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Managerial work identity construction and problem-solving: systemic reflections

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Abstract

In modern society, organizations and individuals are facing great challenges in managing people's identity because of some newly emerged social and organizational phenomena. However, academic research in the identity field fails to make explicit the process of identity construction; further, few supportive instruments have been developed to assist people in managing their identity construction process. The thesis aims to further expose the process of work identity construction, identifying problems and difficulties embedded in the process and developing a set of instruments to assist people in managing the process.

In order to achieve these objectives, systems theories were introduced to the identity research field through an action research project. In depth long-term case studies were conducted based on four managers' experiences of applying four systems approaches in their management practices and identity construction processes.

Some advances in identity research and practice have been made in this research. By bringing in the perspectives of systems thinking, some new interpretations on the identity issue are achieved. By exploring the triggers, mechanisms and outcomes of identity construction, the identity construction process is further exposed. By summarizing and reflecting on the experience of application of systems approaches in assisting identity management, a new set of instruments is developed.

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1 Introduction

The research is about the process of managers' work identity construction in the modern organizational context. The main aim is to expose the problems and difficulties embedded in an identity construction process and provide a set of instruments to assist people in identity management. To achieve these objectives, systems theories were introduced to the identity field through an action research project. In the following sections, a more detailed description of the research background, problem statement, research purpose and design, as well as the thesis structure, will be presented.

1.1 Background

The dynamic changes in modern society brought on by the rise of the knowledge economy, globalization, the development of computers and information technology and other newly emerged social phenomena have greatly affected the way that organizations manage their work and workers and also the way that people manage their career and organizations (Ellemers, 2001, Judy, 1997). The career ladder that could be climbed easily by following clearly marked bureaucratic rules and procedures has gone in many organizations¹ (Kaye and Giulioni, 2012). And the social contract between employers and employees has changed greatly too. Now people have been left on their own to "figure out how to survive and thrive within a changing, flexible work environment in which employees have little obligation to individual employees' development and future" (Wieland, 2007, 6). Buzzanell (2000) points out that "the new career and social contract are continuations of organizational trends toward greater corporate self interest and work force disposability that are unhealthy not only for the workers but for global society as a whole" (p234).

For modern organizations and workers, there are many new issues that need to be dealt with, such as "greater fragmentation and pluralization, the weakening of older collective solidarities and block identities and the emergence of new identities associated with

¹ It should be clarified that the career ladder discussed in this thesis means more than pay and promotion scales; when talking about career ladder, we mean the layers of the pyramid of organizational positions and the career paths between these positions; the focus is on roles rather than pay. It is argued that the career ladder has died out in modern organizations as: (1) organizational belt-tightening and de-layering that have occurred since the 1980s have left far fewer leadership positions (Kaye and Giulioni, 2012). The upper layers of the pyramid have become a mere sliver. (2) The predictable progression from one established position to the next has given way to career patterns. These are more fluid, flexible, and responsive to the needs of the business and the individual. Today's career development looks more like a rock-climbing wall than a ladder (Kaye and Giulioni, 2012).

greater work flexibility, the maximization of individual choices through personal consumption” (Hall, 1991, 58). Among these new issues, identity may be the key word which could link all those phenomena together (Anderson, 2012, Ellemers, 2001, Stefanie, 2010). On the one hand, identity is important for organizations because identity is so meaningful and helpful in understanding and managing their employees, so that organizations can find out a way to rebuild their cooperating relationship under the framework of a new social contract and then organizations and employees can confront together the more turbulent external environment. On the other hand identity is also critical for individuals, because now they need to reinterpret and redevelop themselves to adapt to the changed organizational environment; they also need to make a new plan for their career development to replace the disappeared career ladder. Cheney (1991) argues that in the 21st century the management of employees’ identity is the critical management issue for all organizations.

Therefore, the identity issue has attracted great research interest from many disciplines, and lots of studies have been conducted on this issue.

Studies in the social psychological field provide a general framework to understand the link between society and individuals, which is called as the identity theory; however, they do not provide specific methods to resolve those practical problems that are of concern to current organizations and employees.

In organizational studies field, the social identity theory and related studies are developed, which concentrate on the relationship between organizations and employees. Another group of organizational scholars follow the tradition of social psychological research and focus on the dynamics of identity construction. Since the 1990s, a new research branch has also emerged, reflecting on a new social phenomenon, identity control, which may be a practical effect of the development of identity research and other related theories.

All the three branches have achieved great advancement in the past few decades; however, the gap between practical needs and theoretical supports is still significant. In the next section, a more detailed discussion about the problem facing identity research will be presented.

1.2 Problem Statement

In this section, the main arguments and unresolved problems of the three research streams will be presented one by one. And a possible theoretical framework which may assist the research to make some advancement in the identity research will be discussed.

1.2.1 Gaps in Current Identity Research

There are three main streams in the field of identity research field.

First of all, social identity researchers see identification as the panacea for organizations. They believe that once identification happens, “individuals understand, accept, and employ organizational premises in their decision making and other actions, in effect becoming a microcosm of the organization such that acting on behalf of the organization is tantamount to acting on behalf of themselves” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 337).

However, social identity researchers meet two problems in implementing their arguments. The first one is that although huge amounts of empirical studies have revealed the positive relationship between identification and other organizational outcomes (e.g. work effort, motivation, cooperation and coordination, as well as organizationally beneficial decision making); academics still cannot prove that identification can directly lead to any positive behavior (Albarracin et al., 2001, Webb and Sheeran, 2006). In the literature review of Ashforth et al. (2008), it is summarized that “various factors may attenuate the link between cognitive and affective identification and behavior, such as situational constraints, competing identifications, impression management concerns, and so on... Thus, we argue that behavior should be regarded as a probabilistic outcome of identification, not as a necessary component” (p331). It can be seen that the relationship between identity/identification and behaviour needs to be disclosed further.

The second problem is that academics still do not know how to effectively enhance people’s organizational identification. Although there are a great many empirical studies which have identified dozens of antecedents of identification, most of them are relatively static predictors which cannot reveal the dynamic process of identification. This kind of research is criticized by many researchers. For example, Demo (1992) points out the essential problems of this kind of research:

“Although theoretical attention has been devoted to the situational variability of the self-concept, empirical investigations continue to rely on one-shot methodologies. Such efforts assume that data obtained through these methods can be generalized to other situations in the person’s life, even to subsequent years or stages in the life course. Self-concept is a structural product of reflexive activity, but it is also susceptible to change as the individual encounters new roles, situations, and life transitions.” (p303)

Ashforth et al. (2008) emphasizes again:

“Yet surprisingly little research has attempted to capture these dynamics... they (most of current empirical studies) provide pictures of the surface of an ocean wave, not the undercurrents that formed it.” (p340, 341)

Despite this strong appeal for research on the identity construction process, as of 2012, there are still very few empirical studies on this issue. Through an extensive literature review, only four papers were identified which focused on revealing the process of identity construction and had developed some models about the process (Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Pratt, 2000, Pratt et al., 2006); and only one of them conducted the research from the perspective of organizations (focusing on the identification process), the other three concentrated on the individuals’ identity construction process. Besides, three of the four models focus on a role transition period, and the other one is a theoretical proposal without empirical data to support it ; and in all these models, the potential difficulties or problems of identity construction are not discussed. Therefore these models are inspiring for our understanding of the identity construction process itself, but not helpful in deepening our understanding about the dilemmas that organizations and employees are facing in modern society (these dilemmas are discussed in Section 1.1).

In short, little knowledge has been obtained about how organizations can manage members’ organizational identification; because on the one hand the relationship between identification and behavior is still unclear; on the other hand the process of construction and re-construction of employees’ organizational identity has not been made explicit.

Secondly, scholars based on the identity theory try to explore the identity issue from the perspective of individuals, and they also pay much attention to the identity construction process. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue:

“Moreover, despite the existence of many contributions at a conceptual level, there are relatively few empirical studies addressing specific processes of identity constructions on the personal level in depth” (p1164).

As we have mentioned above, there are a few models about identity development from all the three branches, scholars from this stream make great contribution to the issue by conducting numerous intensive qualitative studies to explore identity dynamics in the lived experience of some individuals. Each of these studies exposes one or more special aspect of identity construction, such as the influence of elicited identity on consultants’ identity construction (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006), the communication methods used by evangelical Christian workers in identity construction (Anderson, 2012), social sense-making used by musicians to re-narrate themselves after traumata (Maitlis, 2009), the influence of emotion on the identity construction of doctor managers (Cascón-Pereira and Hallier, 2012) and so on.

These studies are quite instructive because their thick descriptions and open-minded exploration broaden the view of identity research. However, those instruments identified in these studies are often too general to be learned and followed by other people. There are a few studies focus on revealing those difficulties and troubles that people may meet in their identity construction process, especially when facing the challenging modern organizational environment. Therefore it is argued that there is some shortage in developing useful supportive instruments for managing the identity construction process.

Thirdly, researchers who focus on the issue of identity regulation are not a big group. Not much attention was paid to this issue until Alvesson and Willmott (2002b) argue that identity regulation is an emerging way of organizational control; and they also suggest that “human resource management techniques... can be read as more suspect” (Alvesson et al., 2008, 16). To some degree, the identity regulation research can also be seen as a sub-branch under the framework of identity theory, because it also takes the individual perspective.

Not many findings have been achieved in this sub-branch. One significant study may be Beech (2008), which tries to reveal how people’s work identity become meaningful for themselves and their organizations. They claim that a dialogic process is often taken by people and their organization, to negotiate the meanings that can attach to a worker; the negotiation actually contains organizations’ effort of identity control and individuals

resistance to the control. Four forces that influence the outcomes of the process are identified: emotive, cognitive, power dynamics and narrative style; Beech argues that both organizations and individuals should pay more attention to these four forces in their identity management.

Identity regulation is still a topic which has not been explored deeply; although to some degree it is a topic closely linked with the dilemmas that both organizations and individuals are facing: how to manage the relationship between organization and individuals to achieve both personal development and organizational development when working under the new style of social contract.

In summary, there are four gaps existing in current literature of identity research: first, the relationship between identity and behaviour is still unclear. Second, the process of identification/ identity construction has not been well exposed. Third, there is a great shortage of instruments which could assist people and organizations to manage the process of identity construction. Finally, because of the practical needs, identity research also should pay more attention to the identity problems raised by the changed organizational environment and new style of social contract.

1.2.2 The Potential of Introducing Systems Thinking to the Identity Management Field

Systems thinking is a well developed research field in organizational studies, in which a number of specific approaches have been developed for resolving different types of organizational problem.

Systems theories and approaches have not been applied in identity management in previous research; the researcher envisaged a potential of systems approaches to improve individuals' identity management. Therefore this research is a first attempt to introduce systems thinking into the identity research field.

Specifically, according to the argument of previous identity research, practical experience is the main source of identity construction (Ibarra, 1999, Pratt et al., 2006); because identity work is actually a sense-making process in which experience is the key material (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Weick, 1995). It is argued by reflection researchers that experience will not lead to learning without reflection; in other words, the effectiveness of sense-making significantly depends on the quality of reflection on

experience (Boud et al., 1985). However, current study in the identity research field has paid little attention to the quality of reflection and the effectiveness of the sense-making process; and as a result, few instruments have been developed to assist people in managing their identity construction process.

Systems thinking may provide a good framework for identity research to make some advances in this direction. Each systems approach is established with a special philosophical assumption, a clear theoretical framework, and a set of specific methods to deal with practical problems; therefore, applying a systems approach in personal identity management is actually like talking and debating with an expert who has a unique view and has mastered some useful approaches to problem solving. This talking and debating may arouse high-quality reflection on individuals' practical experiences; and if the reflection process can be guided to focus on the identity issue, an improvement in identity management can be expected.

Hence introducing systems approaches in the field of identity research may provide a feasible way to develop useful tools for individuals for managing their identity construction process; besides, guiding practitioners in making reflections on their work problems and work identity may also provide a great opportunity for researchers to closely observe and analyze the process of construction of work identity, which may lead to a further insight into the process.

1.3 Research Purpose and Research Design

As a response to the gaps and potential identified in literature, this thesis considers the following two main research questions: The first question is: how is work identity (which refers to 'a set of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences by which people define themselves in a given work role' (Sealy and Singh, 2010, 290) constructed in the modern organizational environment? The second question is: what kinds of instruments can be provided to support the work identity construction process?

To answer the first question, there are four sub questions: 1. What is the relationship between people's work identity and work activity? 2. What can trigger an identity construction process in the modern organizational environment? 3. What is the content of identity and identity construction? 4. What are the possible outcomes of the work identity construction process in modern organizations?

To answer the second question, there are also two sub questions: 1. What are the potential conflicts and difficulties that exist in the work identity construction process? 2. What are the possible instruments that could support people to interpret and deal with these problems?

To answer these questions, an inductive qualitative research was conducted. I first chose a case study strategy and then supplemented it with an action research project.

In this research, H Business School was chosen as the case organization; because it was experiencing a series of internal changes and at the same time was facing some external challenges, so it is expected that H organization, to some degree can represent the turbulent organizational environment that modern employees are facing. Then a group of senior and middle managers of the H organization were chosen as the participants; they represent some different types of employees, and may take different positions when faced with identity regulation. Because the focus of this research is on individuals' identity construction process, the unit of analysis is the individual rather than organization.

As far as the first research question is concerned, the thesis adopted the critical incident technique to review key incidents in people's career life, so that potential triggers of identity construction can be identified, and the content and possible outcomes of the work identity construction process can be revealed; besides, by exposing the approaches that people used to manage each incident, the relationship between activity and identity could be also disclosed to some degree. The following action research project provided a second chance for the researcher to closely observe the ongoing process of people's work identity construction in a period of organizational change, and a special attention was paid to the practical problems faced by participants and their approaches to problem-solving; therefore the relationship between work identity and work activity could be exposed further; and some more types of triggers, contents and outcomes could be identified.

As to the second research question, the thesis took the action research project as the main approach to pursue the answer. Four systems approaches were chosen and introduced to participants of the projects based on a literature review and critical reflection. Then three modes of the application of these approaches were distinguished. While Mode 1 describes the traditional way of the application of systems approaches; Mode 2 was developed for assisting people in reflecting on their current work and

approaches to problem-solving; Mode 3 was developed for assisting people in reflecting on their work identity. Through making reflections with the systems approaches in Mode 2 & 3, the conflicts and difficulties that those managers were facing in their organizational life were exposed; besides the underpinning problems of identity management were also made explicit through the critical discussion between participants and the researcher with the framework of these systems instruments. Further, the feedback of the participants and the reflections of the researcher also address the usefulness of these four systems approaches in supporting people's identity construction in a modern organizational environment.

It is needed to be noticed that as the thesis is an exploratory research in which reflection is a main theme, the conduction process of the research also needs to be a reflective process; and the researcher herself needs to keep learning and reflecting on her own identity too. Therefore, in some parts of the thesis, the first person will be used to emphasize the reflection and learning process of the research.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The thesis has nine main chapters to address the two main research questions.

Chapter one provides an overview of the thesis, and makes explicit the research questions.

Chapter two presents an extensive literature review about the concept, theoretical framework and main findings of identity research in the organizational study field. The theoretical assumptions of this research are also made explicit in this part.

Chapter three explains the philosophical assumptions and specific designs of the research project. The former addresses the researcher's assumptions on ontology, epistemology and human nature, as well as the research choice on approaches and methodologies. The latter presents the research strategies, the design of the initial case study project and the following action research project, as well as the process of developing the set of supportive instruments. Methods of data analysis are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters four to seven present four participants' stories one by one, and the findings achieved in each story are also addressed.

Chapter eight looks in-depth into the mechanism of identity construction, and then discusses the application of systems approaches in the identity management field; finally my own reflections on the research project are also presented.

Chapter nine gives a summary of the findings of the research; the contributions and potential future directions are discussed too.

1.5 Summary

Organizations and employees are facing great challenges in managing their relationships and in achieving personal and organizational development; and identity is identified as the central issue that may link up many organizational problems. However, academic research in the identity field fails to make explicit the identity construction process; further, few supportive instruments that could be used to manage people's identity construction have been developed. This research tries to find some answers for these problems by exploring the identity construction process in a typical modern organizational environment which has not been well studied before; and by developing and testing some supportive systems instruments which have not been introduced into the field either.

In order to realize these research purposes, the thesis will begin with an extensive literature review to provide a theoretical basis for the research. Recent findings in the identity research field will be discussed in the next chapter.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the context of organization studies, identity has been a topic of great interest to researchers from multiple disciplines (Ibarra, 1999); and it has also become “a popular frame through which to investigate a wide array of phenomena” (Alvesson et al., 2008, 5). One reason may be that identity is viewed as central for many popular organizational issues, such as merger (Paviglionite, 2007), culture (Erez and Earley, 1993, Klugkist, 2009), motivation (Van Knippenberg, 2000), commitment (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b), leadership (Carroll and Levy, 2010), team performance (Gundlach et al., 2006), ethnicity (White, 2004) and so on.

Amid the raising interest in the topic of identity, this chapter first aims to clarify the key tensions underlying the extensive literature in the identity research field; then by reviewing, classifying and comparing recent findings, the possible gaps existing in current studies can be identified. After a review and discussion, another topic, reflection, is introduced to provide some new light to identity research. Finally, through reflecting on my learning from these two strands of literature, the research interests and motivations are further exposed, and the objectives of this research are presented.

The literature review of this chapter was based on 281 papers selected from a broad range of literature. The literature review strategy for this thesis was informed by the traditional narrative review approach and the systematic review approach (a detailed discussion can be found in Appendix 3).

2.2 Identity Research

2.2.1 Definition

Before entering into the identity research field, it is necessary to make explicit what is being studied, and what concepts are normally used. In this section, these issues are discussed.

2.2.1.1 Identity

Identity has been defined in a variety of ways (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, Giddens, 1991, Tajfel, 1972). For example, identity can be seen as “the various meanings

attached to an individual” (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, 137); or as “a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘who am I?’ or ‘who are we?’” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 327).

Although researchers based on the social identity theory and identity theory both agree that identity represents a kind of self-awareness, different scopes are offered to identity definition because of different research interests: Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) focus on independent individuals while Ashforth et al. (2008) care more about the relationship between the individual and organization/groups.

Therefore, Ashforth et al. (2008) further distinguish the concepts of ‘personal identity’ and ‘social identity’, to make explicit the relationship between individuals and groups. Social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, 255). Personal identity refers to “a person’s unique sense of self” (Postmes and Jetten, 2006, 360); therefore personal identity can be seen as the “gestalt of idiosyncratic attributes, such as traits, abilities, and interests” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 327). Ashforth et al. (2008) point out that “what distinguishes social and personal identities is not so much their respective attribute...but their respective levels of self”: social identity can be shared by group members, therefore make a distinction in groups; while personal identity is unique to an individual and then can make a distinction in individuals within a group (p327).

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) also see a difference between social identity and personal identity, but they interpret the differences from another perspective: the source of one’s identity. They argue that the meanings attached to an individual can “be based on the social roles a person holds”, or be based on “personal idiosyncratic characteristics the individual displays and others attribute to him or her based on his or her conduct” (p137).

In recent years, more reflections are made on the distinction between personal identity and social identity. For example, Alvesson et al. (2008) argue:

“Despite the appeal of persistent distinction between personal and social identities, we also wish to resist the often arbitrary clarity of such divisions. Instead, we invite identity theorists, including ourselves, to develop a sharper eye for the diverse and fine-tuned

ways in which the inevitable personal-social relation might be configured in identity research.

...[Define] ourselves as secretaries, middle managers, or professors, for instance, does not entail simply stepping into pre-packaged selves, but always involves negotiating intersections with other simultaneously held identities (e.g. Black male professor and parent) and making individualized meaning in interaction with the people and systems around us (e.g. competent, high-status secretary).” (p10)

As a response to Alvesson et al.’s (2008) appeal, in this research, Ibarra and Barbulescu’s (2010) definition of identity was adopted, because the research sought to expose diverse approaches to the individual-organization relations in the identity construction process.

2.2.1.2 Identification and Identity work

As a result of the different perspectives taken in identity definition, researchers also have different ways to interpret the process of identity construction; two concepts are commonly used which may represent these two research strands: ‘identification’ and ‘identity work’.

Because of the focus on relationship, and the emphasis of the “collective’s or role’s defining essence as self-defining” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 329), some researchers use the term ‘identification’ to refer to “the perception of oneness or belonging to some aggregate” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, 21); in other words, the identification is successfully achieved “when a person’s self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity” (Dutton et al., 1994, 239). And more commonly, identification is used as organizational identification (OI); for example, Dutton et al (1994) claim that “organizational identification is the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization” (p239).

The definition of identification and the perspective underpinning it are criticized by many researchers. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue:

“Despite the espoused interest in the issue of becoming identified, most authors do not go very far in this direction. Broadly popular streams, such as social identity theory and organizational identification, typically emphasize themes such as social identifications

in the form of a perceived overlap between a person's identity and a group's or an organization's identity (Dutton et al., 1994; Elsbach, 1999). They assume fairly stable views of the organization and the self, the becoming being constrained to the active linking of the two.” (p1164)

As a response to these criticisms, a new concept, 'identity work', was developed (Snow and Leon, 1987, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). It is defined as “people's engagement informing , repairing, attaining, strengthening, or revising their identities” (p137), and emphasizes the social efforts made to meet a person's identity aims (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010).

In this research, identity work will be used to refer to the process that people are involved in to form and reform their identities; and in the next section, the reason for the choice will be further explained by further exposing the theoretical perspectives underpinning these two terms.

2.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives in Identity Research

In this section, two broad theoretical perspectives in the field of identity research are presented: (1) social identity theory and related identification studies. (2) A diverse and loosely organized body of identity theory studies which focus on identity work / the processes of identity construction. And recently, a new perspective has arisen which also captures some attention: identity regulation and resistance (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b); this perspective will be discussed and reflected in this part too.

2.2.2.1 Social Identity

Social identity theory may be “the most influential, or certainly the most prominent” theoretical stream in the organizational research field on identity issue (Alvesson et al., 2008, 12).

Two theories in this stream are most influential: social identity theory (SIT) and its sister approach self-categorization theory (SCT) (Tajfel, 1972, Tajfel and Turner, 1979). SIT claims that individuals understand themselves through positioning themselves into different social group categories; while SCT specifies the operation of the social categorization process and argues that people are only embodiments of the relevant prototype of groups/organization; in other words, the depersonalizing aspect of identity is emphasized (Ashforth et al., 2008, Hogg and Terry, 2000).

Based on these two theories, most studies in this stream see social units as the major source of people's identity, and personal distinctiveness is deemphasized. And because of this assumption, much research in this stream "adopts a technical/functionalist stance", and "a fairly static view" (Alvesson et al., 2008, 13). Specifically, the organization is treated as the main object of identification, and the identification itself is assumed to be relatively stable; besides, much interest is concentrated on revealing how high identification with an organization could bring great benefits to the organization, such as motivation, commitment and loyalty.

Recently, researchers under this framework have started to reflect on their assumptions. For example, Demo (1992) argue that:

"...the limitations of prevailing research methodologies have prevented the processual perspective from being systematically applied in empirical research, and consequently little is known about the emergent, dynamic, changing qualities of human self-images" (p306).

However, about 16 years later, Ashforth et al. (2008) find the situation has not been significantly improved:

"Yet surprisingly little research has attempted to capture these dynamics. The rich descriptors in the paragraph above belie the static models guiding research. Authors have suggested that this state of affairs stems from research designs that promote snapshot images of identification." (p340)

Due to the difficulty met by social identity researchers, another framework, identity theory and related identity work research have received more attention.

2.2.2.2 Identity Work

Studies on the identity construction process (identity work) forms a second major stream in the identity research field.

A practical-hermeneutic approach dominate studies in this field, which seeks to understand "human cultural experience"; and in the identity field, its interest mainly concentrates on "how people craft their identities through interaction, how they weave 'narratives of self' in concert with others and out of the diverse contextual resources within their reach" (Alvesson et al., 2008, 8). In other words, identity work is believed to be a key approach through which the complicated, ambiguous and even contradictory

experiences that people met in their work and life can be resolved. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that

“... identity work is a more fruitful approach emphasizing dynamic aspects and on-going struggles around creating a sense of self and providing temporary answers to the question ‘who am I’ (or ‘who are we’) and what do I (we) stand for?” (p1164)

About when and how identity work can be triggered, there are two kinds of view. Some researchers believe that to some degree, identity work is a continuous process (Carroll and Levy, 2008, Simpson and Carroll, 2008, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003); while others consider that identity work frequently happens in some specific contexts which are fragmented and fluctuating, such as crisis or macro transitions of individuals or organizations (Ashforth, 2001, Beech, 2008, Beech and Johnson, 2005, Ibarra, 1999, Pratt et al., 2006).

Along with the development of research on identity work, the influence of organization on identity work is reconsidered again, but mostly from another angle: the negative influence brought by power and organizational control. Studies from this perspective form the third research area on identity issues.

2.2.2.3 Identity Control

In this research stream, power takes the central attention; and an emancipatory/ critical perspective is taken by researchers in the field (Alvesson et al., 2008, Ashforth et al., 2008). The common questions asked are: how is identity controlled? Or ‘how are employees enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives?’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, 619) .

To some degree, this stream represents a different worldview on doing research; it provides researchers with a lens to rethink the employment relationship, human resource management, and also the relationship between individuals and groups, which are also embedded in the process of identity construction. For example, Ibarra (1999) claims that clear and vivid feedback is helpful for individuals’ identity work because it could narrow down people’s search scope; Ashforth et al. (2008) interpret the same material from the view of identity control and argue that the identity regulation made by the organization constitutes an “invisible identity cage” for employees (p17).

By making explicit the three theoretical frameworks in the identity research field, we can understand the extensive findings in the field with less confusion; because each research branch may be supported by one of the three theoretical frameworks. In the next section, the main findings of these branches will be discussed.

2.2.3 Recent Research Findings

In this section, findings on four research topics are presented, including outcomes, antecedents, process of identity work and common instruments; then gaps and possible directions of identity research are discussed.

2.2.3.1 Outcomes

As has been mentioned, identity researchers, especially social identity researchers, have great passion for finding the possible influence of identity/identification on both individual and organizational behaviours. Therefore, there are lots of studies concentrating on this issue; and many relations have been identified.

Firstly, identity/identification is argued to be important for individuals, because it is an important approach for people to achieve self-enhancement. Cialdini (1976) finds from experiments that people attempt to enhance their public image, and they tend to link themselves with their organizations to share others' success. Ashforth (2001) also claims that people have strong motivations to identification, because it is helpful for self-knowledge (by locating oneself in a context) and self-expression (by linking to valued identity). Haslam et al. (2005) indicate that social identity can protect people from strain and stress because it provides a basis for people to receive social support. These studies show out the benefits that individuals could obtain from connecting themselves to organizations.

Next, it is argued further by some scholars that identification is necessary for people because it represent some basic needs of human beings. Hogg (2000) points out that self-categorization could help people to decrease perceived uncertainty; and Hogg (2003) further argues that it is self-uncertainty which mostly motivates people to identify high-entitativity groups (entitativity refers to "the property of a group that makes it appear a coherent, distinctive, and clearly structured entity", while high-entitativity groups represent "ones that are distinctive, internally homogeneous, clearly defined, purposeful, and well structured" (p206)). Ashforth et al. (2008) claim that people are meaning

seekers, therefore they identify groups and roles which can help them reduce the uncertainty or un-safety that brought by changes of environment.

Besides, a few researchers focus on the positive influence of identification on people's organizational life. For example, Carmeli et al. (2007) indicate that organizational identity (OI) may enhance people's work outcomes, such as adjustment and job performance; van Dick et al. (2004) also report that OI is critical during merger, because it is positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively associated with turnover intentions and negative emotions.

Finally, a small group of researchers also notice the unsuccessful results of identification, but not much attention has been paid on this issue. Snow and Leon (1987) report that sometimes homeless street people may use distancing or fictive storytelling to reject their 'homeless' roles; Snow and Leon explain it by people's need of self-esteem which may be destroyed by identifying their 'homeless' roles. Pratt (2000) also finds that some people refuse to develop their organizational identification, and others ambivalently identify with the organization; Pratt explains the reason as that sometimes the approaches organizations take to foster people's identification may fail because of external disturbance, but he does not explain the internal reasons for individuals' resistance.

To some degree, the failure of identification is disregarded by current research compared to the great passion for studying the benefits that identification could bring. It is argued that the unsuccessful results of an identity construction process may need more attention, and their reasons and specific processes also need to be explored further.

Another sub-branch of the research on outcomes of identification concentrates on its influence on social groups/ organizations

First of all, identification is argued to be important for encourage employees to serve organizational interests better, and many popular organizational topic, such as commitment, social capital and citizenship behaviour have been linked with identification. Cheney (1983) reports that employees with high organizational identification would consider organizational interests when they make work related decisions. Efraty and Wolfe (1988) also indicate that identification is related to employees' affective and performance responses. Haslam (2006) points out that group members' commitment to faltering organizational projects is underpinned by their group

identification. Roderick (2006) reports that identification with a workgroup can enhance people's willingness to help their group create social capital. Van Dick (2006a) conducts a large scale empirical research and they summarize that identification is related to organizational citizenship behaviour. Kovoov-Misra and Smith's (2011) empirical study shows that identification is associated with individuals' cognitive, behavioural, and affective support for organizational change.

Secondly, identification is argued to be important for improving team management; because it is positive related to many collective behaviours. Bartel (2001) find that higher identification can bring better interpersonal cooperation and work effort; Dukerich et al. (2002) also observe the positive influence of identification on physicians' cooperative behaviours. Fiol and O'Connor (2005) argue that identification is vital for virtual teams because it can promote group cohesion which may be problematic because of the relative lack of face-to-face interactions in virtual teams.

Finally, a meta analysis conducted by Riketta (2005), which summarizes that identification is relatively strongly associated with job involvement, in-role performance and extra-role performance.

The reason why identification can bring positive behaviours of individuals is exposed by DiSanza and Bullis (1999):

“Individuals understand, accept, and employ organizational premises as they are heard. Identification, then, is a process that involves the adaptation of member perceptions and premises through the use of enthymemes. It is through subtle, ongoing communicative interactions that members are adapted to the organization.” (p350)

And Ashforth (2008) further revealed the identification process: employees are actually “becoming a microcosm of the organization such that acting on behalf of the organization is tantamount to acting on behalf of themselves” (p337).

However, Riketta (2005) also notices in his meta-analysis that many outcomes/ measures are attributed to identification improperly in lots empirical studies; Ashforth et al. (2008) worry that the long list of outcomes of identity/identification may be misleading because “many of the outcomes attributed to OI are actually quite distal” (p337); and they argue that the concept of identification is losing its value because it is becoming vague and sometimes used as an equal term to organizational commitment.

Besides, studies from other fields remind us that the influence of identification on people's behaviour may be problematic; because the link between belief/attitude (identifying with an organization) and behaviour (acting on behalf of the organization) is possibly weak. For example, Albarracin et al. (2001) conduct an interesting meta-analysis study which shows that belief-based-components are related to attitude (the correlation is 0.56); and then attitude and norms can influence intention (0.70); and finally, the correlation between intention and future behaviour is 0.45. It can be seen that people's belief and behaviour are related but not as strongly as we expected. Another meta-analysis conducted by Webb and Sheeran (2006) suggests that an intention does not always lead to changes in behaviour, or at least there may be a degraded running of that intention (he reports that a medium-to-large change in intention leads to a small-to-medium change in behaviour). It can be found that most empirical studies on the outcomes of identification issue use self-reported data, and sometimes use the variable of intention to behaviour instead of the variable of behaviour when they test the relationship between identification and other individual/organizational behaviours. Therefore, Ashforth et al. (2008) argue that "behaviour should be regarded as a probabilistic outcome of identification, not as a necessary component" (p337).

It can be summarized that although identification/identity construction is argued to be important for organizations and individuals, its connections with people's actual behaviours still needs further research.

As a response to this situation, some researchers look for ways to strengthen people's identification to intensify its link with behaviours; then another sub-branch, studies on antecedents of identification, also attracts many academics. This sub-branch will be introduced in the following sections.

2.2.3.2 Antecedents or Predictors

In this section, findings about what can prompt or inhibit people's identification are discussed.

