constructs (e.g. Singh, 1995; Antonides & van Raaij, 1998).

Aaker (1997) set out to create a framework of brand personality dimensions, "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p.347). She argued that consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits. As noted previously, the use of human characteristics to describe elements of organizational identity is relatively common (e.g. Davies, et al, 2003; Balmer & Soenen, 1999), although it has also been criticized in various ways.

Davies, et al sought to devise a corporate reputation scale, which they argued could work for both internal and external audiences. Many earlier scales have tended towards one type of stakeholder, or another, (van Riel & Balmer, 1997; Fombrun et al, 1999). Aaker (1997) for example, focused particularly on a consumer perspective. Davies, et al also chose to use human personality traits, in their work on corporate reputation, as they accepted the view that organizations are, in essence, "an organized group of people with a particular purpose."
(http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/organization).

In a similar way to Aaker, Davies, et al looked for traits from everyday language, which might describe a person and argued that such traits could equally be used to describe organizations, allowing research subjects to differentiate one organization from another. An initial list of 114 traits, drawn largely from earlier sources, was created. In questionnaires, participants were asked to imagine an anthropomorphized organization and rate each word on a five-point scale.

Factor Analysis was used to refine the set of traits and further analyses were carried out to produce a final set of seven factors. Davies, et al's approach has received some support, in terms of the reliability and validity ascribed to the method by which their scale was created (Hulland, Chow & Lamb, 1996; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996; Jaccard & Wan, 1996), although the same criticisms leveled at other personification, or anthropomorphized metaphors apply here too. Ultimately, Davies, et al produced what they referred to as the seven dimensions of corporate personality and these can be seen below, in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Agreeableness	Enterprise	Competence	Chic	Ruthlessness	Machismo	Informality
Cheerful	Cool	Reliable	Charming	Arrogant	Masculine	Casual
Pleasant	Trendy	Secure	Stylish	Aggressive	Tough	Simple
Open	Young	Hard Working	Elegant	Selfish	Rugged	Easy-Going
Straightforward	Imaginative	Ambitious	Prestigious	Inward Looking		
Concerned	Up to Date	Achievement Oriented	Exclusive	Authoritarian		
Reassuring	Exciting	Leading	Refined	Controlling		
Supportive	Innovative	Technical	Snobby			
Agreeable	Extrovert	Corporate	Elitist			
Honest	Daring					
Sincere						
Trustworthy						
Socially Responsible						

Davies et al, 2003

Davies, et al conducted workshops in organizations, after survey results were analyzed, to provide additional validity for their dimensions through triangulation. They argued that their scale could be used effectively with

internal stakeholders and that use of personification metaphors to explore

employee perspectives was well supported in the literature (e.g. Argyris,

1957; Furnham & Gunter, 1993; Goffee & Jones, 1998). Interestingly, Davies,

et al (2004, p.127) also suggested that improvement in methods for

measuring organizational reputation might specifically be useful in a non-

profit context, where assessment, based solely on profitability might be

considered inappropriate, or potentially even negative.

The opportunity to focus on internal stakeholders, which Davies, et al noted,

as a means by which to measure, or assess reputation has been critical in

the development of *audit processes* for organizational identity, some of which

are explored briefly in the following section.

2.4.3. Audit Processes
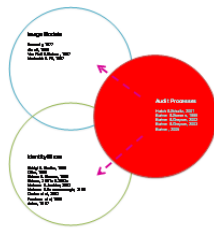
Audit Processes might be understood as those approaches to scholarly identity theory, which aim to answer the question: how is an identity assessed, or measured.

In 2001, Hatch & Schultz developed a diagnostic toolkit to investigate the alignment between what they referred to as organizational culture, corporate identity and image/reputation and a simple framework for corporate branding. To model the toolkit, they surveyed managers, employees and other stakeholders of British Airways around three particular concepts, which they defined as:

- **Vision** – The senior managers' hopes and aspirations for the company;
- **Culture** – The values of the organization, as shared by the employees; and
- **Image** – The perception of the organization held by external stakeholders.

Their survey data was subjected to gap analysis, which highlighted discrepancies between the views of various stakeholder groups. Like Abratt

(1989), Hatch & Schultz's refer to interfaces between stakeholders but do not clearly define how such an interface might be understood. Hatch & Schultz (1997) specifically criticized Abratt's approach, arguing that considering a single stakeholder interface was inadequate. Their own approach therefore engaged a more diverse range of stakeholders and concepts, suggesting a number of measurable gaps, including between managers and employees, internal identity and external image; and corporate vision and external image.

Organizational culture has been seen as complex, multi-faceted and difficult to define in many models of organizational identity (e.g. Melewar & Jenkins, 2002; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006), yet Hatch & Schultz seem to adopt a relatively narrow reductionist view, which suggests that organizational culture is merely the values of the organization. This approach might facilitate their method, as it creates less elements and therefore less 'interfaces' to analyse but given the diversity of proposed definitions of culture (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006), it might also be perceived as somewhat unsophisticated, or abstract. The practitioner preference for simplicity (Balmer, 2002) might enable measurement and therefore be suited to *audit processes*, but overlooks the complexity in concepts as rich as organizational culture.

Numerous other researchers have developed what might be considered *audit processes* that seek to answer the question: how is an identity assessed (e.g. Bernstein, 1984; Fombrun, 1996; Ind, 1992; Rekom, 1997). However, the focus below will be largely on the work of Balmer (1999-2005).

Balmer, et al's 'ACID Test' series is highlighted here because of the variety of other scholars and developmental stages involved; and primarily, its attempt to approach the notion of managing organizational identity from a multidisciplinary perspective. Most of the earlier *audit processes* take a more single-disciplinary approach, whilst Balmer & Greyser (2002) argue that there is, "diagnostic and prescriptive power from marshalling a variety of disciplines" (p.73).

With a number of other scholars (Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Balmer, 2005), Balmer developed a series of models, beginning in relatively simple fashion with the acronymic ACID Test[TM] (Appendix 15), which posited four broad identity types, rather than viewing organizational identity as a single indivisible phenomenon. Balmer & Soenen proposed that 'actual identity' represented the reality of what the organization is; 'communicated identity' should be seen as the perception of the organization by various audiences and the ways it communicates; 'ideal identity' is a conceptual construct linked to optimum market positioning; and 'desired identity' describes the looked-for vision of the organization's leaders.

Like Hatch & Schultz (2001), this initial model attempts to corral complex, multi-faceted concepts into a relatively small number of very broad categorizations, to enable the relationships between those concepts to be more easily explored. Whilst Balmer & Soenen might wish to reduce the conceptual elements to a manageable number, as with any reductionist approach, the abstract nature of the elements itself raises many questions.

For example, notions of actual identity, or communicated identity, seem

particularly broad, given the breadth of academic literature around the

subject. Their concept of communicated identity alone might be seen to

contain many discreet elements, as proposed by other authors (e.g. Abratt,

1989; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Balmer & Soenen offer some

expansion on these areas but the model remains greatly over-simplified, or

reductionist and therefore difficult for practitioners to use in practice.

Balmer & Soenen provided a staged process model through which managers

might apply the ACID Test^{TM}. They described these stages as:

1. **R**eveal the Identities;

2. **E**xamine the Interfaces; and

3. **D**iagnose the situation.

This second acronymic variant model was referred to as the RED ACID Test

process^{TM} and consisted primarily of a gap analysis between proposed

identity interfaces. The model can be seen in Figure 9, overleaf.

Figure 9

Having proposed multiple identities, Balmer and Soenen suggest that lack of

alignment between such identities causes conflict that might weaken

organizations. The RED ACID Test process[TM] is intended to analyze such

alignment at the theoretical interfaces between identities, although it is

unclear how an effective gap analysis should be conducted. The technique of

analyzing 'gaps' at theoretical interfaces, informed by Abratt (1989) and seen

in Hatch & Schultz (2001) might lead scholars toward more reductionist

models, as a greater number of elements would lead to an exponential

increase in the range of potential gaps. This, in turn, might overwhelm practitioners attempting to utilize such *audit processes*. The consequence of avoiding over-complexity however might equally result in over-simplification. It appears that Balmer himself appreciated the limited nature of the first ACID Test[TM] and the RED test process as he added further elements in later iterations. As with numerous models of identity, it is unclear how the proposed abstract elements could be accurately measured, or meaningfully compared.

An interesting development in the iterative (2005) AC[4]ID Test[TM] (Appendix 15) was its reference to a temporal aspect to identity, suggesting that, "identities can inhabit not only the present, past but also the prospective-future time frames" (p.1075). In contrast to authors, who argue that identity is essentially fixed, or enduring (van Riel, 1997a; Albert & Whetten, 1985) Balmer argued that, "…corporate identities…are not of course fixed but are flexible and…can accommodate change" (p.1076). He suggested that such change might be a result of change in the external environment.

Academic literature around organizational identity has become increasingly complex and diverse over many years. Different schools of thought exist and a proliferation of models have been created, which variously claim to describe the process of corporate image formation (*image models*); reveal the component elements of identity (*identity mixes*); or proffer a tool to assess identity/image (*audit processes*). Many such approaches have claimed to provide instruments by which to manage identity, with a view to

improving organizational performance. However, the abstraction and conceptual nature of such models appears to have limited the extent to which they can be reliably utilized.

2.5 Selecting an appropriate model for UK Charities from within the literature

Whilst there is a diverse range of academic literature and proposed models for the broad area of knowledge around organizational identity, it has been noted that there is an almost complete absence of research, or modeling, of organizational identity in specific relation to UK charities.

UK Charities are differently constituted to for-profit organizations; have different objectives; and rely on very different forms of income generation. It is not clear therefore, which, if any, existing models might be most appropriate for exploring the views of internal stakeholders in such organizations. In Table 1 (page 59), a brief comparative synopsis of several previously described models is provided. The table considers the potential suitability of such models for research into organizational identity in UK charities, which is rare and not well understood.

Early *image models* are omitted, as they are concerned with the process by which organizational image is formed and adopt a broadly external perspective. Neither the views of external stakeholders, through

organizational image, nor the process of image formation, are directly
pertinent to the research objectives.

Similarly, the ACID[TM] tests of Balmer are also omitted. Balmer might argue
that they provide a useful framework for practitioner investigation, or
measurement, of multiple organizational identities. However, their focus is on
the measurement, rather than the understanding of identity and their
effectiveness is unclear. As research into internal stakeholder understanding
of organizational identity in UK charities is at an embryonic stage,
codification, rather than measurement is more apposite.

Based on critical comparison of extant theory (summarized in Table 1) and a
review of the wider literature, Melewar & Jenkins (2002) taxonomy has been
identified, as the model, which might be most appropriate for exploring the
nascent topic of organizational identity in UK charities. The key criteria used
to compare and select the chosen model included a preference for a multi-
disciplinary approach, drawing on different schools of thought, to provide
breadth; a clear focus on internal understanding of identity (linked to Brown,
et al, 2006); an *identity mix*, rather than an *image model*, or *audit process*,
focused on codifying the elements of organizational identity; and a utilitarian
approach to complexity, allowing scope for exploration but also the potential
for usefulness to practitioners.

Table 1: Comparison of key corporate identity models

Model	Birkigt & Stadler (1986)	Olins (1995)	van Riel & Balmer (1997)	Balmer (2002a)	Melewar and Jenkins (2002)	Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006)	Markwick and Fill (1997)
Key Features	Behaviour, communication and symbolism combine to form an internal corporate personality, projected as external corporate image.	Behaviours, products communications, and environment/location, or services should be managed to externally promote a 'core idea' (identity).	A holistic *image model* primarily concerned with improving corporate reputation and thus organizational performance.	Argues for active identity management through considering additional (abstract) factors (Environment, Stakeholders and Reputations).	Combines multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic resources to propose a universal taxonomy of corporate identity elements.	A holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on many earlier models, and claiming to enable granular-level identity management.	Identifies strategic management as a discreet element in developing and managing corporate personality and corporate image.
Main Focus	Seeks to codify the relationship between the concepts of corporate image and corporate personality.	Suggests the promotion of a 'Core Idea' of what the organization is, and what its aims are, to external audiences.	Suggests multi-directional links between the CI Mix, corporate reputation and organizational performance.	Suggests managers can actively manage corporate identity by understanding and controlling (largely) external factors.	Identifies and codifies elements, based on a range of academic theory, to propose a definition of corporate identity.	A particular focus on organizational culture, under nine elements, and strongly linked to corporate communication.	Significant focus on communications as tools for managing identity and influencing corporate image.
Main Contribution to Knowledge	Offered a distinct shift from earlier models, which focused primarily on visual identity.	Suggested a tailored approach to identity management, based on organization-type.	Implied a causative relationship between CI and organizational performance.	Proposes a mechanism for actively managing identity, building on existing models.	A broad framework suggesting a solution to the problematic nature of defining corporate identity.	Elevates the status of corporate culture and communication as key elements of corporate identity.	Argued that the strategy process, rather than its content, is linked to corporate personality.
Strengths	Flexible and easy to use. Forms the basis of many subsequent models.	Easy to use and adaptable for different organization-types.	Links identity management to improved performance through a holistic approach.	A holistic approach, which codifies elements for management, rather than identity itself.	Multi-disciplinary. Provides a range of opportunities for practitioner exploration.	Highly detailed and complex, offering many avenues for academic, or practitioner focus.	Draws on a range of other theory and has a clear focus on communication.
Weaknesses	Overly reductionist and simplistic. Focused largely on marketing identity to an external audience.	Reductionist and from a single disciplinary perspective. Focused on an external audience.	Somewhat complex and focused on improving external reputation.	Complex and multi-disciplinary approach required. Substantial resource requirement.	Overlap between elements. Apparent conflation of diverse elements under broad headings.	Overly complex for practitioners. Others argue that identity informs culture, not vice versa.	Highly complex. Sees identity as only one aspect of strategic management.
Key Selection Criteria (identifying a model to evaluate against research data)	• *Identity Mix.* • Single disciplinary approach. • External focus. • Overly simplistic.	• *Identity Mix.* • Single disciplinary approach. • External focus. • Overly simplistic.	• *Image model.* • Multi-disciplinary. • External focus. • Overly complex.	• *Identity Mix.* • Multi-disciplinary. • Management focus. • Overly complex.	• *Identity Mix.* • Multi-disciplinary. • Internal focus. • Manageable complexity.	• *Identity Mix.* • Multi-disciplinary. • Internal focus. • Overly complex.	• *Image model.* • Multi-disciplinary. • External focus. • Overly complex.

2.6 Organizational Performance

Managers are increasingly aware of the extent to which organizational identity, like individual identity, is established and transformed through an ongoing conversation between the organizational self and all those who take an interest in it (Hatch, & Schultz, 2001).

There is a huge range of existing research, theory and modeling around the notion of organizational identity. It has been argued that organizational members experience and understand their organization through a number of different attributes, such as organizational image, reputation, corporate values, organizational mission, and the personal characteristics of fellow members, or stakeholders (Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2012). It has also been argued that some, or all, of these attributes contribute to the formation of an organization's identity, "its central, distinctive, and enduring character" (Albert and Whetten, 1985).

Importantly, theorists (e.g. Balmer, 2002; Markwick & Fill, 1997; van Riel & Balmer, 1997) have sought to determine ways in which managers might control aspects, or elements of the organizational identity.

2.6.1 Corporate Identity Management

Numerous scholars have referred to the notion of corporate identity management and argued for a link between managing corporate, or organizational, identity and improved organizational performance (Abratt,

1989; Balmer, 2002; Markwick & Fill, 1997; Stuart, 1998; van Riel & Balmer, 1997). Many scholars, who argue for the importance of corporate identity management, have created models, which, they claim, support such management and many of these have been explored above. However, from a practitioner perspective, the models share some common weaknesses.

There is no single, accepted definition for the key terms used in the subject area, as has been noted previously. The terminology used by differing scholars is diverse (Abratt, 1989; Olins, 1978, van Riel & Balmer, 1997) and often used inconsistently or interchangeably (Balmer, 2001a; Chun, 2005; Wartick, 2002). If there is no clear understanding, or consistency, in what relevant terms mean, it is difficult to understand what approach, should be adopted in practice.