First of all, group or organizational characteristics are identified as antecedents or predictors of identity construction. For example, Mael and Ashforth (1992) collect data from 297 alumni of college; and their findings indicate that organizational identification (OI) is associated with organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and intra-

organizational competition (negatively), but not with inter-organizational competition. They also find that some individual antecedents of OI, such as satisfaction with the organization, tenure as students and sentimentality. However, these data come from self reports, and represent people's intention rather than behaviour; besides, satisfaction is often taken as an outcome of OI, but here it is listed as an antecedent. Smidts et al. (2001b) also find that organizational prestige is important for employees' organizational identification, and they further report that communication climate plays a central role in mediating the impact of communication content on OI. Similarly, Dutton et al. (1994) identify two key organizational images (the perceived image of members and the perceived image of outsiders) which can shape people's OI. They argue that members assess the attractiveness of the two images by "how well the image preserves the continuity of their self-concept, provides distinctiveness, and enhances self-esteem" (p116). However these arguments are based on theoretical analysis rather than empirical research; in other words, no data is obtained to support these arguments. Milton (2009) point out that identity affirmation, especially reciprocal expertise affirmation, is critical for team cooperation and team identification. However, again, these arguments are based on a proposed model rather than empirical data.

Some academics pay more attention to antecedents at individual level. For example, Carlsen and Pitis (2009) claim that hope may play an important role in employees' organizational identification; their paper is interesting but does not provide feasible approaches to implement their arguments. Caza and Wilson (2009) argue that the possession of multiple social and role identities is critical for individuals because "work-Identity complexity can generate cognitive, social and behavioural resources that foster resilience to work stress" (p6). However, they do not explain how to obtain and manage that kind of complexity. Roberts et al. (2009) point out that being authentic at work is important for the construction of a positive identity, because it is helpful for deepening self-awareness, peeling off masks and having others see people as authentic. To some degree, these antecedents are general and abstract concepts, and are hard to be learned or developed (for example, how could people achieve the objective of possessing multiple social and role identities?), at least not much easier than developing identity directly.

A group of researchers study antecedents of identity construction/ identification through analyzing the success or failure experiences of identification from the view of social identity theory (SIT); they focus on the fit/ classification issue. Cable and DeRue (2002)

find that person– organization fit perceptions were related to organization related outcomes, such as OI, citizenship, turnover; while needs–supplies fit perception is related to job/career related outcomes such as job/career satisfaction and occupational commitment; and although demands–abilities fit perception emerges as a distinct construct, it is not related to job performance. Their findings are instructive, but some of the relationships identified are a little confusing; for example they find person–organization fit is related to OI, but these two concepts almost share a common definition. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2006) find that owners of organizations always identify more with the organization than with the profession or workgroup; and the identification of associates depends on whether their professions fit with the type of organization, for example veterinarians in non-veterinary medicine organizations identified more with their profession and workgroups than with their organization. Parker (2007) makes a theoretical analysis about identity status and argues that dividing is central to the identification process. All these studies can be seen as following the direction of SIT research; on the one hand, fitting between individuals and organizations is seen as the main predictor of identification; but on the other side, the purpose of improving identification is to improve the fitting degree between organizations and their employees. Therefore, the research on antecedent and outcomes of identification from this perspective may focus on the same relationship but emphasize the two possible influence directions.

Some other researchers study antecedents by focusing on the identification of special groups, trying to obtain new findings through studying unique or extreme cases. For example, Russo (1998) chooses to study a group of the journalists through survey and interviews; and they find that autonomy is very important for journalists’ organizational and professional identification as well as job satisfaction; and they also find that these people identify their professional identities significantly higher than their organizations; and Russo claim that the reason is “the boundary between the constructs of organization and professional are blurred” (p99). Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) conducts a quantitative research among 250 virtual workers, and the data suggest that employees in the context of virtual work may need affiliation and work-based social support to strengthen their organizational identification. Ward and Winstanley’s (2007) study is interesting; they concentrate on the Lesbian and Gay Identity and discuss the important influence of dominant discourses of the workplace on sexual identity construction. Saren (2007) studies a special group, consumers and argues that identity is constructed through

performing identity (“we are what we consume”, “we are what we have”, p18). By studying these special groups, some antecedents that may be ignored in previous research are identified; and these researchers also argue that more attention should be paid to special groups because some of them may need extra support in their identity management.

Through a review of studies in this sub-branch, it is clear that these studies do not provide a clear view about how identity is constructed and what the process of identity work really is. The antecedents identified are often too abstract to be managed. As Ashforth et al. (2008) comment:

“Although instructive, these variables capture relatively static predictors and not process; that is, they provide pictures of the surface of an ocean wave, not the undercurrents that formed it.” (p341)

In the next section, studies that focus on the processes of identity construction will be discussed; to some degree, they may touch some undercurrents of identity construction.

2.2.3.3 Processes of Identity Construction

It is surprising that there are only a few studies which really concentrate on revealing the process of identity construction. In order to broaden our view, some other studies which provide rich data that may also expose a part of identity work to some degree are also included in this section.

Significant Models about Process of Identity Construction

There are about four models of process of identity construction that have great influence on this sub-branch, because each of them brings some new views into current research.

First of all, Pratt (2000) studies a case company and identifies the sense-breaking and sense-giving mechanisms underpinning an organizational identification process; this model takes the organizational perspective and concentrates on how an organization can ‘brainwash’ its organizational members so that they would give up their old identities and positively identify with the current organization. Specifically, sense-breaking involves ‘the destruction or breaking down of meaning; it involves a fundamental questioning of who one is when one's sense of self is challenged’. So that a meaning void can be created through sense-breaking (p463). Sense-giving is actually a mechanism to fill a meaning gap; and it takes the form of ‘positive programming’ which

is a process whereby the employees are taught to fill their mind with things that are 'uplifting and edifying' (p469).

Pratt (2000) also identifies three possible results of the identification process: if sense-breaking fails, people may fail to identify or experience de-identification; the main reason for this result is that people never have felt or have stopped feeling uncomfortable with their current life and therefore would not like to accept the meaning offered by the organization. Dis-identification happens when sense-breaking succeeds and sense-making fails; in this situation, people would feel distant from or even hate the organization. Ambivalent identification happens if the sense-giving is partly successful; and these people tend to move toward, away or against their organizations.

Pratt's study is impressive; because it is the first article which clearly points out the existence and importance of the sense-breaking strategies which are ignored in previous research and identification practice. Unfortunately, Pratt does not make explicit what conditions may cause those dis/de/ambivalent identifications; nor are the reasons why people response to the same sense-breaking or sense-making strategies in different ways.

Second, Ibarra (1999) studies a group of professionals from two case companies where people are facing transitions to senior roles; he finds that experimenting with provisional selves may be an important mechanism for individuals' identity construction. Specifically, Ibarra builds a model to describe three stages of the processes of identity adaption to new roles: " (1) observing role models to identify potential identities, (2) experimenting with provisional selves, and (3) evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback" (p764). Besides, he also identifies some strategies that individuals take during the experiment process, they are 'imitation' and 'true-to-self' (p776, 778); these two strategies help people to learn and also develop their unique ways to do their work.

Compared to Pratt (2000), Ibarra (1999) draws more attention to the role of individual agency in the process of identity construction, and his research reveals the generative mechanisms and sequences of stages of the process. However, Ibarra admits that "the present sample may have inadvertently consisted of people prone to an innovative response in identity construction" (p788); because junior professionals who are facing promotion may experience different identity construction processes compared to senior people, or other people who are not promoted. Besides, Ibarra does not make explicit the other possible outcomes and difficulties of the identity construction process, which

may be also meaningful for academics and practitioners to understand the problem situation and improving their approaches.

Third, Pratt et al. (2006) further develop their model by examining a group of medical residents' career/ role process (from students to professionals). They find that identification construction can be triggered by 'work-identity integrity violations' which means a perceived mismatch between what people actually do and what they expect. Besides, three tactics that residents use to resolve this mismatch problem are identified: (1) Splinting is the first tactic used by residents: some of these residents are initially not sure of their professional identities, therefore they adopt a previously learned identity to serve as a splint to protect their growing new identities. (2) Patching is used later; it means people draw upon a provisional identity to patch up holes or deficiencies in their understandings about who they are; this provisional identity is developed through tasks that people do at work. (3) Enriching tactics are used in the final stage, in which feelings of competence occur and people's identity beliefs become relatively stable and are continually being nuanced.

Pratt et al. (2006) move further by identifying the trigger of the identity work, and some difficulties and related tactic of the process are also reviewed. Based on this model, we could understand the process of identity work much better. However, again, the sample Pratt chooses is still junior people facing a role transition; the experiences shared by this case may be not applicable in understanding mature professionals' identity work or the identity work that occurs in normal daily organizational life. Besides, the failures or problems aroused by the identity construction process are not exposed; so that little is known about what are the crucial problems that needed to be paid more attention to when we manage our own or others identity work.

Fourth, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) propose a new process model (without data) to reveal the important role that narrative repertoires play in individuals' identity work. They argue that we should 'treat identity as narrative is especially critical for our understanding of identity dynamics during macro work role transition, defined as passages between sequentially held organizational, occupational, or professional roles' (p135-136).

In this theoretical model, three stages are identified, which constitute a circle. They are 'effectiveness of narrative identity', 'narrative evaluation and retention' and 'evolution of narrative repertoires'. Ibarra and Barbulescu also point out that there are two

outcomes for work role transition: the new role identity is internalized and also accepted by other organizational members; or the new role identity is rejected by the individual and other members, then may be dropped or remain provisional. They argue that the outcome depends on the “extent of enduring and coherent repertoire changes to express the new role identity” (p135).

This new model is inspiring, but its argument (“A concept of identity as narrative, we argue, is especially critical for our understanding of identity dynamics” (p135-136)) may be a little extreme; and Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) do not provide any data to prove that people have to “draw from an evolving narrative repertoire to engage in narrative identity work” (p148). Although some researchers claim that self-narrative (“a narrative makes a point about the narrator” (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, 135) is important for identity construction (Beech, 2008, Klugkist, 2009, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, Tilcsik, 2010, White, 2004); normally narrative is treated as a sense making device to assist people in expressing and reflecting their identities (Ashforth et al., 2008, Bird, 2007), or a approach to study identity (Beech, 2008, Beech and Johnson, 2005, Klugkist, 2009, Smith, 2011, Stefanie, 2010, Steve, 2010), rather than seeing it as identity itself. Besides, the model still focuses on role transition period rather than any other possible identity construction process.

In summary, these four models greatly improve our understanding of the identity construction process; to some degree, they may touch ‘the undercurrents’ of the process. However, our field of view about the process is still limited; more undercurrents still need to be explored, such as how does identity work happen outside role transition periods? Is there any other possible outcome of identity work besides successful role transition? What are the difficulties that need to be dealt with during the process? What are the triggers and motivations of people to engage in identity work? What approaches can be provided to assist people in identity construction?

Other inspiring studies

Some other studies which have wide research interests may also provide some clue about where to find answers for these questions, although they do not focus on the process of identity construction or do not aim to capture the dynamics of the process.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) conduct a case study which focuses on a senior manager’s organizational life. They address the interplay between organizational

discourses, others' role expectation, an individual's self-identity and her struggle to construct her work identity. The story of this senior manager describes a rich picture of a complex of organizational discourses and multiple sub-roles to which the senior manager has to situate her identity construction process. The findings illuminate that multiple discourses may lead to conflicts between one's sub-roles, and then cause the fragmentation of people's work identity; to deal with the complexity, people may use their self-identity as a stabilizer to help themselves make sense of the problematic situation. In this study, an important concept, 'narrative self-identity' is proposed and defined, which is "associated with personal history and orientations 'outside' the immediate work context" (p1185).

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) also argue that there is a grandiose discourse on management underpinning the story: "whereas managers were previously seen as 'apparatchiks of various forms of bureaucracy', the contemporary understandings exalt managers as 'entrepreneurs', leaders', 'culture-creators' or 'visionaries'" (p1187). The senior manager in this case is believed to "have been thoroughly exposed to this discourse", so that she would reject some other discourses/ sub-roles which may define her as a 'manager' rather than a 'leader' (p1187).

The case study completed by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) shows us that there are other types of identity work which are happening in normal organizational life; besides, identity work does not always mean successful identity development, it can also be accompanied with pain, struggle, conflict and confusion, and be without a perfect ending. Those processes of identity construction are still staying there, waiting for more explorers.

Another interesting case study is reported by Beech (2008) who focuses on the dialogic process happened between a manager and other people in the organization, to explore the question : 'how does the process of 'managing the inside' occur?' Beech (2008) find that the meaning that this manager attaches to himself is quite different from the meaning that the organization attach to him. Although Ronnie's line manager had made great effort to change Ronnie's work identity, but Ronnie still believed that the change to his status was unreasonable, until a serious accident happened in Ronnie's work which made his line manager exercise coercive power to force Ronnie to accept the identity regulation and make change to his work identity.

Beech (2008) reveals another possible identity construction process in which organizational control play an important role. The impasse between Ronnie and his line manager is broken by an unexpected accident, and then identity change becomes possible; I wonder if there is no such key incident, what instrument could be introduced to improve the situation? Because in Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) case, the senior manager and her organization have to live with their conflict and the fragmented work identity, which has significantly negative influence on their performance.

Many other studies also help me a lot in understanding how can identity work be done, and many interesting topics about identity construction are examined, such as elite identity (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006), default identity and desirable identity (Carroll and Levy, 2008), the influence of role (Simpson and Carroll, 2008), sense-making under conditions of change (Stefanie, 2010), organizational talk (Amy and Jean Helms, 2009), discourses of disrupted identity (Beech and Johnson, 2005), identity exploration (Grotevant, 1987), identity talk (Snow and Leon, 1987), sex identity in work place (J.Ward and D.Winstanley, 2007), researcher identity trajectory (Hibbert et al., 2007, Pullen, 2007), core values (Hermine and Carl, 2006), and so on. Each of them makes a point from a specific perspective on the interpretation of the process of identity construction, by providing thick descriptions and deep analysis.

In the next section, another group of studies that see the identity issue from a unique view, the identity regulation, will be presented.

2.2.3.4 Identity Regulation and the Development of Instruments

Organizational control may be a permanent topic of organizational studies. Traditionally, structural configurations of control are the focus of academics. For example, Mintzberg (1992) summarize five kinds of coordinating mechanisms through which an organization can manage its employees to complete tasks coordinately and then achieve the targeted organizational objectives. These mechanisms include: (1) directly supervising people's work (through specific orders or one-to-many monitoring); (2) standardization of work (defining path and rules for each work process); (3) standardization of outputs (setting up measures for outcomes); (4) standardization of skills (setting up measures for employees' knowledge and qualification); (5) mutual adjustment (through communication between peers). It could be found that this kind of organizational control focuses on the design and implementation of impersonal,

bureaucratic and mechanistic structures; and the complexity and subjectivity of people are ignored.

In recent decades, the ‘formal’ and ‘objective’ views of achieving control are being replaced by a new focus on the human side, along with the development of some related theories, such as ‘X’, ‘Y’ (McGregor, 1985) and ‘Z’ (Ouchi, 1981), as well as organizational learning and learn systems (Senge, 1999, Womack and Jones, 2003). Located in the main stream of organizational studies, identity research attempts to achieve organizational control through managing the ‘inside’ world of people; “through the self-positioning of employee within managerially inspired discourses about work and organization with which they may become more or less identified and committed” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, 620). As we mentioned, the social identity theorists and academics of the identity regulation field both focus on this issue. The former argue that identification “engages more than our cognitive self-categorization and our brains, it engages our hearts” (Harquail, 1998, 225); with strong identification, “individuals understand, accept, and employ organizational premises in their decision making and other actions, in effect becoming a microcosm of the organization such that acting on behalf of the organization is tantamount to acting on behalf of themselves” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 337). The latter claim that “identity regulation is a significant, neglected and increasingly important modality of organizational control”, but they also point out that “the organizational regulation of identity, we argue, is a precarious and often contested process involving active identity work” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, 621).

However, neither researchers from the social identity and identity regulation fields have found a feasible way to achieve their arguments, because of the great resistance from employees. In other words, achieving organizational control through identity management is still a kind of theoretical assumption rather than a feasible method, because few findings about how to manage the ‘inside’ without great resistance have been obtained. This argument is based on a review of extensive literature from these two sub-branches: Specifically, Ashforth et al. (2008) summarize that “behavior should be regarded as a probabilistic outcome of identification, not as necessary component” (p331); besides, Alvesson and Willmott (2002b) claim that “However, it is naive to assume that identity can be pushed in any direction without inertia, pain, resistance and unintended consequences, as the case of the angry worker demonstrates” (p637). Empirical studies in the field also expose much resistance and negative influences brought by identity regulation (Beech, 2008, Carroll and Levy, 2008, Sveningsson and

Alvesson, 2003). To some degree, the case studies conducted by Alvesson and Robertson (2006) and Pratt (2000) move further than others. Alvesson and Robertson (2006) find that some consulting firms construct elite organizational identity to attract their members and increase their willingness to identify organizations; Pratt (2000) expose that Amway manages employees' identification through 'encapsulation' (separating its members from outsiders). However, the two case studies also show that these strategies may succeed with some employees but fail with others; and sometimes, some members may even hate their organizations.

The failure in applying identity regulation and identification theories has aroused some interests of academics, and therefore recently more attention has been paid to identifying possible tactics that organizations and individuals could use to strengthen organizational identification or personal identity work.

The first group of researchers focus on how organizations can manage people's identification. Riketta et al. (2006) argue that employees' situated identification can be fostered by their organization, and a series of approaches are suggested, such as emphasizing to employees about organizational successes or competition with other firms, or shared features and distinctiveness. Riketta et al. also claim that the situated identification can be turned into deep-structure identification by repeated education. However, they do not provide data to support their arguments. CDiSanza and Bullis (1999) study an organization's newsletter to its members, and identify a few identification inducements used by this organization which can be shared for enhancing the organizational identification. These inducements include creating a common ground with employees by (1) recognizing individuals' contributions inside and outside the organization; (2) highlighting organizationally shared values; (3) global recognition of a unit of the organization; (4) invitations (requesting its members to become or remain involved with some organizational activity) (5) bragging (boasts about time, money and effort the organization puts into a task). Sivunen (2006) focuses on four virtual team leaders and their attempts to strengthen their members' OI; and four similar tactics are identified: (1) catering for individuals; (2) positive feedback; (3) common goals; (4) communication (including workings and talking up team activities and face-to-face meetings). Corley and Harrison (2009) pay more attention to supporting identity development rather than identification, and the data from a case organization suggests that authenticity searching can be a good approach to achieve continuous identity

change; and the process of authenticity searching can be enabled through action and reflection practices.

Other researchers concentrate on the traits that individuals can take to manage their own identities. Kopelman et al. (2009) argue that self-narration can be an important approach for people to mitigate threats and restores or affirm a positive relational identity; and they also claim that observing, describing and participating in social interactions are the main methods that individuals take to generate their self narration. Similarly, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) claim that narratives are the main means taken by individuals in constructing their identities; and they build a theoretical model to represent the process of self-narrative development . Kreiner and Sheep (2009) argue that people can be purposeful in the changes in their identities; therefore identity growth can be achieved. By reviewing extensive literature, they identify five tactics to assist identity growth: (1) developing spiritual identity; (2) searching for optimal balance; (3) transforming identity threats; (4) experimenting with possible selves; (5) leveraging incongruence. These studies are inspiring; however, none of them provides data to support their arguments. Smith (2011) may make a move in this research direction; he studies two project managers' cases and finds that they use their projects as vehicles for the performance of their "project manager identity". Smith then argues that identity is produced through action, while action and identity are framed by social narratives; therefore researchers should seek evidence of people's identity within real-life stories told by practitioners. In short, narratives are identified as important instruments of individuals' identity construction.

Recently more researchers have started to introduce some qualitative methods into their research, therefore some inspiring cases are provided to help people learn from others' experience of identity work. Maitlis (2009) studies the experiences of four musicians whose career development are interrupted by traumas; Maitlis argues that it is social sense-making that re-narrates these musicians in some expanded and empowering ways which promote professional or personal growth. The four stories told by Maitlis (2009) are quite helpful for people to make sense; however the social sense-making approach exposed in the study is too general too be learned. Batagiannis (2011) conduct an action research project in a group students, and use the project "both for aspiring principals engaged in such research and for professors using it as pedagogy for teaching educational leadership" (p1304). Batagiannis argues that learning to do action research has the potential for powerful impact on emerging leadership identity; but he also

admits that since participants are students, “while they did not yet feel confident in fully defining their leadership lens, all expected the transition to progress as they learned more about leadership” (p1315). In other words, the identity transition does not really happen; the project is helping students to learn and prepare to construct their leadership identity; but it is still interesting to see the learning process that these students experience. Goodnough (2011) conducts another action research, and he focuses on teacher perceptions of the long-term impacts of engaging in collaborative action research on professional identity and practice. Ten teachers’ are interviewed before, during, and after engaging in the action research, and the data reveals that several aspects of their teacher identity and education practice are changed. However the specific approaches used in this action research which may assist identity construction are not sufficiently discussed; therefore it is hard to learn them.

A gap identified in reviewed studies in this field is that there is a great lack of methods which may assist people and organization to analyze their own problem situation and achieve organizational identification or individual identity development. Since each identity work is a unique process, maybe it is the practical people and organization who have sufficient knowledge and strong motivation to best understand and improve their own identity work. Here we look to the literature on sense-making and reflection for guidance.

2.3 Sense-making and Reflection

Identity work and sense-making

Sense-making is a term frequently mentioned in the studies of identity work, which can also be seen as a type of sense-making process (Amy and Jean Helms, 2009, Bird, 2007, Fulton, 2001, Linda, 2006, Maitlis, 2009). Weick (1995) points out that human beings are all meaning seekers, they try to identify with collectives and roles so as to reduce the uncertainty associated with external and internal environment changes. Therefore, identity work should be greatly active during such role transition periods, because people need to “structure the unknown” and sense-making could ‘place stimuli into framework’ (p4, 5). That may be one reason that most research about identity constitution process focuses on the role transition period.

However, Weick (1995) also points out that there are two types of sensemaking; one is what Thomas et al. (1993) define as “the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action” (p240) . The other type of sensemaking mechanism is one that ‘organizational members use to attribute meaning to events, mechanisms that include the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are typically used in a given culture setting’ (p5).

According to the second definition, identity work could be a phenomenon always existing in people’s day to day organizational life rather than just aroused by some unusual or critical events; and it may also be a continual process which accompanies the development of individuals and organizations. Therefore, revealing the continual process of identity construction in normal organizational life may be a possible research direction in the identity field, and it may bring some new light to our understanding on identity work and its relationship with personal development and organizational development. Besides, making explicit the process of normal identity construction may be helpful for organizations to better understand their employees, and then achieve some kind of management on its members’ ‘inside world’.

Identity work and reflection

Another question needs to explore was whether identity work can be improved by providing some extra support. Although some tactics and strategies are discussed in previous literature, most of them are too general to be applied; besides, few studies pay attention to identity work in normal organizational life, therefore no instruments are offered. By reviewing literature more broadly, it was found that research in the reflection field may be helpful; and a few issues which may be important for identity development were identified.

First of all, the role that practical experience plays in the process of identity construction was reconsidered. It is interesting that Pratt (2000) and Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) completely ignore the experience while Ibarra (1999) and Pratt et al. (2006) give it a central role in their studies of the identity construction process; Beech (2008) also does not pay much attention to it until the key incident happened in that story.

The influence of the experience on identity construction may be significantly influenced by the way people treat it. Researchers in reflection field argue that:

“We also agreed, however, that experience alone is not the key to learning.”(Boud et al., 1985, 7-8).

In other words, experience could be an important material of sense-making, and then lead to some kind of identity development. However, experience does not necessary imply identity construction. The four studies mentioned above focus on different groups (junior / mature professionals); junior people may see their experience as the most important way to learning, to make sense about their job. Therefore, researchers who study those people notice it and take practical; experience into their models. On the other hand, mature people may have been familiar with their work and not pay much attention to those specific things; therefore their narrative stories are full of relationships, belief and values; so practise experience is excluded in the related identity construction models.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that treating experience seriously, encouraging and facilitating learning from experience may be a possible way to improve people’s sense-making and identity construction process. Researchers from the reflection field suggest that ‘reflection’ can make experience meaningful, and therefore a feasible way for assisting identity development. They argue that:

“We say that we need time to catch up with ourselves, to take stock, to make sense of what has happened, or to share other people’ ideas on an experience. These are so commonplace that we regard them as almost natural events in our culture- as nature as breathing” (Boud et al., 1985, 8).

However, because reflection is such a natural thing, sometimes people may ignore that reflections may also have different quality; and that effective and efficient reflection making may be critical for learning from work experience, and therefore be critical for work identity development.

Based on the above analysis, it is inferred that assisting individuals’ identity development can be achieved through assisting individuals in reflecting on their work experience. The model presented by Boud et al. (1985) which reveals the role that reflection plays in people’s organizational life provides some support for this inference:

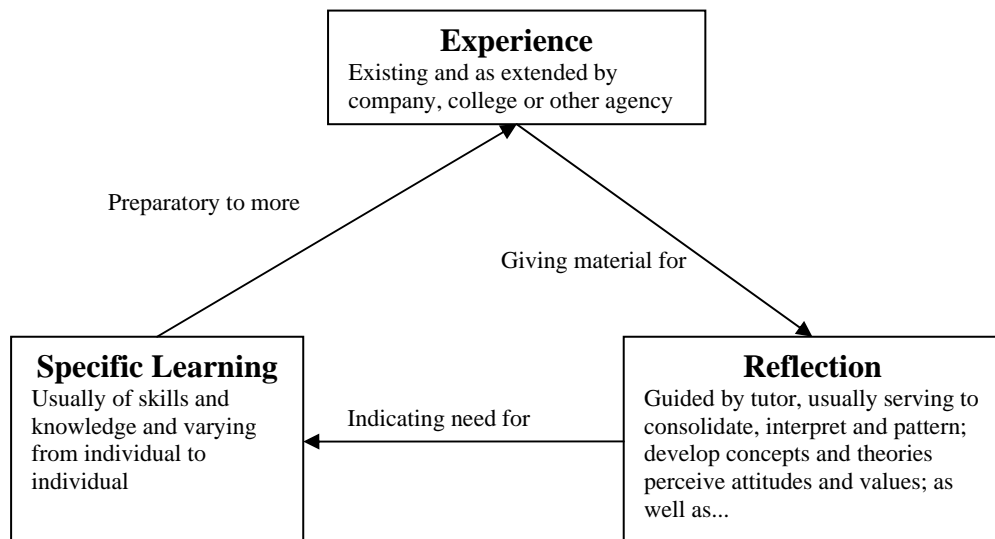


Figure 2-1 The role of reflection in practice; Source: Boud et al. (1985), p13

Boud et al. argue that individuals' experience need to be followed by some organised reflection which may enable people to learn from it, and also identify some gaps in their knowledge or skills so that they can prepare well for further experience.

It can be seen that reflection in organizational life focuses on improving practice by developing skills to resolve specific problems. Therefore focusing on those reflections which are made on specific problem solving may be an easy way to understand people's real organizational life and their identity construction process; and approaches to assist them in completing such reflections may be welcomed by practitioners, because it may provide direct help for improving their work. Although the relationship between work identity and work behaviours/ activities is still unclear in current identity research field, it is argued that making reflections on identity cannot be alienated from reflections on practical work, and should be done along with reflections on work activities.

These analysis and interference significantly influenced the design of the research project (The systems approaches that were introduced in the project for assisting individuals in making reflections were designed in three modes in their applications. Mode 1 represents the traditional way of systems thinking, Mode 2 focuses on making reflection on approaches to problem-solving, and Mode 3 focuses on identity reflection. More detailed information is presented in Chapter 3).

In summary, three assumptions were made in this part: firstly, identity work is also a kind of sense-making process; secondly, in normal organizational life, reflecting on specific work problems is an important way for people to make sense about their work,

therefore reflection on work can also arouse some kind of identity work; thirdly, observing this kind of reflection may provide the researcher an approach to study people's normal identity work while providing assistant tools for reflection may be a possible way to facilitate people's identity construction in normal organizational life.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, extensive literature on identity issue has been reviewed; and some gaps in different sub-branches are identified. The main problems that current identity studies are facing with include:

Firstly, the relationship between identity/identification and individual and organizational behaviours is still unclear; more attention should be put on actual behaviours rather than intentions.

Secondly, the process of identity construction is still not fully disclosed; especially the identity work that occurs in non-transition period among mature employees. Moreover problems and other possible outcomes of identity work have not been fully discussed.

Thirdly, instruments which can assist people's identity construction have not been developed.

By reviewing related literature on sense-making and reflection, it is inferred that assisting people's reflections on specific practical problems could be a possible way to achieve identity development and also be a potential approach to study people's identity construction in normal organizational context. Because these assumptions were not proven, it is necessary for the research to keep challenging these assumptions, and then further developed the research methods in the field work. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to discuss the design of this research project. Before entering into the specific research design, it is necessary to make explicit the research philosophy and paradigm adopted because the choice of research methods is always steered by the researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Thus, in this chapter, the philosophical assumptions of this research will be presented in the first section, and the specific research design will be discussed in the second section.

3.2 Research Philosophies

With regard to research philosophies, there are many frameworks proposed by many researchers. In this section, I will follow Burrell and Morgan's (2010) framework for discussing my own reflections on research philosophy. One reason of my choice is that this framework have been widely accepted by previous researchers; for example, Saunders, Lewis et al. (2009) argue that "Burrell and Morgan (1982) is particularly helpful in summarizing and clarifying the epistemologies and ontologies... in addition, these writers have offered a categorisation of social science paradigms which can be used in management and business research to generate fresh insights into real-life issues and problems" (p119). Another reason is that the framework of Burrell and Morgan is quite clear and simple to be followed for a beginner like me.

In this section, following the framework proposed by Burrell and Morgan's (2010), the assumptions about the ontology, epistemology, and human nature of this research will be presented; then paradigms will be discussed; at the end, the methodology of the research will be presented. And in each section, the arguments made by Burrell and Morgan's (2010) will be presented first, and then personal reflections made by the researcher on the related issues will be discussed.

3.2.1 Ontology, Epistemology and Human Nature

According to Burrell and Morgan (2010), there are four basic assumptions about the nature of social science--ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. They are shown in the Figure 3-1, and will be discussed in the following sections.

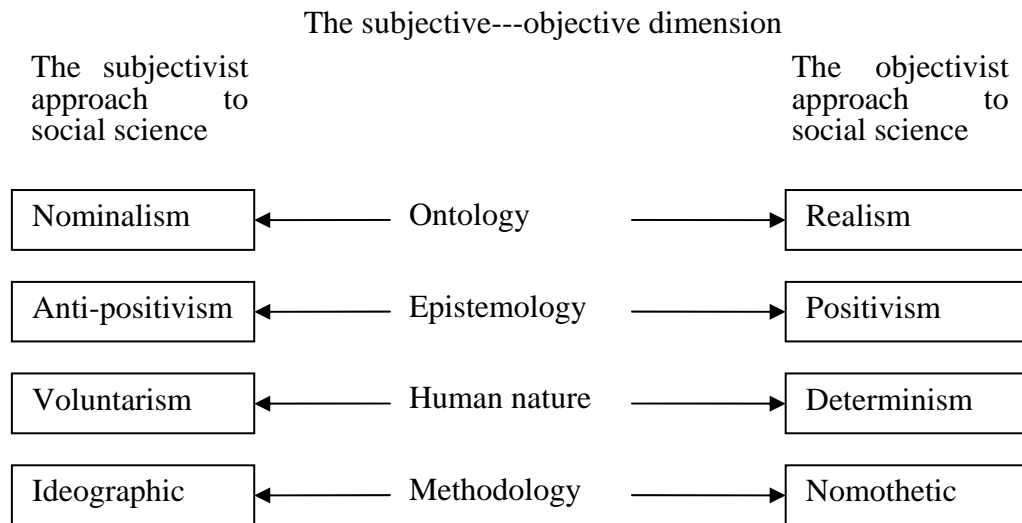


Figure 3-1 A scheme for analyzing assumptions about the nature of social science

3.2.1.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns the essence of the phenomena under investigation (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010); in other words, it concerns “the nature of reality, and this raises questions of the assumptions that researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitment held to particular view” (Saunders et al., 2009, 110). Subjectivists and objectivists take opposite positions on this assumption: nominalism and realism. The nominalist postulates that “the social world external to individual cognition is made up of nothing more than names, concepts and labels which are used to structure reality”; whilst the realist claims that “the social world external to individual cognition is a real world made up of hard, tangible and relatively immutable structures” (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010, 4).

The assumptions of the thesis on ontology were developed gradually along with the conduction of the project. When I wrote my research proposal, I thought that as the focus of this research was work identity construction, I could argue that the very essence of the phenomenon under investigation in this research is the product of human mind; thus, nominalism should be taken as my assumption. In other words, I believed managers’ work identities were created from the perceptions and consequent actions of managers and ‘this is a continuous process in that through the process of social interaction this social phenomenon is in a constant state of revision’ (Saunders et al., 2009, 111). However, this understanding on ontology was not enough to assist me in dealing with some problems met in my research.

When I first conducted my interviews, I tried to stay out of the research, using unemotional words in discussions, so as not to ‘contaminate’ it. However I found this tactic did not work well; if I did not push the participants to reflect on their experiences, challenging their current situation and bringing in my own opinions, I could not adequately observe the identity reconstruction of the managers, and they also lost interest in talking with me (I will explain in further detail in the Section 3.3.3.2). Consequently, I realized that I had made a mistake: although I had argued I would take a nominalist assumption, I was still constrained by my previous positivist view (coming from my educational background; my bachelor degree obtained in China was in Management Science and Engineering). Then I realized that my research was inevitably value-laden; and at no time was there a definitive entity called as *identity*, a manager’s identity is constantly changing through social interaction between the manager and other people. Thus I could influence participants in this interaction process with my own opinions.

This experience made me reflected on how I should address philosophic issues. For me, it was hard to make explicit all the philosophical assumptions in advance; I could only get a general idea about what the appropriate position would be and try to conduct the research by being immersed in it; then I needed to reflect again and again in the course of my research, analysing those problems I met during the process, and then figure out my philosophical position and what position I should take to achieve a better result. Thus, it was a dynamic process for me. In the next few sections about the other three assumptions, I will also explain those problems I met and the decision I made.

3.2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is assumptions about the grounds of knowledge, about how people begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to others (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010); it concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a study (Saunders et al., 2009). Subjectivist and objectivists also take opposites positions on this assumption: anti-positivism and positivism. Positivists seek to “explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities between its constituent elements”; while the anti-positivists argue that “the social world is essentially relativistic and can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied” (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010, 5).

When I first came to UK for my PhD study, I thought theories were generalizable. As a researcher, I took a spectator stance and saw myself as separate from the objects studied; in my view, the knowledge and theory were things “out there”. However in the UK, I found many researchers adopted another approach to their research, which gave up the pursuit of generalizable research findings that can be applied and replicated in other similar situations. Instead, this kind of research is done to improve knowledge about a particular situation, which is unique to the people involved. Although this kind of knowledge cannot be generalized or applied, it can be shared (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009). So the aim of this kind of research is to share knowledge and the learning that led to the creation of knowledge. I was not very used to this perspective because of my educational background in which the deductive and quantitative research took the dominant position. However after reading a few qualitative research papers (Snow and Leon, 1987, Steve, 2010, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) that draw on some written narratives of individuals to reveal the construction of their identities, I found this kind of approach was also interesting; and I felt that I could make sense of how to study my own research topic from this perspective. I also tried to read more books discussing qualitative research methods (Cassell and Symon, 2004, Gabriel, 2000, Hartley, 2004, McNiff and Whitehead., 2009, Meyer and HÖLlerer, 2010, Miles and Huberman, 1994, Morgan, 1997, Roulston, 2010, Russ, 2002, Saunders et al., 2009, Stake, 1995, Swanborn, 2010, Yin, 2009). By reading those methodology books and qualitative research papers on identity, and by reflecting on my interview experiences with managers, I found that knowledge and theory could be something “in there”, embodied in the practice. As a researcher, I was in dynamic relation with my participants and with the environment we lived in; we could develop knowledge together in dynamic processes.

Through these readings and discussions, I also started to doubt the usefulness of generalized research conclusions based on research with a small sized sample. I found many arguments had been made by previous researchers, such as Burgoyne (1989) contends that “a universal mechanistic differentiated list of managerial competencies is highly inappropriate because it overlooks the holistic nature of the management processes”. Robert (1993) claims that “the idea of the possibility of arriving at a universal list of managerial competencies is predicated upon a particular understanding which privileges a pro-observational model of what managers do” (p57). Then I started to wonder: if getting a universal list of key factors for managers’ work identity

construction is impossible, and what kinds of findings should my research look for. By reviewing previous research on identity, I thought that I could try to develop a living theory of practice, which is about practitioners' personal theories of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009). Because I was trying to understand the construction of work identity from the point of view of managers and myself who were directly involved in a reflection process, the purpose of which was to review and develop one's identity, my assumption on the epistemology should be anti-positivism.

In the next section, I will continue on discussing my choice of the assumption regarding human nature.

3.2.1.3 Human Nature

Human nature is about the relationship between humans and their environment (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010). Subjectivists and objectivists again take opposite positions on this assumption: voluntarism and determinism. Determinists believe people and their activities are completely determined by the situation/ environment in which they are located; while voluntarists claim that humans have free will and are completely autonomous (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010).

Among extensive identity studies, there are numerous studies that try to identify the determinants of identification/ identity construction (Bartels et al., 2006, Bartels et al., 2009, Boen et al., 2006, Dutton et al., 1994, Eisenbeiss and Otten, 2008, Eun-Suk et al., 2011, Gleibs et al., 2008, Guseva et al., 2009, Haley and Ann, 2002, Johnson et al., 2006, Lipponen et al., 2004, Mael and Ashforth, 1992, Margolis, 1998, Reade, 2001, Richter et al., 2006, Riketta et al., 2006, Rink and Ellemers, 2007, Russo, 1998, Smidts et al., 2001a, Ullrich et al., 2005, Van Dick et al., 2006b, van Dick et al., 2004, van Knippenberg et al., 2002, Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). There are also researchers who focus on learning experiences of successful or unsuccessful identity construction with qualitative methodologies (Amy and Jean Helms, 2009, Beech et al., 2012, Bell and Das, 2011, Carlsen and Pitsis, 2009, Cascón-Pereira and Hallier, 2012, Caza and Wilson, 2009, Chang and Johnson, 2010, Creed et al., 2010, Gendron and Spira, 2010, Herminia and Jennifer, 2010, Langley et al., 2012, Larson and Pearson, 2012, Lok, 2010, MacIntosh and Beech, 2011, McInnes and Corlett, 2012, Stefanie, 2010, Tietze and Musson, 2010, Warhurst, 2011). Yet there are few studies concentrating on how to help practitioners find their own way of dealing with identity construction problems or what instruments could be used to assistance people in their identity construction process

(Hermine and Carl, 2006, Hewitt et al., 2010, Trent, 2010) The thesis aims to fill this gap by developing instruments for assisting individuals' identity construction, emphasizing the autonomous capability of practitioners; thus voluntarism will be taken as the assumption regarding human nature.

These three sets of assumptions (ontology, epistemology, human nature) have direct implications on methodological nature (Meyer and HÖLlerer, 2010). I will discuss the methodology of this research later, after the choice of paradigms.

3.2.2 Paradigms

Paradigm is a frequently used concept which has multiple meanings; here the view of Burrell and Morgan (1979) is adopted. The four paradigms proposed by them are shown in Figure 3-2.

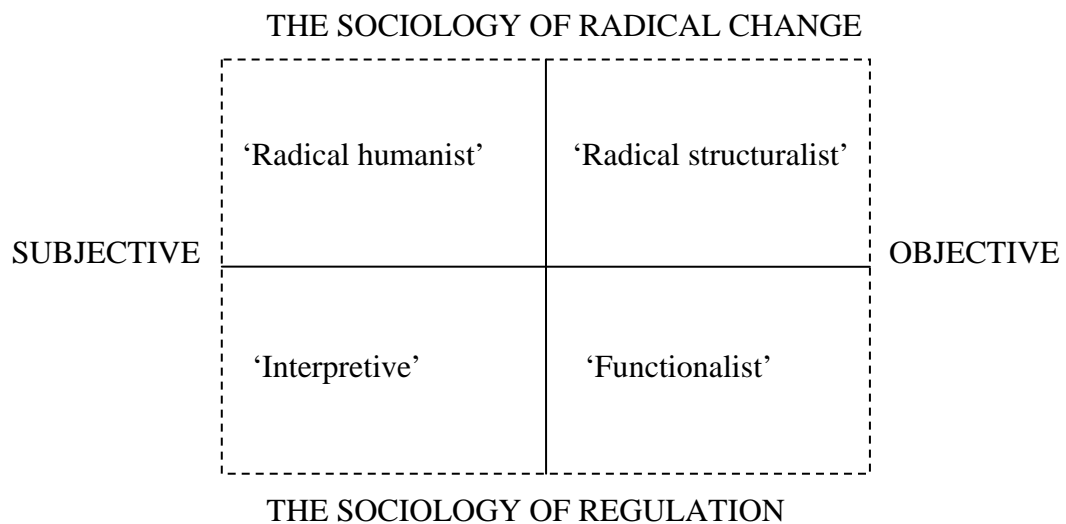


Figure 3-2 Four paradigms

SOURCE: BURRELL AND MORGAN (1979)

There are two dimensions that need to be considered when locating the research: the subjective-objective dimension and the regulation-radical change dimension.

The subjective-objective dimension has been discussed in above sections. The regulation-radical change dimension represents two poles of the assumptions about the nature of society (Meyer and HÖLlerer, 2010). The ‘sociology of regulation’ refers to “the writings of theorists who are primarily concerned to provide explanations of society in terms which emphasize its underlying unity and cohesiveness. It is a sociology which is essentially concerned with the need for regulation in human affairs”

(Meyer and HÖLlerer, 2010, 17). In contrast, ‘sociology of radical change’ seeks to “find explanations for the radical change, deep-seated structural conflict, modes of domination and structural contradiction which its theorists see as characterizing modern society” (Meyer and HÖLlerer, 2010, 17).

Most studies on identity construction take the position of regulator, assuming that the identity construction process is cohesive and ordered, and focusing on understanding the process ‘as it is’ rather than ‘what it should be’; only the new emerged research stream of identity regulation pay more attention to the perspective of emancipator/critical. When I first designed the research, I thought I would follow the tradition and take the assumption of ‘sociology of regulation’. However, along with my progress in the project, I found it was difficult to locate my research within the category of ‘sociology of regulation’, but nor did it fit into the ‘sociology of radical change’. I will discuss my confusion in the following paragraphs, starting with the arguments of Burrell and Morgan.

According to the work of Burrell and Morgan (2010), there are fundamental distinctions between the sociologies of regulation and radical change; and the differences are shown in the Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 The regulation-radical change dimension

The sociology of REGULATION is concerned with:	The sociology of RADICAL CHANGE is concerned with:
(a) The status quo	(a) Radical change
(b) Social order	(b) Structural conflict
(c) Consensus	(c) Modes of domination
(d) Social integration and cohesion	(d) Contradiction
(e) Solidarity	(e) Emancipation
(f) Need satisfaction	(f) Deprivation
(g) Actuality	(g) Potentiality

Source: Burrell and Morgan (2010)

However, in this research project, many issues are too complicated to be confined to one of the two categories. First of all, the theories and related approaches used in this research project have different assumptions on the regulation-radical change dimension; secondly, the participants also had different assumptions; thirdly, the assumptions of the researcher may also change according to the specific problem situation that she was facing with. Because of these three reasons, I argue that Burrell and Morgan’s distinction between “social order” and “structural conflict” is not so clear in practical

work, although their argument is sound from the theoretical perspective. I prefer Cohen's argument that 'the two models are two sides of the same coin; they are not mutually exclusive and thus do not need to be reconciled' (Cohen, 1968, 166).

If I have to choose a position in these two dimensions, I would say it is "regulation"; because even if the approach I take is to provoke my participants' self-reflection on their management approach and work identity, my purpose is still to generate a "living theory" to help managers overcome the difficulties brought by organizational changes.

Based on the above analysis, this research takes 'sociology of regulation' and 'subjective' position. Thus, the interpretive paradigm is chosen in this research.

The interpretive paradigm refers to the way that we attempt to make sense of the world that we studied (Saunders et al., 2009). Working under this paradigm, researchers would seek to understand the world as it is, delving into the depths of organizational members' consciousness and subjectivity in seeking for the fundamental meanings that underlie organizational life. Instead of emphasizing rationality, the principle of this research would be discovering irrationalities; for example, what mistakes the participants and I made when we tried to re-examine their management approaches and identities to adapt to organizational changes; or how the research strategies and approaches introduced failed to realize their aims because of some unforeseen reasons; and what we could learn from these failures. In Saunders et al.'s (2007) words, "your concern here would not be to achieve change in the order of things, it would be understand and explain what is going on" (p121).

Within the "interpretive paradigm the approaches and methodologies that could be adopted will be discussed in the next section.

3.2.3 Research Approaches and Methodologies

1. Research Approaches

According to Saunders et al. (2007), there are two kinds of research approaches: the deductive approach (in which a researcher develops a theory and related hypotheses, then designs a strategy to test these hypotheses) and the inductive approach (in which a researcher first collects data and then analyses the data to generate a theory). Saunders et al. (2007) point out that normally, an interpretivist would follow with an inductive approach. Thus the inductive approach is adopted in this research.

2. Methodologies

Methodology refers to the way in which the researcher tries to investigate and obtain knowledge about the research objects; subjectists and objectivists also opposite positions on methodology: ideographic and nomothetic approaches (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010). The ideographic approach emphasizes “getting close to one’s subjects and exploring its detailed background and life history..., stresses the importance of letting one’s subjects unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation”; the nomothetic approach emphasizes “the importance of basing research upon systematic protocol and technique” (Meyer and HÖLLerer, 2010, 6).

Because the basic assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and human nature of the research are subjective, and the paradigm chosen is interpretivism, thus ideographic approach is taken as the methodology of this research.

In summary, this research is an inductive and ideographic research. This means that when exploring answers to the research questions, theoretical hypotheses were not developed in advance; and the findings pursued were not general regularities, but illuminating experience getting through studying the subjects’ detailed background and history.

3.3 The Specific Research Design

The focus of this section is the specific research design. According to Saunders et al. (2007), research design is about how to go about exploring the research questions. In the following sections, the choosing of research strategy is presented first; and then the data collection approaches and the selection of the sample are discussed; later, the data analysis method is addressed; and at the end, the credibility of the research findings is discussed.

It should be noticed that my research design was not completed until I finished the field work; most part of the design was gradually developed by learning and reflecting during the course of my study. My experience and reflection will be discussed in each of the following sections.

3.3.1 Selecting Research Strategies

The thesis is based on an inductive and ideographic research; common research strategies for this kind of studies include phenomenology, ethnography, action research and case study (O'Leary, 2010) (although according to Hartley (2004), ethnography is not a kind of research strategy but a data collection method; in this research, ethnography is treated as a strategy following the classification of O'Leary (2010)). Among current studies in the interpretive paradigm in the identity research field, case study (Askham, 2008, Beech and Johnson, 2005, Haug, 2011, Henderson, 2007, Lee, 1997, Margolis, 1998, Reade, 2001, Sveningssson and Alvesson, 2003, Warhurst, 2011, Watson, 2009), phenomenology (Goodnough, 2011, Praner, 2008, Rowlett, 2006, Smith, 1999), and ethnography (Alvesson, 1994, Bird, 2007, Hermine and Carl, 2006, Hewitt et al., 2010, Pratt, 2000, Schouten, 1991, Sharpe, 2006, Snow and Leon, 1987, Watson, 2008, White, 2004) are the three strategies frequently used.

When I first designed the research project, these three frequently-used strategies were considered. The following paragraphs are my initial analysis of the three strategies.

The basic aim of ethnography is to “describe and explain the social world the research subjects inhabit in the way in which they would describe and explain it” (Saunders et al., 2009, 149). A researcher needs to spend a long time with subjects to understand their world. In this research, the subjects were organizational members in an organizational change situation, and I wanted to investigate the reflective interaction process between these members and the reconstruction of their identities during this process. According to suggestions of previous researchers, employees may need quite a long time to feel truly assimilated in the changed organization (Amy and Jean Helms, 2009, Bastein, 1992, Beech and Johnson, 2005, Hermine and Carl, 2006, Soumyaja et al., 2011, Stefanie, 2010, Stensaker and Meyer, 2008). Some of my participants also told me they need time to adapt to new roles (for example, it was 16 months according to the interview records with Daphne), or changes within roles brought by organizational changes. This means I would need to spend a few years to observe this reflective process. Due to the limitation in time, ethnography appeared to be not very feasible for this research at its initial stage.

The phenomenological approach is suitable for “the data desired as understanding participants’ perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of an event that occurred in their lives” (Leedy and Ormrod (2001) cited in (Rowlett, 2006, 10). The findings that

phenomenological studies pursue are developing patterns and understanding through studying a small number of participants with extensive engagement. This research method means that the quality of a phenomenological study depends greatly on the quality of the small number of participants; but I was not sure if I could find such a group of people when I first designed my research project (This issue will be discussed in detail later in this section). Thus, at the start of the research such a phenomenological approach did not seem feasible.

Case study is a very broad concept, including numerous specific methods. According to the suggestion of Saunders et al. (2007), the case study strategy is the appropriate choice when one wishes to “gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and process being enacted” (p146). Hartley (2004) also suggests that “the case study is particularly suited to research questions which require detailed understanding of social or organizational processes because of the rich data collected in context” (p323). The questions of this research do require deep understanding of the developing process of managers’ work identity, and the case study strategy is quite open for other research ideas. Thus, in the design stage of the project I decided to adopt this strategy.

At that stage, I planned to conduct two rounds of interviews with managers who were facing organizational change: four months before the change and four months after the change. The first round of interviews was conducted according to my plan, and then I started to reflect on my design and looked for better ways to do this research. The following paragraphs give details of the journey I went through during December 2010 and May 2011.

After completing pre-change interviews, which were done four months before the departure of the dean, I planned to conduct the post-change interviews when the new dean had been in post for four months. I expected that comparing the managers’ identity construction pre and post organizational change could expose the identity construction process to some degree.

However, the Business School took longer than anticipated to find its new leader: the old dean left his position in March, 2011, but the new dean did not take office until September, 2011 (the supposed start date was June when I initially made the research plan). Consequently I conducted the pre-change interviews in December, 2010, but would have to wait until January, 2012 to collect the post-change data. I felt it was a waste of opportunity to wait for such a long time, as I was living in the organization

being studied and had good chances to observe and participate in the whole process of the organizational change. This made me start to think about using some other methods to collect data.

Furthermore, two academic problems preoccupied me at that time. The first one was the practical contribution of my research. My research questions came from gaps in literature, which showed a lack of qualitative research on the issue of identity construction process. However, it was hard to be sure that my findings would be useful for practitioners because I did not know if I could get any meaningful conclusion before my field work. I was not really aware of this problem until one of my critical friends challenged me on it in one of our meetings (Discussion with Critical friend is an approach adopted by the researcher to take a step back (Anderson et al., 1994) and reflect on the research project from different perspectives (Loughran, 2004). Further discussion on the issue is made in Section 3.3.7):

The practical value of your research is problematic; it depends on the quality of your case. If you are lucky, the organization and managers that you choose may have some interesting stories, and then you could write a good paper. However, it is hard for you to find out if it is a good case in advance. (Wallace, Critical Friend Discussion, 2010)

I did not look for a resolution for this problem until I finished the pre-change interviews, because I thought that I could find out if the subjects I had chosen were suitable by doing these pre-change interviews. However, although I obtained some interesting findings in the pre-change stage, I was still not sure if I could collect some high-quality data during and after the organizational change. One reason is that the method used in pre-change interviews (the Critical Incident Technique; this method will be introduced further in Section 3.3.3.1) did not work well for each interviewee. For some of them, recalling critical incidents was easy and the incidents identified provided great insight into the transformation process of their identity development. However some other interviewees felt there was no critical incident in their career; one reason for this difficulty may be that this kind of change/ transformation happened quietly and gently, so people did not know when and how it happened; another reason may be that they could not awaken their memory immediately when I asked.

Secondly, as the interviews were done after the completion of the change events, there is a possibility of inaccurate recollection and hindsight problem (Isabella, 1990). As the interviewees were asked to recall their experience during change after the organizational

change had occurred, this could lead to either an exaggerated distinction or reduced ability to distinguish between those different points in time. Additionally, it is also possible that more positive or negative events could be recalled than actually occurred (Lewis, 2000). The critical incident technique (CIT) which I used in pre-change interviews could reduce the negative effects of recalling to some extent, by focusing on the most critical events, however CIT could not avoid all the problem raised by recalling.

One approach to resolve the two academic problem is to give up the pursuit of generalised research findings; instead, to improve knowledge about an existing situation. Although this kind of knowledge cannot be generalised or applied, it can be shared (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009). If I chose to work with a small group of people intensively and then write about their narrative stories, I would have more time to observe and communicate with my interviewees, talking about those specific issues that happened in their work; and therefore the recall problem and the difficulty of representing participants' perspectives could be alleviated because my interviewees would have more space to think and reflect; and other practitioners could make sense easily from our lived stories. It was at this moment that I re-examined my research aim and decided to develop a living theory of practice, which is about practitioners' personal theories of practice (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009).

In order to develop such a living theory, I could choose two kinds of positions, as an observer or as an actor. As an observer, the researcher tries to understand the research field by observing then describes and explains what is going on under the specific situation. However there was a problem for taking the observer position in my research: as 'identity' lacks sufficient substance and discreteness, it is hard to be captured in questionnaires or single interviews and to be measured and counted' (Pratt, 2000, Pratt et al., 2006, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Actually previous researchers often adopted combined methods to observe individuals identity. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) focus upon one single individual; in order to study this person in considerable depth, they undertake six interviews with the individual, interview 40 other managers about this person and her situation, and attend 14 meetings for further observation. It was hard for me to take a similar approach, because of the ethical problems that might be raised. Specifically, asking managers to talk about others' management activities or roles would have negative effects on their relationships, especially in the period of organizational change. Another difficulty for me was that I

was not sure how long it would take for managers to reform their work identity during the period of organizational change, and I was also not sure when they started their reconstruction processes. These two difficulties then made me give up the position of pure observer.

If working as an actor, the practitioner-researcher positions herself in 'the research field, within a social context, and observes, describes and explains what is going on in her own learning, in relation to herself and the social context' (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009, 12). In my research, it meant trying to be involved in the field, taking action to influence managers' identity construction in the specific organizational context, doing research and telling stories about how things were improved through my intervention. I preferred to be an actor rather than an observer. One reason is that the organization did not provide related support for managers to reconstruct their identities, and in my pre-change interviews, many managers expressed that they needed some opportunities to reflect on their own work and work identity, and they would like to get some support for adapting to the changed organization.

Another reason is that being an actor provided more opportunity for me to collect high-quality data. As the participants of my research were all senior and middle managers who were facing an organizational change, they were busy and would not spend much time with me if I could not prove my value/merit. In order to get more time and patience from participants, a useful way was to provide them something attractive, such as some management tools which could be used to assist them in improving their management performance and understanding of themselves.

The third reason is that in the extensive literature, little research has been done on developing instruments used to assist the identity construction process (Batagiannis, 2011, Margolin, 2007); and the study of Margolin (2007) is on managers' self reflection on his actions of leadership identity development, and the other study is about how to teaching students do action research to develop their leadership identity (Batagiannis, 2011). Although action research is conducted, none of them really focus developing useful instruments.

Thus I decided to conduct an action research project. There were two purposes of the action research: one was to develop a set of tools which could be used to assist managers in constructing and reconstructing their identities; the other one was working together with these managers to facilitate them to deal with management problems

brought by the ongoing organizational change. The specific design of the action research will be presented in the next section.

3.3.2 The Design of the Research Project

3.3.2.1 The Initial Design of the Case Study Project

According to Hartley (2004) and Stake (1995), some issues should be considered carefully in the research design of a case study: (1) whether the research will be based on a single case or multiple cases; (2) whether the focus of the case study is the whole unit or the contrasting cases which exist within the whole unit, or both of them.

A single case emphasizes the uniqueness of the objective case in providing valuable information about the research question; a multiple case study is designed with more concern for representation (Hartley, 2004, Stake, 1995). In this research, detailed data and a compelling story were much more important than representation for realizing my research purposes (which were revealing the process of identity construction to help readers make sense of their own identity construction, and developing some usable tools for practitioners to reflect and develop their identities). Therefore although multiple cases were studied, the focus of the research was still on selecting participants who can provide meaningful stories. In order to strengthen the research conclusion, developing contrasts between cases became an important criterion of case selection; this will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

Although the unit of analysis was at the individual level, the first issue needed to be considered was selecting the organizational context of the study. The basic criterion was to maximize what we can learn (Stake, 1995). In order to learn how managers construct and reconstruct their work identities to deal with organizational uncertainty, I planned to find an organization that (1) was experiencing some kind of organizational change (therefore the organizational environment may be turbulent and more challenging for employees; and then I had more chances to observe the identity construction processes of its employees and to identify those problems and difficulties that they meet in the process); (2) emphasized human resource management and organizational culture development (therefore the identity regulation may be a significant phenomenon within the organization); (3) its senior managers had different backgrounds and approaches on organizational management (so there was a great possibility that they had contrasting ways in constructing and reconstructing their own work identities and also led to

different discourses within the organization which had influences on employees' identity construction).

Two organizations were identified immediately according to the criteria; one in the UK and one in China. In order to widen the pool of potential organizations, I also made a search of other organizations through using contacts in the MBA centre of Nanjing University in China. By interviewing with those MBA students to get a list of potential organizations and contacting with the CEOs or HR managers of those organizations, a case pool with basic information of each organization was achieved.

Then I decided to conduct a pilot study in the first organization identified, the H Business School in the UK. Along with the development of the pilot project, I found that perhaps I did not need to go to another organization to do a formal research; H organization could be the focus of my research. There were two reasons for this choice: (1) I was very familiar with the organization, thus I could easily find out those potential individuals who may have interesting stories about their work identities; it was also easier for me to enter the 'back regions' of the organization. (2) An organization change may last for a long period of time; if I chose an organization in another country or area, I may face with serious resource problems.

Thus H was chosen as the case organization; and I started the first round of interviews four months before the old dean stepped down (from December 2010 to March 2011).

Two groups of interviewees were chosen from the H organization: top and middle managers.

The reasons of choosing top managers were: (1) From the perspective of organizations, senior managers' identity should be paid more attention to (MacTavish, 2007); because their actions have significant influence throughout the organization, especially when they also take charge of the responsibility of managing other employees' identities and behaviours. (2) Those strategic and other broader organizational issues which can significantly influence work in organizations are often most strongly played out at senior manager levels (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Those specific problems faced by senior managers may offer a good entrance to the formulation of organizational control; lots of values, discourses and vision of the organization can be also revealed in the process of discussing specific management problems.

The reasons of choosing middle managers were: (1) Although middle managers may encounter less broadly shared organizational issues, they may be more familiar with those professional details of their own departments and groups; therefore, the difficulties and problems that they meet in the process of identity construction may differ from senior managers; therefore studying middle managers may provide the researcher more chances to learn the process. (2) Comparing to senior managers and low-level employees, middle manager have more chances to experience some kind of identity regulation; because they often take charge of the operation of some specific policies or strategies, therefore organization need to guide their behaviour but cannot develop too strict rules considering the nature of their work.

It is argued that taking senior and middle managers as participants could provide the researcher great chances to study different kinds of identity construction processes, to identify different problems and difficulties embedded in the process and also help the researcher to examine identity regulation from different perspectives (senior managers may represent the view of the organization, while middle managers may represent the view of individuals).

There were lots of top and middle managers in the H organization. In order to identify who are the 'significant persons', the 'snowball' technique was used. The main problem for snowball sampling is making initial contact. In this study, some senior members of the organization were contacted first to find other 'significant managers' who showed great contrast with each other in their backgrounds and ways of management.

In the first round of interviews in H Business School, 14 interviews with senior and middle managers were completed (out of 32 invitations). In all these interviews, the critical incident technique was used. The methods used in these interviews will be discussed in Section 3.3.3.

3.3.2.2 The Emerging Action Research Project

As discussed above the first round of interviews raised many new problems and ideas into my head; and reflections during this process impelled me to amend my research plan: conducting an action research project rather than just a round of post-change interviews.

I started to consider what approaches could be taken to assist managers in accomplishing their identity reformation. In this stage, the problem that worried me

most was how to deal with my relationship with the participants who were senior and middle managers. These participants had more knowledge and experience about management than I. Would they accept the approach I introduced to them? Would they agree to work with me to reconstruct their work identity using the approach provided?

I addressed the problem in two ways: one was to review related literature to learn what instruments had been developed by other researchers, making sure that I prepared well in theory. The other was to choose a critical friend, who was an expert in this field; I hoped to keep reflecting in action and making improvement by discussing with her about my performance during the whole process of the project.

Through comprehensive review of relevant literature, the issue of “reflection” attracted my attention. This is a common method used in the professional development research field, especially for training new teachers and nurses. A reflective practice intervention was identified as an useful way for people to learn professional skills, which are learnable, coachable, but not teachable (Schön., 1990).

It is believed that change management is such a kind of professional skills, for the following reasons (basing on Schön’s criteria of unteachable skills (Schön., 1990)):

- The gap between a description of a required change and the knowing-in-action that corresponds to it must be filled by reflection -in-action.
- The change must be grasped as a whole, by experiencing the change process in action.
- Change management depends on recognition of change competencies and quality, which must be learned by doing.
- Descriptions of required change are likely to be perceived initially as vague, confusing, ambiguous, or incomplete; so these descriptions could only be made clear by a dialogue in which participants’ understandings and misunderstandings can be revealed through their own actions.
- Change management is a creative process; thus managers have to try to see and do things in new ways, and no prior description of change management can take the place of learning by doing.

Because of these characteristics of change management, reflective practice may be a good way for managers to develop their competencies in dealing with change problems.

Another issued needed to consider was the relationship between identity construction and approach to problem-solving. In identity literature many studies have been done on the influence of identity on individual/ group behaviours (Bastein, 1992, Boen et al., 2006, Jane and Oded, 2001, Lipponen et al., 2004, Paviglioni, 2007, Van Dick et al., 2006b, van Knippenberg et al., 2002), for example they claim that organizational identity is positive related to commitment, corporate citizenship, or conflicts. However little research focuses on managers and explores on how a manager’s identity influences his/ her management activities. Besides, identity and self are both very abstract concepts which have been studied and understood through observing activities (Herminia and Jennifer, 2010). Extensive research had not yielded a clear answer about how people link their identities with their work activities; therefore it can be argued that there is a gap in literature on the issue of the relationship between managers’ identities and their approach to problem solving. This issue was reflected upon by me and those managers in the action research project, and our findings will be discussed in Chapter 8.

In this thesis, work identity and approach to problem solving are linked together. This belief came from McNiff’s argument about the interrelationship between practice, values and logics (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009). McNiff claims that ‘practice (what we do) is influenced by, and influencing (1) a values base (what we value), and (2) a logical form (how we think)’ (p8); in other words, “values, logics and practices are mutually influencing” (p8), their relationships are shown in the Figure 2:

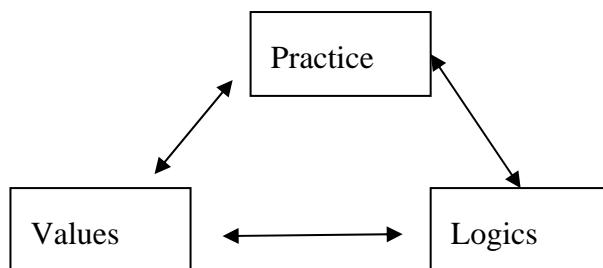


Figure 3-3 The relationships between practice, values and logics

Work identity can be seen as a kind of value/ belief, while approach to problem solving is a kind of logic; they can be both influenced by and influence the reflective practice. In other words, our beliefs influence our approach to problem solving; how we think about problem solving influences our beliefs about ourselves as well; and our beliefs and approaches influence and are influenced by management practices. Thus I decided to conduct a reflective practice intervention project (practice) to assist managers who

were facing an organizational change to reconstruct their work identity (values) and improve their approach to problem-solving (logics) to deal with organizational changes.