There is a widespread tendency toward reductionism in existing models. Balmer (2002) suggested that practitioners seek simplicity in identity modelling, whilst academics celebrate complexity. Some practitioner models (e.g. Bernstein, 1984; Olins 1995) appear simpler than some academic models (e.g. Kennedy, 1997; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006), in terms of the number of elements they include. However, in many cases, the apparent simplicity is merely a consequence of reductionism and abstraction, conflating a complex set of indefinable phenomena into a smaller number of broader but similarly indefinable phenomena, e.g. Hatch & Schultz's (2001) treatment of 'organizational culture', or Olins reference to 'behaviour'. The use of abstract terminology

and the common tendency towards reductionism adds further challenge, or impenetrability, for those seeking to implement theoretical approaches in a practical setting.

The use of abstract terminology applies to all three categories of models described previously and equally, to those models in each category, which purport to offer an approach for 'managing' organizational identity. Abratt (1989) refers to an image interface but provides no clear explanation of what such an interface comprises, or how it might be interpreted in a practical manner. Balmer & Soenen (1999) suggested that managers "need to take cognizance of environmental forces" (p.261). It is not made clear exactly what such environmental forces might be, or what form that cognizance might take. Hatch & Schultz (2001), amongst others, proposed measuring gaps at a range of interfaces. Again, there is no clarity about what such interfaces are, or indeed, how the 'gaps' should be measured.

There remain therefore, significant questions about the likely efficacy of corporate identity management approaches, or indeed, what corporate identity management is in practice, given the abstract and conceptual nature of the elements involved; the inconsistency in terminology; and the lack of effective metrics. Nevertheless, there are a range of claims in the literature suggesting reasons why practitioners might wish to engage in actively managing identity.

2.6.2 Theoretical support for management intervention in identity

Senge (1990) argues that if team members are able to align their thinking about identity with one another, i.e. develop a shared, or collective, understanding, this can be a first step toward team learning and ultimately, goal achievement. He suggested that team learning is a "microcosm for learning throughout the organization". Beyond learning, Senge critically also made a link between the notion of a shared understanding, or vision, and the performance of teams. "Successful teams are comprised of individuals who are aligned by a shared vision and are able to act together to create desired results".

Other theorists have also argued that organizational performance can be improved with the development of shared understanding (e.g. van den Bossche, Gijselaers, Segers, Woltjer, & Kirschner, 2011). Melewar, Karaosmanoglu, & Paterson (2005) showed that many practitioners and theorists believe that a strong and positive corporate identity could achieve a range of positive benefits, including increased employee motivation; increasing transparency in business practices; and crucially, competitive advantage. In 2008, Melewar went slightly further in suggesting that:

> Increasingly, firms have realised that the management of these tools can increase return on investment, motivate employees, attract the most intelligent and talented executives and serve as a means of differentiating their products and services.
> (Melewar 2008, p.14)

There is a weight of literature supporting the notion that managers should seek to understand and intervene in shared organizational identity, as a means to control the way their teams behave and consequently perform (Swann, 1987). "Without understanding 'who they are', it is impossible for organizations to know how they should act toward others and for those others to know how to react with them in turn." (Albert & Whetten, 1985)

However, there is evidence that understanding and controlling identity may not be as simply achieved, as described. It has been argued that different organizational members, even within the same stakeholder group, e.g. staff members, might understand their organization's identity in different ways.

Some members may choose to focus on particular elements within those that make up an organization's identity, e.g. organizational mission, rather than leadership style. Some members may understand the organization differently, based on their particular interactions with it, e.g. their work location, length of service, or position in the organizational hierarchy. Others may base their individual assumptions about identity on comparisons with other organizations that they know, or have worked for. So different members, even within the same stakeholder group may hold different perspectives on their organization, or even hold differing views at different times.

This diversity in the way people perceive organizational identity is suggested in the identity literature. For example, Corley (2004) found that inconsistency

in organizational identity perception could be caused by the organizational members' formal positions within the organization. "The disparity in terms of beholders' role, responsibility, and exposure to organizational information can lead to different interpretations and sense making of what the organization stands for (the identity of the organization)" Corley (2004).

He observed that people at higher levels of organizational hierarchy, i.e. senior managers, understood identity through the organization's adopted strategy, whereas those at lower levels in the hierarchy focused more on culture.

It was also argued, by He (2012), that different internal stakeholders viewed the organization's identity from different perspectives, who again highlighted the possible discrepancy between senior managers and non-senior manager employees.

So, it is argued that Organizational Identity, as perceived and understood by internal stakeholders, i.e. staff members at different hierarchical levels, or in different groups, has significant implications for the ways in which identity is managed through corporate strategy (Bouchikhi and Kimberly, 2003; He and Balmer, 2007; He, 2008). This implies a significant risk for organizational leaders if other internal stakeholders develop their own perceptions of organizational identity that are markedly different from what those senior managers wish, or intend, to project.

2.7 Summary

There has been enormous growth in corporate identity research and concomitantly, in the areas of businesses, on which it is believed to impact. For example, some large companies now regard even recruitment, as an integral component of the management of its corporate brand (Ind, 1997). The increasing diversity of elements considered, and the resultant complexity, can also be seen in a range of existing literature reviews around the subject (Abratt, 1989; Balmer & Wilson, 1998; Grunig, 1993; Kennedy, 1977).

John Balmer (2001a) in his attempts to analyze the breadth and depth of scholarly thought around the topic of identity, described a metaphorical 'fog' and claimed that both practitioners and researchers were at risk of a somewhat scattergun approach to the terminology and the concept more broadly. "What is clear is that the identity concept, in its various facets, is ubiquitous, but it can be used with reckless permissiveness among practitioner circles and, to a lesser degree, among scholars" Balmer (2001a, p.251).

The breadth of research, in a corporate setting, highlights some reasons that charities might seek to influence internal stakeholder perception of organizational identity. It has become more widely understood and accepted that: the best employees wish to work for the organizations with the best image or reputation (reputation is a "collective construct, a term referring to all stakeholders' views of the company." (Chun and Davies, 2001, p. 316)); investors, suppliers, or commissioners will favour those organizations

perceived to have more positive image, or reputation (Fombrun, 1996); customers make choices based on image and reputation (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000); and stakeholder loyalty can be significantly impacted by a strong brand/identity (Balmer, 1995).

Scholars have proposed an array of different elements of organizational identity in the literature. For example, "Several channels provide an opportunity to communicate difference and uniqueness to stakeholders: One of them is the communication of a firm's essential values through its vision and mission statements" (Leuthesser and Kohli, 1997, p.60). So, organizational, or charitable, mission might potentially be seen as one element (amongst many) within an organization's identity that managers might seek to influence.

In reviewing the literature, only a limited amount of research related to organizational identity in UK charities was identified. The significant majority of identity literature focuses on the corporate sector and whilst some research exists around other forms of not-for-profit (e.g. Vandijck, et al, 2007, Aust, 2004); around visual identity (Bennett & Gabriel, 2003); or around gender identity (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007), there appears to be a gap in identity research focused on the shared understanding of organizational identity by internal stakeholders in UK charities.

This is a challenging time for the UK economy and for charities in particular and it has been argued that difficulties with organizational identity and

conversations about organizational identity arise most clearly when an organization is under pressure, or when it is threatened (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Weick, 1995).

The research seeks to make a contribution to the already rich body of knowledge in the field of identity research but more specifically, aims to offer some insight into the potential for understanding of organizational identity amongst internal stakeholders in UK charities, at a time of great challenge. Numerous scholars have suggested mechanisms through which organizational identity might be actively managed. It is not clear how effective such approaches are and in the embryonic area of UK charity identity, there are grounds to focus initially on the codification of those elements, through which internal stakeholders understand organizational identity, before any attempt is made to identify means to manage those elements. Nevertheless, the codification process may point to particular areas of interest, or focus for managers within the sector.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Positioning & Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Scholarly exploration of stakeholder organizational identity has been approached in a variety of different ways. Consideration needs to be given to the selection of a practical technique, through which research data might be collected. Equally, the researcher's epistemological stance, i.e. the philosophical foundation in which the investigation is rooted must also be established. Locke (1689) argued that adopting a particular epistemological stance could be seen as preparation for selecting an appropriate method.

Methodology relates more directly to the practical steps, or interventions, required for the researcher to obtain knowledge. Attention therefore needs to be given to both this practical method of exploration but firstly, to the selection of a research philosophy, or paradigm, through which the topic area might be effectively explored.

The study sought to illuminate the understanding of organizational identity through the perceptions of employees in two organizations. Trauth (2001, p.4) argued that, "what one wants to learn suggests how one should go about it" and critically, that, "Once the researcher allows social intervention into the research setting, then an interpretivist perspective on data must replace the positivist perspective of detached, objective observation" (p.196).

In the context of this research, it can be argued that individual stakeholder perceptions of organizational identity are likely, at least in part, to be based on the personal values of research participants, which in turn are informed by their individual and collective histories and experience.

The views of other actors, such as co-workers, and the compromises, understandings and agreements, in terms of commonly-shared views that result from accommodating these differing opinions, may also be likely to impact on subjects' reported perceptions.

The study, focused on individually-articulated perceptions of organizations, seems to allow for social intervention and therefore, an interpretive epistemological approach, within a broadly social constructionist paradigm, is adopted and expanded upon below.

Social interaction between researcher and subjects might also affect participant responses and therefore, must result in a reflexive approach, if the research is to be effective (Trauth, 2001). This issue will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The views of internal stakeholders in UK charities (in various categories) were compared, through analysis of interview data, to identify differences, or assess any shared understanding, in the way they 'understand' their

organizations. Organizations might be described, or analysed in a number of ways. However, from a social constructionist perspective, knowledge about organizations is a product of the daily social interactions between people, particularly through language (Burr, 2003). Meaning, created by organizational members, and subsequently interpreted by the researcher, is not the product of some objectively observable reality but rather the collective product of the social interaction between the participants, "despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p.78).

To illuminate the views of internal stakeholders, the individual's perceptions, rather than the corporate view, was the primary focus, although expressions of the corporate view might also be used by participants in their own sense-making (Weick, 1995). Unlike radical constructivists, who particularly value the meaning given by individual minds, social constructionists are more concerned with the, "collective generation and transmission of meaning" (Crotty, 1998, p.58) and therefore, drawing on contributions from multiple perspectives can add value to the interpretation of expressed perceptions.

From a social constructionist stance, it is argued that individual stakeholders bring their experience, knowledge and learned preconceptions to bear on their perceptions of the organization and that broader historical and cultural factors impact their perceptions too. Social phenomena are affected by the point in history at which they are observed; by the prevailing social and

economic conditions; and by the wider culture (Burr, 2003). The current economic and political conditions in the UK are highly unusual and perhaps unique, in terms of the 'austerity measures' imposed by a coalition government, and the sudden and significant reduction, or removal, of funding available to charities from central and local government, in response to the financial crisis of 2008. If such unusual conditions cause concern, or lack of clarity for employees, the selected paradigmatic approach might be particularly useful as it is argued that, "interpretation, sense-making and social construction are most influential in settings of uncertainty" (Weick, 1995, p.177).

In exploring employee understanding of organizational identity from a social constructionist perspective, there seems therefore, to be no requirement to accept that there is any absolute, objective truth in the views expressed by individual participants. Rather, one must accept the proposition that the views expressed by the research subjects and interpreted by the researcher, are constructed, in a variety of ways. Even views expressed by an individual as their own, should not be accepted as such, as the individual's view cannot be truly knowable in isolation. Individual perception might be seen as identification, interpretation and organization of information, used to represent and understand the environment (Schacter, Gilbert & Wegner, 2011). Even where findings are drawn from the reported perceptions of individual research subjects, it is difficult to argue that such perceptions have not been influenced, shaped and understood through interaction with others.

Having accepted that a range of different social interactions inform the perceptions of individual research subjects, the potential impact of the researcher on expressed views must also be considered. From a social constructionist perspective, the observations, or actions, of observers significantly affect the situations they are seeking to observe. Simply, the interaction between researcher and research subject effects the behaviour and sense-making of the research subject. The researcher therefore, needs to reflect upon these impacts carefully, prior to and throughout the research process.

This notion of researcher reflexivity is extremely important in social constructionism and will be covered in more depth later in this chapter. Pollner (1991) defined reflexivity as "an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality" (p. 370). For the social constructionist researcher, this implies critical consideration of planned actions and acknowledgement of the potential impact of those actions. The reflexive researcher acknowledges that their own interventions contribute to the expressed views of research subjects, both directly and/or through interpretation of those views. Neither researcher, nor research subject, can understand the world and the other people in it without the influence of their prior experiences, their background, their culture, their gender, etc. Effective social enquiry must aim to reflect this.

3.3 Research Strategy

Research strategies might be seen as idealized models and not necessarily practical summaries of the steps researchers take (Blaikie, 2009). They provide an essential 'platform' for social enquiry and frame the way in which research asks questions. Whilst there are a number of alternative research strategies described in the literature (e.g. Wallace, 1971; de Vaus, 1995), Blaikie (2009), argues that there are four major alternative research strategies: inductive, deductive, retroductive and abductive; and that which of these strategies is chosen, changes the nature of research enquiry and the ways in which the researcher seeks to answer research questions.

Deductive strategies are rooted in the natural sciences and rely on the notion of empirically falsifiable hypotheses. Commonly, deductive theorizing stems from a positivist epistemological stance (Babbie, 2005). From a social constructionist perspective, the unpredictability of social actors cannot be deduced, or predicted, a priori. Popper (1959), a pioneer of deductive research strategies, suggested that theories, or hypotheses, should be exposed, "to the fiercest struggle for survival" (p.42), repeatedly falsifying hypotheses, in a quest for objective truth. Social constructionists, on the contrary, argue that it is not possible to learn some objective, unbiased truth through observation, or even that such an objective truth exists (Burr, 2003).

Retroductive approaches rely primarily on the construction of models, or structures, which can be tested repeatedly, as hypothetical descriptions of observable phenomena (Bhaskar, 1979). The approach is intended to be

used in a cyclical fashion: Once a model has been tested, the whole process can be repeated to further explain the structures 'discovered' (Harré, 1961). There is some theoretical overlap between constructionism and retroductive approaches. For example, Harré (1979) referred to the term social actors and suggested that people do not simply respond passively to the world but are instead active agents. However, retroductive strategies require the creation of a priori theories, expressed as models, which seem somewhat incongruent with a social constructionist approach in which any models (where they exist) might instead emerge through the investigative process.

Checkel (2004) argues that social constructionism is, from an interpretive perspective, "committed to a deeply inductive research strategy" and Stake (1995), noting that qualitative research does not require a hypothesis to begin, also linked qualitative approaches to inductive strategies. Commonly, constructivists develop their findings by working from emergent detail to theoretically informed arguments, "moving from the specific to the general" (Mason & Bramble, 1997, p.6).

Arguably, interpretive research must, at some level, involve inductive processes because of the nature of the data derived from constructionist investigation and the subsequent treatment, or interpretation, of that data. Palys (1997) suggested that inductive theorists "engage a phenomenon of interest on its own terms and let theory emerge from the data" (p.46). The notion of engaging phenomena 'on their own terms' implies a lack of a priori hypotheses, or even modelling. Equally, parallels can be drawn between the

reference to the emergent nature of the data and the claim that "organizational identity is socially constructed as it emerges" (Hatch, 2005).

There is a clear indication that exploring employee understanding of organizational identity from a social constructionist paradigmatic stance must at some level, include inductive strategy.

The notion of abductive logic was first posited in the early 1900s by Peirce, who claimed that, "abduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to explain them" (1931-1958, Vol. 5. Para.145). Social constructionists might however, dispute the accessibility, or even existence, of objective facts. Peirce argued that neither induction, nor deduction (what Fischer (2001) described as the traditional models of reasoning) alone, was enough to explain how people reason and that the notion of abductive reasoning was also required, "Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually is* operative; Abduction … suggests that something *may be*" (Peirce, 1903, in Cooke, 2006, p.41).

Whilst abductive logic was initially used primarily in the natural sciences, it is now being used as a method of theory construction in interpretive social science (Blaikie, 2009). Again, abductive strategies can be seen to have some degree of commonality with a social constructionist approach. Scholars attempt to interpret the lay descriptions of people, expressed through routine communication, into social scientific language and reason by, "inference to the best explanation" (Sober, 2008).

Abduction is a hermeneutic process, devised to understand the whole from the conflation of the parts, which also acknowledges the reflective nature of social research. Blaikie (2009) suggests that abductive strategy is based on an ontologically idealist perspective and a constructionist epistemological stance and argues that it offers insight into the meanings, motives and feelings that social actors attach to their lives. However, he also suggests that, "the social scientist's task is to describe [an] 'insider' view, not impose an 'outsider's' view on it" (p. 90). Social constructionists acknowledge and often welcome the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

It seems questionable whether a truly social constructionist approach can sit perfectly, or exclusively, within any one of the major research strategies described. It might be argued that elements of induction (e.g. allowing generalized theories to emerge from the data, without hypotheses) and abduction (e.g. producing a technical account from lay accounts) will be required, at different stages, through the process of research. The researcher will therefore adopt and utilize a broadly social constructionist orientation, relying largely on an inductive approach but including elements of other research strategies at various stages in the research process.

3.4 Methodology

The chosen research methodology was informed by both the philosophical and paradigmatic underpinning of the project and by the selected research strategy. The researcher sought the individual and collective sense-making of a range of workers in the two participating charities and describes the workers' communicated views through the lens of their own experience. The epistemological stance logically suggested a qualitative approach and therefore, a number of differing techniques were considered before the final methodology was selected.

3.4.1 Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is a significant issue to consider, in evaluating the appropriate research methodology. Reflexivity, particularly in the social sciences, enables the researcher to consider his potential impact on a research project; acknowledging his own beliefs, experiences, history, culture, etc. and the impact these might have on the research, just as such elements affect the expressed views of the research subject in interpretive research. Reflexivity does not occur solely in the experimental process of the research (reflexivity-in action) but from the research conception, through analysis, to publication (reflexivity on action) (Schön, 1991).

Researchers need not only to acknowledge reflexivity but actively consider it as they develop their approach to research; carry out the practical research; and thereafter, write-up their findings. The importance of reflexivity in social research practice has been increasingly recognised by academics (e.g.

Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Johnson & Duberley, 2003). It was therefore essential that methodological practice was examined critically, understanding and allowing for the potential implications of the researcher's own pre-acquired views, or behaviours. The researcher carefully considered the potential for influencing the research subjects' responses; the choices made during the research process; and particularly what impact the researcher's own behaviours might have had on the research outcomes.

Where due regard is given to reflexivity on the part of the researcher and appropriate steps are taken to either mitigate, or at least acknowledge the potential impacts, it may be seen as adding positive value. Whilst the presence of the researcher, or their actions might change the behaviours, or communicated views of participants, the researcher may reflect carefully on such issues and may even bring expertize, or valuable prior knowledge, to the research investigation.

> Once we abandon the idea that the social character of research can be … avoided by becoming a 'fly on the wall', or a 'full participant', the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research process becomes clear… He, or she, is the research instrument par excellence. The fact that behaviour and attitudes are often not stable across contexts, and that the researcher may play an important part in shaping the context becomes central to the analysis. Indeed, it is exploited for all its worth (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.17).

3.4.2 Selecting an appropriate Research Method

To select the most apposite method for data collection, a range of potentially appropriate techniques were considered. A comparative summary table of methods considered is provided as Table 2 (overleaf).

Table 2: Methodology Comparison Table

Methodology	Principle Characteristics	Typical areas of application	Strengths	Weaknesses	Decision
Critical Incident Technique	Unstructured interview. Participants identify incidents, events, or issues. Aims to solve practical problems, or develop broad principles.	Almost any workplace; psychology; healthcare; organizational development; market research.	Focused and context rich. Context and focus are participant-led and expressed in participants' own words.	Terminology unclear, e.g. 'critical'. Behaviour rather than contextual focus. Requires an experienced and skilled researcher.	**Rejected** **(due to focus on behaviours, rather than understanding)**
Electronic Survey	Largely quantitative. Consistent questions, with standardized responses, circulated to many participants.	Market research; Service user feedback; Human Resource Management; Positivist social research; opinion polling.	Highly cost effective and efficient. May reach many participants. Highly consistent and standardized data.	Reductionist by design. Largely quantitative approach. Access to a large sample required. Incongruent with epistemology.	**Rejected** **(due to quantitative and reductionist nature)**
Focus Groups	Qualitative Method. In-depth interviews on a specific topic, with several people simultaneously.	Market Research; Opinion Polling; Social research; Product, or service development.	Enable insight into social dynamics. Can describe collective sense making. Less time-consuming than 1-2-1 interviews.	Significant risk of researcher bias. Difficult for the novice researcher. Can be distorted by 'power' relationships.	**Rejected** **(due to risk of researcher bias and access requirements)**
Grounded Theory	Fundamentally interpretive (this is debated). Data collection by a range of methods is coded, conceptualized and analysed to derive/abduce hypotheses.	Health Sector; Customer/Client research; Exploring social relationships or group behaviour in numerous contexts	Requires no hypotheses. Enables a mix of qualitative and quantitative data; Can be used congruently with epistemology.	Notoriously difficult to use. No clearly agreed approach. Highly challenging and potentially time-consuming for the novice researcher.	**Rejected** **(due to lack of clarity around usage and time required)**
In-Depth Interviews	Qualitative approach. A purposeful discourse between researcher and participant on a continuum from un-structured to structured. Interviews can be analysed using a range of possible techniques	Job selection; Journalism; media; counselling; Social Work; Market research; Opinion polling; Product/service development.	Produces rich data. Can be participant-led (to varying degrees). Elicits detailed description using verbal and non-verbal cues. Flexible. Focused and yet derives perceptual detail. Highly congruent with epistemology.	Access to participants can be challenging. Requires careful prior planning and multi-tasking during interviews. Produces large amounts of data, making analysis challenging.	**Selected**
Observation	Qualitative Method. Observing and recording in depth the behaviours of participants in their 'natural' setting.	Cultural anthropological studies; Consumer Marketing; Social research in business settings.	Inherently naturalistic. Provides rich depth of data. Promotes trust and confidence in the researcher.	Behavioural focus, rather than understanding. Can be time consuming. Concerns around researcher bias and ethics.	**Rejected** **(due to potential researcher bias and time required)**
Repertory Grid Technique	Quantitative, or qualitative. Often semi-structured interviews to identify a set of "elements", which are rated against opposing pairs of constructs (using triad combinations of elements).	Psychological research; counselling; market research and marketing; software development; Human Resource Management.	Minimises researcher bias if participants define constructs/elements. Permits sophisticated numerical analysis, or produces rich data for interpretive analysis.	Highly complex for both participants and researchers. Focus on pattern creation and concept counting incongruent with epistemology; favours positivist research.	**Rejected** **(due to complexity of usage)**

Ultimately, the researcher adopted a classically interpretive method, used widely by researchers of all schools, including positivists, and certainly within a social constructionist paradigm: In-depth interviews.

3.4.3 Sampling Approach

Research subjects were selected from across the two participating organizations. The written permission of both organizations, for their team members to take part, was sought and attained (Appendix 16). Eighteen staff members were invited to participate and sixteen ultimately agreed to take part in the in-depth interviews; eight from each participating organization.

The researcher wished to ensure, as far as possible, a broad mix of senior managers and non-managers in the sample. The two organizations (jointly) have six senior managers. The researcher is one of these senior managers and was clearly excluded. The remaining five managers were invited to participate and all agreed.

A greater number of non-managers exist in both organizations. Therefore, the researcher was able to be more selective in the demographics of those invited to participate. A range of non-managers were invited to participate, with a view to achieving an equal division (including managers and non-managers) between genders. The final sample was therefore 50% male and 50% female. Similarly, the researcher targeted an equal number of 'new-starters' (people with less than two years' service) and 'long-servers' (people with over ten years' service) to gain a range of perspectives. Not all those

initially invited agreed to participate and consequently, the final sample (of 16) included nine new-starters and seven long-servers.

Participants were selected from across a range of age groups. Higher priority was attributed, to other criteria, e.g. manager, or non-manager and therefore, it was not possible to achieve a sample with a completely uniform range of ages. Ultimately, five participants fell between the ages of 25-34yrs; four fell between the ages of 35-44; five fell between the ages of 45-54; and two were aged 55, or over. There is no particular focus on age, as a determinant factor in organizational identity within the existing literature and the researcher did not examine the matter in any detail. As a gap in the academic literature, the impact of age on organizational identity might merit further investigation. However, the researcher has chosen to focus on other areas.

Sampling choices were primarily intended to enable comparison between the expressed views of managers and non-managers. Only five eligible managers existed in the two participating organizations and in-depth interviews can be very time consuming for both participants and researcher. To mitigate access issues; to recognize the total time available for the study; and yet to achieve a reasonably broad sample of participants, eleven non-managers were included.

The range of participants was selected to admit the possibility of drawing different comparisons, or perhaps identifying a range of shared understandings. However, with a social constructionist approach, the

positivist notions of validity and statistical exactitude, applied in quantitative research, are not germane (e.g. Maxwell, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Depth is considered more important than volume, i.e. the rich detail and quality of the data derived through interviews is far more important than the total number of interviews, or respondents, so considerations of sample size, confidence level, or margin of error, etc. are redundant. An anonymized breakdown of the sample can be seen in Appendix 17.

3.4.4 Interviews

Interviews can mistakenly be seen as simple conversations. However, as a research tool, they are far more complex and require a careful, well-planned and considered approach. Various factors clearly distinguish interviews from conversations (Denscombe, 2010), including *consent*: research subjects gave formal consent to take part in the process; *recording*: confidentiality was maintained through the removal of names, or other identifiers, but formal acceptance by interviewees that their comments would be recorded was attained and *control*: even with a social constructionist approach, there is an acceptance and acknowledgement that the researcher will, to some extent, control the agenda for the interview, creating some degree of inequality, which does not necessarily exist in a day-to-day conversation.

Structured interviews, which tend to be questionnaires, or surveys; and limit the responses of the research subject, were rejected as inappropriate. Their tendency towards reductionism makes them inappropriate for a reflexive social constructionist approach. The difference between semi-structured

interviews and unstructured interviews is considered by some to be a matter of degrees (Denscombe, 2010). Both methods allow the research subject to lead the conversation to some extent. However, to enable research participants to articulate their own understanding of their organizations, in a non-prescriptive manner, underpinned by the adopted social constructionist approach a broadly unstructured approach was taken. A simple breakdown of the interview process followed is provided at Appendix 18. The researcher elected to carry out one-to-one, in-depth, unstructured interviews, with a purposive sample as detailed previously.

From an interpretive perspective, interviews are themselves empirical situations - both interviewer and interviewee co-construct the particular reality. A flexible, unstructured format allowed participants to provide detailed, wide-ranging, descriptive responses, enabling the researcher to surface and explore the participants' individual understanding of their organizations.

3.5 Interview Process

Having read out the Research Interview Introductory Script (Appendix 18) and confirmed the participants' readiness to proceed, the researcher began by asking each participant to tell him a little about their organization, 'what sort of organization is it'. Where appropriate, the researcher encouraged participants to expand on the views shared, primarily using open questions. The researcher did not utilize pre-prepared, or scripted, questions but rather,

allowed the participant to lead the discourse to a great extent. This approach was intended to enable participants to develop their ideas and express their personal points of view more broadly, with minimal direction, or intervention from the researcher.

The unstructured approach additionally provided opportunities for the researcher to probe (a way for the interviewer to explore new paths which were not initially considered (Gray, 2004, p. 217)) and check the views expressed, to elicit more detailed, or more accurate, data.

Contemporaneous notes were made during interviews to supplement the audio recording of speech, enabling the recording of observed facial expressions, body language, emphasis, etc. Field notes are considered good practice in research interviews (Denscombe, 2010) and enable richer interpretive analysis than interview transcripts alone.

3.5.1 Exploring descriptive metaphors of identity

Various other researchers in the broad field of organizational identity have relied on the use of a priori descriptive metaphors, which, they argue, enable research participants to more easily articulate their perceptions of an organization's identity. Such approaches, e.g. Davies, Chun, DaSilva, & Roper (2003) tend to use quantitative analysis and by their nature, impose a pre-determined theoretical framework upon responses.

Such an approach would not be consistent with a social constructionist stance, which seeks to enable participants to articulate their individual understanding of their organizations, unfettered by a priori descriptors, which risk biasing the responses. However, the researcher was interested to explore any potential value that such metaphors might have in helping participants communicate their feelings about the organization.

Therefore, at various points in interviews, where the researcher judged a particular avenue of exploration to have reached a 'natural' conclusion, participants were asked to consider the usefulness, or appropriateness, of particular personification metaphors (drawn from Davies, et al, 2003) as a means by which to describe their organization, e.g. Might you describe this as a 'competent' organization? This element of the research interviews comprised an ancillary, or secondary, line of investigation, exploring, to some degree, the usefulness, or otherwise of such descriptive metaphors. However, the aim of the adopted approach and the central tenet of the interviews remained clearly focused on surfacing participants' own understanding of their organizations, expressed in their own terms.

3.6 Analysis

Interview transcripts have been examined using template analysis, which "works particularly well when the aim is to compare the perspectives of different groups of staff within a particular context" (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p.257). Template analysis relies on coding that emerges concurrently with

data analysis, which is distinctly different from other forms of coding, such as content analysis, in which a coding scheme would be constructed prior to beginning analysis.

Interview transcripts were carefully coded to draw out themes that seemed to be of significance to participants, "the excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding" (Strauss, 1987). Codes are simply labels, used to index particular portions of the interview transcript, which the researcher considers important, or pertinent. Codes may be descriptive, or interpretive. Interpretive coding can sometimes be more difficult to use as it might, for example, relate to a staff member's feelings about a disconnect between the manager's view of their role and their own. However, the prior experience and knowledge of the researcher offered some advantage here, as a broader understanding of the inter-relationships, personalities and past histories of many of the 'actors' helped to interpret and apply coding more effectively.

Through iteratively cycling back through interview transcripts repeatedly, thematic codes emerged, which were modified, promoted, demoted, as appropriate, to create the template. The final template is provided at Appendix 19.

The development of the template and the emergence of the codes required a significant degree of reflexivity from the researcher. Simply counting the occurrence of codes, as an indicator of importance, would have been

incongruent with the research paradigm but would also have provided a very descriptive account, lacking richness and context. Similarly, treating every code, and every incidence of that code, as equally vital would again have lacked interpretation; failed to acknowledge and utilize the researcher's experience and skill; and would have been methodologically closer to quantitative content analysis.

Where appropriate, links are drawn between the taxonomic model of Melewar & Jenkins (2002) and the data derived from analysis. Their model takes a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, which might offer a greater opportunity for compatibility, or appropriateness, in the largely unexplored UK charity sector. It is explicitly focused on internal stakeholders and equally, includes frequently expressed themes from the body of research, e.g. communication and visual identity; behaviours; corporate culture; and market conditions. As with most existing models, the focus and terminology is corporate, rather than organizational. However, it is hoped that it may still provide some structure and point of reference for the current study.

The analysis is presented as a descriptive, interpretive account of the research participants' perceptions of their organizations, with the apposite elements of their accounts illustrated by exemplar quotations taken from interview transcripts. Priority is given to those elements, which seem to offer greater insight into the perspectives of the participating stakeholders on understanding of organizational identity.

3.7 Limitations

The research is not intended to provide a comprehensive, or highly detailed, analysis of the understanding of organizational identity amongst employees of UK charities. Instead, it seeks to uncover some useful insight into the communicated patterns of understanding amongst a limited sample of UK charity employees. Whilst the research findings highlight areas, which merit further investigation, or consideration by scholars and management practitioners, the communicated perceptions of the research participants are inherently anecdotal and certainly, particular to the participating individuals and organizations. The individual participants in the research have a personal and professional history that informs their reported perceptions (Silverstein, 1988).

The researcher brought his own history and professional relationships to bear on the research process and analysis. There are advantages in the tacit knowledge of both organizations and participants held by the researcher, which for example, enabled a degree of 'reality-checking' (Firebaugh, 2008) during interviews and analysis. The researcher was also afforded comparative ease of access to participants and to secondary data. However, the researcher remained conscious of the potential risk of interviewer bias and questions around validity in practitioner-based research (Kvale, 1995; de Leeuw, 2005; Mitchell & Jolley, 2012; Murray and Lawrence, 2000). In analysing the interview transcripts and making observations upon the participants' expressed perceptions, the researcher was particularly conscious of the challenge of objectivity in interpretive research

(Hammersley, 2000). In a social constructionist paradigm, these issues are generally not considered to be detrimental. As noted elsewhere, they are embraced in the process of co-creation between researcher and subjects.