Once it was decided to do a reflective practice intervention, the next step was to develop related instruments used in the intervention; and this issue will be presented in the next section.

3.3.3 Methods of Data Collection

3.3.3.1 Methods for the Initial Case Study Project

According to Hartley (2004), multiple methods can be used in case studies, including: participant observations, direct observation, interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, questionnaires, or a combination of these methods. He also claims that using a combination of methods is useful in studying complex phenomena and can provide triangulate data and theory and thereby better validity. Hence, in this project a combination of method was used: interview was used as the main method, document analysis as a supplementary method.

Documents used in this study were profiles of participants and the history, structures, culture and current policies of the case organization; the purpose of collecting these documents was to supportt the design of the guided questions used in the interviews and helps the researcher to interpret the data obtained from interviews. Sometimes, documents were also used to check factual of the information obtainted from interviews.

Interviews were conducted following the principle of the critical incident technique, which is popular in the individual behaviour research field (Cassell and Symon, 2004). A detailed discussion of this technique will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The critical incident technique

Chell (1991) gives an definition of the critical incident technique (CIT): ‘The critical incident interview is a qualitative interview procedure, which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes or issues), identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain an understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account those cognitive, affective and behavioural elements’ (p46). And Chell argues that the CIT is useful analysing people’s behaviour, especially those less tangible aspects of behaviour.

The CIT was used to design the unstructured interviews in the pre-change stage, focusing on the central topic of identity construction and trying to capture the respondents' thought process, their frame of reference, and their feeling about an incident or a set of incidents, which are meaningful for participants for their identity formulation. In interviews, interviewees were asked to give an account of what an incident meant for them, and describe their situation and present circumstance, attitude and orientation.

There were two reasons for choosing CIT method. First, CIT provided an effective way to identify the critical events that happened in an individual's life history, and could assist to understand how these managers became who they are and why they chose to practise management in this way. Secondly, CIT was suitable for the requirement of studying the dynamic change of identity. Identity is a kind of social psychological phenomena, which is hard to observe, and its change is often very slight and imperceptible (Rick et al., 2005, Saren, 2007, Stefanie, 2010). Through the CIT method, I could identify some change in individuals, which appears to reflect the change of their belief and logics.

In the next section, the specific design and conduction of the action research project (the second stage of my field work) will be discussed.

3.3.3.2 Methods for the Action Research Project

This section explains how the instruments used in the intervention process were developed. There are two stages that were gone through: (1) reviewing the literature about reflection, personal/ professional development and change management, looking for tools that could be used for assisting individuals in completing self reflection or personal development; (2) developing a set of instruments for reflective practice, which would be suitable for managers facing with an organizational change. In the following paragraphs, a detailed description of my journey will be given.

First of all, a review of action research that focuses on the issues of personal and professional development was undertaken; the purpose was to make sense on how to assist people in developing skills of reflective thinking, especially the instruments that could be used in a reflective intervention.

In extensive studies, three kinds of instruments for reflection facilitation are often used: (1) journal writing (2) reflective discussion and (3) reflective practicum.

- Reflective journal writing is believed to be a very important reflective strategy (Diamond, 2001, Glass, 2006, Horwitz, 2007, Lemke, 2007, Stevens, 2001, Varley, 2003, Walker-Floyd, 2011), because it could provide individuals a space to reflect on their experience, make the connection between theory and practice, and find a balance between the value and practice (Horwitz, 2007). A reflective journal is also a tool for individuals, making their thoughts clearer and making their reflective process more concrete.
- Reflective discussion can be done in many ways, such as coaching discussion (Johns, 1998, Pond, 2000), reflection group (Boshoff, 2003, Diamond, 2001, Horwitz, 2007, Stevens, 2001), or reflection dialogue (with another person who is facing the same situation) (Chambers, 1997, Croke, 1999). The aim of a reflective discussion is to provide individuals with some different perspectives and different possibilities on the problem being analysed, which may assist people to reflect on their own ideas.
- Reflective practicum is some purposefully designed activities which can help people learn certain skills by doing. For example, in Lemke's (2007) study, with the purpose of improving nurses' reflective learning, the participants are asked to do a self-assessment, then identify a practice problem, make and implement a personal learning plan, and finally evaluate their learning and outcomes achieved. Practicum is very useful for developing skills that are learnable, coachable, but not teachable.

Each of the three reflective instruments has its own advantage: journal writing is useful for personal learning and reflection; discussion could provoke some critical feedback and bring in some new thoughts; and practicum offers the opportunity of learning by doing. Thus all the three instruments were employed by the researcher in the reflective practice intervention project. In the next section, the specific design of the three instruments will be discussed.

1 Reflective Practicum and Reflective Journal

The practicum for this intervention project was designed first; as its design could influence the design of reflective journal and discussion.

However, the design of a reflective practicum was problematic: little research had been done on shaping managers' identity during a period of organizational change with a reflective practice intervention method; this meant I had to develop a reflective

practicum for managers by myself. The initial idea about this design was generated in a meeting with my critical friend: Belinda, a systems practitioner. Belinda suggested that I considered bringing in some system approaches: introducing a few system approaches to managers, and then asking them to reflect on their work identity using these approaches.

This idea seemed to be a feasible way of conducting the reflective practicum. As I was a student of the systems studies centre in which knowledge of systems approaches can be obtained easily. The leader of the organization being studied also had a background in system studies, thus it was more likely that the participants of the project would accept this design, because they knew the systems approaches as well, although without much experience. The only problem was whether these approaches would be useful in assisting managers in completing reflection on their work identities, as this would be an 'unconventional' use of such approaches. A brief introduction of systems approaches will be provided in the following paragraphs.

The basic idea of systems thinking is providing a holistic analysis framework for complex problems; "It embraces holism and creativity to handle complexity, change and diversity" (Jackson, 2003, xix). By reviewing a range of systems approaches for management, Jackson classified them into four types: Type A: Approaches focusing on increasing the efficiency and efficacy of processes and structures of an organization for the purpose of improving goal seeking and viability. Type B: Approaches seeking to improve organizational performance by exploring purposes and ensuring stakeholders have an agreement on organizational purposes to some degree. Type C: Approaches pursuing fairness in organizations by encouraging full and open participation. Type D: Approaches trying to improve organizational performance by promoting appropriate diversity to deal with challenges.

According to the summary in last paragraph, it can be seen that all the systems approaches are developed to improve organizational performance, and they are suitable for resolving complex organizational problems. In other words, systems approaches take the organizational perspective rather than the individual perspective; and most of their applications are on the organizational level (Jackson, 2003, Waring, 1989). However an unpublished research paper in the systems research field (Jambekar, 2005) suggests that basic ideas of the systems approaches can be borrowed and used in personal development field without mechanistically following the procedures of these

systems approaches. And this study inspired my design of instruments for fascinating reflective identity construction.

By reviewing a range of systems approaches (reference was made to the framework of Systems of Systems Methodologies developed by Jackson and Keys (1984) and Jackson (1987), to ensure that my consideration included approaches that reflected different paradigmatic assumptions), and discussing them with my critical friends, Belinda and Wallace, who were experts in the systems field, four approaches were selected for this project. The criteria were that: (1) at least one approach was selected from each type (Type A to D, mentioned above); (2) the procedures of the approach should not be too complicated to be learnt and followed by participants; (3) the researcher could find a way of using them to assist self- reflection. Finally four approaches were selected after reviewing a range of systems approaches carefully; the reasons of choosing them were: (1) the researcher could find out a way to link the basic ideas/ principles of these approaches with individuals self reflection on identity; (2) the researcher could make a link between these four approaches so that they can form a coherent process rather than being applied as four unrelated tools. The other approaches excluded in this research may also be applicable for people's identity development, and the researcher planned to explore and introduce more of them in future studies; but for the PhD study, there was not enough time to realize this objective.

Among the four approaches, two were selected from Type A (approaches for improving goal seeking and viability), one from Type B (approaches for exploring purposes) and one from Type C (approaches for ensuring fairness). No approach was selected from Type D. Actually there is only one approach in Type D, the postmodern systems thinking approach (PST) whose basic idea is revealing indeterminacy encouraging resistance.

The four systems approaches selected were: (1) Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH). (2) Strategic Assumption Surfacing & Testing (SAST). (3) Lean Systems Thinking (LEAN). (4) System Dynamics (SD). Having selected these approaches, I considered how the approaches, in their original form might be applied in personal development field; if there did not seem to be a logical way to use the approach in its original form then the approach was reviewed to see if a set of principles could be derived from it that could be appropriately applied to support personal development (see Section 3.3.4 for a more detailed discussion). After deciding how the systems approaches would be used, I began

to design the introduction packages of the four approaches, which included the content of each approach, and the procedures that managers could follow in their own reflection on identity with these approaches. The content of these introduction packages will be introduced in Section 3.3.4, and here the design process and reflection during the process are presented.

Seven versions of the introduction packages were developed in total; they were continually updated along with the learning and reflection process of the researcher in designing the project. For each version, a pilot meeting with a PhD student was conducted first, asking the student to read the introduction material, use the approaches to do a self-reflection, and then give the feedback. Then a reflective discussion with critical friends was done to bring in critical perspectives to make further improvements. Three issues were noted during the discussion and reflection processes, and they are presented in the following paragraphs.

First of all, it was realized that the form of the introduction package was as important as its content, because the content has to be communicated through its form. Barthes (1973) argued that text could be divided into “readerly text” and “writerly text” according to the purposes. A readerly text positions its reader as a receiver of its meaning, while a writerly text involves its reader in the living co-construction of the text. McNiff and Whitehead (2009) also point that ‘although action researchers initially produce some writerly texts, where they work out ideas, researchers need to appreciate generally that their reader needs some kind of framing device, through which they could make sense of what they are reading’ (p49). The participants of the project could be seen as the first group of readers of the research, and they also needed some ‘readerly’ materials to avoid the misunderstanding and improve their willingness to participate. Therefore, two amendments were made for the introduction packages to make it ‘readerly’: (1) A brief introduction sheet was prepared, which contained the main purpose of the project and the specific approaches that would be introduced, as well as a detailed schedule of the project; (2) The introduction packages and worksheets were rewritten for many times to become more user-friendly.

Another important thing realized during the process was that the ‘paradigm’ that the methodology came from had to be considered seriously when designing the introduction materials. Previously, the relationship among values, logics and practices was discussed. In this part, epistemology is taken into account: the way we think (logic) and the values

we hold (values)work together to influence ‘the way we know and the way we come to know (epistemology); and these in turn influence how we act’ (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009, 8).

Consequently, if the paradigm underpinning each systems approach was not considered in the design stage, it would be hard for the researcher and the participant to communicate with each other on the application of the systems approaches; because we may think and come to know in different ways, and we would be likely to apply the approaches in different ways. If we could make clear on the paradigms that underpin each systems approach, although we still have our own values and logic, the researcher and the participant could develop some “living epistemology” (that means “forms of knowing in an open and relational way”, according to McNiff and Whitehead’s (2009) argument) on the specific problem being analysed; and that would be helpful for the developing of a nurturing relationship between the researcher and the managers in the field.

This reflection was also important for the whole action research project, as I became aware of the idea of “deconstruction”, which is an important way to achieve critical reflection that is an important criterion for the quality of action research. According to McNiff and Whitehead. (2009), deconstruction involves “understanding how our thinking is influenced by the ‘norms’ of a culture, and appreciating the validity of other people’s opinions” (p52). Specifically, through this reflection, I appreciated that there were different kinds of logics, values and epistemologies in different systems approaches; and they had great influence on the conduction of the action research; and the participants may also have different beliefs which have influence on this project too. On the other hand, I began to question my own values and logics along with the progress of the research. It is argued by McNiff and Whitehead (2009) that the underpinning values and logics of action research are living, inclusion and emancipatory. Thus, in order to conduct a high quality research, the action researcher should tell living stories, underpinned by living logics and values; and they also need to keep improving their ways of action through deconstruction and being critical. This reflection influenced the way I conducted my research and wrote the thesis; I tried to keep challenging myself and then show you the journey I went through.

After developing the introduction packaging and worksheets, it was the timing to begin to work with the participants. A plan was also necessary for the conduction of the reflective discussion; and this issue is addressed in the next section.

2 The Reflective Discussion

Unlike much other action research on the issue of reflection, the purpose of the reflective discussion in this research was not 'providing a space for the participants who have different backgrounds, life experiences, professional activities and frameworks of thought to do a social exchange on the same critical incident being analysed' (Horwitz, 2007, 32), or sharing personal experience or stories with each other (Klugkist, 2009). In this research, the reflective discussion was more like a dialogue between a coach and a student: it took place in a context in which the students (managers) attempted to be reflective on their identities by applying some new tools; it made use of words, but was based on actions; and it depended on some kind of reciprocal reflection in action (Schön., 1990). In the conversation between the researcher and participants, the researcher had not only to try to understand the stories of participants, but also to give critical feedback to generate some new stories with the participant in the reflection process.

The understanding about the purpose of the reflective discussion was improved along with the conduction of the project. Initially, I defined my role in the discussion as an instructor as well as an observer. That meant I would first introduce a system approach to participants, and ask them to use it to do reflections on their management work and on their work identities. Then in the next meeting, I would be a listener, interpreting the managers' stories about what happened to them after applying the approach and how they felt and evaluated this approach. However, I found this definition of my role did not work well in practice, as I had to be more positive and take the initiative to facilitate the completion of managers' reflections. I needed to play the role of a coach or consultant, using systems approaches as diagnostic tools, and working with the managers to reflect on their work and identity. Besides, the relationship between the researcher and the participants was not as simple as the relation between knower (I) and receiver (the participant), as the participants in this research were all senior and middle managers who had great knowledge and experiences in the management field. Thus, by reflecting on the experiences obtained in the project, I finally conducted reflective discussions in three tiers. Tier one: the managers analysed their current work using the

systems tools, and the researcher tried to learn their stories and identify what reflections had been made by the managers. Tier two: By giving critical feedback on managers' action, I inspired further reflections of the managers on their approaches to problem solving and on their work identities. Tier three: the managers and I then reflected on our conversation, and evaluated the usefulness of the system approaches. After each discussion three issues were further interpreted and reflected: the reformation processes of managers, the usefulness of the set of systems tools and the efficacy of the reflective discussion. In the following section, the specific instruments used in this project will be presented.

3.3.4 Theoretical Preparation for the Action Research Project

As mentioned above, four systems approaches were selected as the tools prepared for managers to complete reflection on their identities and ways of problem-solving. However these systems approaches were not designed for personal development, as you can see from their names, they are 'systems' approaches. Therefore, before introducing these systems approaches to my participants, I had to review and redesign them to adapt them to the needs of personal development. In this section, the procedures I went through in completing this work will be introduced: firstly, a brief introduction about systems thinking will be given, and the necessity for redesign of the systems approaches for this project will be presented; secondly, the four systems approaches and the redesign of them will be introduced.

3.3.4.1 A Brief Introduction of Systems Thinking

Systems thinking researchers believe that 'managers today need to cope with increasing complexity, change and diversity, and simple solutions are bound to fail when pitched against complex problem situations'; therefore they argue that "systems thinking is holistic rather than reductionist and, at least in the form of critical systems thinking, does every possible to encourage creativity" (Jackson, 2003, xv). Thus most systems approaches seek to "make use of the philosophy of holism and the systems vocabulary associated with it" (Jackson, 2003, xv). And these systems approaches 'concentrate their attentions on the organizational level and on ensuring that the parts are functioning and are related properly together so that they serve the purposes of the whole; they also approach problems ready to employ the systems language to be holistic' (Jackson, 2003, xv).

However these characteristics (focusing on organizational level, being holistic, employing the systems language) cause systems approaches become even “more difficult to understand”; as Jackson (2003) points out: “managers, although increasingly interested in systems thinking, have reached different stages in their understanding of it. Some know little except that it might help. Others are employing systems ideas almost instinctively.” (p xv-xvi) I met the same problem when I tried to introduce systems approaches to managers. Many of them thought these approaches were too complicated and therefore would require a huge amount of time to use; they gave responds like: “On a day to day basis, I couldn’t do this.” Or “If I’m in a two years part time course doing an MSc in Systems Thinking, I would be learning and I would be reading, and I would be applying these things over time. But I just don’t have time to do that.”

It seems that the main challenge of introducing systems approaches to managers is how to make these approaches easier for users. At the same time, it was important to maintain the core ideas of these systems approaches so that their advantages could be preserved. Another thing to be considered was finding a way to link systems approaches with day to day work, so that managers would not put them on the shelf until a “big” decision is coming.

In order to realize these goals, first of all, in this section, systems approaches are reviewed from a holistic view, making explicit each approach’s strengths, weakness and ideal-type of problem context.

The framework developed by Jackson and Keys (1984) and Jackson (1987) ² is presented in Table 3-2, which classifies systems approaches into categories according to the problem situations that each of them could deal with, and this classification is helpful for us to organize different systems approaches and select some of them for this research project.

Before moving on to discuss this framework (named as Systems of Systems Methodologies, SoSM), it is necessary to make explicit of the common criticisms of the SoSM and the reason why I used it despite these criticisms.

² Jackson and Keys (1984) are the first writers who consider methodological pluralism in the community of management systems (Midgley, 2000); they developed a grid with four boxes which represented four different types of problem context, and they also identified a few suitable systems methodologies for context. These four boxes were later expanded to six by Jackson (1987); and this grid of contexts is called as the System of Systems Methodologies.

Lots of researcher have proposed their comments on SoSM (Midgley, 1992, Mingers, 1992, Mingers, 1993, Sutton, 1995, Tsoukas, 1992), and three criticisms can be summarized:

Firstly, the two dimensions used for clarify problem contexts are often questioned. For example, should other issues, such as the task or the problem-solver be considered as other important dimensions (Mingers, 1992, Mingers, 1993)? Or could the system type dimension be expanded to include more types (Sutton, 1995)?

Secondly, the relationship between SoSM and problem contexts is also challenged by reviewers. Mingers (1992) argues: “in summary, either problem contexts do not have significant characteristics, in which case there is no need for the system of systems methodologies, or they do, in which case discovering and defining the nature of a problem context is very much part of the problem. If, as I believe, the latter is the case, then a successful methodology must tackle this rather than leave it to chance.” (p6)

Thirdly, the intent behind the SoSM is questioned, especially the potential contradictions between the assumptions of SoSM and its arguments about enhancing OR (operational research) or facilitating the management task.

Before choosing the SoSM as the framework for guiding the selection of systems approaches in the design stage, the three criticisms were considered, and the risks of using SoSM were evaluated. The reason and the way that I used SoSM are showed as follows:

For the first problem about dimensions, it has little influence on this research. Because using some other frameworks which have more dimensions or more system types would not be helpful for this research. The reason is this research focused on individuals rather than systems, therefore I did not need more detailed classification; besides, the framework was used by the researcher to assist the selection of systems approaches rather than using it to guide the whole project or the intervention.

For the second problem about the relationship between SoSM and problem contexts, because I had different purposes of using systems approaches, therefore I did not follow the principles of SoSM in the implementation stage of the action research project. Specifically, although I considered the strengths and weaknesses of each systems approach according to the SoSM in the design stage, in the implantation stage, all the four systems approach were applied in the same problem context: the work situation

that each of participant was facing with. In other words, my participants did not choose most suitable approach/approaches for their problem contexts; instead, they applied the four approaches to help them diagnose the problem context from different perspectives, so that they may reflect on themselves from different perspectives. More specifically, CSH was used to remind my participants to reflect on their identities by considering the power relationships underlying their roles (focusing on the relationship between organizational role requirement and individual identity construction); SAST was used to remind participants to reflect on their identities by considering others' assumptions, especially those opposing ones on their identity/ role definition (focusing on the relationship between others' role expectation and individuals' identity definition). LEAN was used to guide participants to review their performance of identity in a systematic way (focusing on the relationship between one's thoughts and activities), while SD provides an opportunity to reveal the underlying structures of their identity construction (focusing on the development tract of individual identity). To some degree, in this project, the use of the four approaches was not decided by the problem context (because for a participant, the context was the same one), but decided by the purpose of the reflection. In other words, the real world problem context is so complex, sometimes we could not clarifying the problem context at the very beginning of a practical project, but we still can resolve those problems that we can identify and deal with at the moment with approaches at hand and, then we may improve our understanding on the problem context gradually, which in turn would provide some clue for finding out more problems and what other approaches could be used to resolve these newly identified problems.

In summary, the second problem of SoSM also has little influence on this research.

For the third problem of SoSM, it had no influence on this project too. As mentioned, above, this research used SoSM as a guide to organize and select different systems approaches, but did not apply its intent behind to direct the application of the selected approaches.

After addressing why and how the SoSM was used, a brief introduction of SoSM will be given in the following paragraphs.

Table 3-2 The ‘ideal-type’ grid of problem contexts and its relations with systems approaches

		PARTICIPANTS		
		UNITARY	PLURALIST	COERCIVE
SYSTEMS	SIMPLE		-Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing	-Critical Systems Heuristics
	COMPLEX	-System Dynamics -Lean Thinking		

It is argued that problem contexts are becoming more difficult for managers because they exhibit great complexity, diversity and change. Systems thinkers believe that there are two sources for this difficulty: the ‘systems’ which are becoming larger and more turbulent, and the ‘participants’ whose values, beliefs and interests are diverse (Jackson, 2003). Therefore Jackson (1987, Jackson and Keys, 1984) developed an ‘ideal-type’ grid which uses the ‘systems’ and ‘participants’ dimensions to describe problem contexts, and then to relate systems approaches to the problem contexts.

The vertical axis classifies system types into two extremes: simple and complex. Initially the assumptions made by hard systems thinking about system type were that simple systems only had “a few subsystems that are involved in only a small number of highly structured interactions; they tend not to change much over time”; therefore the outcome of the simple systems could be predetermined (Jackson, 2003, 21). Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, unfortunately this simple systems assumption was challenged because people found that mathematical models developed with that assumption could only offer a “limited and distorted view of reality”, because the real life is extremely complex and turbulent (Jackson, 2003, 20). So more and more people characterize systems as complex ones which “have a large number of subsystems that are involved in many more loosely structured interactions”; and therefore “such systems adapt and evolved over time as they are affected by their own purposeful parts and by the turbulent environment in which they exist” (Jackson, 2003, 21).

The horizontal axis expresses that three types of relationship could exist between participants of systems: ‘unitary’, ‘pluralist’ and ‘coercive’. A unitary relationship means that participants have similar values, beliefs and interests, so they share common

purposes and would all be involved in decision-making. If people are in a pluralist relationship, it means they have different values, beliefs and interests; therefore debate and conflict may exist in a decision making process, but people could still achieve some agreement, at least temporarily, to put the systems forward. If people are defined as being in a coercive relationship, it means they have few common interests and beliefs and they would not resolve the difference through debating or discussion; instead, power would be used to ensure adherence to command.

This ideal-type grid of problem contexts is helpful for understanding how to apply different systems approaches, because the assumptions and application conditions of each approach are exposed in the framework. In this research project, these four approaches were applied in varying ways and for different purposes. Some of them were introduced to participants with detailed methods, but others were applied just with basic ideas. The choices were made based on a judgement of whether the original methods of each approach could be applied in personal development field directly; if the answer is yes, methods will be applied; if the answer is no, principles will be used. In the following paragraphs the characteristics of the four systems approaches and the ways of using them in this project will be discussed.

First of all, two approaches holding a “Complex-Unitary” assumption were selected in this project; they are System Dynamics (SD) and Lean Thinking (LEAN). Normally this kind of approach is used to “assist managers improve goal seeking and viability” (Jackson, 2003, 22). They were developed because people found the reductionism did not work well in problem situations that are complex and turbulent; and therefore this kind of approach emphasize the efficient use of resources to realize organizational goals; and they also emphasize the adaptability of organizations in complex and turbulent environments. In sociological terms, these approaches are all functionalist in character, therefore they aim to achieve prediction and control so as to obtain better regulation of the organization (Jackson, 2003).

These two approaches may be useful in the problem situation that the participants of this research project were facing: an ongoing organizational change; because they are designed for ‘complex and turbulent’ problem situations. SD and Lean also differ from each other in the way that they deal with complexity (a more detailed description of these approaches will be given in the next section).

In this research, five principles of Lean and some related methods were introduced to participants to help people identify waste activities in playing their roles and being flexible for their identities (for example, in order to applying the principle of “making the value steps flow”, the tool of Cause-and-Effect Diagram was introduced). The reason of applying Lean’s methods directly is that much work had been done in previous studies about applying Lean in the individual level (Gitlow, 2009, Goldacker, 2010, Seddon and Caulkin, 2007, Tatikonda, 2007); therefore, those methods of Lean could be applied easily in this project based on the achievements of previous studies.

For SD approach, the tool Casual Loop Diagrams (CLD) was introduced and used in this project. The other part of the methodology of SD was not applied, because in this project managers did not have enough time and facilities to achieve scenario planning and modelling using custom-build software; therefore we focused on the first two phases (problem structuring and causal loop modelling), which were easy and helpful for facilitating people’s reflection on identity.

Secondly, an approach (Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing, SAST) holding a “Simple-Pluralist” assumption was introduced in the project. Approaches with this assumption were developed because functionalist system approaches failed to deal with the participants’ complexity in systems; they often aim to “assist managers improve the way in which they decide what purposes their enterprises should pursue and achieve a measure of agreement around those purposes” (Jackson, 2003, 22). In other words this kind of approach emphasizes that there are different values, beliefs and philosophies in the world; and managers should listen to different parties’ opinions so that a better regulation of the organization can be achieved.

SAST may also be useful for managers facing with a change, because it could assist them in re-examining the developing direction of the organization and themselves. In this research, SAST was used as some principles for self reflection: SAST premises that the best way to test an assumption is to oppose it, and this idea was introduced to individuals to reflect on their identity: challenging their own assumptions with others opposing opinions. Those specific methods of SAST were not applied, because the original methodology of SAST is designed for organizations, and need to be completed by a group of people; besides, little research has been done on applying SAST in the field of personal development.

Thirdly, critical systems heuristics was introduced as an approach holding a “Simple-Coercive” assumption. Its aim is to assist managers “improve their enterprises by ensuring fairness”; approaches with this assumption were developed because of “the failure of functionalist and interpretive systems approaches to give appropriate attention to ensuring the proper participation of all stakeholders in taking decisions” (Jackson, 2003, 23) . In sociological terms, this approach is “emancipatory in character, oriented toward eliminating sources of power and domination that illegitimately oppress particular individuals and groups in society” (Jackson, 2003, 23).

As organizational change is thought to be a complex activity in which great conflicts may happen between parties that have different interests or beliefs (Qian and Daniels, 2008), CSH may be useful for managers facing a change too. It could provide people with a new view on the organizational change, reminding them to look for those assumptions and perspectives underpinning a decision; therefore they could generate more robust decisions when they are decision makers; or they can be given a useful tool to reveal and challenge the normative content of a decision made by others. In this research, core ideas of CSH (about boundary judgements and comparisons of ideal and current situations) were introduced to participants; besides its 12 boundary questions were also rewritten as guiding questions for individuals’ self-reflection. Although boundary judgment was developed to analyze organizational problems, in this research, the role-identity construction issue was treated a kind of system design problem (it means individuals and organizations have different boundary judgment about how a role/ identity should be defined), therefore the CSH methods could be used directly.

Although these four approaches may be helpful for individuals reflections on identity, as I mentioned above, these approaches are designed for resolve problems at organizational level and are often hard to understand. It was necessary to do some preparing work before introducing them to participants. Two issues were considered in the preparing stage: the sequence of the introduction of the four approaches; the specific ways of introducing each approach.

Firstly, by reviewing the assumptions and related methods of each approach, the sequence order of the introduction was decided. First of all, CSH was introduced because its purpose was to “*help us decide what we ought to do*” (Jackson, 2003, 215) ; then SAST was used to supplement this blueprint by exposing different opinions of the stakeholders on this blueprint. Because of the assumption of “Complex-Unitary”

context, SD and LEAN are good at finding the most efficient ways of achieving predetermined ends; in other words, they can help people to decide how to realize the blueprint in an efficient way. In short, these four approaches were used for achieving different reflections: reflections on objective setting (considering options of identity definition), reflections on planning making (what changes could be made on identity), and reflections on planning implementation (how to make changes happen).

Besides, in order to make the use of system approaches easier for the managers, they were introduced to three ways of applying these approaches:

- Mode 1 - a problem situation is investigated from the outside using the methodology to structure the enquiry and for problem solving;
- Mode 2 - the methodology is internalised by the manager and used to aid thinking about and making sense of events as they unfold from within the problem situation;
- Mode 3 - the methodology is internalised by the manager and used to aid reflection on their own role and identity within a problem situation.

Mode 1 is the form of application that is most commonly discussed in the management literature (application in on the organizational level). In this project, the participants were asked to use the systems approaches in Modes 2 and 3; that was to carry out reflection on themselves about their work identity and approach to problem-solving.

In the next few sections, the presentation of the four approaches will be further discussed.

3.3.4.2 Critical System Heuristics

Introduction

Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) was proposed by Ulrich (1983, reprinted in 1994), who argued that the possible unfairness in society should be countered in decision making, so that those people affected by systems decisions will not be 'left in the dark'. Therefore CSH is developed as "a practically orientated, emancipatory systems approach that can ensure planning and decision-making include a critical dimension, and can enable the designs emanating from other systems approaches, whether hard or soft, to be suitably interrogated to reveal whose interests they serve" (Jackson, 2003, 213). The basic idea of CSH is that whenever a decision is taken, a prior decision is

made, often implicitly rather than explicitly, about what information is needed and hence who needs to be involved. Therefore CSH encourages reflection upon:

- how decisions are made
- who makes the decisions
- the possible consequences of decisions

CSH distinguishes between those involved in decision making, usually those regarded as having some formal position or expertise, and those who are affected, who have experiential knowledge of the impact of decisions. The aim of CSH is to achieve a decision making process which generates robust decisions by encouraging a comparison between the current situation (as is) and how the situation ought to be (defined through debate between the involved and the affected).

In summary, CSH:

- emphasises boundary judgements
- provides support for managers/stakeholders to question whose values are being respected and interests served and whose ought to be
- demands that attention be given to those affected but not involved
- undermines the notion of expertise and promotes participation

For CSH's application, there are two main steps:

First of all, people need to decide what knowledge is relevant to the decision, a boundary judgment. Normally, there are four groups of people that need to be considered:

- The client: Who benefits from the decision?
- The decision maker: Who has control over the decision?
- The expert: Whose knowledge is relevant to the decision?
- The affected: Who is affected by the decision and how?

By considering these four groups of stakeholders, people would be able to work out the purpose of the decision, the resources for decision making, the knowledge basis, and the potential response to the decision. Then a checklist of twelve questions can be used to interrogate the basis for the decision making process, so that people can generate more information to enable the re-examine of a decision making process to ensure the development of robust decisions.

Introducing the CSH to the personal development field

Core CSH ideas about who are involved in a decision making and the comparison of how a situation is with how it might otherwise be can inspire some valuable reflection for managers in personal development. For example, when facing a difficult situation whose advice should a manager seek? Do they routinely rely on the same people or do they challenge themselves to seek out new perspectives (even if these views might challenge their own deeply held beliefs)? In addition, the idea of comparing ones ‘actual self’ with the ‘ideal self’ may raise awareness of possibilities for change.

In this project, managers were introduced to ideas about how to use CSH to reflect on their actual management identity (mode 3) and ways of problem solving (mode 2), so they might find some possibilities of making improvement in their management work. A step by step guide was provided to them, and then some reflective discussions were held to make further reflection.

3.3.4.3 Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing

Introduction

Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (SAST) is designed by Mason and Mitroff (1981) as an approach specifically to deal with messes or wicked problems. When tackling wicked problems, it is assumed that problem structuring is more important than problem-solving using conventional techniques; because if problem formulation is handled badly, managers may choose the wrong problem to deal with (Jackson, 2003).