Including elements of a fundamentally reductionist set of descriptive metaphors in interviews, albeit in an incidental manner, inevitably carried some risk. The metaphors might have constrained participants' views, or directed their expressed perceptions in particular ways, which would be counter to the epistemological stance adopted. However, the inclusion of metaphors was consciously and substantially secondary to the open and unstructured approach, which formed the basis of the research interviews. Therefore, the researcher argues that the data derived from interviews reflects the individual understanding of participants, expressed in their own terms and that every opportunity was provided to elaborate upon and clarify that understanding without the potential constraint that a different use of metaphor might have imposed.

To mitigate the risk of any error, due to lack of objectivity, or bias, the researcher sought additional documentary evidence from the participating organizations, e.g. annual reports, accounts, staff surveys. Where appropriate, these secondary sources were referred to in the analysis to provide some degree of triangulation. The available secondary data might not provide confirmatory evidence but rather suggests some level of consistency that might illuminate the template analysis data (Patton, 2002).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In the researcher's view there were no substantial, or unaddressed, ethical concerns related to the research. The research did not put anyone at risk of physical, or psychological, harm. There was no risk to property, the environment, or any physical edifice.

Neither children, nor vulnerable adults, were involved in the research process and the confidentiality of all participants was protected through the removal of names, or identifying features, from the published transcripts. Only a single sample transcript is provided in the appendices.

No financial incentives, or inducements, were offered to anyone involved in the research and none of the research was carried out covertly – all participants have been fully apprised of their roles.

As with most research interviews, there was some ethical consideration as interviews were recorded (audio only) for later transcription. However, no recording took place without the participants' express prior permission and all audio recordings have been securely deleted, after written transcripts of the interviews were produced. Copies of interview transcripts were made available to individual participants, if they requested them.

3.9 Summary

The focus of the research, and its intention to rely on reported perceptions from a particular group of research subjects, have directed the approach taken in terms of the research philosophy, research strategy and the research methodology used.

In-depth, unstructured interviews, in particular, can be seen as a form of discourse: a jointly constructed product of interviewer and interviewee (Mishler, 1986). The analysis of the findings generated, has also been informed by the tenets of the epistemological stance.

Secondary data (where available) is provided in appendices to provide some degree of triangulation and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) for interview transcript data.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings from sixteen one-to-one, in-depth interviews, with employees from the two participating organizations, are detailed below. The two organizations will be referred to throughout by a set of initials: Groundwork Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford (MSSTT) and the National Communities Resource Centre (NCRC).

Each interview respondent was provided with a participant ID to ensure confidentiality and any and all names have been redacted in the transcripts (post-analysis) to provide a further layer of confidentiality. An exemplar transcript of the interview with one of the Participants (A) is provided at Appendix 20.

Interview participants were encouraged to talk broadly and at length about the ways in which they understood their organizations. The researcher wanted to surface the internal stakeholders' perspectives on the participating organizations, to explore the degree to which any shared understanding existed and to illuminate those elements, which might be seen to contribute to organizational identity in UK charities. A range of salient and interesting responses emerged from interviews.

In different circumstances, or with 'unknown organizations', the researcher might have anticipated participant responses to refer to physical or structural

matters, such as the size of the participating organizations; their internal structures; their ownership; or their geographical areas of operation. However, perhaps because the researcher is, or has been, Chief Executive of both organizations, participants made little reference to such matters. Participants seemed instead to focus on less tangible notions, linked to their feelings about the organization, as will be set out below. In brief, both organizations are charities registered in the UK and companies limited by guarantee; both have annual turnover of less than £10 million; and staff teams of between 30-60 people. Further factual and structural information about the two participating organizations has been provided in Section 1.4: Background on Participating Organizations.

As the researcher is particularly interested to explore any similarities, or differences, in understanding between managers and non-managers in the participating UK charities, the evidence garnered from interviews was initially categorized under two headings:

- Non-Manager Perceptions of MSSTT and NCRC; and
- Manager Perceptions of MSSTT and NCRC.

To further illuminate and organize the interview transcript data, the researcher adopted a thematic template analysis approach. The researcher elected not to utilize any available qualitative research software, e.g. NVivo, as it was felt that the time required to prepare the data and critically, to learn

to use software packages effectively, would exceed the time required to
conduct the analysis manually.

4.2 Template Analysis Coding

The objective was to illuminate the ways in which UK charity employees
understand their organizations. Through iterative review and interpretation of
interview data, cycling through each transcript repeatedly to draw out themes
from communicated participant perceptions, a coding template emerged. The
final template is provided at Appendix 19.

Themes, or codes, emerged inductively, as a product of careful data
analysis, rather than being defined a priori. To provide a provisional starting
point, from which to explore the interview transcripts, the researcher used to
the participant categories (stated above) as a simple organizing framework,
which might facilitate the emergence of thematic codes and thence, the
coding template.

4.3 Findings from Interview Data.

Findings are presented, initially, under the two stated participant categories.
However, two broad groupings of themes emerged from the analysis of
participant responses, which might be understood as 'descriptive themes'
and 'influencing factors'. Here, 'descriptive themes' are those elements that
participants perceive as representing the essential nature of their

organization [its perceived identity] e.g. *trustworthiness*; and 'influencing factors' are those themes, which perhaps suggest the key drivers, or influencers, of those perceptions, e.g. *leadership and leadership style*. Data is therefore presented below to reflect these apparent groupings of themes. The emergence of a small number of cross-cutting themes will also be explored and some secondary data presented, to supplement interview data.

'Descriptive themes' are explored under the two category headings (non-managers' perceptions and managers' perceptions). Subsequently, under a third heading, the key 'influencing factors' expressed by managers and non-managers will be considered and where appropriate compared.

In some contexts, certain elements might be considered as both 'descriptive themes' and as 'influencing factors', e.g. *locus of control*. This highlights, to some extent, the difficulty inherent in understanding the perceptions of participants on a topic as complex and multi-layered as organizational identity. Where such issues arise, it is noted and the researcher's rationale for classifying as a 'descriptive theme', or 'influencing factor', is provided.

The researcher noted an approximate indication of the frequency with which particular themes occurred, in case marked anomalies emerged, although interpretation did not rely on simple counting of phrases, or themes, which would be wholly incongruent with a social constructionist stance (Harri-Augustein, 1978).

4.3.1 Non-Manager Perceptions of MSSTT and NCRC

Non-managers comprised a majority of the research sample, as both participating organizations have only small management teams. Below, the principle 'descriptive themes', linked to the ways in which participants expressed their perceptions of their respective organizations are examined.

'Descriptive Themes' emerging from Non-managers' interviews:

A group of seemingly linked perceptions, expressed in a number of ways by non-managers, seemed to highlight the importance of the organizations' values, in preference to its profitability. These are explored below, through the 'descriptive theme' of *values orientation*.

Values Orientation

Across the sample, there was repeated reference to the importance of organizational *values* over profitability and the perception that this was a key element of the organization itself. "We are not here to make money. We only want to improve people's lives. That's who we are" (Participant C).

Non-managers frequently described the way they understood their organization through comparisons with other organizations that seemed to highlight their own organizations' *values orientation*. Participants seemed to suggest that charities are inherently *value-oriented*, by contrast with for-profits, or even other industry sectors. For example, Participant D suggested, "Well because we're a charity, we're certainly not selfish, like a big corporate, which only cares about profit".

Participants often utilized comparison with previous employers to emphasize positive and seemingly understood aspects of their current organization. One participant (Participant I) suggested, for example, that their organization, unlike a previous employer, was driven by values linked to serving its beneficiaries (*beneficiary needs*), "They [previous employer] are driven by the personal needs of their staff, rather than the needs of the people who should benefit, like here". Participants also used comparison with other industry sectors, to suggest elements, which they did not recognize in their own organizations, e.g. "if we were working at Strangeways [a Manchester prison], being able to be authoritarian… that would be a good thing … but we would never be that here" (Participant K).

The perceived view of a *values-oriented* organization was consistent across non-managers but there was a marked difference in the way new-starters (less than two years' service), as opposed to long-servers (more than ten years' service), explained the way they understood their organization. New-starters used comparisons with other organizations to a far greater extent (both in terms of frequency and emphasis) regardless of gender, or even management status. Indeed, new-starters were noticeably more animated and passionate in their responses throughout the interviews.

Participant E, a new-starter, suggested that NCRC might even consider a structural change to emphasise the *value-orientation* of the charity, rather than its limited commercial activity, "…sometimes you feel it should be split:

to have the charity side and then the commercial side". The researcher sought to clarify this view by asking, "A split in the organization?" and the response was, "Yes, so that they can have their own separate identities."

Another recurring sentiment amongst employees of both organizations, that seemed to capture a perceived organizational powerlessness, emerged from participant responses. This sentiment is referred to here, using a 'descriptive theme', drawn from psychological research, *locus of control*.

Locus of Control

Participants suggested that the organization was rarely in full control of its activities, or behaviours, as other actors, or agencies restricted it. "The problem is that we don't really get to be what we want to be because we're always delivering someone else's priorities (Participant I). Non-managers in particular, appeared to feel that 'others', including their own managers, were compelling the organization to be different from the way it should be, as decisions were outside their control, "We can't be the organization we should be because [managers] tell us we have to do it differently" (Participant F).

Non-managers described an increasing lack of control over their individual activities; and the way the organization, as a whole, had become, particularly in recent years. "We can't be the way we should be anymore. We're always having to do things the way somebody else wants; not the way we think they should be done" (Participant G).

The suggestion from participants seemed to be that the organization had a greater degree of autonomy in the past but that this had been lost, or taken away. This perception: that the organization was controlled in some way by 'others', leaving it relatively powerless, was expressed widely across the sample and seemed particularly significant to non-managers.

In some contexts, participants' tendency to externalise the organization's *locus of control* in responses, might be seen as an 'influencing factor', rather than a 'descriptive theme'. However, the sense of powerlessness, or lack of self-determination, seemed to define the whole organization for non-managers and hence its inclusion as a 'descriptive theme'.

A number of participants seemed to express a reaction against the perceived powerlessness they described, by emphasising what they referred to as the *competence*, or *professionalism* of the organization, "We know what we're doing. We are professionals. They should just let us get on with our jobs and stop interfering" (Participant F). Reference to *professionalism and competence* was also made more widely across the sample and is therefore considered as a descriptive theme below.

Professionalism and Competence

Participants referred repeatedly to notions of *professionalism and competence* and expressed a seemingly shared view that their organizations displayed these qualities, through both individual and collective behaviours and in relation to external actors. As noted previously, non-managers

sometimes emphasised their *professionalism* to suggest that they merited a greater degree of control over their organization's activities, linked to the perceived powerlessness of their organization (*locus of control*). However, the notions of *professionalism and competence* were not merely a response to perceived powerless but more often used to describe a view that the individuals within the organization behaved in a *competent* and *professional* manner and that the 'presentation' of the organization, as a whole, internally and externally, was also highly *professional and competent.*

Non-managers in particular, seem to believe that there is a perception, amongst private sector organizations, that charities are somewhat amateurish, or lacking in skills. Responses, which might be described via the theme of *professionalism, or competence,* seemed to reflect concern about this perceived view. For example, Participant N said, "You know, we're working with a lot more corporates now and maybe they have their doubts about our ability to deliver. They don't always know how *professional* we are… but we do." Participants, in some cases, seemed to use the term *professionalism* as some form of measure of, or evidence for, *competence*, or capability.

Respondents from both participating organizations described these issues similarly. They wanted to be seen as *professional, or competent,* and believed that they were a *competent, professional* organization*. However, there was a feeling that externally, they might not be perceived to be so and

internally, non-managers in particular, felt that managers did not always recognize the organization's *professionalism, or competence,* either.

Participants throughout the interviews consistently suggested that their organizations might express views, or display seemingly human characteristics, e.g. *professionalism and competence*, as if the organizations were animate entities, which they are clearly not. The use of personification devices, or human characteristics, to describe an inanimate construct, such as an organization, will be considered in the following chapter. However, in this chapter, participants' articulated views will be conveyed verbatim.

Participants also made reference to the *informality* of the organization in describing notions, which were linked to *professionalism, or competence.* Describing the *informality* of their organization was common across the sample and appeared important to the participants. It is therefore considered below as a further descriptive theme.

Informality

All participants talked in some way about the notion of *informality* and consistently claimed that their organizations were highly *informal.* For the majority of non-managers, the *informality* they described in their organizations was perceived to be a positive thing, "the atmosphere is very easy going, so it makes it a pleasure to work in" (Participant I). However, for some non-managers, *informality* was perceived more negatively, "I think informality is an awful thing, when you're trying to run a business"

(Participant F). Nevertheless, all shared the perception that the organization was essentially *informal*.

Non-managers suggested that the pervading cultural norm - what they described as the *informality* of the organization, was something that was influenced in some way by managers, or their behaviours, "It's all very laid-back. You can go weeks at a time without having to feedback to anyone. So you just come in; do what you've got to do and go home (Participant C). Again however, some participants seemed to express doubts about the efficacy of their management's *informal* approach, "…in one respect, the casual approach is a good thing because maybe people are more relaxed ... But in another sense, there's no impetus to get things moving forward" (Participant E).

Despite differing views on the value, or benefits, of *informality*, as a behavioural norm, there was a consistency with which participants described their respective organizations as *informal*. New-starters were again more passionate than long-servers, in the way they described the organization's *informality*, "…it's massively, massively informal compared with anywhere else I've worked, particularly my last employer" (Participant K).

Again, participants appeared to be describing *informality* via understood norms, reflected in internal stakeholder behaviours, rather than the organization itself, which cannot be informal.

Non-managers also described their organizations (their experiences of the way organizational members collectively behave) as somewhat slow moving, or change-resistant. This seeming grouping of views is explored here via the theme of *risk aversion*.

Risk aversion

Non-managers from both participating organizations expressed a range of views, suggesting that the organizations were slow to change, or innovate. (Again, it seems that participants were, in reality, describing the natures, or behaviours of other organizational employees, or managers, rather than an organization itself.) Whilst such views were conveyed in a number of different ways, the behaviours seemed to be attributable to a common trait, or theme: *risk aversion*.

For example, Participant C, when talking about the programme of training delivered at NCRC, suggested that, "It's very much doing what we've always done, instead of looking at what we can do. There's more looking back than looking forward because we are too frightened to take a chance. It's not in our D.N.A." (Participant C).

Non-managers in MSSTT also suggested that their organization was somewhat *risk averse.* Participant P used the speed with which the organization was adopting social media as an example, "…how we use marketing… or social media… It makes us look really old-fashioned to

outsiders, just because we're too worried to really commit to it" (Participant P).

Different non-managers offered different examples but all seemed to express a similar perception of their organization, as one that was *risk averse*. This *risk aversion* seemed to be perceived as a 'characteristic' of the organization itself, rather than any specific individual employees, "we should probably be a more innovative organization but it's not the way we do things" (Participant E). Clearly, *risk aversion* cannot be a characteristic of an inanimate organization and is more likely participants' way of describing an established cultural norm, within that organization.

Another widely shared sentiment that participants seemed to express, in different ways, is explored below via the descriptive theme of *trustworthiness*.

Trustworthiness

Participants across the sample described their organizations as being honest or dependable [*trustworthy*], through the behaviours of their members and in some ways, through their shared values and approaches. A clear majority seemed to perceive such *trustworthiness* as a very positive thing, "We're quite an honest organization I think …We are quite supportive of each other and there's a lot of trust there, which is great" (Participant N).

Again, new-starters seemed more loquacious and far more passionate in the ways they expressed their perceptions in this area, although the views they described were essentially very similar to long-servers.

Whilst most participants suggested that their organization was perceived to be *trustworthy*, when talking more specifically about certain individual relationships, a smaller number (exclusively in NCRC) referred to some lack of trust between internal stakeholders, "in certain areas, there's a total lack of trust between managers and the people on the ground" (Participant H). Overall however, participants maintained a belief that the organization's collective values reflected *trustworthiness* as a key element.

A number of non-managers suggested that their organization had become, or was becoming, less *trustworthy* in recent years. Participants, when questioned, generally referred to this reduction in *trustworthiness* taking place over the past five years. Participant O explained, "In the old days, we just used to focus on doing what we were supposed to do, for communities. We were more of a charity… I think we'd do things now that we would never have done… It worries me that we might be seen as less trustworthy".

Those participants, who believed that their organization had become less *trustworthy*, strongly expressed concern about the change. They suggested that the organization had historically been highly *trustworthy* but that recent factors (which will be explored under 'influencing factors' below) had negatively impacted the *trustworthiness* of the organization.

Another combination of views emerged, which were linked to the founding

principles of the charities and the significance these continue to have on the

organizations and their behaviours. Here, that grouping of views is referred

to through a descriptive theme, describing the organizations as *mission-led*.

Mission-Led

Participants made frequent reference to their organization's charitable

mission. There was widespread support for and belief in the *mission* of both

organizations across the sample. Moreover, participants seemed to suggest

that the *mission* itself was critical in shaping their organization. Participant E

suggested that the "way the organization is" was due to, "the charitable ethos

and the mission".

Non-managers in particular suggested that decision-making within the

organization was in some way shaped, or impacted upon, by the charitable

mission - that choices about policy, or even simple day-to-day decisions

were weighed against the tenets of the charitable mission, "what we are

supposed to be" (Participant O). For MSSTT non-managers, the principles

enshrined in the charitable *mission* were perceived to be a good basis for

decision-making, as something that provided guidance: an understanding of

what the organization should and should not do.

NCRC non-managers also articulated a view that their organizations actions

were *mission-led*, but occasionally suggested that managers could rely upon

the *mission*, as a means by which to reinforce other, less positively perceived, characteristics, such as *risk aversion*, or to limit the activities the organization carried out. Participant C, for example, talking about the need to innovate, suggested that the *mission* was sometimes used, as an excuse, to avoid perceived risks, "I think it's because managers choose not to be innovative. You *can* be flexible within the *mission*…but it's more that some managers are scared to move out of their comfort zone." Whilst linked to the notion of being *mission-led*, this portion of the interview also re-emphasised the theme of *risk aversion*. Participants frequently talked about multiple 'themes', or 'influencing factors', in tandem, highlighting the complex relationships between themes and perhaps, the multi-layered nature of participant perceptions.

Despite the perception from some NCRC non-managers, that the *mission* might sometimes be inappropriately used, there was a consistency across the sample, which suggested that both organizations were *mission-led*, or driven by its principles. Participant O seemed to summarise the broad view succinctly, "I think we're clear about our mission and that informs our strategy and ultimately, that's what we try to be every day."

Non-managers collectively articulated one other sentiment, which referred to an apparent toughness, or durability, which they argued the organizations (or its members) possessed. Here, this seemingly shared view is referred to via the 'descriptive theme' of *resilience*.

Resilience

What is described here under the theme of *resilience* is a grouping of perspectives, which emerged only from non-manager interviews. Non-managers articulated this theme almost exclusively in relation to the contemporary economic and (to a lesser extent) political climate, suggesting that such external factors were forcing changes upon the 'nature' of their organizations.

In this context, and particularly as the theme was only expressed by non-managers, there might be scope to consider *resilience* as a possible 'influencing factor', rather than a 'descriptive theme'. However, participants consistently described such *resilience* as if it were a characteristic of the whole organization and hence its inclusion here as a descriptive theme.

Participants did not themselves use the term *resilience* but conveyed views, which described their organization, in ways that suggested hardiness, or a determination to survive. For example, in the context of *resilience*, participants often used the term toughness, "I think there's a toughness, in terms of sticking it out and weathering the … conditions, which is not what we should be" (Participant M); "An organization has to be tough to take on the challenges of survival, certainly at the moment and that's not who we are" (Participant I).

Almost every participant, who expressed a similar view, seemed to display a noticeable amount of wistful regret in doing so [*nostalgia*]. They suggested that whilst the organization was able to be tough, or *resilient*, it was not the way the organization 'should' be, or had been in the past. The context in which non-managers expressed these views was almost always linked to the financial challenges that the organizations were facing and this will be explored further in the 'influencing factors' below. However, the frequency and passion with which non-managers talked about their perceptions of the organization as being tough, strong, etc. [*resilient*] seemed to suggest that it might be a central element of the way participants currently perceive the organization.

Interestingly, new-starters were even more passionate and verbose than long-servers, in expressing the theme of resilience as a change to the organization. The apparent contradiction in new-starters, who have limited experience of the organization, expressing a view, which requires a longer, historical understanding, will be explored in the following chapter.

The 'descriptive themes' above emerged from non-manager interviews and seem to suggest some of the ways in which non-managers perceive their organization to be. Below, we will similarly consider those 'descriptive themes', which emerged from manager interviews.

4.3.2 Manager Perceptions of MSSTT and NCRC

Managers comprised a far smaller proportion of the research sample, as neither participating organization has a large management team. Consequently, there was somewhat less data to consider. The principle 'descriptive themes', linked to the ways in which managers expressed their perceptions of their organizations are reviewed below.

'Descriptive Themes' emerging from Managers' interviews:

In reviewing interview responses from managers and comparing them with those responses given by non-managers, it became clear that in the majority, managers recognised and expressed very similar themes to those identified by non-managers. Like non-managers, managers also seemed to imbue their organizations with human characteristics, in articulating their perceptions. However, this matter will be considered in the following chapter and managers' views are set out below, as described.

As will be seen later in this chapter, the various themes were sometimes expressed in differing ways, or informed by different 'influencing factors'. However, in terms of their perception of the notions of *values orientation*, *locus of control*, *professionalism and competence*, *informality*, *risk aversion*, *trustworthiness* and *mission-led*, managers articulated broadly similar sentiments to non-managers.

In the case of the first of these themes, a *values orientation*, managers also felt that their organization was defined by its values, rather than its

profitability, "We're different from corporates. We're here to do what we believe is right, based on our principles; not chase the money" (Participant A); and often compared their organization with others, to emphasise the *values* they believed the organizations held, "…we're not the sort of nasty, sharp-elbowed capitalists, who rip people off and steal their money … people look at us and say: yes, good organization, doing good things, with good values, the people that work there are good" (Participant J).

Managers articulated the *locus of control* theme with perhaps greater frequency and fervency than non-managers but referred to other external actors holding the power, which the organization lacked. This is explored further in the following section on 'influencing factors'.

As with non-managers, managers implied that their organizations were highly *professional and competent*, "I think the organization, as a whole, is very competent. It knows what it is; it knows what it should be doing; and it knows its fields really well" (Participant A); or that organizational members displayed *competence and professionalism*, "… we've got a lot of very competent people, who are really good at what they do; experts in their own field; and in some cases, have national recognition for their work" (Participant J).

Managers also appeared to share (with non-managers) a concern that the *professionalism*, which they perceived internally, was not always understood by other actors, particularly for-profits. A senior manager from MSSTT referred to regular meetings with a large corporate. Despite a positive and

long-standing relationship, a sense remained that he felt sensitive, or concerned, about a perceived comparative weakness, in terms of *professionalism*, "…even when we go to talk to people like [multi-national corporate], who are very professional; [he] probably thinks we're a bit quirky because we're outside our comfort zone, I guess" (Participant J).

In the context of perceived *informality* in their organizations, managers (and particularly new-starters) again expressed a similar view to non-managers, "It's casual; it's simple; it's easy-going" (Participant A); or "…you know… I can walk up to somebody's desk and say, hello. I don't have to make an appointment; I don't have to ring them first; I don't have to email … So I think we're very informal" (Participant L).

Similarly, managers seemed to share the view of non-managers that their organizations were disinclined to take risks, "we're not daring enough yet, as an organization. I think some of us want to be and we need to build that culture where people feel able to take more calculated risks" (Participant J); and indeed, acknowledged their own role in creating, or sustaining this *risk aversion*, "We're scared to take risks and that's from [trustee names redacted] downwards. I'm very risk averse, so that doesn't help some of the new members of the team" (Participant H).

Managers made occasional reference to notions, linked to the 'descriptive theme' of *trustworthiness*, "I think there's definitely this, sort of, feeling of honesty and sincerity" (Participant B); and expressed similar sentiments to

non-managers around the centrality, or importance, of organizational *mission* in the organizations' aims, "Trafford Hall [NCRC] works really hard for the mission … That's the end goal" (Participant A).

However, one particular sentiment did emerge from manager interview responses, linked to partnership and *collaborative* working, which had not been apparent in non-manager responses.

Collaborativeness

Managers suggested that working together with others was an essential part of the organizations' make-up and reflected its collective approach.

Participant H, in talking about potential competitors in the market said, "We'd rather work with them, than fight them." Similarly, Participant L suggested her organization was, "…about welcoming and working with others… sort of fostering partnership".

Whilst managers seemed to share a view that (both) their organizations were partnership-builders and essentially *collaborative*, there also appeared to be a belief that this particular trait of the organization was changing, "We weren't the sort of organization that competed with other partners in the sector but we are now. We've become less collaborative" (Participant J). This particular view came from a new-starter, who may have learned the comparative historical perspective from others, but was expressed by many managers.

Again, when questioned, participants suggested that the changes they

perceived had occurred over a period of around five years.

In a similar manner to non-managers talking about a change in the

trustworthiness of the organization [its members behaviours], managers

seemed worried, or wistful [*nostalgic*], about their belief that the

collaborativeness of their organizations was diminished, or changing. There

seemed to be a commonly-understood belief that these changes were being

wrought by other actors, which linked to the *locus of control* theme and will

be explored further under 'influencing factors'.

The key perceptions emerging from the two categories of participant have

been set out under a range of 'descriptive themes' above. Below, those

factors, which seem to reflect the key drivers, or 'influencing factors', of the

'descriptive themes' for both categories of employees will be briefly detailed.

4.3.3 'Influencing Factors'

The 'descriptive themes' set out above, attempt to corral the articulated

views of participants on the elements that they understand to reflect the

essence of their organization, in terms of its values; its behavioural norms; its

culture; its style, or what might perhaps be termed the intangible elements of

its organizational identity.

In describing these themes, or explaining the ways they were understood, participants referred to a number of factors, which seemed to particularly influence their perspectives. Those 'influencing factors', expressed by non-managers and managers in NCRC and MSSTT, are shown in the analysis template (Appendix 19) and also described briefly below.

For ease of reference, the emergent 'themes' and corresponding 'influencing factors' are also shown in Table 3 overleaf.

Table 3: 'Descriptive Themes' and 'Influencing Factors'

	Themes shared by Managers and Non-managers							Manager-only Themes	Non-Manager-only Themes
Descriptive Themes	**Values Orientation**	**Locus of Control**	**Professionalism & Competence**	**Informality**	**Risk Aversion**	**Trustworthiness**	**Mission-Led**	**Collaborativeness**	**Resilience**
Influencing Factors	Organization Type	Management Controls	External Image	Organization Type	Social Media	External Image	Beneficiary Needs	External Economic Factors	External Economic Factors
	Beneficiary Needs	Spatial Factors	Organization Type	Leadership & Leadership Style	Founding Members	Management Controls	Founding Members	Pressure from Funders	
	Pressure from Funders	External Economic Factors	Leadership & Leadership Style	Management Controls		Spatial Factors			
		Nostalgia	Dress Code	Spatial Factors					
			Internal Communications						
			Management Controls						
			Spatial Factors						

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To some extent, the different categories of employees referred to different 'influencing factors' in describing their organizations. The particular 'influencing factors' used by different categories of employee will be noted below, as appropriate.

Organization Type

Both categories of participants seemed to place strong emphasis on the charitable status of their organization in articulating their understanding of it. Participants seemed to feel that certain characteristics, or collective values, were inherent in charitable organizations, as distinct from for-profit organizations, or even public sector bodies.

The suggestion that *organization type* predetermines certain organizational traits, or collective values, seems highly questionable but was consistently articulated and seemed particularly influential for participants in expressing their understanding of their organizations' *values orientation*. In essence, participants suggested that their organizations were driven by their *values* as a direct consequence of being a charity, "That's how charities are. We're about doing good" (Participant O).

Prior Experience

Participants also relied on their *prior experiences*, in other organizations, to emphasise and contrast with the perceived 'nature' of their current [charity] organization. Such *prior experience* seemed to have significant influence in relation to the 'descriptive themes' of *informality* and *professionalism and*

competence but primarily for managers, e.g. "… people here prefer an informal approach. Having all the staff in uniforms, or big cheesy corporate smiles, like when I was at BT, just wouldn't work." (Participant H).

Nostalgia

Only non-managers seemed to be significantly influenced by *nostalgia*, which appeared to have a particular impact on participants' perceptions of their organizations as lacking self-determination [*locus of control*]. Interestingly, even new-starters relied on *nostalgia*, which might again suggest that understanding the organization in this way had been learnt from others with longer service.

Primarily, non-managers seemed *nostalgic* for (implied) better financial times in the past. However, they did not seem concerned with the financial income per se but rather for a time, whether real or imagined, when the organization was better able to be itself. For example, Participant M explained, "…we used to be funded to improve people's lives in the best way, which is why we're here. Lately, we spend more time ticking boxes and complying with a load of requirements."

Management and Management Controls

Non-managers made numerous references to the influences that managers had on the ways in which they understood the organization, often in a negative manner.

It was felt that *management controls* had a significant influence on the *locus of control* of the organization. Non-managers were clear that, what were perceived to be unnecessary, internal *management controls* led to, or sustained, the sense of powerlessness, which they felt.

Paradoxically, non-managers also pointed to lack of *management control* as a factor in the way they understood their organization, "There is absolutely no authority and there's no control. Staff can just do what they like" (Participant D); or "because nobody's telling them what to do, there are staff members that come and go as they please. They choose their own times" (Participant C). Non-managers suggested that such lack of *management control* was a factor in the degree to which the organization might be seen as *professional and competent*.

Non-manager participants further suggested that the lack of *management controls*, described above, contributed to the *informality* of the organization. Primarily, this association was made by those non-managers that felt the organization's *informality* to be a negative thing.

Some NCRC non-managers directly described a distinction in the ways managers and non-managers understood their organization, "I think there's …an upstairs, like [the TV programme]… there's an upstairs and downstairs here, and they very rarely mix, or understand things the same way" (Participant F). This view perhaps suggests a sub-theme in non-managers' 'influencing factors', which will be described below as *spatial factors*.

Spatial factors

For staff at NCRC, the notion of 'upstairs-downstairs' is not merely an analogy from the 1970's UK TV drama but a literal description of the division between the work locations of different staff teams.

Operational staff members all carry out their duties on the ground floor of the organization's premises, which is the area that customers/beneficiaries primarily use. Administrative and managerial staff members all have offices in the upper floors of the building and are therefore, literally 'upstairs'. This physical *spatial* separation itself seemed to be an 'influencing factor' in the way non-managers understood their organization, through their relationships with *management*.

Leadership & Leadership Style

Leadership appeared to be particularly important to the managers, across the sample. Participant J talked positively about the *competence* of the organization being linked to the behaviours modelled by *leaders*, "…it's the way that management is done within the organization and the way the *leadership* operates". Although more negative, Participant B suggested that an absence of *leadership* had an impact on the way internal stakeholders understood the organization, "Since I've been here, there has been no one saying, this is us, this is what we do, this is what we're about".

Managers in the two organizations described *leadership* having different effects, either positive (MSSTT), or largely negative (NCRC), on the organization. In elucidating a significant number of themes, NCRC participants were significantly more negative in their outlook than MSSTT participants. However, as a grouping, managers clearly felt that *leadership and leadership style* had a direct impact on the development, or understanding of the organization. One NCRC Manager (Participant A) suggested that the organization had "evolved, through different leaders… It's really interesting reading all the annual reports and looking at the different styles".

Managers also suggested that the *informality* of the organization, which they perceived to be a highly positive thing, was brought about, or generated by the prevalent *leadership style* in the organization, "people not needing to seek permission to do things; the dress code; the fact that we're very flexible in terms of working arrangements; the way that people talk to each other… it feels like a really easy-going, nice organization. We try to keep a light touch on management. We make it that way" (Participant J);

Non-managers, occasionally made reference to the theme of *leadership* but seemed to place far less emphasis on its importance. In fact, when non-management participants were asked to expand upon the impact of *leadership*, or *leadership style*, they actively downplayed its importance. For example, participant E specifically suggested that the "way the organization

is" was due to, "the charitable ethos and the mission, rather than the leadership style."