SAST aims to reveals the underlying assumptions on which the success of a decision or plan rests. By making assumptions explicit, managers can make judgments about how certain they are about the assumption and how important it is in affecting the success or otherwise of a decision or plan. Through this structured process of reflection managers can ensure that their decision making and planning has a solid basis and any weaknesses are known before it is exposed to others or implemented in practice. Where there are two opposing sides on a decision then both parties may enter into a battle of assumptions to generate a higher level of understanding which may provide the basis for agreement between warring factions.

Introducing the SAST to the personal development field

Although SAST is designed to deal with wicked problems, especially when there are divided opinions on an organizational decision, one of its basic ideas is still useful for personal problem-solving: SAST premises that the best way to test an assumption is to oppose it, and even on an individual basis people can improve their decision making and planning by seeking out assumptions and confronting their treasured beliefs with their deadliest enemies (i.e. I believe the world is flat but what if it is actually round?).

In this project, SAST was selected as the second approach introduced to managers; the purpose was to made supplement and make comparison with the application of the CSH approach.

SAST takes an assumption of a “simple-pluralist” context while CSH consumes a “simple-coercive” context, so they both admit that people may have different world views and opinions on the same systems. When applying the CSH in the project, managers had been asked to use the checklist of twelve questions to reflect on four groups of stakeholders. Therefore when applying SAST, managers were not be asked to review the related stakeholders again; instead, they were asked to reflect on how certain they were about the assumptions identified with the CSH approach and how important these assumptions were in affecting success.

Also different from CSH, which argues that power is often used to ensure adherence to command because of the irreconcilable conflict of different interest parties, SAST assumes that although debate and conflict exist in a decision process, people may still achieve some agreement, to take things forward. In this project, these two approaches were introduced to managers to reflect on the same problem situation; therefore their assumptions and applicability could be examined by the management practices; besides the participants and researcher could also have a chance to see a problem with different theoretical lens.

3.3.4.4 Lean Systems Thinking

Introduction

Lean Systems Thinking (Lean) is a structured process used to improve work processes through the identification, reduction and elimination of process waste and non-value-added activities (Monden, 1983, Ohno, 1988, Womack and Jones, 1996, Womack et al., 1990). The basic idea of Lean is that an organization should obsessively focus on the

most effective means of producing value for their customers and understand waste and value in its work; training staff who do and manage the work to act as improvement teams to bring about change. So the lean approach can be used to:

- Reveal the causality between the current process and performance
- Identify what works well
- Identify quick hits, as well as longer-term options for process improvement

Introducing the LST to the personal development field

As a popular systems approach, there are many ways to apply LST to organizational life. In this project only one idea of Lean was chosen to be introduced to managers: dealing with the relationship between the whole and its parts.

From a Lean perspective, the organization that we work in can be seen as a complex system, containing many functional departments. If these departments can cooperate well with each other, the organization may enjoy synergies; if the systems within an organization do not cooperate well, organizations may suffer from high internal transaction cost. In order to improve organizations' internal management, people could reconsider and redesign the system processes of the organization according to the principles of Lean, which is basically about getting the right things to the right place, at the right time, in the right quantities, while minimizing waste and being flexible and open to change.

The same principle could be applied in personal management. As managers, people may take charge of a project, a department or an organization; thus it is important for them to make proper work assignment for their staff and manage their own time efficiently. Therefore, lean's basic idea of eliminating waste and adding value is useful to assist individuals to reflect on the effectiveness and efficiency of their work and management.

Lean was the third systems approach introduced to managers after applying CSH and SAST; by that time, the underpinning assumptions of a problem situation had been made explicit sufficiently, and therefore those managers had understood their purposes clearly about their own development or about the problem needed to be solved. Consequently differences between stakeholders could be put aside for a while, managers then were asked to focus on the complexity brought by the system. Since a direction had been chosen, it was time to sit down to find the most efficient way to move on.

3.3.4.5 Systems Dynamics

Introduction

System dynamics (SD) is a method that is specifically developed to support the study of dynamic behaviour in complex systems. Although SD and Lean both assume a “complex-unitary” context, SD is different from Lean in dealing with the complexity of systems. Forrester, the creator of SD, argues that by employing the science of feedback and utilizing the power of digital computer, the SD approach could unlock secrets of those complex systems (Forrester, 1961, Forrester, 1973). Specifically, this approach claims to be able to model all those multiple-loops of systems, including the impacts of the decisions of human participants, so that the simulation by powerful computer could “reveal the unexpected consequences that arise from complexity and the dynamic behaviour of the systems” (Jackson, 2003, 69).

Introducing SD to the personal development field

It is hard to apply SD in the personal development field directly. As mentioned above, managers need some tools that they could use in day to day management; and if SD was introduced in a traditional way, managers may be asked to build models for each of the problem being analysed and then perform simulation in computers; that means the cost would be high in time and finance.

In order to assist people to articulate their understanding of the dynamic, interconnected nature of our world, a useful tool of SD was introduced in the project: Causal Loop Diagrams (CLD). With the help of CLD, people could easily identify and visually display intricate processes and root causes. By looking at the all the interactions of the variables in a system, the behaviour of the entire system can be discovered; therefore it becomes possible for people to find out the leverage points to influence current actions.

In the personal development field, people could use the tool of CLD to analyse their own behaviour patterns, and recognize those normally hidden structures which result in undesirable consequences. CLD also can assist people to articulate their world views and reflect on their previous work experience in a detached way; so they may deepen their understanding on themselves and find a way to make improvement.

SD was the last approach introduced in the project; the purpose was to assist managers in reviewing their life histories (the findings with the CIT method) and the development processes they experienced in the action project. By drawing casual loop diagrams, it

was easier for these managers and the research to see the construction and reconstruction processes of their work identities in a visible way.

In summary, by introducing these four systems approaches in the action research project with a new manner of application, it provided managers a chance to review and re-examine their current identities and approaches to problem-solving from different perspectives. In the next section, the details of the implementation will be presented.

3.3.5 The Implementation of the Action Research Project

3.3.5.1 An Overview of the Conduction of the Project

The purpose of this intervention project was to engage a group of managers who were facing an ongoing organizational change in a critical reflection process with the assistance of a series of systems approaches, to accomplish personal development that could result in new and critically-evolved understandings about their identities and practices related to management.

With this purpose, five senior and middle managers in the same organization were invited to participate in this project (one left after three meetings because of illness; the other four completed the project, but one of them had not participated in the first round interviews).

These five managers were purposefully selected. As mentioned in Section 2.2.1.1, in order to answer recent calls for greater attention to the diverse ways of personal-social relation configuration in identity research, and to observe if there is “highly personal in a seemingly impersonal template of social identity” (Alvesson et al., 2008, 10). To some degree, these five individuals may provide a good sample for observe the phenomenon that Alvesson et al. (2008) argue to be studied:

All these five participants play manager roles, and they came from the same organization, H Business School, which was experiencing some changes when the research project was being conducted. Therefore they were expected to have a ‘seemingly impersonal template of social identity’.

On the other hand, these five managers had different backgrounds, and were facing to different career situations when they entered in to the project: Coral was a female senior manager who played the acting dean role during the period of organizational change; Alton was a male senior manager who worked as a member of the top management

team and also led a department; and he was nearing retirement. Berta was a young female manager who got promotion after participating the research project; and in our first meeting, she still worried about losing her job and being moved to other positions. Delilah was a mature female middle manager who had worked on her current position for quite a few years. Quentin was a young male manager who was promoted to be a manager one year before he joined the project (due to the constraints he was not able to complete the project). Coral and Alton are academics managers while Berta, Delilah and Roy are administrators. Therefore, these managers may interpret and play their manager roles in different ways, and make different responses to changes happened in the organization.

In this project, they were asked to:

- Be introduced to a range of systems approaches;
- Critically reflect on their own work self-identity and how this defines how they act in the workplace, particularly how they approach problem-solving/decision-making;
- Identify how they might like to change their work identity and ways to realise this in practice;
- Increase their capacity for critical reflection and problem-solving/decision-making.

The four different systems approaches introduced in this project were CSH, SAST, LEAN and SD; a summary of their main features is shown in Table 3-3.

Table 3-3 Four systems approaches used in the research project

APPROACH	KEY FEATURES	VALUE TO MANAGERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenging how things are and the arrangements that maintain the status quo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparison of the current situation with the ideal situation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic Assumption Surfacing & Testing (SAST) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making explicit & challenging assumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Generation of a higher level of understanding by surfacing and evaluating assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lean Systems Thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding waste and value in work processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and implementation of effective and efficient means of producing value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ System Dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discovering and representing feedback processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understand how structure drives behaviour and identification of points of leverage for bringing about change

For each systems approach, a package of learning materials was provided, which included three documents:

1. An overview of the approach and instructions on how to use it in each of the above modes of practice;
2. Work sheets to support managers' use in practice of the approach in Modes 2 and 3;
3. Diary sheets on which to record managers' reflections on and evaluation of each approach.

In order to introducing these approaches and then reflecting on managers' application, a series of meetings were held between each participant and the researcher. The time plan of the project is presented in the Appendix 1, and its implementation is recorded in Appendix 2.

In next section, the experience of conducting this project will be reflected will be discussed.

3.3.5.2 Reflection on the Implementation

The implementation of the project was actually through the reflective discussions. The reflective discussion was envisaged as an opportunity for the researcher to listen to the stories of the participants, and make sense of how their application experiences of

systems approaches had affected the way they identified themselves as managers and shaped their approaches to problem-solving. When the discussions were conducted in practice, those participants indicated that telling their stories had helped them examine and reflect on their experiences again and gain a greater and sometimes fresh understanding of what those experience meant for them. I also learned many new ideas about how to apply systems approaches effectively from those managers' experiences. Thus the reflective discussion was developed as a way of giving both the managers and the researcher a space in which to reflect on themselves and their practices by interpreting the meanings generated in their conversations. In this way the reflective discussion did transform from "narrative means to therapeutic ends" (White and Epston, 1990).

After completing these reflective discussions with my participants, the data collection was almost completed. Then I started to analyse the data obtained from the worksheets, interview transcriptions and my own reflective diaries. Those data analysis methods used are presented in the next section.

3.3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

The data analysis happened as a recursive process in this study. In this section, the different stages will be described.

Data Management

The analysis began when the field work started. It was from that time point I began to organize all of the data for analysis. For example, the meeting records with my critical friends and the letters between us were collected; then reflections were made on these discussions and letter writings; these reflections were analysed and reflected upon again latter in the stage of thesis writing. Because the data analysis occurred continuously throughout the life of the research, and a wide range of documents were collected during the process, it was important to manage these documents carefully; at least it was necessary to make explicit what materials were available for data analysis and how to make use of them (Patton, 1990). The following table shows a summary of the data points of this study.

Table 3-4 Data points of my research

DATA POINTS	USE
Meeting records and letters with critical friends	Design and reflections on the research project
Transcripts of the pre-change interviews and reflective discussions with the participants	Main material. It was used to analyse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The usefulness of systems approaches • The identity construction of participants • My success and failure in conducting the project
Worksheets completed by the participants (Including the records of the two application exercises and the reflective diary for system approach	Supportive material. It was used to analyse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The usefulness of systems approaches • The identity construction of participants
My reflective diaries for each discussion with the participants	Supportive material. It was used to analyse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My success and failure in conducting the project • The usefulness of the systems tools I designed

Note: Because of the words restriction, these materials are not presented in the thesis; they are available if readers require.

Writing an Initial Action Report

Once all the materials were prepared, they are read through for making sense. Then a second reading was made for writing an initial action research report according to the rules of action research (McNiff and Whitehead., 2009). The main purpose of this step was to integrate all the different materials into a whole and distinguish the different voices the action report contained. And seven levels of analysis were distinguished according to McNiff and Whitehead (2009, McNiff and Whitehead., 2011) (see Table 3.4.):

Table3-5 The seven layers of an action report

FRAMES	THE WAY I DID IT
(1) Action: a largely descriptive story of the action.	In this layer, I needed to give descriptions of the action: “I/ they did this, I /they did that. This happened, that happened.”
(2) Explanation: an explanatory layer offering explanation for the story of the action.	In this layer, my job was to explain why those actions are happening and for what purpose: “I /they did this because... and I /they did that in order to...”
(3) Research: showing how the validity of the story was tested.	This layer was to show how the claims about the actions and reasons are tested rigorously and shown to be valid.
(4) Scholarship: strengthening the validity of the claim through linking it with existing ideas.	This layer means I needed to engage with the literature critically; in other words link my findings with previous studies with the purpose of supporting them or challenging them.
(5)Critical reflection: learning from the action-reflection.	This layer was to show my awareness of my own mistakes or others’ problems which were made in this action project and had influence on the research.
(6) Dialectical critique: making judgment on the quality of your action, your research, and your own thinking.	This was to show how I appreciated that I/ they are living in a context that is shaped by many things, such as history, culture, economy and politics.
(7) Meta-reflexive: saying how doing and writing your action research has developed your learning and contributed to the learning of others	This final step was to look at all the other six layers together.

McNiff and Whitehead’s framework provided a clue about how to organize those different data points from the research. For example, the worksheets could be used to show frame 1 (the action of the participants); the transcripts of discussion could be put in frames 1, 2 and 5 (the actions and explanations of participants, and even some

reflection); my reflective dairies could show frames 3, 4 and 5 (how I designed and conducted the research project as a researcher). The last two frames (6&7) would not be touched in the initial analysis phase; they would be considered in the next stage of further analysis.

In order to show how these materials were organized, a small part of one of participants' stories which is written under the framework of McNiff and Whitehead is presented in Table 3-7.

Table 3-6 An example of an initial action report under the framework of McNiff and Whitehead

<p>Background: (Friday, January 13, 2012) This is the second meeting between Delilah and me. The purpose of today's meeting is reviewing Delilah's use of the CSH approach. Two months have passed since our first meeting (on Oct 27, 2011), in which a brief introduction of the action research project and the first reflective tool-CSH was been given to Delilah.</p>	<p>Frame2: my explanation of the theoretical framework used in this reflective discussion (source: my reflective diary)</p>
<p>Content of the discussion</p>	
<p>I: Tell me what you feel about the CSH approach.</p>	
<p>Delilah: It is very interesting. I feel it's a bit work you probably do any way, but do it without stopping to think about it. So it is probably something makes sure you do it, and gives it a framework through which to do it. I think some bits I feel were, not obviously to say, repetitive, but it felt long-winded. But I think I can understand having to look at it from those different angles. But you would see probably, by the time I got the end of something, I wasn't quite sure what to put for some of the sections, because I feel it had probably been covered already.</p>	<p>Frame 1: Delilah's description of her actions and feelings (source : transcripts of the reflective discussions)</p>
<p>Action of Delilah: (at the same time) Delilah shown her worksheet to me, pointing out that in many places she wrote "see above" rather than answering the questions asked in the worksheet. Delilah also summarized her evaluation on CSH in the worksheet: "CSH-have not identified clear benefit, so unlikely to continue use from evidence so far".</p>	<p>Frame 1: Delilah's actions in this meeting and in her previous application (source : 1 transcripts of the reflective</p>

Delilah: I say it is not quite useful as saying I wasn't sure because the issue at pains was a project rather than one thing I make a decision or not. But it was useful in making you step back and think about, as you say, those affected by things. And I think another thing occurred to me by it was some groups were both, eh, they were, eh, although for example, the students are the beneficiary, so the clients, but they are also the people affected, involved, you know. I think some of the people are multiple-roles, really, and I think that makes it more difficult to separate some other things up.

Psychological activity of mine: (after listening to Delilah's feedback) I felt that Delilah's application experiences of CSH approach may be not as good as I expected. Thus I needed to do something in this meeting, to improve her feelings; otherwise, I may lose this participant.

(Then we started our critical discussion focusing on the two application exercises.)

First Application Task

Psychological activity of mine: I hoped to push Delilah to reflect further under the framework of CSH, so I started to challenge her by asking questions. These questions were prepared this morning, after reading her worksheet of CSH.

Supportive material: In the worksheet completed by Delilah, she chose to analyse a project conducted by her recently; the problem identified by her was: "What workshops to organise as part of World of Work Week which students will want to attend and which will be beneficial into their understanding and preparedness for the world of work." World of Work Week (WoW) is a project organized by Delilah, it happens every year. The next one will happen in March, 2012; so Delilah is preparing for it now.

	Questions in the worksheet	Delilah's answers
Q1	Who is the client or beneficiary of the	Ultimately the students, but also those delivering the

discussions; 2 the worksheets completed by Delilah)

Frame 2 &5: Delilah's explanation and reflection of her actions and feelings. (source : transcripts of the reflective discussions)

Frame 2 &5: my reflection on how to conduct the reflective discussion and my explanation of the action plan for the following discussion (source: my reflective diary)

Frame 1, 2&4: Delilah's actions and thinking process under the framework of CSH approach (source: the worksheet completed by Delilah)

	decision?	workshops.	
Q2	What is the purpose of this decision?	To develop a programme which is relevant and helpful to the students, which they will want to attend.	
Q3	How will the client judge the success/failure of the decision?	Attendance at the event and feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the event.	
<p>Psychological activity of mine: When I read the worksheet (an excerpt is shown in the following table), I noticed that Delilah's understanding of her client may have some problem.</p> <p>I think her client, the students, would not judge the decision according to the attendance on the event; it is Delilah and her team who use this criterion to judge the success. So I prepared to ask Delilah if she noticed this problem, and if she really understood her client's needs.</p>			<p>Frame 2, 3&5: my interpretation of Delilah's actions and thinking that are recorded in her worksheet, and my reflection on them under the framework of CSH.</p>

In this excerpt, three kinds of materials are combined together to make a whole story (transcript of the reflective discussion, worksheet of the participant and my reflective diary). The benefit of this combination is that it could show the event analysed from different perspectives and triangulate the researcher's findings. By reading a story like this one, the reader may trace the original state better than by reading the researcher's findings directly, accompanied by evidences supporting this finding. Writing a story like this could also help me manage the materials obtained from the field work more effectively.

As an action researcher who is exploring a new issue (introducing systems approaches into the personal development field), I think the way I designed and conducted the project and the problems I met in this process are as meaningful as the findings I obtained from this study. I hope to share my experiences and present the mistakes I have made. Besides, I raised my interpretations and reflections for each story; no matter you agree or disagree with me, if it can make you think, I feel that it is a satisfying result for me.

In the next step, it will be explained further how I made my own interpretations and reflections on the data.

Selecting a method for further data analysis

A problem with applying the Framework of McNiff and Whitehead is that it does not provide an executable approach for researchers to achieve Frames 4, 5, 6 and 7. In order to deepen my analysis and achieve the goals claimed by McNiff and Whitehead, I started to look for other data analysis methods used by other qualitative researchers.

A lot of qualitative data analysis methods were reviewed, and the following is a brief summary of the four different methods considered in the stage:

1 Discourse analysis:

Discourse analysis could be “text orientated” (that was what I wanted to do), but its analysis emphasise ‘a triangulation between the micro level of the text itself (level 1) and the meta level discourses (level 3) that may have informed it (and therefore might be reproduced through it), whilst also examining a range of contextual factors (level 2) which could explain why the text produced is as it is’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002a, Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, Jackson and Keys, 1984).

This method focuses too much on discourses, which is not the main purpose of the research; therefore, it is not suitable for further data analysis.

2 Conversation analysis

This method is based on an attempt to describe people’s methods for producing orderly social interaction. A normal way to do a conversation analysis is: (1) identify sequences of related talk; (2) examine how speakers take on certain roles through talk; (3) look for particular outcomes in the talk (Josselson, 1997, MacIntosh and Beech, 2011, Psathas, 1995).

This method pays too much attention to language rather than focusing on the content of the talk; therefore it was not suitable for the project either.

3 Narrative analysis

There are many sub-methods in this category and here the focus is the sub-method of thematic narrative analysis (compared with structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, visual analysis) (Hibbert et al., 2007, Schleiermacher and Bowie, 1998).

Thematic narrative analysis is “akin to what scholars in folklore and history use with archival data”; and the scholars of thematic narrative analysis keep a story ‘intact’ by

theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases (Schleiermacher and Bowie, 1998).

Keeping a story 'intact' is very important for the thesis; each participant's experiences of using a systems approach need to be interpreted as a whole rather than be analysed by doing a word-by-word, line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding.

However this method also has its problem: the method pays little attention to "how a story unfolds in a conversation exchange or the questioner's role in constituting it" (Schleiermacher and Bowie, 1998, 58). Because this research is an action project, the design of the project and the role of the researcher in reflective discussions cannot be ignored. Therefore, narrative analysis is not suitable too.

(4) Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

According to Smith et al. (2009), "IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. And it aims to conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems." (p32)

Smith argues that IPA emphasizes the 'human lived experience' rather than theoretical account of lived experience. The theoretical account can be "insightful and illuminating but it should be there to serve the stuff of lived experience rather than the other way round" (Smith et al., 2009, 33). Smith's words resonated: the lived experience from field work should be central to the research; and the researcher's account under the theoretical framework is just an attempt to provide some sustained and systematic interpretation of the experience.

Also IPA is specific on how to see the phenomena/ experience being studied and what position a researcher could take in the study. From the view of IPA, "experience" is "tantalizing and elusive"; in other words, pure experience is never accessible, people can only "witness it after the event" (Smith et al., 2009, 33) . Therefore, when a research is done, researchers could only get close to experience rather than 'get at experience' as they often claim. IPA treats people as "a sense-making creature, the meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes experience, can be said to represent the experience itself" (Smith et al., 2009, 33). This view fits well with the philosophical assumptions of the thesis.

Following this assumption, IPA operates a “double hermeneutic” (Smith et al., 2009, 35). Firstly, it claims that “the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x” (Smith et al., 2009, 35).

The reflective discussion conducted in this research was a little different from a typical interpretative phenomenological analysis case, because in each discussion, after participants introducing their management problems, I could make sense of resolving the problem with the systems approach directly; and then I shared my opinion with the participants, and they shared their opinions to me too; thus we were making sense of each other. When I wrote the report, I could not only report my interpretation of the participant’s reflection on identity reformation, problem solving and systems approaches’ application based on participants’ talking, I could also report my own reflection on the usefulness of the systems tools in problems solving too.

Secondly, IPA argues that researchers can take two interpretative positions at the same time: a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion (Smith et al., 2009).

As mentioned above, in thematic narrative research, the subtle give and take between speakers (or between interviewers and interviewees) as they make meaning together may slip away (Schleiermacher and Bowie, 1998); but in this thesis, I did not want to give up the co-construction of the experience between me and participants; IPA may fit well with my requirement. From the perspective of IPA, I could in part adopt an “insider’s perspective”, “see what it is like from the participants’ view”; at the same time, I could also “stand alongside the participant, to take a look at them from a different angle, asking questions and puzzling over things they are saying” (Smith et al., 2009, 36) . With the ‘double hermeneutic’ perspective, I could explain my role in the reflective discussions as both empathic and questioning; thus it was necessary to include my questions (asked in the discussion) in the report, because I was bringing in new things and not just interpreting.

The third issue IPA argued is the focus on the particular. Smith et al.(2009) claim that “IPA has an idiographic sensibility. We see the value of IPA studies, first and foremost, as offering detailed, nuanced analyses of particular instance of lived experience. A good case study, with an insightful analysis of data from a sensitively conducted interview, on a topic which is of considerable importance to the participant, is making significant contribution to psychology. In our view, only through painstakingly detailed cases of this sort can we produce psychological research which matches and does justice to the

complexity of human psychology itself.” (p37) This argument shows a way to present this thesis. Although this study is not a psychological study, identity reformation could be seen as a kind of psychological phenomenon. Thus, taking the view and method of IPA may help the researcher and readers to understand the phenomenon better.

Doing further analysis with IPA

Based on the procedure developed by Smith and Osborn (2008), a few stages of data analysis were followed:

1 Looking for themes in the first case

This stage includes two sub-steps:

1-1 The transcript is read a number of times, the right-hand margin being used to annotate what is interesting or significant about what the respondent said.

1-2 Then one returns to the beginning of the transcript, and the other margin is used to document emerging theme titles. Here the initial notes are transformed into concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text.

The following table shows an example of how themes in text were identified. Two excerpts of stories of Delilah are presented.

Original Transcription	Exploratory comments	Emergent themes
<p>Except 1: Delilah’s description about her first job:</p> <p>When I graduated from university, I worked for BP Chemicals that was in H city. And I was the research librarian; I worked with those researchers, engineers, and so on. I provided them with access to the information they required... I was a part of a very small team, so I probably had quite a lot of influence on what I did. And I think that’s the environment I liked to be in...So that was my first job, I really really enjoyed it.</p> <p>And again, it is the people I worked with; I think for me, part of the important things is I feel the organization and the person I worked for are very professional, honest, values, you know, that’s quite important to me. So that’s my first job, I did quite a lot within that.</p>	<p>First job has good environment, which means: a small team and some professional colleagues</p> <p>But Delilah decide to leave</p>	<p>The work role is chosen carefully, rather than being accepted passively.</p> <p>The work role would be abandoned if it could not match with the</p>

<p>I left the company, although I hadn't planned to necessarily... Initially I went to work for them for six months, but stayed for about six years, because they extended the contract and made it permanent. The reason I left was because they were making people redundant elsewhere within the company and bringing them to H city; so my promotion prospect was blocked by those people who came from another part of the company, which meant I had no opportunity to progress. The company did try to find me an opportunity, but would be in another area of work. I didn't want to do that, so I left.</p>	<p>when she found there was no space to progress, even through she loved that environment and job.</p> <p>Delilah left the job because "no opportunity to progress".</p>	<p>developed work identity (the conflict between unchanged role and developing identity).</p>
<p>Except 2: Delilah's description about her fourth job</p> <p>Then I left and I joined the N organization, I came back here, to work for the N organization crossing break on the third bank in H area.</p> <p>And it was setting up a library service, didn't have one at all, but in now they wanted one, because of all the changes happened in the N organization. So they were setting up a new organization, they were still recruiting people; there was only a very small organization. But they had the requirement to access information, and they needed somebody to set up all the systems and some processes and everything for enabling them to do that. So again it was the right environment for me, a smaller organization I wanted, a professional organization, they really valued information, and you know the people were really nice and really wanted to develop and learn, so on. So I joined up that organization to set up their library service. For me it was a really exciting time, because I set the service up, it functioned really well within the organization. And then I was always looking for different ways, developing things, getting new things to be involved in. So then the service was working with district nurses, GPs, and like pharmacies and so on. Because it was a quite rural area, they didn't have access to information; so it's about supporting them, in the organization I worked for, they really wanted it to happen, so it was then really developing services not just supporting the organization, it's a part job, but wider health community in that part.</p> <p>So that was quite an exciting time; so I did quite a lot of that sort of work...and I had a very small team, so again it was developing, so I had some supportive staff to do it. And through doing that job, I worked with people all over the country, really, all over</p>	<p>Delilah loved her fourth job, because it fits both her requirements on environment and job itself.</p> <p>Delilah's requirement of environment stays the same: (1) a small team (2) supportive colleagues.</p> <p>Her requirement of job content was revealed: she loves to develop new things, such as setting up a service. She also emphasizes that her work could get respect and people need her work.</p> <p>A new problem emerges: Even through Delilah loved her fourth job, and nothing bad happened, she decided to</p>	<p>The criterion of an acceptable role has been formed.</p> <p>The criterion is developed according to the individual's needs, and that may be explained by the theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs..</p> <p>The role does not change, but the perception of the role may change along with time.</p> <p>Subjective perception is critical for her career</p>

<p>England. And as a result of that, after being there maybe about five or six years, I applied for a job to be part of the new team they were setting up to support the region; so to support a bigger area to cover D area and H area; so quite a big area. So they set up the new service again, small team, very professional, and about developing something new. So that's the sort of thing I like, setting up a new service, thoughts of exciting, putting things in place, working with a very small very professional team. So I then got that job; so I was working in D city... still living here but commuting to D city.</p>	<p>apply for a new position in the same company. Why? Her fifth job may provides some clue: in there she can "develop something new"</p>	<p>choice.</p>
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It can be seen from this example that by making exploratory comments and summary emergent themes, a link could be made between the material analysed and the research questions. At this point there was no order to the themes and surfacing connections by clustering was the focus of the next stage.

2 Connecting the Themes

This stage also included three sub-steps:

2-1 The emergent themes were listed on a sheet of paper, and I looked for connections between them.

2-2 The next stage was to produce a table of the themes, ordered coherently. Thus, the above process had identified some clusters of themes which captured most strongly the respondent's concerns on this particular topic. The clusters themselves were given a name and represented the superordinate themes. The table listed the themes which go with each superordinate theme, and an identifier was added to each instance to aid the organization of the analysis and facilitate finding the original source subsequently.

In this step, the focus was on interpreting the emergent themes. In other words, it was to make sense of the text studied, and find an explanation about why these themes emerged. For example, when studying Delilah's experience in her first and forth jobs, the Needs theory of Maslow was brought in to explain the phenomena observed (Maslow, 1954), because it was felt that the requirements made by Delilah on her job were the embodiment of her needs about life; the reason that she left each job may be caused by the unsatisfied needs. Specifically, Delilah preferred small team, supportive colleagues and respectable work because of her love/belonging need and esteem need; she loved to develop "new things" so that she could achieve the self-actualization. But

after working in a position for a few years, it became hard for her to find new things to do, and then she left to look for a new job which could enable her to satisfy her self-actualization needs again. The explanation is shown in the right column in the Table 3-8.

Table 3-7 Connecting themes and developing explanation

Superordinate theme and emergent themes	Explaining
<p>Needs (linking with Maslow's hierarchy of needs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The criterion of an acceptable role • One's perception of a role • The conflict between unchanged role and developing identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Delilah talked about the “Supportive Environment”, she meant: a small team that could support her ((love/ belonging needs) and could give her the space to have impact (esteem need), and some professional colleagues who respect her work (esteem need). • Delilah's fourth job (working in N company in D city) provided Delilah a good environment, and the job was interesting enough to satisfy her needs of creativity. But after working on that position for a few years, most work became routine, and her self-actualization need could not be achieved further, thus Delilah decided to apply for another position in NHS, to set up a new service again.

It could be seen that the main purpose of the step is to give meaning to phenomena observed. Participants' stories were interpreted in a subjective way; I cannot be objective in this process, but I tried to make it reasonable.

The findings achieved in the Step 1 and 2 are reported in Chapter 4 to 7; each participant's stories are presented as a chapter (However, Roy's stores were not included because he did not complete the project), in which five stories are included, based on the five main meetings with each participants (one focusing on the life history, the other four concentrate on the applications of four systems approaches). Each story contains two sections: The action report based on principles of action research and the analysis of the report based on the principles of IPA (the first step) are presented as the story and findings' section; and the emergent themes in each story are addressed in the discussion section (the second step).

3 Continuing the Analysis with Other Cases

According to the IPA, a single participant's transcript can be written up as a case study in its own right or, more often, the analysis can move on to incorporate interviews with

a number of different individuals. The superordinate list derived from the first case could be used to analysis the next case, and some new themes may also emerge from the next case, and the new theme may expose the research problem further.

In this step, a similar logic to the second step was followed; but this time, it was to make sense of all the four participants' stories.

The achievements of this step are presented in Chapter 8, in which the findings obtained in previous analysis were rearranged according to the new emerged higher level themes, which include the dimensions of identity and role, the matching problems between identity and role, the learning and validation of identity construction, the possible outcomes of learning and validation, and the reflections of the applications of systems approaches in identity management. Through this analysis, those common themes embedded in the four cases were summarized, and an overview on the issues of identity construction and systems' application were achieved.

With the action research and IPA methods, the data analysis was completed. Another issue that needed to be considered then was how I could evaluate the research I had done and how to improve its quality. In the next section, this issue will be discussed.

3.3.7 Validity of the Research

When considering the quality of qualitative research, validity is a central and complex issue to address (Wells, 2011); scholars have proposed many different arguments on it. For example, Polkinghorne (2007) suggests that interpretations should not be considered as valid or invalid, instead we could only say that different studies valid in varying degrees. Shaw and Norton (2008) caution that judgments of the validity of a study are never final; because along with the development of related research on the phenomenon under study, the judgements will evolve. Others argue that a study could not prove it is validated until other people who work in the field come to rely on it for their own work (Hammersley, 1992, Mishler, 1990a); to some degree, this view makes a shift on the responsibility for demonstration of validity, from the individual researcher to the research community.