Dress Code

A somewhat unexpected but frequently repeated observation, that emerged from both managers and non-managers, was what might be interpreted as the symbolic value of prevailing *dress codes*, as an influencing factor on *professionalism and competence*, "I mean, there's no dress code and as long as you work… you know… that doesn't mean we're not very professional to external clients and internal clients" (Participant E). Here it would appear that *dress code* could be seen as merely an analogy, or proxy, for describing *professionalism*, or lack of it, rather than suggesting that *dress code*, in itself, is considered an important element in understanding the organization.

Social Media

References to *social media*, as an influencing factor in describing the two organizations, were all made by younger (age 25-34) non-managers; were largely negative; and focused on the slow pace of change within the participating organizations, linked to the descriptive theme of *risk aversion*. Participants specifically seemed to feel that their organizations were 'lagging behind' in terms of newer forms of (electronic) communication, in comparison to other external bodies, "We've asked for more support with Twitter and Facebook… it doesn't seem like we're very well set up to make that happen quickly" (Participant P); or "I don't think we're up to date; I think we're quite far behind" (Participant N).

There was again a great deal of consistency in the ways that participants linked this theme to *risk aversion*, although new starters were again noticeably more outspoken and vociferous.

Internal Communications

Managers in particular, highlighted the significance of formal *internal communications*, primarily via meetings, when talking about how employees understood the organization. Clearly, any shared understanding requires communication at some level but managers, in contrast to non-managers, more often referred to formal *communication* channels. Managers seemed to want to further formalise, or improve those *communications*, primarily through more regular meetings, which they felt were crucial but too infrequent, "it was very difficult to even get people to agree to meet quarterly and, you know… quarterly meetings… so much water flows under the bridge in a quarter. It's just very difficult there" (Participant B).

Non-managers, particularly in NCRC, seemed to feel that *internal communication* was poor, "nobody listens to anybody" (Participant F) and when asked to expand on their perceptions of *communication* within the organization, criticized the lack of *management control*, reflected in that poor communication, and the impact, which they felt this had on the organization and its behaviours.

Desired External Image

Some participants suggested that the desire to be perceived 'positively' by external stakeholders, or *desired external image* had some influence on the organization's collective behaviours. Participants seemed to feel that certain organizational traits were more prominently, or more knowingly, presented to external stakeholders.

This particular factor was utilized somewhat more often by managers than non-managers, e.g. when talking about the organization as *competent*, Participant A said, "But we have to make sure we're showing that to outsiders. I think it's about how we want to be seen by external people like the Department of Communities and Local Government … they don't give their money easily, if they don't think they're going to get something of value in return".

Non-managers also made reference to the active promotion of a *desired external image*, often linked to the 'descriptive themes' of *trustworthiness* and also *professionalism and competence*, "People trust us. We are a trustworthy organization but we make a conscious effort to make sure that people recognize that externally." (Participant C).

External Economic factors

Managers consistently seemed to believe that prevailing *external economic factors* had changed the essence of the organization over time, although as

will be noted below, they also believed that the organization's understood 'true self' would re-establish itself when conditions changed. For example, when talking about a perceived reduction in the organization's *collaborativeness,* Participant J said, "I think it's a reflection of the economic environment we're operating in".

Managers did not simply describe changes in practice brought about by dealing with *external economic factors* in a difficult economy but directly implied that they impacted on the nature of the organization, "Of course, it has the factors of the economy and what's out there, which does shape the whole organization" (Participant A); or, "I don't think we were a very tough organization but we can be, if external financial factors make us demonstrate those characteristics, so we're becoming one" (Participant L).

It seemed that managers believed their organization was substantially changed, as a direct consequence of *external economic factors*, "We're having to become something we shouldn't be and don't want to be. It's a matter of survival" (Participant L). There also seemed to be a collective belief amongst managers that the economic cycle would ultimately turn and that the organization's 'true character' might reassert itself, "…and when the money comes back, we'll be back to ourselves again" (Participant L).

Non-managers made broad references to the prevailing *external economic* conditions but only to emphasise, or articulate the *resilience* of their organizations. When non-managers talked about changes to the nature of

the organization, particularly around *trustworthiness* and *locus of control*, they clearly implied that the changes were being brought about by managers internally, as well as any *external economic factors.*

Pressure from Funders

Somewhat linked to *external economic factors*, managers across the sample suggested that the contemporary approach of *funding bodies* was directly reducing the resources available. Perhaps more importantly, funders were changing the requirements and conditions that are imposed upon funding recipients and participants believed that their organization was compelled to change its nature, as a consequence.

Managers argued that *funders* are seeking increasingly detailed justification for the value of their investment and applications for funding are favouring organizations with clear sustainability strategies, intended to remove, or dramatically reduce, long-term reliance on grant funding. It was suggested that this led to a more commercially-driven model, which might impact upon the *collaborativeness* of the organization and particularly on its *values orientation*, "I think sometimes we've shaped what we are to fit with those pots of money, which … dilutes what we are meant to be doing" (Participant A); or, "I think some of the work… we're competing directly with really aggressive, large, profit-making companies and the way they do business might be a million miles away from our ethos but I think those are things we'll have to learn from them" (Participant J).

Non-managers made occasional reference to the pressures from funders, also linked to the *values orientation* but again implied that in fact, the responsibility for any subsequent impact on the organization, lay with their managers, "I know it's not who we want to be, or should be, but I think, in all fairness, they [managers] can probably twist and change to suit whoever they're approaching for money" (Participant G).

Beneficiary Needs

Non-managers strongly expressed the influence of meeting *beneficiary needs* linked to the organizations *values orientation* and when referring to the organization being *mission-led*.

Conversely, they suggested that managers did not understand *beneficiary needs* to be a central feature of the organization and instead were too focused on more corporate matters, "I don't think it's an approach that's necessarily been chosen from the top [management]. Customers [*beneficiaries*] are the reason we're here and [managers] don't always understand that" (Participant G).

Founding Members

For NCRC managers only, the role of the charity's *founding members* was clearly an important factor. For example, Participant B, in expanding upon the notion of charitable *mission*, said, "…but I think the key person for me with all of that side of things is the President [founding member's name

redacted] because he will always bring you back to the mission; to what Trafford Hall [NCRC] is."

NCRC managers suggested that these *founding members* play a particularly important role, getting closely involved in the organization's activities, "There's a certain amount of battle sometimes with [founding members names redacted] around what we should be doing compared to what we can do" (Participant A). In addition, there were links suggested between the role of the *founding members* and themes, which have emerged elsewhere, such as *risk aversion*, e.g. "We're scared to take risks and that's from [founding members names redacted] downwards" (Participant H). NCRC managers made repeated reference to trustees and specifically, to the two remaining *founding members* of the organization, in illuminating their perceptions. The role of *founders*, or trustees would therefore appear to be of some interest, as an 'influencing factor' in terms of exploring employee understanding of the organization.

The 'influencing factors' set out above might be seen as the ways in which managers and non-managers articulated the key 'descriptive themes', by which they understood their organizations, or the aspects of their interactions with the organization and other actors, which helped to shape their perspectives. Certain other themes, which did not seem directly attributable to either managers, or non-managers, also emerged.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Themes

A number of potentially interesting findings emerged, which were not directly associated with the management status of participants. Some secondary data is also provided, where it seems to support data from interviews.

4.4.1. Intra-Organizational Understanding

Participants from both organizations described very similar sentiments about the nature of their organizations but NCRC participants seemed to convey a more internally-diverse understanding than MSSTT participants. Managers and non-managers did articulate common 'descriptive themes' but the consistency and strength with which those themes seemed collectively-understood, or shared by the two participant categories in NCRC, was somewhat less than with MSSTT participants. Additionally, a significant majority of views, which expressed negativity about the organizations, were described by NCRC participants.

Secondary data, provided by the participating organizations, offers some further insight into intra-organizational understanding and also suggests an increasing degree of dissatisfaction amongst NCRC staff over the past three years. When asked (in the NCRC Staff Survey, Appendix 21) whether there was a strong feeling of teamwork and cooperation at Trafford Hall, only 32% of the staff agreed, compared with 74% in 2010. In response to the statement, 'I have a good understanding of what Trafford Hall [NCRC] is trying to achieve', only 74% agreed, compared to 100% in 2010.

By contrast, 100% of staff in MSSTT's staff survey (Appendix 23) believed that they could understand and communicate the organization's vision and values in 2012, up from 87% in 2010; and 92% of MSSTT staff felt that communication between staff, line managers and senior managers was good, compared with 35% in 2010.

It is already established in secondary financial data (Appendix 1 & 2), and a supporting letter from the Chief Executive of NCRC (Appendix 3) that financial performance in NCRC is currently poorer than in MSSTT and that NCRC is reducing and restructuring its staff team, as a consequence. Some further consideration will be given to these factors in the following chapter.

4.4.2 New Starters (Length of Service)

Staff members who were new to their respective organizations (less than 2 years' service) and those with long service (over 10 years) expressed their understanding of organizational identity with markedly different emphasis across the whole range of interviews, although the same broad themes emerged. New-starters were keener to talk expansively and emphasized their perceptions more forcefully. The researcher noted this apparent difference based on the observed intensity, or enthusiasm, with which themes were expressed and described.

Paradoxically, new-starters also articulated what they believed to be changes to the 'nature' of their organizations over the past five years. New-starters had been employed for less than two years and therefore, could not have

direct personal experience of their organizations over this time span. Despite this, new starters widely expressed a view, which seemed to require knowledge from a time prior to their joining the organizations.

4.4.3 Secondary Line of Investigation

At various points in interviews, where the researcher judged a particular avenue of exploration to have reached a 'natural' conclusion, participants were asked to consider the usefulness, or appropriateness, of various personification metaphors (drawn from Davies, et al, 2003) as a means by which to describe their organization. This element of the research interviews comprised an ancillary, or secondary, line of investigation, exploring, to some degree, the usefulness, or otherwise of such descriptive metaphors.

Responses to the various metaphors were mixed. Two of the terms (*competence* and *informality*) emerged from participant interviews without any researcher intervention, i.e. these were terms, which participants used of their own volition and seemed to understand clearly. The term 'agreeableness' did not emerge from participant responses but was generally felt to be appropriate and potentially helpful in describing an organization, e.g. "I think we are quite supportive of each other and there's a lot of trust there, which is great, so I guess that's kind of agreeable" (Participant N).

Participants suggested that certain of the metaphors required further explanation. The term 'enterprise' seemed to have little resonance with participants and was felt to be more appropriate to other sectors, or for-profit

businesses. The term 'chic' seemed to confuse participants, "Gosh! I don't know what that means…who came up with that word?" (Participant L). Even those participants that understood the term seemed to feel it was completely inappropriate for understanding a charity. When the word 'chic' was mentioned by the researcher, almost every participant laughed.

'Machismo' was also felt to be unclear, or inappropriate. Again, it was not clear that participants fully understood the term, "But I don't think… I think we equally… we've got… you know… feminine influences. So I think it's quite an equal organization…" (Participant N).

The term 'ruthlessness', initially, seemed to be well understood. However, participants' responses to it suggested that in fact, it was understood in two completely different ways: Most participants understood it to be a negative characteristic that reflected, 'feeling, or showing, no mercy; hard-hearted' (http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ruthlessness). This group of participants perceived the dimension to be inappropriate in describing a charity.

A second group of participants however, considered ruthlessness to be a virtuous characteristic, which denoted the ability of the organization to survive in the face of significant challenges. These participants (almost exclusively non-managers) made links between the term ruthlessness and the 'descriptive theme' of *resilience*.

The reference to a selection of metaphors, used in some other areas of identity research, was intended merely as a secondary line of enquiry, exploring the potential usefulness of such an approach in articulating participant perceptions of their organizations. Some brief comment will be provided on the efficacy of such approaches in the following chapter.

4.4.4 Gender and Age as Determining Factors

The researcher used a purposive sample to ensure the involvement of a broad range of age groups and a 50:50 split in terms of gender, although there was no attempt to achieve any degree of statistical validity. The small number of participants within each age group made it extremely unlikely that age-dependent elements would emerge and even with the more differentiated factor of gender, no substantial divergence emerged in terms of understanding of organizational identity.

4.5 Summary

The perceptions of internal stakeholders in the two participating charities have been described initially under an organizing framework, based on two different categories of employee in the sample.

Through careful analysis of the interview data, a series of apparent themes emerged, which were subsequently grouped as 'descriptive themes' and 'influencing factors'. The various emergent themes and factors are summarised in Table 3 and in the final analysis template (Appendix 19).

What seems immediately apparent from the emergent template is the complexity of the inter-relationships between factors, or elements, which participants appear to use to describe, or understand, their organization [its identity]. Whilst the findings from the research are not generalizable to the wider sector, the sense that participants' perceptions of their organizations are formed in numerous ways and by reference to an assortment of both tangible and conceptual features, might imply that organizational identity is potentially a nebulous and imprecise concept.

The seeming complexity of organizational identity, as a concept and the ways in which internal stakeholders might formulate their understanding of it will be explored further in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Having set out findings from the interview data in the previous chapter, several areas of interest are considered below. The study specifically explored the degree to which internal stakeholders (employees) in two small to medium-sized UK charities shared an internally-common understanding of organizational identity. Particular focus is given to similarities, or differences in understanding between managers and non-managers, prompted in part, by anecdotal evidence that managers in UK charities might understand their organizations' identities differently to non-managers.

The data outlined in the previous chapter is discussed to illuminate the ways in which the notion of organizational identity appears to be understood by the internal stakeholders of the two participating charities. Where the interview data suggests potential associations between the study and existing theory, links to the body of identity research and particularly, Melewar & Jenkins' (2002) taxonomy of corporate identity, will be considered.

The findings from the study are not generalizable to a wider population due to the relatively small sample size and the ontological and epistemological stance adopted. However, they might still provide some interesting areas of focus for future research, or tools around which practitioners might seek to influence understanding of organizational identity in their own organizations.

Where appropriate, reference will be made to secondary data from the two participating organizations.

5.2 Organizational identity in UK Charities

The primary research objective was to explore an under-researched area of identity scholarship: the UK charity sector.

Internal stakeholders in the participating UK charities seemed to understand their organizations through some very strongly held and collectively understood sentiments, which were reflected in the 'descriptive themes' and 'influencing factors' emerging from participant interviews. Participants did not themselves use the term organizational identity but, for example, Participant C, when talking about the perceived *trustworthiness* of the organization, suggested "that's who we are", which seems to resonate with the definition of organizational identity offered by Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten (2006, p.102), "who [we are] as an organization".

Interpreting the interview data, we might synthesize what seem to be the essential features that reflect the way the managers and non-managers in the two participating organizations think about their organizations and thereby, better understand the degree to which the internal stakeholders (employees) in two UK charities shared an internally-common understanding of organizational identity.

Participants described a range of core values, principles and beliefs, in their own terms, through the themes, which emerged in interview responses (e.g. *values orientation, trustworthiness, mission-led*). There was a clear, shared sense that the organizations were *values* (rather than profit) *oriented* and that these values were driven, or informed by the founding principles, mission, or purpose of the organization. Participants seemed to feel that their organizations were fundamentally philanthropic; collectively a 'force for good'; and seeking to provide a positive benefit to society. Participants suggested that these core values offered guidance, or informed the activities and behaviours within the organization. Such collectively understood principles and values might be conceptualized as representing an understood organizational culture, although participants themselves did not use that particular term, other than colloquially.

A related but somewhat different grouping of themes focused on the accepted and understood behavioural norms of the two organizations (e.g. *informality, risk aversion, collaborativeness*). Ehrhart and Naumann (2004) suggested that norms convey the types of behaviours that are valued by an organization and here, the data suggests that participants collectively acknowledged and even anticipated the organizations' tendency [more accurately its members' tendency] to behave in certain ways. This grouping of themes, linked to behaviours, might be interpreted as reflecting an organizational personality, which Bernstein (1984) describes as "the sum total of an organization's characteristics from which its identity is generated".

Participants frequently utilised references to organizational behaviours, management behaviours and the behaviours of individuals in articulating their perceptions. A range of such behaviours are interpreted here as 'influencing factors' (e.g. *management controls, leadership style, internal communications*), which contributed to, or acted as exemplars for several of the emergent elements of organizational identity (e.g. *professionalism and competence, informality, trustworthiness*).