Since scholars give many different explanations about what validity is, the criteria used to assess validity are also complex and vary in different studies, therefore cannot be applied in a mechanical manner (Seale, 2002). It is argued that researchers must make

judgments by themselves about to which extent their own study would conform to those accepted research principles (Mishler, 1990b).

In this section, three frameworks of validity that this study is based on are discussed, they are: the framework of Wells (2011) on narrative research, the work of McNiff and Whitehead (2011) on action research and the principles proposed by Smith (2009) on interpretative phenomenological analysis. For each framework, key problems considered and my approach to deal with them are addressed.

Before discussing the specific measures taken for improving research quality under each framework, it is necessary to make explicit the different stages and my roles in this research project.

There are three stages in this research: designing, implementing, and analysing. In the first two stages, the researcher was central to the research; the main threats to research quality would be the researcher's limited capability of designing a strong research plan and then implementing it. In the third stage, the participants and researcher were both central to the research; the main threats to research quality would be the researcher's limited capability of interpreting the participants' stories and then making strong claims.

Different frameworks were used to improve the research quality in different stages. Specifically, the framework of narrative research was used as the general guide for this research, the principles of action research were used to evaluate and improve the quality of the first and second research stages, and the principles of IPA were applied in the third stage. Of course, these three methods are all general methods, for example, IPA also has guidance for research design and implementation; it was a subjective choice to use them in this way, because the narrative research was the first approach I considered while the IPA was identified in the stage of data analysis. The following sections will discuss the applied principles in different stages separately.

3.3.7.1 Framework for Narrative Research

Wells (2011) develops a framework with which researchers may consider the trustworthiness (which is believed by Wells as a broader concept than validity) of a narrative study based on the work of Hammersley (1992). The main standards he advances are validity, relevance, reflexivity and ethical issues. In the following paragraphs, criteria for the assessment of trustworthiness will be discussed, and measures for improving trustworthiness used in this research will also be presented.

Measures for the Evaluation and Improvement of Validity

According to Wells (2011), “assessment of validity hinges ultimately on the match between a study’s evidence and central claims”(p116); and four important issues needed to be considered carefully:

First of all, “it is important to specify the circumstances under which study data were obtained because the conditions of narrative production may suppress, encourage, or limit what the narrator says or contribute to gaps between what the narrator says and what the narrator means” (Wells, 2011, 117). In order to aid validity from this aspect, this research combined different kinds of data together to make a whole story for each participant so that readers may understand the conditions of narrative production better than by reading the researcher’s narrative analysis directly,

Secondly, “irrespective of the amount of text displayed, it is important to describe where in the transcription the excerpted material falls and to include a summary of the material that preceded and follows the portion of the text that is displayed” (Wells, 2011, 117). As mentioned above, by writing stories for each participant, it is believed that readers of this thesis are able to understand the context for each narrative, which may be helpful for them to consider the adequacy of related analysis made by me.

Thirdly, “narrative methods depend on careful attention to language” (Wells, 2011, 117). This research is not a pure narrative analysis, therefore would not emphasises too much on language. However, by pairing the original text of a narrative with an analysis made by the author, this thesis provides readers a good chance to evaluate the researcher’s claims against the evidence at hand.

Fourthly, “returning analyses of texts to narrators for comment” is a useful way to improve validity (Wells, 2011, 118). In this research, conducting a number of meetings with each participant provided these narrators the opportunity to clarify what they said and also to confirm if my interpretation conformed to their understanding of our experience.

Measures for the Evaluation and Improvement of Relevance

The relevance of research is the second standard, which refers to “a function of the collective judgment of scholars over time. As a result, the relevance of findings cannot

be asserted in advance of the completion of an investigation...it cannot even be determined immediately after its conclusion” (Wells, 2011, 118).

According to Well’s argument, the relevance of this study cannot be asserted now. What could be done now is to discuss my understanding about the link between this research and previous studies in the field, and the potential contribution of this research to the research field (related discussion can be found in Chapter 9).

Measures for the Evaluation and Improvement of Reflexivity

As the third standard, reflexivity refers to “the ways in which an investigator’s experience and commitments shape his or her engagement in each element of the research process” (Wells, 2011, 119).

Five types of reflexivity have been identified, including “reflexivity as introspection, reflexivity as intersubjective reflection, reflexivity as mutual collaboration, reflexivity as social critique, and reflexivity as discursive deconstruction. Each comes with its own problems and possibilities, although what is most important in the end is how well the investigator shows how his or her experience, circumstances, and presuppositions affected the research” (Wells, 2011, 120).

For reflexivity as introspection (in relation to researchers’ positions and perspectives), I firstly examined how my own behaviour influenced the conduction of the research through writing reflective diaries; in the later stage of the research, I started to reflect on the influence of my ‘fore-conception’ on the study (see Section3.3.7.3).

For intersubjective reflection (refers to the relationship between researchers and participants), I examined what role I and my participants should play in the research project so that the project could be conducted in a better way (see Sections 3.3.3.2 and 3.3.5.2).

For reflexivity as mutual collaboration, this study conforms to this type of reflexivity naturally because it contains an action research project in which my participants and I collaborated together to study the identity phenomenon and the usability of systems approaches (see Section3.3.5.2).

For reflexivity as social critique (refers to the difference in power between researchers and participants), I considered the issue when designing the research project; I made the decision of conducting an action research partly because it was helpful for me to gain

more power when working with a group of senior and middle managers (see Section 3.3.1).

For reflexivity as discursive deconstruction (refers to the ambiguous nature of words and language), I realized the issue in this research when I found there may be more than one way to analyze the same narrative which may result in completely different interpretations (more detailed discussion can be found in Section 3.3.7.3).

Reflexivity of narrative research also challenges the traditional form of representing the results of research. According to Wells (2011), “writing in the first-person and acknowledging the inevitably partial and unstable nature of interpretations is one straightforward way in which to represent one’s findings” (p122). In this thesis, the first person are used in the sections of research design and data analysis to emphasize the reflection and learning process of the research

Ethical Issues

A core ethical question for narrative research is: Who owns the story that is told, the researcher or the narrator? Since narrative analysis involves “the re-representation of someone’s story which runs the risk of an implicit pathologization of the storyteller” (Wells, 2011, 123), narrative researchers need to pay extra effort to deal with their relationship with narrators.

I realized that my research project may still have great influence on my participants’ feeling and life although this research had strictly followed the ethical procedures of the Hull Business School; because this research focused on identity phenomena and told stories of personal trouble and development, which are sensitive topics. I also noticed that my participants may only reveal what they want me to know and may hide issues that they reflect negatively on their self- or work identities (by using the technique of triangulation, see Section 3.3.7.3); one reason of this hiding may be that participants worry about being pathologized by me. I respected their choices, and at the same time tried to reveal their stories as much as I can by introducing other data sources (also see Section 3.3.7.3). Besides, sometimes I had to stop probing during a discussion with my participants, and exclude some content from the thesis because some topic was too sensitive to be exposed (the signals were different for each participant, but most people would say: “this must be confidential”, and I would then only listen, without further probing and recording; and those conversations were not presented in the thesis too).

In summary, the stories told in this thesis are owned by my participants and me; we may not reveal everything we experienced, but we did share the most important part with readers under the principle of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

In next section, some other measures taken by the study for improving research quality will be discussed, according to the framework of action research.

3.3.7.2 Action Research Principles

McNiff and Whitehead (2011) argue that action researchers “need to demonstrate publicly that they know what they are doing and that their judgment can be trusted. This means that they have to make their explanatory and evaluation processes visible, show that these are rigorous and robust, and produce strong evidence to show that they as practitioner-researchers are competent and capable” (p80).

Following McNiff and Whitehead’s principle, in the stages on research design, data collection and implementation of the research project, lots of efforts had been made to make explicit my explanatory and evaluation process. Specifically, six aspects were focused on in the self improving and validation process:

(1) Pursuing a rigorous research process.

In order to achieve this goal, I did three things: in each step of my research, reviewing existing literature first to find theoretical support; discussing with my critical friend to bring in new perspectives to my research; writing reflective diaries to learn from my own experience.

(2) Moving from description of practice to explanation of practice.

This aspect was more relevant to the third stage (analysing data), but it was also useful for me to engage in reflective discussions and design my own intervention tools, because in these two tasks, I could not just accept others’ view, I needed to bring in my own voice to make it work. However I also was aware that my own understanding is limited and fallible; the way I dealt with this problem was to talk with my critical friend and with my participants, as their feedback might help me to reflect on my understanding and correct the mistakes I had made. Of course, this

correction is limited too. And in the third stage of data analysis, the way I realized this move was by following the procedure of IPA, which has been discussed before.

(3) Linking these practical ideas to my philosophical assumptions.

As discussed in Section 3.2.1; my philosophical assumptions were gradually developed along with the research process; and each reflection on philosophy also helped me to improve my practical actions.

(4) Validating my claims to knowledge through the production of authenticated evidence.

(5) Testing the validity of my claims and evidence by opening them to public scrutiny

(6) Being open to requests to modify claims

These three aspects also pertain more to the third stage (analysing data) but because the data analysis was done along with the field work, actually the data analysis and data collection are two aspects of a dynamic process, therefore they can validate each other. From this view, the mistakes that I made in the research had more chances of being corrected during this dynamic process. Specifically, I held at least five meetings with each participant. Thus, from the beginning of the second meeting, I always tried to discuss with my participants about the findings I obtained from the previous meetings with them and with other participants; their feedback helped me to find out my problems of understanding and then make an improvement. I also tried to communicate with my critical friends and other academics, to learn from their feedback. And the final results of data analysis were also sent back to my participants and we discussed and corrected them together.

In the next section, I will discuss how I sought to improve the research quality in the final stage of pure data analysis and thesis writing with the IPA principles.

3.3.7.3 IPA Principles

The action research method was very useful for me to design and conduct my research project, but when I entered into the final stage of data analysis and report writing, I found I needed more specific guide. That was why I selected the IPA method.

In this stage, three issues were considered.

The first issue is about how to improve the fairness of representing different perspectives in data interpretation process.

In the above sections, I have discussed how the technique of triangulation was employed to include multiple sources of data and different methods. Using different sources of the same information could improve the quality of data; and using different data analysis methods could improve the quality of analysis.

In this section, the ‘fore-conception’ (meaning prior or pre-conception) problem is discussed (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Specifically, the researcher may bring her fore-conception to the interpretation process and cannot help but look at the text studied in the light of her prior experience. According to Smith (2007), there are two ways to deal with the problem: Firstly, “invoke a particular stance to the researcher’s position in human inquiry where one articulates one’s preconceptions or starting position at the beginning of a paper and this will, therefore, allow the reader to understand the interpretative account which follows” (p6).

However, it was hard for me to adopt this approach. The reason is that I could not make explicit my preconceptions in advance. Just as I have indicated in the section on philosophic assumptions and the section on research design, I recognized my preconceptions gradually during the process of conducting research. Sometimes, I could not realize my problems until someone pointed them out to me, or I met a difficulty which required me to reflect on my preconceptions. Smith (2007) also questions the feasibility of the first approach; he argues that “When encountering a text, I do not necessarily know which part of my fore-structure is relevant. Having engaged with the text, I may be in a better position to know what my fore-structure is”. (p6)

Therefore, Smith (2007) proposes a second way for dealing with the problem: “Therefore, in practice, one may only begin to see some of one’s fore-understandings as one endeavours to make sense of what this person is saying. However, that awareness of the fore-understandings may itself be fleeting as the process of interpretation changes the fore-understandings to new ones”. (p7)

According to Smith, the key point is to be aware of the fore-understandings, once you find them, you can resolve them easily. The way I used to find out my fore-understanding was that: (1) Making full use of the materials I obtained. I check each of my idea with all the materials I had and tried to look for those ones that opposed my idea. Once I find the opposed evidence, I would ask why, and try to generate some new

claim to explain the differences in evidence. (2) Getting feedback from my participants and critical friends. This kind of discussion was very useful for me to find out not only my mistakes in comprehension, but also the unfair interpretation caused by my fore-conceptions.

In summary, interpretation is also a dynamic process; there were three ends here: the materials, my interpretation, and other people. I moved between these three ends for many times, and data analysis of my themes deepened in this process.

This tactic of making interpretation in a dynamic process is also useful for me to dealing with the problem caused by cultural differences and language differences.

As I am a foreigner whose first language is not English, my interpretation could be problematic during the processes of data collection and analysis, because the purpose of my research project was to assist managers review and reconstruct their identities, which are “regarded as being socially constructed in that they are partly projected by the self towards others and partly projected by others onto the self. These projections may be interpreted in various ways and hence the potentiality for a lack of ‘smoothness’ is considerable. Multiple mis- and re-interpretations of identity projections are possible, and the nature of such interpretations or ‘reading of the situation’ , can be strongly influenced by the perceiver’s membership of a particular interest group” (Hibbert et al., 2007, 237). Because of my background, this problem was especially serious for me. When working with my participants, I had to pay much attention to the possible misreading caused by our different cultural background; and in the phase of data analysis, I also needed to beware of the misinterpretation of the data.

The way that I viewed and dealt with the problem was greatly influenced by Schleiermacher, I tried to read the originator of a text to improve the reading of text itself. Schleiermacher and Bowie (1998) claim that reading a text is a dual process: a parallel concern with the author as well as with language; and they described these two kinds of reading as “grammatical interpretation” and “psychological interpretation”. They argue:

“As every utterance has a dual relationship, to the totality of language and to the whole thought of its originator, then all understanding also consists of the two moments, of understanding the utterance as derived from language, and as a fact in the thinker . . . Every person is on the one hand a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their discourse can only be understood via the totality of

language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their discourse is only one act of this spirit of connection with the other acts” (p8).

In my research project, I held at least five meetings with each of the participants, and many emails were exchanged between us during this process. Therefore I came to know and understand my participants gradually; and my interpretation of the data could be deepened and corrected along with my better understanding of the participants and their work situation. In other words, my interpretation of the data was conducted in two ways: reading the text itself and reading the participants; these two readings could support each other, improving my capability of interpretation the data I obtained, and even helping me to understand the British culture better.

The second issue is about how to increase the validity of the research

As I have mentioned, because of the characteristics of IPA, studies using this method normally have a small sample; the sample size of this research was small too. Thus, this study followed the tradition of IPA studies: taking the “sensitivity to context” as one of its main principles for assessing the quality of research. According to Smith, Flowers et al (2009), “The researcher may show sensitivity to, for example, the socio-cultural milieu in which the study is situated, the existing literature on the topic, the material obtained from the participants” (p180).

In this research, I think a few things I have done may be helpful for my “sensitivity to context”:

- (1) I redesigned the research plan, deciding to conduct an action research project instead of a round of post-change interviews. This choice gave me more chances to get close to the identity construction phenomenon studied. According to IPA, “establishing access or rapport with key gate keepers, may well be central to the very viability of an IPA project from the outset”, thus could be seen as ‘a demonstration of sensitivity’ (Smith et al., 2009) (p180).
- (2) “Sensitivity to context is also demonstrated through an appreciation of the interactional nature of data collection within the interview situation” (Smith et al., 2009) (p180). I paid much attention to this aspect, from the design stage to the implementation stage. I wrote reflective diaries for each interview, to summarize the mistakes I made and then propose updated plans for followed interviews. This work helped me to improve the quality of interviews.

- (3) "...this sensitivity to context continues through the analysis process... a strong IPA study will thereby be demonstrating a sensitivity to the raw material being worked with" (Smith et al., 2009) (p180). The way I adopted in this aspect was writing a story for each interview conducted in the action research project; thus my participants may have their own voice, and then readers could check my interpretations with their own judgements.
- (4) "Researchers can also show sensitivity to context through an awareness of existing literature" (Smith et al., 2009). The way I did it was finding theoretical support for my claims, and comparing my findings with previous findings in the field. These two exercises may broadened my view, and linked my study with the current academic research on this topic.

By evaluating my own research with the principles of action research and IPA, I hope to show that as a practitioner-researcher, I am capable and competent to do research; in other words, I hope to prove that I know what I am doing and I have tried my best to make my judgments trustworthy.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, the philosophical assumptions of this research were first discussed, a subjectivist and regulation position was taken; hence the research design followed the interpretive paradigm.

In order to gain a rich understanding of the identity construction phenomenon, this research followed a case study strategy. In the specific design of the case study, interview and action research were adopted as the main methods of data collection. Then the data analysis methods were presented; and finally I have explained how I evaluated and improved the credibility of the research.

In next chapter, those stories and findings obtained with these approaches will be presented. There are five chapters in total; four managers' stories and related discussions are reported one by one, then another chapter is presented to discuss the links between cases and make further reflection.

4 Alton's stories

4.1 Introduction

This chapter and the following three chapters present my reflective journey with four participants in this action research project on the issues of work identity and approach to problem-solving. For each participant, five stories are organized: Story 1 is provided as an opportunity for readers to make sense of how these people's particular life histories had shaped the way that they identified themselves as managers. Stories 2 to 5 then present how a space of reflection was made by introducing four systems approaches to these managers and how the four managers reexamined their work identities and re-interpreted the problem situations that they were working on with the assistance of these approaches.

Although each of these managers approached their reflection in an individualistic manner, their stories together still constitute a multi-storied world, including larger stories of organizational change, personal development and systems thinking.

As part of this specific universe of stories, the researcher's own annotations are added in the right-hand column of each story. In addition, the themes identified through analyzing the stories on the issues of identity construction and the application of the systems approaches are addressed at the end of each story.

In this chapter, the journey of a mature manager, Alton, in this action research project is discussed.

4.2 Story 1: Life History and Current Identity

Thursday, 14 April, 2011	My annotation
<p>Alton is the director of the E department in the H Business School, and he is also a member of the top management team. I went to meet him today with three questions: his previous work experience, the key incidents that happened in his life and his feelings about the forthcoming organizational change. At this moment, the Dean Leroy is still working in his position, but he will leave at the end of this month.</p> <p>Some main topics discussed in this meeting are presented in the story.</p>	Background

4.2.1.1 Previous Work Experience and Reason for Each Resignation

I started the meeting with Alton by asking: “Could you please tell me what jobs you have done before working as the E director in this Business School?”

Alton checked: “Earlier in my career? Ok.” Then he started to tell me his life story. Alton started his career in the docks industry in 1967, and then he got a job in local government as a management development advisor in 1974. He stated to do an MSc part-time in 1985, and became a lecturer in 1985 in LC College. From 1999, he began to work in H Business school as a lecturer. And since 1995 he had become a specialist in running external programmes for corporate clients and college partners; now he works as the director of the E department.

The career development path of Alton and reasons for each resignation were also discussed; in summary he always tried to be “better qualified and then (get a) better job”.

4.2.1.2 His Current Job

Alton also talked about his interpretation of his current job. He thought external business was popular when he entered the university; however most academics did not want to participate in external business because “it’s scary” and “too much strain”. Alton was proud of his capability in this field:

“But because I worked, I mean when I left the local government organization, I was 38 years old. So I was mature and confident...I knew (what) the people like...we are all the same kind of people that I was...”

Although proud of his work, Alton thought external business was a “Cinderella” in most universities, and explained the status of his department in the business school:

“So in a way, I’m one of the small minority of people, that was confident about working externally. And it is still the case in universities; in most universities, external business is, is what we say in UK, is ‘Cinderella’.

Previous work experience

Alton is proud of his capability in dealing with external business.

Previous experience has great influence on Alton’s current career choice and capability.

...Anyway, the point is: 'External business is a minority thing,' So in business, only about ten people out of a hundred academics, only about ten people, work externally. And basically, in terms of the revenue, the business school earns 26 million pounds year revenue.... For external business activity, it is just a million...."

Despite 'being in the minority', Alton still thought his work was important:

"It's a, it's a question of the credibility of the business school; it increases, because we do external work and, um... So, it's an important part of the business school's profile, that we are very good to do, a good quality delivery to the corporate world. "

4.2.1.3 A Key Incident

After a short chat on Alton's life history, a key incident in Alton's life which had great influence on his work identity was discussed: in 2005 the H Business School tried to terminate the relationship with a college partner to get AMBA recognition:

".. we had a college in L city which was a partner, called G... And in 2005, as we were preparing to submit for AMBA recognition, um, there's a discussion about whether we would get AMBA recognition as long as we had G as a partner. And, there's a lot of, um, people in the University, including the vice chancellor who had strong loyalty to G ...

...I was proposing we should terminate the relationship with G as a means to secure AMBA...And eventually the vice chancellor said he accepted my recommendations and we ended the relationship.

... Um, and we had to withdraw our programmes from G... because the students were flowing through, you can't stop ...So that would be a managed withdrawal. And, so we knew it would be complex, but you know, we made careful plans. And I chose to tell them myself, and I told them face to face.

And what I did was, I said I would help them find another university partner, which they were very surprised at...And in a sense, it turns to me, is my, you know, if you like, my identity as a person, identity of a professional. I wanted them to trust what I said to them, and they were

External business is seen as "Cinderella", but at the same time it is "an important part of the business school".

A key incident for Alton: terminating the partner relationship with G College.

Alton stood out and took the responsibility.

Alton's way of dealing with this tough task: talking

prepared to.

...I personally wrote to about 45 deans of business schools in UK, and explained why we would withdraw, and recommended G, as a good proposition, and a good organization. ... So eventually we, we identified two universities, they wanted G and G wanted them; so they would take over where we were; so now University of W and University of P are the university partners of G.

... After the termination, the university had what is called a collaborative audit (by QAA)... H (University) was commended on the way it ended the relationship. So the government agency actually commended us on the way that we handled it. .”

Alton also tried to reflect on this key incident, and he thought this incident was important for himself and for the department, “it set up the tone”, he said.

“So for me, that was a pretty important thing, for my career in H (University). And I think in terms of people’s words around me, I think they thought about the leadership that I gave in the issue, was something they could learn from. And I could learn from it as well. So I learned from it is that, um, being yourself, being natural, um, being open, being direct and being firm. Because I had to be resolute, you know once I told them the termination would happen, I couldn’t go back on it, and nobody can go back to it. And we had to be resolute, we had to go through. But never the less, I think the way we managed that, set the tone, um, for the way we continue to work with our other partners.”

4.2.1.4 The ‘Parent-child’ Relationship

When we talked about the partnership with G, another topic emerged: the parent-child relationship between universities and colleges. Alton said:

“...And these colleges, in the university’s view, they are quite insignificant... And my position with G, with all those partners, was treating (them) with respect, always; and to be direct, not to be parent-child...”

Alton then drew a picture on a piece of paper to explain the two

with G’s leaders directly and helping them find a way forward.

A critical factor for Alton’s success: trust from G college. And for Alton, it is meaningful to build up this trusting relationship.

A perfect ending

Alton’s comments on this incident: it set the tone.

Alton thought the ‘parent-child’ style didn’t fit with him; because all the success he gained in his career came from “trying to be

different relationships:

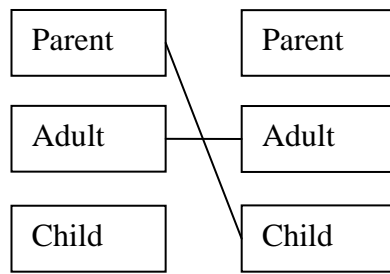


Figure 4-1 Transactional Analysis

Alton did not like the ‘Parent-Child’ management style which was adopted by his predecessor, so he decided to make a change in the department after he took it over:

“... I tried to turn that around, and I tried to be respectful; and I tried to encourage my team...”

Alton also explained his reason for refusing the ‘Parent-Child’ management style:

“...maybe it’s about me. ...I came along and saw what’s going on with these colleges, and with H academics trying to manage these colleges. I saw how they were doing it; and I just saw that’s not very productive, and this is not the way I want to do it; and it didn’t fit with what has been successful in my career. You know, my, whatever I have achieved in my career, it’s through trying to be collaborative and trying to be win-win with people...one expression is ‘As a person, you get back what you give’”

When I asked if this belief also guided his behaviour in managing his department, Alton said:

*“... that’s the **management ethos** that I tried to take to this. And this is the management ethos that I take into the corporate partner relationships, and with my team. So we, um, so we in terms of, um, do you know about Hofstede? ...So in terms of Hofstede, what I try to do is to operate with a low power distance.”*

collaborative and trying to be win-win with people”.

Alton and his predecessor had completely different management styles and played the role of E director in different ways. Therefore we may infer that managers have some freedom to interpret and play their roles; and they may also have some freedom in constructing their work identities under the constraint of the organization.

About his beliefs of management, Alton thought it was “the management ethos” and “operate with a low power distance”.

The purpose of the first story is to present the background of Alton so that we can make sense of what kind of manager we are focusing on.

In short, Alton was a mature manager who had work experience in many different industries; and these experiences had great influence on his current work identity and his approach to problem-solving. It can also be found that Alton felt some conflicts between his own management belief and the culture of the organization, and these conflicts may lead to reflection and even reconstruction of his work identity. In order to encourage Alton's reflection on identity and approach and further reveal the process of identity construction, four systems approaches were introduced to Alton; and more detailed information will be given in the following four stories.

4.3 Story 2: Welcome to the Political Arena

As presented in Chapter 3, three modes had been developed for the application of the systems approaches. In the intervention project, participants were encouraged to use the systems approaches in Modes 2 and 3.

According to this design, Alton was asked to identify a decision that he was currently working on, and then use CSH to reflect on where boundaries were being drawn and what was being included or excluded in the decision making process (Mode 2); and he also was asked to internalize CSH to reflect on his role, how he judged it and whose approval he seek and what changes might be made (Mode 3). In our reflective discussion, I found that actually a role/ identity issue was embedded in the decision that Alton chose to analyze; therefore we did not need to distinguish Mode 2 and 3 in the reflection process, because we could achieve the reflection on Alton's work identity through deepening our discussion on the identified decision-making issue. The discussion between Alton and I is presented in the next section; and some themes identified in this discussion are addressed in Section 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Story and Findings

Friday, November 11, 2011	My annotation
<p>This is my third meeting with Alton, now the new dean has been in his position for two months. After introducing the critical systems heuristics approach to Alton in the last meeting, we decided to review his use of the CSH approach.</p>	
<p>4.3.1.1 The Informal Power</p>	<p>A new teaching programme was chosen to be analysed.</p>
<p>The decision Alton chose to analyse today was a new teaching</p>	

programme that he hoped to get approval, which included two stages: Firstly, the policy committee of the school would give “development consent”. Secondly, the approval of the academic approval committee would be given. Actually, last year Alton had made a similar proposal which failed to be approved; and he made reflections on last year’s failure as follows:

“You know my reflection, you know as being writing things down is that, in theory, the chair of the academic committee has the power to decide whether the project would go to the next stage. But there are other things that come into play...

...So for example, the dean may, he may let the development consent go through; but then he may say to people: ‘Eh, I don’t think this is really a good idea.’ Because the dean may not want to say publicly, to be not supporting an idea; instead the academic approval process stopped it, but behind the scenes... ”

Because of the failure experience of last year, Alton was a little worried about this year’s programme:

“So what’s going on already, I have not yet got the development consent for this. But already, one of my senior colleagues is campaigning against, one of the (top) management team of the school. The management team has five of us; one of them is campaigning against it.”

I asked Alton: “Has he/ she given the reason why?”

Alton said: “Not to me.”

I asked: “To the dean?”

Alton said:

“I don’t know. I think the person is trying to get the dean (new) on her side, but I don’t think the dean wants to play...But this is where the informal power; in the organization it is playing through the process. So on the surface, the process is clean, but different people with different stakeholders’ interests, eh, you know, could interfere.”

4.3.1.2 A Political Game

Alton interpreted his (last year’s) proposal as a victim of this informal power:

“Last year a project I wanted to put through was a new programme; they almost like conspicuously killed it.

...What they did, which was a subtle use of power, clever; what they

Alton thought the decision process was not as clean as its appearance and informal power was used.

The conflict in the decision of this year was revealed: one senior manager was campaigning against Alton’s proposal.

In last year’s decision, instead of making a public debate, tricks were used.

did was they said: 'Before I can progress, you need to do all these things' ...It was a really long list, so I just said 'forget about it'."

I asked Alton "Do you know why they tried to oppose it?"

Alton answered that it was because the dean was worried about that the new programme would interfere with the recruitment of MBA:

"No, I don't know exactly why, but I've got a slight idea why. One of the things, for example, is we have an existing MBA. And the dean, the retired dean had a personal view that the existing MBA was very important for the school; and he didn't want anything else to be offered to the same market, as mine would interfere with the recruitment of MBA. Now he sometimes said that, and he said that was the main reason for arguing against."

Alton did not think the problem that Leroy was worried would happen; he felt disappointed at Leroy's negative attitude towards his approval and effort.

"Really, the people I have got in mind, none of them really would ever dream of coming on an MBA. Or they already have one in (their) earlier career. But he (Leroy) continued to use that argument while (he) even knew about external letters of support; and he didn't take any notice of evidence and neither did he, well, he didn't turn it down. What he did was he just got other people to speak against it."

I hoped to reveal the situation further and asked: "Why were other people willing to speak for him?"

Alton thought that was because those people hoped to agree with their boss rather than thinking independently:

"Well people just don't all have minds of their own; sometimes people who have a senior job, whatever their boss says they will just do it."

Then Alton summarized his interpretation of last year's experiences:

"At the end of the day, the school is a political place."

Based on Alton's description, I worried if the same thing would happen this year. In response to my question, Alton said that he had got support from the new dean publicly, and therefore nobody would oppose the new programme publicly:

"About two weeks ago, I went to the management team, and we talked about these things. Then the Dean (Seth) said: 'What about your new idea of executive developments?' I said: 'Yes, I sent a paper in last week'. And he said: 'Yes, excellent paper.' And he said, 'We don't need to talk about it, do we?' He said to everybody else: 'We do not

Alton knew why Leroy was against his proposal, but this reason was invalid in Alton's opinion.

Alton thought some people who were against him didn't have their own minds.

A similar programme was proposed by Alton this year; after he obtained support from the new dean, the senior manager who had opposed the programme kept silence.

need to discuss it, do we? It's fine to me.' And one of the other people who campaigned against it just stayed quiet, stay silent... So now she has got to decide (whether) she shuts up and lets it go on, or whether she comes into the campaign. ”

4.3.1.3 Deeper Conflict

The next thing I hoped to probe was what the attitude of MBA team was to Alton. Alton told me that the director of the MBA supported his new programme:

“She can't object...She is in my subject group, and in my subject group she speaks in favour of the new development.”

I cannot make sense of the situation; I asked Alton why the director of MBA supported the new programme while the previous dean opposed it, Alton then exposed another conflict between Leroy (the previous dean) and him:

“What the dean was always saying is ‘We need international short courses’, and I was always saying: ‘We can't really do international courses, there is no demand.’ And he continues to say, broken record: ‘you should be concentrating more on getting an international activity.’

Alton also mentioned that he and Leroy had many discussions on this issue; however, they could not achieve an agreement:

“He wouldn't give any evidence, he just says: ‘I think you should do it.’ So I say: ‘Do you want to do my job?’ He said: ‘No, no, no. You do what you think.’ But behind the scenes, he would say to other people: ‘We have to get Alton doing this.’”

It can be seen that Alton and Leroy had great conflicts on what should be the management emphasis of Alton and the E department. The problem was not resolved in their communication and debates; therefore informal power was used in last year's decision making process.

In the following part of the meeting, the underpinning assumptions of Leroy and Alton were further exposed:

“... The dean, when he says: ‘International, international, international’, he's got to say that because EQUIS says we have to be internationalized.

...You ask me the question why I'm doing this (programme); why I'm doing this is because the school's strategy is to have programme

A strange situation: the dean worried about the MBA while the director of the MBA didn't.

Another deeper conflict was revealed: Alton and Leroy had different opinions on what should be the focus of the E department. Leroy emphasized 'being international' while Alton emphasized a 'good product'.

The difference of opinions between Leroy and Alton was mainly caused by their roles.

available for the corporate world.”