Communication also emerged as a key 'influencing factor', which was expressed widely and pointedly, particularly linked to the element of *professionalism and competence.* Here, participants were primarily interested in internal communication, which van Reil (1997) described as a multi-directional form of corporate communication, taking various forms, including team briefings, interviews, meetings, memos, newsletters, etc.

Participants seemed to understand internal communication as a means by which to share elements of organizational identity but also as a reflection of understood behaviours, such as informality.

Participants also seemed keen to talk about the impact of external forces (e.g. pressure from funders, external economic factors) and the ways in which the behaviours, practices and approaches of internal stakeholders might impact on the perceptions of external actors, as 'influencing factors' (e.g. *desired external image, social media*). The perceived links between external actors, or influences, seemed highly important in terms of the way

participants understood elements of their organizational identity, such as *trustworthiness, professionalism and competence, locus of control.*

It might be argued, based on an interpretive synthesis of the emergent data that organizational culture, organizational personality, organizational behaviours, communication and the external environment, collectively comprise the primary concepts around which employees of the participating organizations formulate their understanding of identity. There is some support for conceptual features such as these, as components of organizational identity in the existing academic literature.

Links to existing theory

There is a rich body of scholarly theory around organizational culture (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Ravasi & Schultz defined organizational culture as, "a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organizations" (p.437), which seems to reflect the interpretation of interview data above. There is also a significant level of support for collective core values, as elements of organizational culture in organizational identity literature (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Here then, it seems that the data broadly aligns with one area of identity scholarship.

References to organizational or group behaviours are also widespread in identity literature (e.g. Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Birkigt & Stadler, 1986; Olins,

1995; van Riel & Balmer, 1997) and are often linked to, or comprise an aspect of, what is referred to as the corporate personality (Abratt, 1989; Birkigt & Stadler, 1986). Interview participants relied heavily on commonly understood behaviours in articulating their views on organizational identity and again therefore, it would seem that the data in some way supports academic theory. Melewar & Jenkins specifically included corporate behaviour, management behaviour and employee behaviour in their (2002) identity mix.

Communication is a common element in most recognized models of organizational identity (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Birkigt & Stadler, 1986; Balmer, 2002; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002), although its usage and importance is somewhat differentiated across the range of theory. Empirical research suggests that employees are happier in an organization with strong internal communication (Vallaster, 2004), and Melewar (2003) suggests that internal corporate communication is, "a management tool … for creating a favourable basis for a relationship with an organization's stakeholders." Here, the seeming significance of communication to participants might highlight an opportunity for managers to intervene in organizational identity formation, or maintenance.

The impacts of external matters, or the external environment, are also features of various identity models (e.g. Balmer, 2002; Olins, 1995) and particularly in what have been classified here, in Chapter 2, as image models (e.g. Kennedy, 1977; Markwick & Fill, 1997; van Riel & Balmer, 1997).

Seemingly, external factors can impact the behaviours of organizational members, which in turn might impact the organizational personality, or culture and potentially therefore, the organizational identity.

Broadly then, it seems that the interpreted data, derived from internal stakeholders in the two participating UK charities, can be mapped against some of the ways in which scholars have described organizational identity. The terminology used in different sectors might vary and the study was limited in scale. Therefore, the emergent template analysis does not perfectly align to any existing identity models. However, in general terms, it would seem that organizational identity in UK charities is broadly comparable to theory derived from the corporate, for-profit sector and indeed, the groupings of elements, contained within Melewar & Jenkins (2002) model seem to have a broad degree of consistency with those emerging from the data in this study.

A secondary objective of the study was to explore any apparent similarities, or differences, in the ways that managers and non-managers understood organizational identity and this is considered below.

5.3 Comparing Manager and Non-Manager Perspectives

Anecdotally, there is a view, reported to the researcher, that non-managers understand their organizations differently to managers. The identity literature offers some support for the notion that different groupings of staff members

might understand identity differently (Bouchikhi and Kimberly, 2003; Corley, 2004; He, 2008 & 2012; He and Balmer, 2007) and it was specifically argued by He (2012) that senior managers and non-managers viewed organizational identity from different perspectives.

However, the data derived from interviews here does not appear to support a substantial difference, between manager and non-manager understanding. Broadly the same 'descriptive themes' emerged inductively through analysis of interviews. In some instances, managers and non-managers emphasised different 'influencing factors'. However, even here there was a substantial degree of commonality in the participants' articulated perceptions.

Two apparent themes did emerge as somewhat anomalous, in the sense that they were articulated exclusively by only one category of employee: *collaborativeness* (managers only) and *resilience* (non-managers only). These two themes, and two somewhat unexpected but interesting 'influencing factors', are examined in a little more detail below.

Collaborativeness & Resilience

There were some similarities in the ways that *collaborativeness* and *resilience* were described and in the 'influencing factors' associated with them. It was suggested that both elements represented relatively recent (over the past five years) changes to the organizations, i.e. the organization had become less *collaborative* over time; and the organization had become

tougher, or more *resilient*, over time. The question of whether identity can be changeable, or is fixed, will be explored later in this chapter.

For both themes, the 'influencing factors' described by participants linked primarily to *external economic factors* and to a lesser degree, *nostalgia*. Participants suggested that *external economic factors*, specifically the current 'austerity' policies affecting the UK, arising (debatably) from the international banking crisis of 2008, had compelled the organizations to become less *collaborative*, or more *resilient*. It was claimed that the organizations had not been this way historically; and that the perceived changes were undesirable and a matter of some regret.

Interestingly, new-starters, who had not directly experienced the historical identity of their organizations, articulated similar sentiments around these themes, which might suggest that their understanding was learned, or developed from others, perhaps via a collective sense-making process resulting from the uncertainty and instability of the external environment (Weick, 1995). New-starters will be discussed separately, later in this chapter.

Perhaps participants, trying to make sense of the situational context (linked to *external economic factors*) with their most immediate colleagues, had collectively constructed and shared organizational 'stories' around a reduction in *collaborativeness* and an increase in *resilience*. Harquail (2007, p.150) suggested that embellished histories and organizational stories "can

provide cues from which organizational members can construct their organization's identity".

Two unexpected but interesting 'influencing factors', which participants articulated are explored briefly below.

Founding Members

The apparent importance of *founding members*, as an 'influencing factor' seems somewhat anomalous in the context of organizational identity. It was articulated only by managers and only in NCRC. However, it was referred to with such frequency and emphasis, that it may be pertinent for some UK charities.

NCRC Managers suggested that in some way, these *founding members* acted as 'guardians', or 'custodians' of the organization's core values, principles and purpose, which have been interpreted here as contributing to the organizational culture.

Not all charities have continuing *founding members* (MSSTT does not) but there is some support in the literature for their significance. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu included the element, 'founder of the company' within their (2006) model, itself a development of Melewar & Jenkins (2002) model. It might be anticipated that managers would have interaction with a charity's trustees, on a more regular basis, which might explain why non-managers made no reference to *founding members*.

Spatial Factors

Spatial factors seemed particularly interesting in this context. It was referred to as an 'influencing factor' exclusively by non-managers at NCRC, where operational staff members all carry out their duties in separate areas of the building to administrative and managerial staff members. This physical, *spatial* separation itself seemed to be an 'influencing factor' in the way non-managers understood their organization, linked particularly to the *locus of control* theme. Melewar & Jenkins suggest that 'architecture and location' is a significant element in their (2002) identity mix and perhaps the emergence of this physical, *spatial factor* here might provide some support for that and potentially highlight an area of interest for practitioners.

Despite a small number of interesting anomalies, it seems that managers and non-managers in the two participating organizations broadly understood their organizations' identities in similar ways. Exploring potential differences between the two groups as a research objective was informed to some degree by anecdotal evidence of perceived differences. However, it appears that those perceived differences are not in fact supported here.

5.4 Cross Cutting Themes

A number of emergent cross-cutting themes were described in the previous chapter. Each of these is explore briefly below.

Intra-Organizational Understanding

Every organization may be seen as having a unique identity (Olins, 2002) and here, although employees from both organizations articulated broadly similar themes, there was a noticeable difference in the degree to which intra-organizational commonality, or shared understanding, of identity was apparent.

Based primarily on secondary data, it appears that performance in NCRC (particularly financial performance) is currently poor and several rounds of (seemingly unsuccessful) staff restructuring have taken place.

Academic literature suggests that employees in successful organizations have a commonly understood, shared organizational identity and indeed, that the reverse is true (Senge, 1990; van den Bossche, Gijselaers, Segers, Woltjer, & Kirschner, 2011; Melewar, Karaosmanoglu, & Paterson, 2005), although success might be defined in many different ways.

Interview findings initially appear to support a link between more diverse understanding of organizational identity amongst employees of NCRC and poor financial performance, as suggested in academic literature.

There is little research around identity-related consequences of internal structural change, or the ways that managers might approach it (Logan & O'Leary-Kelly, 2007). However, mergers and acquisitions research suggests that experiencing organizational change can lead to negative, or

unenthusiastic, behaviours amongst employees (Haunschild, Moreland, & Murrell, 1994; Van Oudenhoven & De Boer, 1995); and that failed change programmes lead to distrust amongst employees (Wanous, et al, 2000)..

It is unlikely that any active organizational identity management had taken place to mitigate the impact of changes, given the lack of scholarly resource, upon which managers might draw. It might therefore be expected that NCRC employees would reflect existing literature, linking significant organizational change and negatively impacted identity.

In isolation, the secondary data does not provide definitive evidence about the level of shared understanding of identity in either organization, nor does it absolutely measure organizational performance. However, it offers some support to the interpretation of interview responses, i.e. that NCRC employees' understanding of organizational identity is more diverse and perhaps, that this might be linked to poor organizational performance, as some academic research suggests.

New Starters (Length of Service)

Staff members who were new to their respective organizations (less than 2 years' service) and those with long service (over 10 years) expressed their understanding of organizational identity with markedly different emphasis across the whole range of interviews. Although the same broad themes emerged, new-starters were keener to talk expansively and emphasized their perceptions more forcefully.

Without more targeted research it is not immediately clear why this might be. However, there is some evidence in psychological literature, which suggests that 'new' employees are more engaged and enthusiastic and critically, that induction, or organizational socialization, processes can be pivotal.

New employees need to understand, respond to, and make sense of the organization they are joining (Louis, 1980). This cognitive sense-making has been described as a cyclical process of organizational socialization, in which new employees proactively engage in building relationships; acquiring information, seeking and reflecting on feedback; negotiating changes in their job role; and modifying their assumptions based on those processes (Ashford & Black, 1996). Research suggests that new staff members' 'adjustment' occurs during the first six to twelve months after joining (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1978).

Whilst the researcher did not examine this issue in greater detail, the differences in the ways new-starters and long-servers expressed their understanding suggests that some degree of enthusiasm, socialization and reflection may continue beyond the first twelve months, or perhaps diminishes incrementally, rather than ceasing altogether. Certainly, responses suggest that the ways in which new employees are welcomed, inducted and socialized into organizations might merit further investigation, with regard to management practice because new-starters articulated

changes to elements of identity, which required historical knowledge that they could not have possessed, unless they had learned it from others.

Further exploration and learning in this area might offer scholars and practitioners valuable insight into the opportunity afforded for 'installing', or building a higher degree of commonality in understood organizational identity, through induction processes and other, typically early-stage processes, such as job shadowing, or mentoring.

Secondary Line of Investigation

Participants frequently talked about their organizations as if they were, in some sense, 'human' or animate. Interview responses seemed to imbue the organizations with human personality traits, or characteristics, e.g. "we're quite an honest organization" (Participant N); "An organization has to be tough to take on the challenges of survival" (Participant I); "I think the organization, as a whole, is very competent" (Participant A).

An organization is not animate, nor can it literally display characteristics, or hold views. However, the use of anthropomorphization, or personification techniques, in exploring stakeholder understanding of organizational identity is also widespread in the academic literature (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Chun and Davies, 2001; Davies, et al, 2001; Keller and Richey, 2006; Newman, 1953; Steidl and Emory, 1997). The researcher chose to explore the usefulness, or appropriateness, of various personification metaphors (drawn from Davies, et al. (2003)) as a secondary

line of investigation. The findings from this exploration are briefly set out in the previous chapter.

Participants doubts about the relevance of particular terminology might in isolation be overcome by devising and trialling a set of metaphors, which were considered relevant, or better understood, by UK charity employees, although this would require a substantial piece of new research.

However, what seemed fundamentally problematic, in terms of effectively exploring identity through such metaphors, was that different participants understood the same terms, e.g. ruthlessness, in completely different ways. Even with 'acceptable', or 'sector-appropriate', metaphors, researchers could still not be certain that each participant understood the metaphors in the same way, without further exploration. The researcher believes that the inherently reductionist nature of such personification metaphors and the consequent risk of producing flawed data, if used in isolation, suggests they are of limited use in effectively illuminating participant perceptions.

5.5 Is Organizational Identity Fixed, or Changeable?

There is a debate in the academic literature around the question of whether organizational identity is fixed, stable and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; van Riel, 1997), or elastic and mutable (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Here, participants suggested that their organization's identity is changing, or has changed (over the past five years). Themes such as *mission-led*, or *values orientation,* suggested a degree of permanence, or durability. However, the apparent influence on elements such as *trustworthiness*, or *collaborativeness*, from more ephemeral influences, including *external economic factors* and *pressure from funders*, suggest that understanding of organizational identity, informed by organizational practices, or behaviours, might indeed be subject to change over time.

Participants inferred that changes in organizational identity, where they perceived them (*trustworthiness*, *collaborativeness*, *locus of control*, *resilience*), were transitory and some 'true' organizational identity would ultimately reassert itself. This contention cannot be directly supported by academic research and indeed, contradicts the established view of organizational identity, based largely on Albert & Whetten's (1985) work.

Perhaps instead, what participants were articulating was their perception of a gradual change in the understood organizational identity, over the five-year period, which was regularly mentioned. Certainly, this commonly-articulated view highlights a potentially interesting area for further exploration around the notion of a changeable identity, particularly in response to external or environmental factors. As noted previously, the potential impact of such external or environmental factors on identity is supported widely in the identity literature (e.g. Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Kennedy, 1977; Markwick & Fill, 1997; Olins, 1995; van Riel & Balmer, 1997).

5.6 Conclusions & Implications for Practice

The primary objective of the research was to explore an under-researched area of organizational identity scholarship: the UK charitable sector. Specifically, the study investigated the degree to which internal stakeholders (employees), in two UK charities, shared a common understanding of organizational identity, from an explicitly internal organizational perspective.

The range of elements, which emerged through the application of template analysis to the interview transcripts combined with a process of reflection by the researcher, suggest some interesting insights into the ways that organizational identity is understood in two UK charities.

5.6.1 Organizational identity in UK Charities

The researcher interpreted and synthesized the interview data to suggest that the 'descriptive themes' and 'influencing factors', through which participants articulated their understanding of identity, might be understood to comprise the broad concepts of organizational culture, organizational personality, organizational behaviours, communication and the external environment.

The specific terminology used by individual participants here, does not directly mirror the terminology in corporate identity research. However, the researcher concludes that in broad terms, internal stakeholders in UK charities understand organizational identity in ways, which are broadly analogous with the key tenets of organizational identity in existing literature.

Many of the key constructs found in existing identity modelling are reflected in the understanding articulated by employees in the two participating organizations.

5.6.2 Comparing Manager and Non-manager Perspectives

The researcher explored anecdotal suggestions that managers and non-managers, in UK charities, understood organizational identity differently, linked to evidence in academic literature suggesting that such divergence can be found in a corporate setting (e.g. Corley, 2004; He, 2012; Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2003; He and Balmer, 2007).

A broad degree of consistency emerged in the 'descriptive themes' (elements), upon which managers and non-managers relied, in communicating their perceptual understanding of organizational identity. The researcher concludes that whilst the two groups sometimes used different 'influencing factors' to illuminate their views, there is no substantive support for the notion that managers, in the two participating organizations, understand organizational identity differently from their non-managerial co-workers. Indeed, there was a considerable level of agreement across the sample. Further academic exploration of this topic area, in a range of UK charities might support greater generalizability to the wider charitable sector.

5.7 Opportunities for Practitioners and for Further Research

5.7.1 Intra-Organizational Understanding

At the time the research was conducted, there was a significant difference in financial performance between the two organizations. NCRC had significant financial problems and had dramatically reduced staff numbers (by 50%) through a series of restructures and redundancies. MSSTT, by contrast, was in a relatively stable financial position and was forecasting growth.

Although no causal link can be evidenced, the intra-organizational diversity, expressed by internal stakeholders, linked to an under-performing organization appears to support a range of literature on organizational identity (e.g. Senge, 1990; Melewar, Karaosmanoglu & Paterson, 2005).

The evidence derived from interview analysis even supplemented with limited secondary data, cannot be considered generalizable, or dependable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, the researcher concludes that the data highlights an opportunity for future academic exploration of a potential link between shared understanding of organizational identity and organizational performance in UK charities. Practitioners might also consider the possible implications of the research, considering what lessons might be learned from mergers and acquisitions research prior to any planned change management processes.

5.7.2 Internal Communications

Practitioners might wish to focus on improved, more frequent and more targeted internal communications intended to promote a positive internal brand but also on facilitating bottom-up and horizontal forms of communication, enabling feedback and information sharing across the organization. Strong internal communication leads to happier employees (Vallaster, 2004) and pertinently, creates a sense of belonging and cohesion between the organization and its employees (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). 'Influencing factors', such as *spatial factors*, *beneficiary needs*, or *social media* might be utilized as symbolic tools in a formal communication strategy, intended to coalesce understanding of organizational identity around common themes.

5.7.3 Spatial Factors

Managers might actively consider Melewar & Jenkins (2002) 'architecture and location' element, in light of the expressed perceptions of non-manager staff members in relation to *spatial factors*. Clearly, any impact of the topographical layout of premises is not directly generalizable to other organizations. However, the emergent views of those stakeholders suggest that 'architecture and location', or the workplace 'environment' (Olins, 1995), is an element that managers might consider carefully as a potential tool for influencing understanding of organizational identity.

5.7.4 New Starters

Managers in UK charities might wish to focus their efforts on the processes through which they induct, or socialize new employees, or employees whose job roles change. There is support in academic literature for a cyclical sense-making process that new employees engage in to acquire identity (Ashford & Black, 1996). Practitioners might consider the opportunity that this sense-making process presents to actively instil a more consistent understanding of organizational identity at this pivotal point in their integration into the organization, through induction, buddying, shadowing, or other orientation techniques.

The insight provided into the organizational socialization process might also present an interesting avenue for further academic exploration. Existing literature suggests that new staff member's socialization occurs only in the first sixth to twelfth months after joining (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1978). However, staff in the participating organizations, with up to two years' service expressed their understanding of organizational identity in a distinctly different manner to those with over ten years' service. Further research might seek to illuminate, for example, the duration of the socialization period.

5.7.5 Personification Metaphors

Further research into the usefulness, or otherwise of personification metaphors, in organizational identity research, would make a valuable contribution to the academic literature.

It was clear from the participant responses that the use of such metaphors, which seem to imbue a structural or legal entity, such as an organization, with human characteristics, is commonplace.

However, it was equally clear, when exploring the secondary line of investigation, that consistency in understanding such terms is far from established and equally, terms that might be appropriate in one setting, might be highly inappropriate in another.

The use of such metaphors, particularly with a positivist methodology, which might not enable research subjects to fully articulate their broader views, appears to overlook potential variations in understanding. Further research might clarify the risks and benefits, which exist in such an approach.

5.7.6 Alternative Organizational Viewpoints

The researcher focused on Brown, et al's (2006) organizational viewpoint, "Who are we as an organization?" to explore the way charity employees made sense of their organizations from an explicitly internal perspective.

Nevertheless, many participants communicated their understanding of organizational identity by reference to influences beyond the organization (*external economic factors*, *pressure from funders*) and placed some emphasis on the *desired external image* - what external actors thought about their organization.

Brown et al referred to this organizational viewpoint as construed image, represented by the question: "What does the organization believe others think about the organization?" The potential links to construed image appear to be of interest in terms of understanding organizational identity in UK charities. The researcher believes that the direct and indirect impacts of construed image, on internal stakeholders, merits further investigation and might provide an interesting opportunity for future academic study.

5.7.7 Gender and Age as Determining Factors

There is a deficit in the organizational identity literature, using age as a factor. This gap in academic knowledge might offer an interesting area of exploration for future research, which might subsequently enable practitioners to more appropriately target their efforts in managing organizational identity.

Gender differences, in relation to organizational identity in UK charities, might also merit further academic exploration. The gender balance in UK charities is distinct from other sectors. A study, carried out by Agenda Consulting, published in Third Sector Magazine (August, 2011), found that 71% of charity employees were female, compared with 46% across the whole of the UK workforce. Additionally, women held 61% of management posts and 38% of the organizations surveyed had a female chief executive (http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/Governance/article/1087381/Charity-staff-turnover-falls-survey-finds).

There is some academic literature focused on organizational identity and gender (e.g. Aaltio & Mills, 2002; Gherardi, 1995; Hearn & Parkin, 1983). However, as with organizational identity more broadly, there is no significant research focused on the subject area in UK charities. The researcher concludes that this gap in the literature presents an interesting opportunity for future research around potential gender differences in organizational identity amongst UK charity stakeholders.

5.8 Summary

The primary objective of the research was to explore organizational identity in UK charities and investigate the degree to which internal stakeholders in two such charities shared an internally-common understanding. Specific focus was also given to the particular relationship between managers and non-managers, in terms of their understanding of organizational identity.

Based on analysis of sixteen in-depth, one-to-one, unstructured interviews, the researcher has inductively identified a range of emergent elements that staff members in the participating organizations used to articulate their understanding of organizational identity. In broad terms, participants across the sample, regardless of management status, articulated very similar themes.

The emergent themes do not completely align to the taxonomy of Melewar & Jenkins (2002), or indeed to any other recognized model. However, there are

clear similarities, and apparent links, in areas such as organizational culture, organizational personality, organizational behaviours, communications and environmental factors to a range of other existing models and to the broad theoretical understanding of identity in a business setting.

The researcher believes that organizational identity in UK charities is broadly comparable with that of previously researched corporations. However, the lack of consistent and clearly defined terminology in the topic area; the inherent reductionism in identity modelling; the reliance (in those models) on intangible and conceptual elements; and the sheer complexity and multi-layered nature in the formation and maintenance of organizational identity for individuals and groups of individuals (an organization), makes it unlikely that any of the existing models truly represents a comprehensive and replicable model for identity in all organizations.

The researcher identified a number 'influencing factors': tangible and intangible factors, which participants used to articulate their perceptions but would not be considered elements of organizational identity, e.g. *external economic factors*. Managers and non-managers sometimes used different 'influencing factors' to express their views, which may in some way have informed the anecdotal view that the two groups understand their organizational identity differently. Nevertheless both groups essentially seemed to share a common understanding of the organizational identity – 'Who we are as an organization'.

A number of possible areas for further academic exploration have been highlighted above. In addition, whilst the results of the research are not generalizable and no attempt was made to produce a theoretical model, several areas have been identified, which practitioners might draw upon to target their efforts to manage, or manipulate organizational identity.

Chapter 6: Evaluation & Contribution

6.1 Introduction

The reflexivity of the researcher is a critical component of interpretive, qualitative research. It is not adequate for reflection to occur only in the research design, or in the investigative process itself. It is equally important that the researcher extends the reflexive approach through to publication.

Reflexivity enables the researcher to acknowledge and evaluate the impact that their own role; their own experience; their own background, or beliefs; and their particular interventions might have on the research. Johnson & Duberly (2003) argue that it is impossible for management research to be carried out independent of the researcher's own context and indeed, that management researchers should be inherently distrustful of the relationship between the researcher and the research. In extending the reflexive process through to the point of publication, the researcher seeks to mitigate, or as a minimum clarify, the risks inherent in the process of interpreting interpretation, or what Giddens (1984) refers to as the double hermeneutic.

The researcher has therefore critically examined and evaluated the study and will subsequently consider what contribution the research might offer to the field of knowledge.

6.2 Evaluation

Some of the study's limitations have been described previously (Chapter 3).
However, without simply re-stating those considerations, a reflexive
approach requires a re-visitation of certain aspects in a broader retrospective
evaluation of the research.

There are historical and on-going professional relationships between the
researcher and more than half of the research participants. The researcher
has acknowledged and understood the risk of bias (e.g. Horsburgh, 2003);
the problematic question of validity in practitioner-based research (Kvale,
1995; Murray and Lawrence, 2000); and the challenge of objectivity in
interpretive research (Hammersley, 2000).

As far as possible, steps were taken to mitigate these factors through a
carefully planned, systematic and consistent approach in advance of the
investigative process. Absolute consistency remains somewhat challenging
in unstructured interviews, as the researcher consciously enables the
participant to lead the direction of the discourse. The researcher is therefore
required to act reflexively even whilst conducting the interview (reflection-in-
action), responding to the participants' discourse; using prior experience to
influence his actions; and create new understanding (Schön, 1991).

The researcher used a process of review and reflection, based on Gibbs
(1998) reflective cycle (Appendix 22) to provide a more structured and
systematic approach between interviews, prior to and during the

interpretative analysis process. This enabled considered reflection on the research process and, where appropriate, minor modifications to the approach, from a somewhat more objective stance.

Ultimately, the researcher argues that whilst reasonable steps have been taken to be as 'objective as possible', every aspect of the research piece, from conception to publication, has been clearly set within a social constructionist paradigm and from an idealist ontological perspective. The researcher posits therefore that there is no external reality, or absolute truth. Instead, the intention is merely to illuminate the ways in which "social actors constitute their world as they talk it, write it and argue it" (Potter, 1996, p.98). It is acknowledged that, particularly in practitioner research, the researcher too is an actively participating social actor (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Their presence and interventions will seemingly inevitably influence the behaviour of the research participants but through reflexivity, the researcher argues that the very experience and history, which they bring to the study, might add significant worth.

The research is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of organizational identity amongst employees of UK charities and does not claim generalizability to the wider charity sector, or to the wider population. Nevertheless, it provides useful insight for practitioners and considerations for further academic exploration.

The use of interviews, in isolation, might give rise to questions around the value of the data and analysis attained. The researcher has set out the reasons for the use of interviews, rather than some other techniques, in Chapter 3. However, it might be argued that the data and the conclusions drawn might have had more depth if between-method methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2006) had been used.

The researcher acknowledges the likelihood that richer data might have been derived through the use of additional techniques. However, access to additional time with participants in, for example, focus groups; and the additional time required for the researcher in designing and delivering such additional techniques, plus analysis of further data sets, made this approach unrealistic in the available timescales.

A limited secondary data set was utilized to mitigate the absence of between-method triangulation to some extent. The researcher has further attempted to demonstrate a degree of trustworthiness in the research by reference to multiple sources and theories (Patton 1990) in the analysis.

The inclusion (albeit ancillary) of personification metaphors in social constructionist organizational identity research might be challenged. Any attempt to 'lead', or constrain participants' ability to express their own views unfettered, would not be consistent with the epistemological stance. However, the researcher was clear that the inclusion, where appropriate, of certain metaphors was definitively subordinate to the unstructured approach used in

interviews. Using reflection-in-action (Schön, 1991), the researcher ensured that no personification metaphor was introduced into interviews until participants had been given the opportunity to explore and articulate their individual perspective to the fullest extent. In this context, the inclusion of metaphors did not in any way limit the capacity of participants to express their understanding of organizational identity in their own terms.

Template analysis was one of many options open to the researcher, in drawing out findings and conclusions from the participant interview data. Whilst arguments might be made for alternative approaches to analysing the date, the researcher argues that the emergent nature of template analysis, with no recourse to a priori codes, was wholly congruent with the adopted epistemological stance. The method also allowed for a greater degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, which, it is argued, gave richer detail to the analysis and extracted the maximum benefit from the researcher's prior knowledge of the participating individuals; the participating organizations; some external stakeholders; and the UK charitable sector.

In retrospect, the researcher might have adopted a somewhat different or modified approach, such as the use of further triangulation, to add to the data derived. However, in the available timeframe for the research, the findings and conclusions do highlight some interesting areas for further study, offer indicators for practitioners and add to the scholarly knowledge in a number of ways, which will be set out below.

6.3 Contribution

There is a rich body of existing academic literature around the broad topic of identity studies in a business context and an array of approaches, from scholars across different disciplines, and epistemological schools of thought (see Chapter 2). However, the researcher believes that the study makes a contribution to the field in three particular areas: Research Methodology; Knowledge and Theory; and Management Practice.

Research Methodology

The findings make a contribution to scholarly practice and highlight a particular area for academic exploration, linked to methodological approach. There were clear and substantial variations in participant understanding of the personification metaphors considered, based on responses to the secondary line of investigation. Different participants understood identical terms in very different ways and certain other terms were not fully understood at all. It is possible that this suggests weaknesses in the particular set of metaphors used. However, the researcher argues that a reductionist approach, such as the imposition of personification metaphors, impedes or limits the extent to which academic study might draw out a comprehensive range of perceptual understanding from research subjects. Further study, exploring the advantages, or disadvantages, of such approaches; or comparison with more emergent approaches, might have significant value.

Knowledge and Theory

After extensive searches, the researcher was able to identify only a limited amount of research related to organizational identity in UK charities. A significant majority of academic literature focuses on the corporate sector and whilst some research exists around other forms of not-for-profit (e.g. faith groups); visual identity; or gender identity, there appears to be a gap in identity research focused on the degree of commonality in understanding of organizational identity by internal stakeholders in UK charities. The study therefore makes a contribution by adding to the general body of knowledge around organizational identity and specifically addressing an identified gap in the academic literature.

The research data suggests a potential link between the degree to which organizational identity is shared or commonly understood; and organizational performance in UK charities. This appears to support the existing literature in a corporate setting (e.g. Senge, 1990; Melewar, Karaosmanoglu & Paterson, 2005) and therefore makes a contribution by suggesting a similar link between organizational performance and organizational identity in the UK charity sector.

In addition, the researcher has highlighted a theme, emerging from participant interviews, which suggests a degree of changeability, in organizational identity over time. Many scholars argue for the enduring, or stable nature of organizational identity (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985; van Riel, 1997). Others argue for its elasticity and mutability (Gioia, Schultz & Corley,

2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Here, participant responses suggest that organizational identity can change, as a response to certain external or environmental forces. Whilst the findings from the study are not generalizable, the suggestion of a changeable identity makes a contribution to the on-going academic debate in this subject area.

Management Practice

Interview data revealed a marked difference in the manner, or passion, with which relatively new employees communicated aspects of identity, compared to those with longer service. Management practitioners might wish to focus on this apparent dissimilarity, as it may signpost a critical area for employee development, linked to shared understanding of organizational identity. The contribution the study makes to knowledge suggests that practitioners might utilize employees' socialization period, particularly via techniques such as induction, buddying and internal communications, to convey desired messages and thereby instil a greater degree of shared understanding of organizational identity.

There is evidence in literature (e.g. Louis, 1980; Ashford & Black, 1996; Schein, 1978) that supports the significance of the first twelve months of employee development, in terms of socialization. However, the study suggests that this phase of socialization extends for a longer period and practitioners may wish to consider maximizing the potential opportunities to directly influence organizational identity throughout this time.

The study additionally highlighted some areas, which seemed to represent significant influencing factors on understanding organizational identity. Some of these factors are perhaps distinctly important to charity employees. The contribution of the study is therefore to provide charity managers with areas of focus, via themes such as beneficiary needs, spatial factors, founding members, charitable mission, as tools in their efforts to modify, or direct the ways in which internal stakeholders perceive organizational identity, perhaps specifically via a range of targeted internal communications.

6.4 Summary

The researcher has taken every opportunity to reflect on the developmental and implementation processes involved in the study. Particular consideration has been given to the significance of the researcher's own role and the potential impact of existing and historical professional relationships on the individual participants and links to the participating organizations. Such reflexivity is essential in practitioner research and in interpretive study more broadly (e.g. Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Johnson & Duberley, 2003), as it acknowledges (and to some extent mitigates) any potential weaknesses but equally, clearly establishes the context in which the study should be understood.

This study has revealed some interesting variations and conversely consistency in the understanding of organizational identity within UK charities, and has suggested particular elements, which might influence, or inform, the perceptions of internal stakeholders. Further research is required to

determine whether, or to what degree, the findings of this study might be replicated more widely within UK charities. However, a number of interesting provisional suggestions have been made that might offer opportunity for future scholarly activity, or practitioner intervention, in what remains a little understood area of management in UK charities.

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