The different roles that Alton and Leroy played caused their different views. As the E director, Alton thought his main focus should be developing good products. Leroy, as the dean, asked the E department to execute the strategic plan of the school (being international) and did not allow any other things got a higher priority.

4.3.1.4 A New Round of Political Game

Then we again shifted our focus from last year to the decision of this year; I encouraged Alton to identify the four groups of stakeholders with the framework of CSH, and as the response Alton made reflects on his power sources in the decision making process:

“So what I’m interested in is where the power is now? Because in this decision it is political. So where is the power?”

I’m kind of acutely mindful of where my sources of power are. And my sources of power, externally is the companies... And then internally, we have got some new professors in last year... ...Then, people who were thinking they don’t want this to happen, for whatever reason, they can see: “Do I want to take on Alton, and Professor so and so, and the external world? Do I want to take on all those people? Or should I come back to my home?” That’s it really... the school is a political arena where different people think there should be different priorities. And so I’m trying to advance my priorities, and other people would try to stop me or try to support me.”

4.3.1.5 The ‘Hobby Horse’

Alton maintained a leading position in the new political game because he obtained support from the new dean; but there was still one issue that confused me: why was TM’s (the new dean) attitude so different from Leroy’s (the previous dean) towards the new project? In response to my question, Alton gave his reflection:

“You know sometimes people have an idea and can’t let it go... So we say in England, that a person’s got a “hobby horse”... A hobby horse means a person is locked in to thinking in a particular way, and what we say is they are riding a hobby horse... Maybe I’ve got that as well, and you’ve got that; maybe there is something that you think is so right, and you could not be persuaded that they are not right.”

Alton decided to get more power this year.

To some degree, the decision process was interpreted as a political campaign; and the debate between different stakeholders was operated as power bout.

I wondered if this application fitted with the ‘emancipatory’ idea of CSH.

Alton thought people may ride a hobby horse, and this could be another reason for the conflict between him and Leroy.

4.3.2 Discussion

In this section, the themes identified through analyzing the data of Alton's application of the CSH will be addressed. Specifically, there are four issues: the nature of the problem situation, a role/identity issue underpinning the decisions, the meanings of Alton's activities, and the role of the researcher.

4.3.2.1 Mixed Decisions

In the reflective discussion, although we started with the decision about whether or not the new executive development programme should be approved, actually some other related decisions were also involved in, such as: Should the MBA programme be given higher priority? Should the international short courses be more concentrated on? In these decisions, the E department and the H business school could be seen as two parties who shared some interest in dealing with these issues, but at the same time their also had differences which may impede their cooperation and then led to each party regarding the other as 'profane' while they see their own concerns as 'sacred'. (The two words mean valued or devalued judgement, borrowed from (Midgley, 2000, 143)). Specifically, as the director of E department, Alton's main concern was 'having programme available for the corporate world' while Leroy, as the dean, concerned more about the MBA programme and international issues which were emphasized by the AMBA and EQUIS whose accreditations were vital for the development of the H Business School.

In these decisions, people chose to use power to advance their own opinions when agreement cannot be achieved; specifically, one party tried to pursue its purposes by acting in a manner that may constrain the other party's action. In other words, Leroy and Alton both had the power to influence each other's work while they also were influenced by each other's power.

4.3.2.2 An Role/ Identity Issue Underpinning

The conflicts between Alton and Leroy on these decisions are actually an extension of their conflict on the definition of the role of E department: Alton thought providing the corporate world with good products should be the main function of his role while Leroy insisted that the function of developing international issues should be strengthened in the E director role.

The dialogue between Alton and Leroy could be seen as a dialogue between organizations and individuals, or as an example of identity regulation and resistance: Individuals defend their liberty of control their own work by excluding the organizations from their work identity construction processes (Alton questioned Leroy: ‘Do you want to do my job?’). Organizations define the work role to serve their purposes, and asked individuals to construct work identities according to the role definitions offered by the organization (Leroy said: ‘We have to get Alton doing this.’).

Many researchers have argued that managing identity constructions of organizational members is an important approach of organizational control (Dutton et al., 1994, Ibarra, 1999, Lipponen et al., 2004, Pratt, 2000, Scott, 1997, Ullrich et al., 2007, Van Dick et al., 2006b, van Knippenberg et al., 2002), through which “employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, 619).

However, when resistance and conflicts emerged in the process of identity regulation, people involved were significantly impacted emotionally (i.e. Leroy and Alton). Such emotional expression and discussion may alienate people; therefore, false attributions of cause and agency may happen and then bring long-term negative influence into the relationships between people. In this case, Alton felt disappointed and angry when he found “they almost liked conspicuously to kill it”; and this feeling made him change his approach to dealing with problems (“So what I’m interested in is where the power is now”). On the other hand, Leroy may have experienced the same feeling during the process too: he tried to persuade Alton to focus on the international issue at first, but finally some kind of informal power was used to overcome “resistance”.

Beech and Johnson (2005) argue that people should deal with these emotional issues “backstage”, because “if the identity work is done in the presence of people who are providing a complementary role-identity to oneself, emotional and interactive dysfunction could predominate” (p43). Beech and Johnson’s view contradicts the CSH approach, which claims that participative debate involving all relevant stakeholders is necessary for problem-solving, because public debate could shape and direct purposeful decision-making and protect the interests of the affected people. In this case, the two arguments both work to some degree: Alton and Leroy did experience some emotional conflicts because of their debates on the main responsibilities of the E director; and on

the other side, the discussion also provided some clue for Alton to understand the problem situation.

So it may be summarized that when dealing with identity work caused by conflicts on role/ identity definition, the CSH approach should be applied more eclectically: people can conduct reflection within the framework of CSH backstage rather than publicly. Because in this situation, public debate may not resolve the problem but would cause new emotional dysfunction; instead, making personal reflection privately with the CSH approach could help people keep calm and stay back, and then analyse the problem-situation systematically and sophisticatedly. But some kinds of communication are also necessary; it could be done after personal reflection, to move things forward.

Besides, individuals could also take active actions in their dialogue with organizations on the issue of role definition/ identity construction. In the next sections, the approaches that individuals could use will be discussed.

4.3.2.3 Debating Boundaries on Role/ Identity Issue

The problem of identity control/ resistance can be seen as a problem of boundary judgements from the perspective of CSH. Specifically, there are two questions related to the identity construction process: What are the boundaries of the work role/ identity? Whose views should be included?

According to the CSH, “boundary judgements and value judgements are intimately linked: the values adopted will direct the drawing of boundaries” (Midgley, 2000, 139). In the process of role definition and work identity construction, organizations and individuals may draw different boundaries for the role/ identity because of their different values. In order to improve the work performance and organizational performance, these two parties both have intention to achieve agreement on their boundary judgements. However, they also intend to value their own concerns while devalue the other party’s concerns, because their value judgements are relatively stable.

Since organizations and individuals cannot resolve their conflicts through direct dialogue when value conflicts are significant and hard to be dealt with, sweeping in more stakeholders to bring in more views may be an approach to move the dialogue forwards.

In this case, Alton tried to bring in the voices of the companies and some new professors who were not included in the formal decision process in the first stage. To some degree, he was seeking to redraw the boundaries of his role through including some new stakeholders in the decision process. His purpose was not to obtain 'fairness', but to strengthen his power and influence in the dialogue with the organization.

The thesis does not argue that Alton's approach is the right way to deal with the problem, but it is argued that his experience shed some new light on the understanding and approach to dealing with identity regulation/ resistance problems: considering boundary judgements underpinning the problem, and sweeping in more stakeholders to bring in new views and new possibilities.

4.3.2.4 Reflective Critical Discussion

In this part, some reflections of the researcher on the design and conduction of the intervention project will be addressed. Before doing that, let us have a look at Alton's reflection on the CSH approach:

"It helped me a little to think a bit more about the stakeholders. And it may help me a bit more to think about the power, the power situation..."

And I suppose another thing is about a model, it might make me challenge my own assumptions...Some assumptions about "What assumptions and perspectives are dominating the process?" (Question12 in the worksheet) ...I can tell you easily about other people, and what their assumptions are. And the question really is: Can I be honest about my own assumptions? ... if someone like you says to me: '...Why are you doing that? Why do you think that?' then that helps me, you know, it's what I would call 'a challenge intervention'...It'll make you go to dig deep, think about what's going on, what your motivation is... So for me, that's a kind of reflection."

Two issues are summarized from Alton's feedback:

The assumption of CSH on problem context may be useful for personal reflection. CSH could remind people that all stakeholders in a decision have their own values and interests, and it also provides a framework for people to review them. At the same time, CSH could inspire people to reflect on their own assumptions and then re-examine their approaches to problem-solving and their work identities.

It needs to be noticed that the application of the CSH in this project is a little different from the traditional way to applying the CSH. Because this intervention project was designed to assist individual's reflection, participants were asked to complete reflections by themselves or with the researcher. Therefore, in our reflection discussions, it was not possible to achieve the effects of obtaining new perspectives on the situation through sweeping in new stakeholders; instead, the participants were guided to review the problem situation, identified related stakeholders, and then reconsider their different views and the views of the participants. Through this review, reflection can be made on the experience, and learning can be obtained through reflection; therefore, identity development may be achieved in this sense-making process.

This meeting also encouraged the researcher to be more positive in the following meetings with Alton and other participants, because Alton's feedback showed that having a critical friend and discussing with him/her was a useful way for people to make reflection. Therefore more attention was paid on asking critical questions in the reflective discussions; in each meeting, those management problems was first analyzed from the researcher's own perspective and then from the systems approach's perspective, finally the these views will be compared with participants' views to identify the differences on assumptions. Sometimes, a potential option can be found through these differences for redrawing boundaries of identities (some examples can be found in Chapter 6 and 7).

4.4 Story 3: What Is Behind The Political World?

4.4.1 Story and Findings

In this research projects, participants are encouraged to apply SAST in two ways:

Mode 2: Using SAST to surface and evaluate the assumptions within their own preferred decisions and plans.

Mode 3: Using SAST to aid reflection on their plan for changing their work identities.

In this section, Alton's application experience and themes emerged from his experience are presented.

Thursday, November 24, 2011

This is my fourth meeting with Alton; in this meeting, the new programme which Alton proposed this year was discussed further using the SAST approach to reveal the assumptions of different stakeholders.

4.4.1.1 Turning the Corner

First of all, we talked about how things were going on in the business school about this proposal (Mode 2). Alton told me everything was moving smoothly, and there was not much opposing voice in the school. The following paragraph is an example Alton mentioned :

“I’ll get it...the finance department has to approve it; well in the business school, if they know the dean wants it to happen, then there will be no difficulty. They won’t be difficult.

... We have turned the corner in trying to get the development going; it feels like, we going along, receive resistance, resistance, we feel like we’ve turned the corner, and we’ve found a way through it.”

The programme itself had not changed a lot compared with last year; however the attitude of the people is completely different. However, until now those other stakeholders’ opinions were still unknown; therefore I encouraged Alton to use the SAST approach to reveal their underpinning assumptions.

4.4.1.2 Assumptions Underpinning the Programme

First of all , Alton mentioned that an important stakeholder, corporate clients wanted the new programme:

“But the thing is, what I’m doing now is the clients want these things...For example, one of the programmes is public management; and there are people who want to do executive education in public management. And they’d like to work towards an MSc in public management gradually by doing small bites of activity.... And eventually, they’ll get an MSc. It may take three years or four years to do six small chunks

...they are clinicians and doctors who become managers, ok? So their

My annotation

Once the dean gave his approval, there would be less difficulty for the proposal.

The assumption of external stakeholders was exposed: they wanted a distinct programme from the MBA.

<p><i>managing in the public sector; so what they wanted to do was doing leadership and management in the public sector. They don't want an MBA."</i></p> <p>Alton also presented his own reason for proposing this programme: it could provide a "Framework approval" which may give much convenience to him and his department in developing some similar cooperation projects with clients.</p> <p><i>"What this will do, is this will create, um, an opportunity, that when we get a new client in, say, the public sector, then they say: 'Can you do a programme for us, maybe six modules?' I can say 'Yeah'. Then we can start in three weeks time, because the programme has been approved. So the programme is ready... This is what we call (it), we call it 'Framework Approval'."</i></p> <p>In the last meeting, Alton pointed out that Leroy hoped to protect the MBA programme; but it was not clear why Leroy emphasized MBA so much. This time, Leroy's assumptions were further discussed:</p> <p><i>"Because he said it will compete with the MBA. As well we were, um, we were becoming an AMBA school, and they said AMBA won't like it... And so it just kind of, had to stop. And the dean, he wouldn't, he wouldn't let us, give it a priority."</i></p> <p>For the internal stakeholders, Alton claimed "Everybody wants to agree with the dean". But I thought it was weird, so I asked why those academics did not stand out in this decision, and Alton explained:</p> <p><i>"Well, 80%, they, um, they are not against it; they just don't want to participate in it. So 20% or if you like, the people that are supporting me, they are for it and they would like to join in"</i></p> <p>I asked Alton further if he had found the 20% supporters and how he could find them. He answered:</p> <p><i>"No, I can't know where they are really. But the thing is, um...once the development consent is approved... I'll establish a planning group...So maybe four academics to work with me with my colleague; and the six of us will, um, produce the documents..."</i></p> <p><i>So when the documents are finished, um, I'll go to that subject group</i></p>	<p>The assumption of Alton: they need a Framework Approval to operate similar programmes more easily.</p> <p>The previous dean's (Leroy) assumption: securing the accreditation of AMBA.</p> <p>The assumptions of internal stakeholders: most of them don't want to participate.</p> <p>In the current stage, most internal stakeholders have not been involved in the decision making</p>
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with the document. Everybody can have a copy, and I'll say why I want this to happen...they don't have to approve it; but it is just to let people know what's happening. And then, what I might do is I might make more people interested... But that process is just a consultation, not a decision making, ok? So when I make the consultation, the documentation will then go the academic approval panel and that is a decision-making body."

From this excerpt, we may find that most people had not been involved in or even had not noticed the new programme; they may participate more in the next decision stage (academic approval), and their voice may be heard more in the academic approval panel. It is the current stage in which the opinion of the dean is critical.

4.4.1.3 A New Work Plan

Since the situation had changed, I hoped to know if the identity work caused by disjunction (between others' role expectation and his own identity construction) still existed (Mode 3). Alton told me he had made a new work plan.

"After Christmas, we'll be reviewed by some external people and some university people. And then they are going to review, eh, what we do and how we do it.... um, how we think about our strategy in future.

But basically I've got, um, I would like to realize our activities around some areas; I want them is, is this: the accredited executive education, which we do some of it at the moment, but we do very little, because we don't have the product. So after Christmas, I want to get around, get a strategy which is focusing on that. Secondly, focus more strongly on international. And thirdly, focus more strongly on short courses."

These three areas identified can be seen as the three functions of the role of E director; and Alton showed different attitudes to them.

"But one of the thing is the school wanted is trying to run short courses internationally... we tried to make them to be interested, but they won't be interested ... So how I want this group to change is more focusing on this (Alton pointed on the printed document of the new programme). That's one strand, accredit, Accredited Executive

process.

Alton's plan for his department; and he had different attitude to the three main work areas.

The new dean and

Education...So that's one strand."

And Alton also mentioned that the previous dean and the current dean have different attitudes to his work plan and his way of playing the role:

"The new dean is from SA (University); and he has been there a long time. And when I talked about the obsession with international executive education, he said: 'Well, that's got to be hard, isn't it? That's got to be hard, how will we do that?' And I said: 'Yeah, it's hard actually.' And he said, he's already in H (University) and he said: 'we have already do a lot more than SA' where he came from, so he didn't; he has a view that considering where H is, that we are doing it quite well. And of course he'd like it to do better, but he understands it's hard. And he wants to talk about how we are being able to do more. But he's not obsessed with, um, you know with the ideal of it. Instead, he says he thinks wanting to be a bit more pragmatic.

...the previous dean wanted to talk about, only about the benefits; he didn't want to talk about how to do it... he only wanted to talk about that 'we should do it'. The new dean thinks: 'yeah, maybe we should do it. But we ought to think it through very carefully.'...So it's a different attitude really."

It seems that Alton emphasized one function of his role and deemphasized the other two; and the previous and the current dean had different attitudes to Alton's choice.

previous dean had different attitudes to Alton's work arrangement; and this could also be seen as their different definition of the role of E direction, and may also imply that their different vision about the H business school.

4.4.2 Discussion

The discussion based on the SAST framework is a continuation of our discussion with CSH approach. More assumptions of the stakeholders were further exposed.

When talking about Alton's new plan, three functions of being an E director had been summarized. They are executive education, international development, and short courses. Among them, the executive education project was preferred. In order to understand why Alton preferred this function, the findings obtained in the last three meetings will be used together to help us make sense.

4.4.2.1 Role, Self-Identity and Work Identity

During our discussion, Alton presented many benefits of executive education, such as “clients want them”, “two thirds of the income will be from that kind of activity”. On the other hand, Alton could not understand why the international issues should be emphasized; he thought they had been done enough:

“I would say: ‘The evidence of most EQUIS schools is that normally 10% of their activities are international. And for our school, 10% is international, so we are just the same as other people’”

The different visions between Leroy and Alton may be caused by their different self-identities (referring to something ‘deeper’, more personal and ‘non-accessible’ than normal identities (such as professional identity and work identity). As a mature manager, Alton had a well developed self-identity in which “working with corporate clients” had become a central part. Not only on this issue, Alton also felt that he was quite different from people around him in his normal work, he mentioned many times: “And I had a different kind of view”, “I’m one of the small minorities of people”, “ it didn’t fit with what has been successful in my career”.

In order to resolve the conflict between his self-identity and the organizational discourses, identity work was aroused in Alton. He kept questioning himself and tried to develop a work identity which could balance his self-identity and the role expected by external people. (Self-identity is seen as long-term, stable and general identity that people have; and work identity (i.e. work identity) is seen as short- term, unstable and role-related identity):

“...a committee in the school, you know, they call, they are asking me, well, you know, ‘Are you really pushing them hard enough? Are you really doing enough?’ So it’s causing me to think about that...Inevitably, you might think...”

It is argued that conflict between role offered by the organization and the work identity constructed by individuals will arouse the process of identity construction, which aims to resolve conflicts and balance role and identity.

Many studies have been done about the relationship between role and identity. Rockmann et al. (2006) and Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) can represent two strands of them: one focuses on newcomers while the other studies mature professionals.

According to Rockmann et al. (2006), conflicts occur between one's role expectation and role perceptions, because junior professionals do not really understand their job until they come into practical work; and along with the construction of work identity, the gap between expectation and perception may be reduced. This argument is not suitable for mature professionals such as Alton; because they have developed a mature view about their roles already. For mature professionals, the conflicts often exist between different people's interpretations of the same role; and this kind of conflict is hard to be resolved, because their interpretations are greatly influenced by their self-identities, which are quite stable.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) focus on mature professionals, and claim that a role may contain some different functions which imply conflicting identities, people who play this role would suffer from it and their own work identity may become fragmented; then a self-identity can be used as a stabilizer to maintain one's self concept and reach some reconciliation between those work identities. This argument does not fit with this case either, because Alton's struggle came from the different interpretations of the role between Alton and other people. Besides, Alton's self-identity had different degrees of matching with the three functions of the role; therefore Alton interpreted the role in a discrete way: only one function was incorporated in Alton's work identity, and the other two were relegated. Here, the self-identity causes the fragmentation rather than cures it.

Based on these studies, it can be argued that there is not a united form of relationship between role and identity; but commonly any conflict within and between role and identity would cause identity work; and role interpretation and identity construction always influence and fuel each other. In the stories of Coral and Delilah, other kinds of relationship between role and identity will be discussed, and in those chapters, further analysis will be undertaken.

4.4.2.2 Capability is Critical for Identity Construction

Another reason for Alton's resistance to the international issue may be that Alton did not believe the business school had enough capability to develop this function, and he also had not found a way to develop this capability. I made this deduction based on Alton's anticipation of the forthcoming organizational change in our first meeting in April 2011:

“And although the current dean talks about that, um, as a desire, um, he really does nothing to make it happen. And it’s not a criticism of him, but he doesn’t know how; he’s got his own international links...But in terms of making it happen, if you like, for the department, for the E department, he doesn’t know how to make it happen. And quite frankly, none of us do. But an international dean may have good links, and may come from a place where, um, so one scenario is that the new dean may give support to us. ”

In this excerpt, Alton expressed his expectation of developing international issues and also explained why he had refused to concentrate on *it in the past*. Besides, Alton also tried to look for some possible ways to develop these two functions:

“Um, we’ve been trying to get, um, an international partner who we could work with to market short courses... So we might work you know in a joint-venture with, you know, with those people if we can find them... We did try, you know ...these partners help to recruit MBA students, and we try to get these partners to help us to develop short course provision...”

It can be expected that if Alton could make some progress in these two areas, he may have a more positive attitude to the two functions of his role; and the managerial identities implied by these two functions then could become a formal part of Alton’s managerial identity, rather than provisional ones as they were at the moment.

Some studies have been done about provisional identity. Comparing Alton’s case with the findings of Ibarra (1999) who focuses on junior professionals’ identities, it can be found that the adaptation process of identity construction may be longer and more cautious for mature professionals than junior ones. Ibarra (1999) reports that adaptation involves three basic stages: (1) observing role models so as to identify potential identities, (2) experimenting with provisional selves, (3) evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback. But in the case of Alton, it seems that mature professional do not have to find some role models to identify potential identities, they may interpret the role directly.

After doing reflections with the CSH and SAST approaches, Alton’s assumptions on his work have been fully reviewed. In the next two sections, Alton’s reflection on the structure of his work with the lean and SD approach will be presented.

4.4.2.3 Using SAST to Assist Validation

In this project, SAST were used to focus people’s attention on the different values involved in a problem situation (Mode 2) and different boundary judgments on the work roles (Mode 3).

In this case, Alton was encouraged to check his understanding about the external validation (others’ assumptions) on his new proposal and on his new work plan. By comparing their assumptions and others’ assumptions, Alton found out that his new programme had obtained support from corporate partners but had not been validated by internal academics; Alton prepared to communicate more with academics to obtain their support. And Alton also negotiated with the new dean actively to disclose his boundary judgments on Alton’s role; through this negotiation, Alton found out a way to balance the organizations’ expectionation on his role and his identity construction; according to this understanding, a new work plan was made, which may guide Alton to start a new cycle of identity construction.

In summary, SAST can be used to assist individuals making explicit the difference between organizations’ and their own assumptions on their work role/ identity, so that they could negotiate with organizations more actively and positively in the process of work identity construction.

4.5 Story 4: An Expert’s Reflection on Lean

In this section, Alton’s reflection on the Mode 1 of lean’s application is presented in Section 4.5.1; and two themes derived from our discussion are addressed in Section 4.5.2. (Alton’s application of the lean approach in Mode 2 and 3 will be presented in next story.)

4.5.1 Story and Findings

Friday, 15 December, 2011	My annotation
The main task of today’s meeting was to discuss with Alton his application of the lean approach. Alton told me he worked as a performance analyst in the port industry for many years, and his main job at that time was to “review systems, review procedures of way of working, and try to make work more efficient”; therefore Alton was already an expert in the lean systems thinking. It was hard for me to	Alton was an expert in lean thinking; therefore the reflective discussion with Alton focused on learning

<p>play a critical role in this meeting, so I decided to focus on learning from Alton's experience.</p> <p>4.5.1.1 Why Does Not Lean Work?</p> <p>Last week the accreditation team from EQUIS visited H Business School. At the beginning of today's meeting, Alton told me something that happened during the visit of the EQUIS team:</p> <p>One day somebody of the EQUIS team asked Alton to provide a list of the corporate clients; then Alton made the list and submitted it to the team. Later he found that there was another office which was still working on printing the same list. Alton realized this was a typical 'waste' discussed by the lean approach: different departments worked separately and therefore there were a lot of duplications in the system. Alton said the business school had already tried to erase this kind of waste by creating "shared drives" in the computer system; if one office created a data base and putted it into the shared drives, and then all the other people could use it directly. However Alton pointed out this mechanism cannot completely resolve the waste problem, because people had a sociological need "to control their own work". And he gave me an example:</p> <p><i>"If they want to know something, they don't want to go to a person in the building over there, or that building over there; they don't want to email them and say 'Can you give me this information?' They want to have it on their computers."</i></p> <p>Another important reason that Alton identified was the limited vision of each office/ person on their organization:</p> <p><i>"Some duplication and some waste are due to lack of knowledge; that is the lack of comprehension of the whole system"</i>.</p> <p>4.5.1.2 Stakeholder Complexity in Lean Systems</p> <p>Our discussion reminded Alton of another event that happened in his recent work, which he thought may reveal another important issue in lean's application.</p> <p>Alton went to London on Wednesday as an external examiner. His main work was to check the Masters' courses in one college, which has three centres (in London, Birmingham and Manchester). When Alton did his work, he needed to check those courses one by one; that means for a particular module, Alton wanted to see all the three</p>	<p>from his experiences.</p> <p>Two difficulties in applying the lean approach were identified: people's sociological need to control their own work; the lack of comprehension of the whole system.</p> <p>When the lean approach is used, one thing may significantly influence its outcomes: whose interests are served by the lean system?</p>
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centres' information being put together. But the college provided Alton the information organized in another form: they put all the Birmingham's courses in one folder, all the London courses in another folder, all the Manchester courses in the third folder. Therefore it was hard for Alton to use these data, and he spent double time to complete his work. Then he asked if the college could restructure the data for external examiners, and they answered that the information system was designed for their staff to work in the most efficient way, and they would consider asking IT staff develop another copy for the external examiners. Alton thought the problem was actually a judgement of whose time was more valuable, the staff's or the external examiners. Some similar situations may happen in most organizations, and we discussed a common phenomenon in the H Business School.

"...some lecturers for example, they put their office hours on the door; and the students have to come during that time... um, students would come, and the lecturer would be very quick with them. And they'll say: 'You'll get three minutes.' Or they'll say: 'This has got to be very quick.' And what happens is the student sits down and starts to talk about the problem, and then another student knocks on the door....The thing is the lecturers, eh, are organizing their activity for themselves."

Alton then summarized the issue underpinning these phenomena:

"Do we understand the stakeholders' complexity? And who is the customer? ...understanding the whole system, understanding the stakeholders' complexity is quite a big issue."

Based on this reflection, Alton expressed his own understanding about being lean:

"...eh, it's not just like, eh, irrelevant expression 'Are you doing things right?' But another expression: 'Are you doing the right things?'"

The stakeholder complexity should be considered when applying lean approach.

4.5.2 Discussion

4.5.2.1 Applying Lean with the Support of other Systems Approaches

The lean approach has become very popular along with the success of Toyota. However, it is often criticized that in most applications, “lean’ has become synonymous with ‘process efficiency’ and the opportunity for significant performance improvement – as exemplified by Toyota – has been missed” (Zokaei et al., 2010, 3-4). Seddon and Caulkin (2007) argue that the main reason of the poor performance of lean’s application is that most practitioners do not really understand the basic idea of lean, which

emphasises full tapping of the intelligence of employees. And a common argument made by lean researchers is that it is critical to obtain employees' understanding and support in a lean system, so that a problem solving ethos and continuous improvement culture can be developed and implemented at every level of the organisation (Hamer and Lethbridge, 2010). This argument, to some degree, represents the reflection of Western managers and researchers on Toyota's success. For example, Konosuke Matsushita, founder of the Panasonic, JVC and Technics brands had identified the 'Japanese model' as long ago as 1979:

"We are going to win and the industrial West is going to lose out; there's not much you can do about it because the reasons for your failure are within yourselves. Your firms are built on the Taylor made.... For you the essence of management is getting the ideas out of the heads of the bosses and into the hands of labour.

We are beyond your mindset. Business, we know, is now so complex and difficult, the survival of firms so hazardous in an environment increasingly unpredictable, competitive and fraught with danger, that their continued existence depends on the day-to-day mobilisation of every ounce of intelligence." (cited in Bruce (2001) p4)

However, I doubted the feasibility of mobilisation of all employees' intelligence to rescue complex and difficult business, because this argument is based on an assumption that it is easier to deal with participants' complexity than deal with systems' complexity. This assumption is in line with lean approach's assumption on 'systems' and 'participants' (which are 'complex' and 'unitary', see Section 3.3.4.1). However this assumption does not always fit with the practical world. For example, in this case, Alton pointed out that people had some psychological needs and that different stakeholders had different interests; therefore, people may have different requirements of the system and they also have different interpretations of the problem situation; and this kind of difference and even conflict may not be resolved smoothly with the basic idea of lean because this approach does not admit these conflicts and therefore has limited tools for dealing with them.

This finding reminds us that the lean approach should be supported by other systems approaches which hold different assumptions. For example, in this case it was found that CSH and SAST were helpful because they provided a framework to analyse stakeholders' complexity. It is also argued that the misunderstandings and misuse that

occur in Lean's practice may also be caused by the limitation of lean's assumptions; so the lean approach should not be used alone to resolve complex organizational problems.

4.5.2.2 Lean Management and Identity Regulation

As an identity study, Alton's experience was also reviewed from the perspective of identity research. It is found that the problematic applications of lean that were identified by Alton in the H Business school (two cases: 'shared drives' in the computer system, time management of teachers') can also be seen as an identity regulation problem. Specifically, because individuals did not incorporate the values offered by organization in their identity construction process, their work behaviours that are guided by identities may betray the expectations of the organization. To some degree, successful lean systems require effectively identity regulation. This argument is based on a comparison between lean research and identity studies, which shows a great similarity in their arguments on employee management. For example, lean researches points out that the existence of lean systems "depends on the day-to-day mobilisation of every ounce of intelligence" (cited in Bruce (2001), p4); "depends on regulation by the customer, with workers responding to customer needs and managers making it easier for them to do so: in other words on system learning" (Seddon and Caulkin, 2007, 12). While identity researchers argue that identity regulation should be "accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses about work and organization with which they may become more or less identified and committed" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, 620).

Therefore, it is argued that identity research may provide some support to the management of lean systems; because, as argued above, the lean systems thinking approach does not provide many instruments for employee management.

4.6 Story 5: Why Did He Play The Managerial Role In This Way?

Although the focus of this story is on Alton's application of Systems Dynamics, his reflections with Lean in Mode 2 and 3 are included. Some themes emerged from Alton's experiences are also presented.

4.6.1 Story and Findings

In this section, Alton’ application experience with Lean and SD are reported as a story.

Specifically, Lean was used to analyze waste problems within Alton’s department (Mode 2) and to recognize his ineffective management behaviors (Mode 3). A tool of SD was used to aid Alton reflecting on the management processes of his department which lock them into patterns of behavior (Mode 2); and Alton also reflect on his managerial identity to identify key beliefs which constrain his own behavior patterns (Mode 3). The detailed information will be given in the following story.

Monday, 19 December, 2011	My annotation
<p>The focus of today’s meeting is on Systems Dynamics (SD) and its tool named as causal loop diagrams (CLD).</p> <p>4.6.1.1 Behavior, Belief and Identity</p> <p>At the beginning of this meeting, another man’s experience of using he CLD on time management was discussed. Some analysis in this example aroused an echo in Alton’s thoughts. For example, when I mentioned that this man drew some casual loop diagrams to reveal the positive and negative influences of spending personal time on work, Alton said:</p> <p><i>“If I work Saturday and Sunday, here, coming here, then, when I come on Monday, I don’t want to work. I will work, but I’ll work less effectively... ...And then you can be, you can actually go to the point where, um, you have less and less personal time, and you get used to it...eh, eh, a change of your psychological state really, where you become, eh... it changes your expectation of life, you say: ‘Well, of course I work on Saturday and Sunday because I’ve got a busy job and I have to do it.’”</i></p> <p>Alton did not like spending personal time on work because it did not fit with his existing identity:</p> <p><i>“So for example, my preferred style of management, with my team, is to be inclusive...And if you work all the time, and you take more and more jobs, and then, um, my colleague passed down stairs, so she was away last week; so this morning I spent half an hour with her, to catch up. So I just say how is she...and if she’s feeling better...so that’s my identity...My identity is to be caring, and nurturing. And if I have to be working seven days a week, then I can’t be caring and nurturing. So instead, when she came back, after a week of being ill, I just say: ‘Welcome back’ or ‘Work best’.... So</i></p>	<p></p> <p>When behaviour is repeated, a behaviour pattern may be formed and reinforced; and then influence one’s self definition. In short, behaviour may influence belief and identity.</p> <p>On the other side, one’s identity and those embedded beliefs may influence people’s</p>

that's the difference..."

4.6.1.2 What Are Beliefs Embedded in Alton's Managerial Identity?

Since Alton mentioned his identity, then I took advantage of the opportunity to dig deeper on his identity (Mode 3). Alton exposed further that obtaining 'Psychological Buy-in' was central in his management belief.

*"...I think really, the identity for me is we get a lot of work done; and I think the way we get a lot of work done is we get what I call **Psychological Buy-in**, buy in or commitment, by making them feel important, valued, included. And because they feel important, valued, included, then they will buy in to the activities of the group; and they will share the responsibilities for achieving the tasks, and achieving tasks with equality. "*

And then Alton gave an example to show how this management belief worked in his department:

"We'll get a replacement maybe in three months. So for three months, we lost this guy. But the others are saying to me, they coming to me and they say: 'Until we get a replacement, would you like me to do this?' ... You know, what they think is it's for a period of time, they'll go the extra mile...go a little bit more to help the team and to help me."

Alton also explained his way of managing the clients of the E department:

"Well sometimes I say to a client: '...working with me is not a transaction... You are not buying a product from me, what you are doing is you are entering into a relationship in which we both grow and we both develop.'"

If we review the cases mentioned in previous meetings (i.e. refusing the 'Parent-Child' management style, helping G college find new partners), it can be found that two beliefs (building 'constructive relationships' and obtaining 'Psychological Buy-in ') were carried throughout Alton's approaches to problem solving.

4.6.1.3 The Problematic Short Courses

In this discussion, short courses were mentioned as a counterexample of Psychological Buy-in (this case can be seen as an example of the link between approach to problem-solving and work identity):

"... Well, I've been saying for five years, the short courses waste time...They consume managers, they make people feel bad; because you've only got

behaviour choice.

'Psychological Buy-in' is central for Alton's management; in some degree, this belief helped Alton achieve lean management in his department.

Alton managed his clients by 'building up relationship'.

Working on short

five people on that course, and it feels bad. So you've got **psychological drag**...So you feel like, although you work harder, work harder, work harder, you still fail."

In order to show the problem of short courses, Alton drew a diagram to show the main projects run by the department and the revenue each of them achieved (shown in Figure 4-2) (Mode 2 of Lean application).

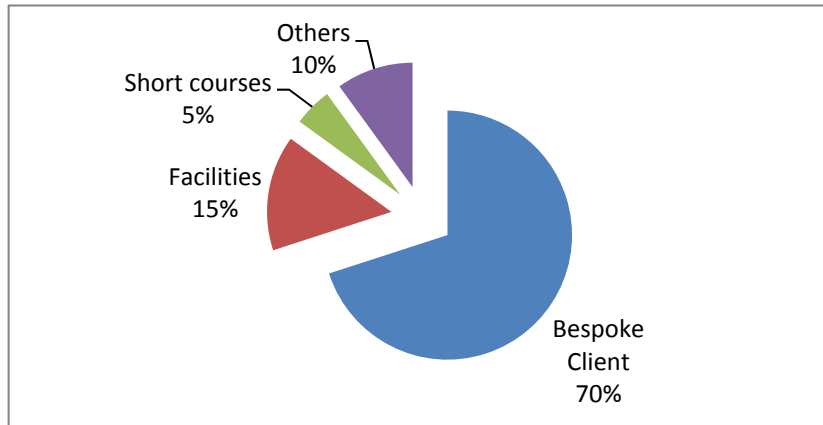


Figure 4-2 Main projects and their revenue

Then Alton drew another figure (4-3) to present how he and his colleagues distribute their time on these routine activities.

People	Time Assignment		
Alton	15% School management	25% strategic things	60% Bespoken
PR	50% short courses	10% Facilities	And then Bespoken
BI	Bespoken 60%		
RC	Leave		
JI	Part time		

Figure 4-3 Time assignment of the team

Alton pointed out that short courses only brought in about 5% of revenue, but 50% of one manager's (PR) time:

"So I say: 'Is it worth it? Is it worth 50% of her (PR) time?' And is it worth it in terms of the impact on her? Because all she does is fails. I don't tell her she fails, but she knows it's difficult.... And if we got rid of (the short courses), then 50% of her (PR) time could be put into this (bespoken project) as well, so commit more resource, get more value."

4.6.1.4 What Is Wrong With Short Courses?

In order to further expose the problem of short courses, the CLD method was used and four loops of short courses' management were identified (Figure 4-4) (Mode 2 of SD application):

The two reinforcing loops (R1: A->C-> D->F->G->A; R3: B->C->D->E-

courses was problematic for Alton because it brought psychological drag and was ineffective.

>B) show that if E department have enough people with great enthusiasm and enough money to invest in the short courses, the income from them will increase; therefore staff will feel good and would like to work harder, and the department would have more resources for further investment.

On the other hand, if we take a long term view and we may notice that people’s enthusiasm may decrease after a long period of hard work, and their work effectiveness also has an upper limit. This phenomenon is described by B2 (A->C ->F->G->A). Similarly, in a relatively stable environment, the size of the market cannot change too much, and then excessive input may cause low return-on-investment. The phenomenon is described by B4 (B->C-> E->B).

Alton pointed out the most important factor was the shrinking market size, which caused the poor performance of short courses and cannot be resolved by internal efforts; therefore the feeling of the staff would become worse and worse, and the available recourses would dwindle gradually because of the failed investment.

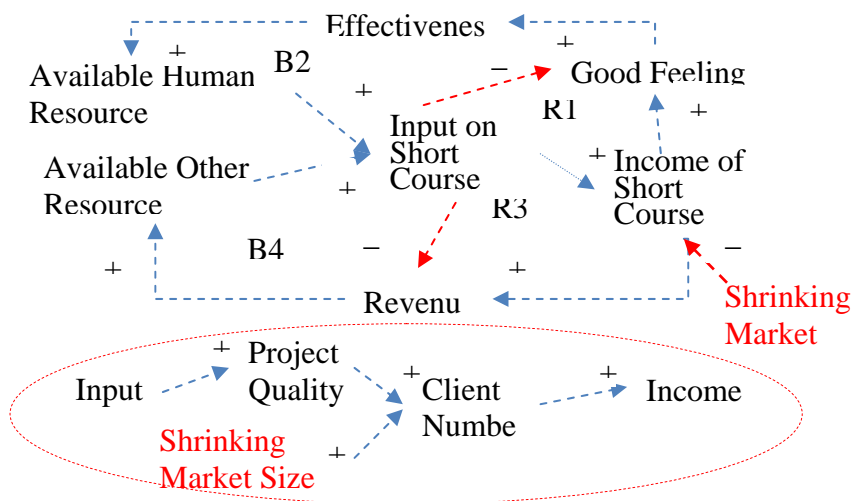


Figure 4-4 Analyzing the short course project from internal and external views

The crux of the whole argument between Alton and Leroy was on how much influence had been brought by the shrinking market size into short courses; Alton argued that “the market is dead” but Leroy believed that there must be something that could be done.

4.6.1.5 Is the Bespoke Project Really So Valuable?

I noticed that Alton spent 60% of his time on the bespoke projects, and I wondered whether as a senior manager, it was worth that so much time was spent on a specific issue. Alton gave me his explanation (Mode 3 of Lean application):

CLD tool was used to analyze the reason of the poor performance of the short courses project; according to the casual loop diagrams, market size was identified as the key points. However, Leroy and Alton had different view about the influence of shrinking market size.

Alton spent 60% of his time on one function; he thought it was an investment in the future.

<p><i>“The 60% of time, some of it is delivering the activity, some; but some of it is just helping to, um, to get the business... It is a balance; it is always a balance between how much time you spend on the present and how much you spend on future. If I go to talk with a client, in the diagnostic phase, then we talk about the future of the client. What we are doing is we are building the client relationship”.</i></p>	
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4.6.2 Discussion

Three themes emerged from the story are addressed in this section.

4.6.2.1 Action and Identity

When talking about the example of time management, Alton and I both noticed the close link between action and identity. Smith’s (2011) argument has well described the relationship between action and identify: “It is primarily through actions that identity, and its appearance of substance, is constructed” (p688).

But there are some difference between young people and mature professionals. Alton summarized that when he was young, most of his actions were based on observation, leading to growth. This argument was in accord with the findings of previous researchers (Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Pratt et al., 2006) who argue that actions are used as experiment instruments for identity construction. For mature professionals, although they could still learn from experimenting provisional identities (e.g. Alton learned from terminating the relationship with G college), they have more intention to keep coherence in their actions to protect and strengthen their identities, which have been well developed.

In summary, work activity is guided by work identity; people intend to keep coherence in their actions to protect and strengthen their identities

4.6.2.2 Identity and Systems Approaches

The application of systems approaches may be significantly influenced by identities of practitioners.

For example, in the case of applying Lean to analyze short courses, Alton may argued that he identified waste and took the initiative to eliminate it quickly, so it fitted with Lean; Alton’s opponents may claim that Alton had not completed the shift from functional or departmental thinking to enterprise multifunctional thinking (Goldacker,

2010). Actually, Alton was trying to apply LEAN in his department, but in his own way, which was significantly influenced by his work identity in which the short courses function had not been incorporated. It was similar when drawing causal loop diagrams. I first explain this phenomenon showing that systems approaches cannot resolve problems directly; they only provide some tools for managers to interpret the problem situation and the interpretation is still greatly influence by their work identity and embedded beliefs.

Later, when I compared the four systems approaches introduced in this project, I found that this problem was more significant in the applications of Lean and SD compared with CSH and SAST. Then I noticed another difference between them: SD and Lean are designed for dealing with systems complexity rather than stakeholder complexity; therefore practitioners are not reminded to reflect on their own identity and beliefs. In contrast, the CSH and SAST approaches' assumptions consider the complexity of stakeholders; therefore more reflections on identity would be inspired.

It is argued that applications of systems approaches are significantly influenced by practitioners' identities; therefore some supportive methods may be necessary for assisting people to reflect on this influence. For example, a critical friend or some approaches like CSH and SAST.

4.6.2.3 Role Transition and Identity Reconstruction

It was surprising to find out that Alton spent 60% of his time on bespoke projects while the other two works were not listed on his schedule. Many reasons have been exposed in last few meetings, and this time I found that it was also possible that Alton was still experiencing a role transition.

Alton had worked in H Business school for many years, but first as a lecturer and then as a specialist in running external programme for corporate clients. Besides, the responsibilities of E director have gradually changed: H business got the AMBA and EQUIS seals of approval in 2005 and 2006; since then the pressure of being international started to increase. After the new dean's coming, the version may be updated again, and his expectation may also bring some new change to the role. Therefore, Alton may have continually experienced some transition in his work role in recent years, which required him to keep reconstructing his work identity.

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) point out that “In successful transitions a coherent and compelling narrative set emerges from repeated interaction and revision, helping the narrator to internalize the new role identity and gain passage through the inclusion boundaries of the new work or occupational group. Alternatively, passages that do not find plausible or consistent narratives remain incomplete or fail.” (p148) It seems that Alton had not found a consistent narrative for his role which was keeping change too, and he was still looking for it through repeated interaction and revision.

4.7 Summary

A few themes emerged from working with Alton for nine months. They are:

Table 4-1 Themes derived from Alton's stories

Coding Number	Themes	Category
4.3.2.1	Role definition/ identity construction is a mixed decision, organizations and individuals both influence on each other's activities and are also influenced by each other's activities.	Definition; Implication
4.3.2.2	The identity construction process is embedded in the process of routine work performance rather than an independent and abstract process.	Definition; Mechanism
4.3.2.3-1	Identity regulation can be seen as a process of boundary debating between organizations and individuals.	Identity regulation
4.3.2.3-2	Sweeping in more stakeholders may bring in new perspectives so as to improve the quality of boundary debate and foster agreement on identity construction.	Practical Implications; Mechanism
4.3.2.4	CSH was used to assist reflection on boundary judgements rather than steering boundary redrawing; and critical discussion is helpful to aid reflection in the process.	Research project
4.4.2.1-1	Conflict between the role offered by organizations and the work identity constructed by individuals will arouse identity work	Match; Mechanism
4.4.2.1-2	Role interpretation and identity construction always influence and fuel each other	Role; Match; Mechanism
4.4.2.2-1	Capability is critical for identity construction; developing related work capability is an important part of the identity construction process.	Definition ; Mechanism
4.4.2.2-2	Mature professionals do not have to find role models to identify potential identities; they interpret their role directly and develop related work identity in practical work.	Mechanism
4.4.2.3	SAST can assist individuals in making explicit the difference between organizations' and their own assumptions on their work role/ identity, so that they could negotiate with organizations more actively and positively in the process of work identity construction.	SAST and Practical Implications

4.5.2.1	Lean should be used with the support of other systems approaches when resolving complex organizational problems.	Lean
4.5.2.2	The identity perspective may bring some new light to Lean on the issue of employee management.	Lean
4.6.2.1	Work activity is guided by work identity; people intend to keep coherence in actions so as to protect and strengthen their identities.	Definition
4.6.2.2	The application of systems approaches may be influenced by practitioners' identities; some supportive methods can be used to assist people identify and reflect on this kind of influence.	Lean; Project
4.6.2.3-1	Change-within-role requires people to reconstruct their identity	Role; Match
4.6.2.3-2	The signals of change-within-role are so slight and subtle that they are often neglected by both practitioners and researchers.	Practical Implications

Alton was a mature manager and approaching retirement. Therefore, his feelings and experience may be a little different from those of other managers. In the next chapter, the experience of Coral, a female senior manager, will be presented to bring in some different perspectives on the identity and systems issues.

5 Coral's Stories

Coral was a key person in this action research project, because she played the leadership role in the period of organizational change. It was a big challenge to work with Coral, because she might have been too busy to be deeply involved in a research project, and she was in a sensitive position to expose her feelings and reflections to a researcher who also stayed in the organization. Although there were many potential difficulties, working with Coral was still very helpful for understanding the art of change management and the development of individuals' work identities.

In the following parts, the findings achieved in the five meetings with Coral will be reported as five stories, which present how Coral developed her own understanding as a manager and what beliefs guided her management behaviours. The themes identified from these stories are presented in the discussion section of each story.

5.1 Story 1: Profile of Coral

This profile provides some information about Coral's previous work experience, the key incidents in her management life, and how she intended to lead the organization in its transition period. All of the excerpts used in this section are from the Interview records with Coral, on February 17, 2011,

5.1.1 Previous Work Experiences of Coral

<i>Coral's narrative story</i>	My annotation
<p>Coral left university as MSc in information science; her first job was in a company on information service and lasted for three years and then she moved to a university library and worked another three years. Then she got promoted, managing a team of five staffs; a year later she switched her career to higher education, being a lecturer for six years.</p> <p>Coral got her first job at senior level in another college, managing the library and learning resources and had a team of 30 people. This work was meaningful for Coral:</p> <p><i>“That was initially a huge shock, because I had never worked in a further education college before, and I went to a director role, so I very quickly had to learn. And I really had changed my identity. I think I had gained management experience before, because I managed projects. But particularly as a leader who is a part of the senior management team,</i></p>	<p>In the first 13 years, Coral did not get many chances to develop her managerial identity.</p> <p>Working as a senior manager helped Coral initially develop her managerial identity;</p>

<p><i>fighting for resources, arguing for resources. For me, those two years were very challenging, very hard.”</i></p> <p>Coral left the position on maternity leave, and then she worked part time in teaching for five years to look after her daughter. She also did a part time MA at that time. Then she got bored, and applied for a job managing the Learning Centre in LC University. She did that for a few years and loved it, because it gave her quite a lot of management and leadership experience. However, soon Coral got bored again:</p> <p><i>“Then once the centre was established, working quite well, and I got bored. That’s a theme in my life, I got bored quite easily. So I actually moved to different jobs at the LC University.”</i></p> <p>Later, Coral became a course resource manager for the library information services, and this job was also meaningful for Coral.</p> <p><i>“A lot of different jobs, a lot of really good management experience. And I think that job enable me to bring together all my experience from my other jobs. And in that job, I really found I was a manager, I knew what I was doing here; and in that job, I can remember, I was saying for straight with my director: ‘I think I can do a better job than you.’ That was quite interesting. I did that job for two years.”</i></p> <p>Then Coral resigned because the university moved to another place and this caused transport problem. Coral set up her own business, and employed a team of 15 trainers to deliver courses in companies. She managed the business for five years, and again got bored. She applied for a part time job in the H Business School, and became a fulltime senior lector in 2002. She was promoted to be the director of X department four years ago, and then became the deputy dean in 2010.</p> <p>When talking about her current job, Coral mentioned that the dean (Leroy) was her mentor and helped her develop managerial identity:</p> <p><i>“I think what really influenced me is working with the dean... he always gives me opportunities...he is acting as a mentor: ‘you could do this, Coral, you know, you could be promoted in this way’. He has confidence in me; it helped me to develop my confidence in myself, this (is) one aspect. The other is seeing how you operate...and I learned a lot about management from him, working with people.</i></p> <p><i>And I think probably another thing I learned is, maybe some of my colleagues may be surprised I said this, that is to be kind. As a manager, or a leader, I think you need to be kind to people.”</i></p>	<p>but the learning process was hard for her.</p> <p>Coral easily got bored on a job.</p> <p>The second chance to be a middle manager helped Coral construct her managerial identity formally and made her feel confident about her management capability</p> <p>Leroy (the dean) was Coral’s mentor, and helped her develop her managerial identity and capability.</p>
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When reviewing Coral’s life history, we can see that she had worked in about 13 positions and was preparing to move on to the 14th one. One reason for the frequent changes may be that Coral easily became bored and she resolved it by “moving to different jobs”. Another issue is that three managerial experiences were identified by Coral, which helped her to build up her managerial identity: the first one showed her what real managerial work was, the second one enabled her to bring together all her previous experiences, and the third one is her current job in which she had found a mentor in management development.

5.1.2 Key Incidents in Coral’s Management Life

5.1.2.1 Never Going Up Straight To the Top

<i>Coral’s narrative story of incident 1</i>	My annotation
<p><i>A few years ago, there was a big problem with the timetable for the undergraduate... Lots of our (staff) pushed me: ‘this is awful, this is a disaster’ ... they were very upset. How I handled it was by writing a very strong letter to the vice chancellor, complaining. He got the related people who were responsible for the timetable, and they sorted it out. It was the wrong thing to do, because what I should have done, is just talking to the people responsible, trying to resolve things at the lower level, rather than jumping to the higher level. So what I learned from that is as a manager, when dealing with a problem if I take it to the top, I could solve things quickly, but that would upset people, and it makes it hard for me to work with people, because they don’t trust me. From that I learned, never to go up straight to the top. I always talk to people, try to solve things informally, rather than formally...This happened about three or four years ago, when I became the director of X Department.</i></p>	<p>This incident made Coral reflect on her approach to problem solving, and learn to deal with problems informally; it also may influence what kind of manager she became.</p>

5.1.2.2 Stand My Ground

<i>Coral’s narrative story of incident 2</i>	My annotation
<p><i>Last year, somebody crashed into my car. She didn’t apologize or say she was really sorry or anything like that. I was very angry, because where she was coming out was beside a nursery school, and also very near a bus stop where children left. She didn’t look at it. It was very dangerous; she just went straight out. I asked her: “Are you aware you could kill somebody there? You didn’t look, the children are all over</i></p>	<p>The second incident happened in Coral’s personal life, but the belief generated from it could also be</p>

<p><i>place, and you could kill a child". She said, 'that was a horrible thing to say to me'. And I said: "I'm sorry but it is true, fortunately you just crashed my car". It went on like this, and at the end, she said, "you are the most unpleasant woman I have met in my life".</i></p> <p><i>Really, what I learned from that was to stand my ground. I knew what I (had) done was correct, what she had done was very dangerous, and she needed to be aware of that.</i></p> <p><i>So I learned to stand my ground, being very clear about what I want to achieve during communications.</i></p>	<p>incorporated in her work identity.</p>
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5.1.2.3 To Be Kind to People

<p><i>Coral's narrative story of incident 3</i></p> <p><i>An example, before I became the head of X department, there was an administrative colleague, whose work was not good, was poor. I and her line manager agreed to meet her every week, talking about her work and how she needed to improve it. And that was very difficult, and this particular person was very upset, very angry. She didn't want to work with me, didn't want to talk with me, and was very very upset. But we got through it, and her quality of work improved. And two years later, her mother died, and she was very upset. But after she got over it, her quality went from there to there (Coral put one hand in a low position, and the other in a very high position). So huge, 1000% improvement. When we reflected, we found that when her work was very poor, she was looking after a sick mother, but she never told us. So she had some reason, but we didn't know about that reason.</i></p> <p><i>I think according to the text book, we did the right thing, according to how to manage people, we improved her performance. But I actually think we didn't see the big picture at that time. And she now is a valuable person, we couldn't do without her. But I still feel I could have handled that a bit better and taken time to know her better.</i></p>	<p>My annotation</p> <p>Through this critical reflection, Coral accepted a new value, being kind to people and taking time to know them.</p>
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5.1.2.4 Please Obey the Organizational Rules

<p><i>Coral's narrative story of incident 4</i></p> <p><i>... when I worked as the director of X department, one of jobs was we monitoring the feedback on assessment. Quite often, people said "I'm very busy", "I 'm working on a research paper", all sorts of things. And I felt sympathy for them. I said to them: "I feel sympathy for you and the students in our business school. It is not acceptable. Unless you</i></p>	<p>My annotation</p> <p>Coral emphasized the importance of obeying organizational rules;</p>
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<p><i>are ill and at hospital, it has to be done as priority”.</i></p> <p><i>My basic belief is we come to work to do a particular job, and the university pay us for doing that job. As long as we treat people with respect, then they need to follow the rules. So sometimes people are unhappy, because they don't like the rules, they don't like what's happening. I just said, “We are working here; this is the way we do things here”.</i></p>	<p>this may explain why Coral said her colleagues did not think she was 'kind'.</p>
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5.1.2.5 Feelings and Plan for the Forthcoming Organizational Change

Coral's plan	My annotation
<p><i>My new role (acting dean) will start on 1st May, and I decided (to take it) last week, so this is really new for me. I will take the time from now to May, thinking about how I will take the role.</i></p> <p><i>... I take the role of acting dean, and the most important responsibility is to maintain the continuity and stability within the business school. So I'm not going to change everything, because when we get the new dean, that person will have his own idea...</i></p> <p><i>But it is also about momentum, because we are a very good business school, we are good because we keep improving. So I see the role as keeping up that momentum. So it is about stability, but also about keeping improvement; it's not about strategic change, it's about operational change.</i></p> <p><i>Another part of I am thinking ,is that, it is a big role, so how do I manage that role, how do I know what I should prioritize, how do I let go the things I love. For me, it's really a challenge; I was involved in things because I loved them. I won't have that luxury as an acting dean, so I'll put these things aside, for three months or six months, and then I'll come back to it... I got an agreement that I can have a part time research assistant, so my mind can focus on the business school's business, but at the same time I am able to keep my research moving.</i></p> <p><i>The other thing I have decided is I need a mentor, when I work as the acting dean ,I need somebody who I can talk to , trust, who I can in a way expose my weakness and my worries. And I have, identified a mentor...</i></p>	<p>Coral's new role aroused some identity work on her.</p> <p>Her strategy of leading the organization was “maintaining the continuity and stability”, and keeping the “momentum”.</p> <p>Coral was trying to make sense about her new role. And she felt some tension between her managerial identity and her academic identity which she valued.</p> <p>Coral decided to find a mentor to help her adapt to the role transition.</p>

Coral was a different manager compared to Alton. She was younger and still learning to be a manager. She learned from all kinds of things, such as her mistakes, her personal life and others' advice. When faced with a role transition, Coral had made a strategic

plan; but she still needed a mentor to provide her some reflection space and to deal with emotional issues. Besides, it can be found that Coral loved her academic identity and was preparing to return to it, although she had decided to grasp the chance to develop her managerial identity further. Coral also exposed many of her management beliefs, such as “stand your ground”, “solve things informally”, and “obeying the rules”. It is interesting that she tried to be kind but she thought her colleagues might not agree.

With these understandings about Coral, we will start our reflection journey with her.

5.2 Story 2: Should I Continue On This Job?

The CSH approach was applied by Coral in Mode 2 and 3. The reflective discussion between is described in Section 5.2.1; and the themes emerged from the data analysis are addressed in Section 5.2.2.

5.2.1 Story and Findings

<i>Tuesday, 01 November, 2011</i>	My annotation
<p>I visited Coral’s office at 3.30pm. When I came in, she told me she only had 30 minutes for this meeting, which I had thought would last for one hour.</p> <p>The purpose of this meeting should have been to introduce to Coral the action research project, but Coral told me she was familiar with the project and then she asked me to jump into the part of reviewing her use of the first approach.</p>	<p>It was Coral who controlled the meeting rather than me.</p>
<p>5.2.1.1 From “I Do Not Know” To “Talking To Others More”</p>	
<p>We decided to use the CSH approach (Critical System s Heuristics) in analyzing a decision that Coral was facing: whether or not to continue to be the deputy dean of the Business School.</p>	<p>Coral found it was hard to generate any new idea with this comparison between “Is Mode” and “Ought Mode”.</p>
<p>It was interesting that Coral said a lot of “I don’t know” when trying to answer the questions listed in the worksheets, which were designed based on the CSH approach. For example, for the question “How <u>ought</u> the client to judge the success/failure of the decision?” She identified herself as the client, and said,</p>	
<p><i>“I don’t know, because I’m not interested in others’ measures of success”.</i></p>	
<p>The purpose of this question is to help practitioners to reflect on their previous answers to the question “How <u>does</u> the client judge the</p>	

success/failure of the decision?” With these two questions, I hoped to see that Coral would reflect on her interpretation of her role by comparing her current work statement with the ideal one. But Coral was not provoked and she also did not want to explore her deeper need in career development.

When we moved to the issue of identifying the affected people and their assumptions, the same situation appeared again. Coral identified her husband and daughter as the affected, and said she did not talk a lot with them about this decision. I asked if she had thought that she should communicate more with them. She said “no”, because “this is my decision”, and she explained further:

“Because it is eh, you know, in other decisions I would, like a decision to buy a house or move to a different part of the country, I would. But not, eh, it depends on the decision. So I think the answer is ‘not this decision’.”

But immediately, she said:

“What this exercise has done is made me think about talking to others more. I’m not sure I would, but it makes me think about it. That’s good.”

5.2.1.2 “I Do Not Think I Work in a Unique Way” And “I am the One I Want To Be”

CSH was also used to analyze Coral’s work identity, and in this part, I focused on Coral’s definition of herself as the deputy dean (Since the new dean arrived in September, now Coral does not work as the acting dean anymore, she has returned to her previous position).

Coral told me that as the deputy dean, the purpose of her work was “education”. The answer was too abstract, so I probed, “What is the most valuable thing you provide to the school?”

Coral answered shortly again:

“My purpose is about promoting education.”

I asked further, “But a lot of people could promote education so... what’s your unique way?” Coral said:

“...but we all work together in different ways. I don’t think I work in a unique way”.

And in the following parts, Coral still felt difficulty in identifying any difference between the “Is Mode” and “Ought Mode” of her view in her identity. So I asked Coral, “So, are you already being the manager

Talking about her family helped Coral make a sense about considering the affected people in a decision, although she did not plan to do it this time.

CSH provided Coral an opportunity to make reflection.

Coral did not want to distinguish herself from other members of the organization, although she had played a leadership role (as acting dean) during the period of organizational change.

<p>that you want to be?”, then Coral answered: <i>“I think so; on the whole, yeah. I’m not saying I’m perfect, there are still things on change; but on the whole I think I’m the one I want to be”.</i></p> <p>I checked, “You enjoy your work life?” Coral said, <i>“Yeah, yeah. I don’t want to change.”</i></p>	<p>CSH failed to broken Coral’s previous definition of herself or provoke some new ideas about her work identity.</p>
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5.2.2 Discussion

Two themes about identity construction and the application of CSH are identified from the data; they are addressed in this part.

5.2.2.1 The Trigger of Identity Work

The main problem met in this meeting is the failure of inspiring the identity work of Coral. According to the idea of CSH, this motivation could be generated by comparing Coral’s current identity and ideal identity. Previous studies also report that the mismatch between people’s expectations and perceptions may trigger identity work (Pratt et al., 2006). The underpinning mechanism could be explained as that this comparison introduces a sense of seekership in people. In the field of religious research, it is argued that individuals will search for ‘some satisfactory system of religious meaning to interpret or resolve their discontent’ when people define themselves as religious seekers (Lofland and Stark, 1965, 868). In this research, CSH is used as a tool for creating the sense of seekership in managers. However Coral failed to distinguish her current self and ideal self; this was not caused by the uselessness of CSH approach in introducing seekership, but by Coral’s satisfaction with her current work identity construction. With the assistance of the CSH approach, Coral successfully reflected on the logic of her decisions and realized the need to consider the opinions of the affected (her daughter and husband) and broadening boundaries of decision making. Thus seekership was generated to some degree, but not strongly enough for Coral to decide to renew her identity. In the literature on organizational identity, a similar phenomenon has been studied by Pratt (2000) who found that the Amway Company brainwashed its employees through processes of sensebreaking and sensemaking. The sensebreaking process involves “a fundamental questioning of who one is when one’s sense of self is challenged”; its main purpose is to “disrupt an individual’s sense of self to create a meaning void that must be filled”. Amway implements the sensebreaking practice by ‘(1) linking one’s sense of self to possessions; (2) creating motivational drives by

comparing current and ideal identities; (3) perpetuating these motivational drives'. (p464). But a few of Amway distributors found that the sensebreaking practise did not work for them, because "there was no need for them to 'make sense' of inadequate current selves; and they were also not motivated to change themselves or to abandon their current identities." (p469) This failure of sense-breaking practice is explained by Pratt as that people 'did not want to change their life now that it was going well' (p477).

So identity reformation would not always occur even when self-reflection is made, it also depends on whether people feel satisfied with their current identity construction. CSH is a useful tool to provoke and assist self-reflection; however, it could merely catalyze identity reformation rather than lead to a reformation.

5.2.2.2 A Boundary Problem Underpinning

The question 'whether or not to continue on the job' is intimately linked with another question 'how to define and play the job? The second question can be seen as an identity construction problem. Coral tried to exclude other stakeholders' boundary judgments on the two issues, she said: "I'm not interested in others' measures of success... this is my decision". However, Coral's boundaries judgments on her role definition and identity construction may be challenged by the organization that held different value judgments. The conflict between Coral and organization on this issue will be addressed in Section 5.4.

5.3 Story 3: Do I Need to Consider All of the Key Stakeholders?

5.3.1 Story and Findings

SAST was used by Coral to surface and evaluate the assumptions within one of her recent decisions (Mode 2); however, Coral did not to use SAST to reflect on her identity (Mode 3). Because she still insisted that she did not need to consider others' opinions in her decision of whether or not to be the deputy dean. She argued:

"It is my decision, not others... they always have (supporting on me)...I don't mind if I'm friendly with colleagues or not, for me, it's about professional relationship."

Coral's application experience (Mode 2) and themes derived from it are presented in this section.

Wednesday, 16 November, 2011

Today I went in Coral's office at 1.30pm; we only had 30 minutes again.

In this meeting we discussed the use of SAST in making a decision on whether or not to keep the writer residence in the H Business School (Mode 2). A writer residence means that a professional writer is hired, working with people in the organization, "to help them find their voice".

5.3.1.1 Different Assumptions

Coral identified four groups of affected people in this decision: staff, managers, students and subject leaders; and Coral identified herself as the decision-maker, because she had the budget and could decide on which aspect to spend it. About these stakeholders' assumptions, Coral said:

"I'm not sure. I think some of the staff will support it and some other staff will say, 'No, we should be doing some other things.'"

Then I asked Coral what would make her satisfied with this decision. Coral said,

"I think what will make me satisfied would be knowing it, um, very good question. It would be knowing that, if we decide not to do it, we are very clear about why we don't want to do that, and the cost of not doing it. If we say yes, I would be satisfied if we are really clear about what we are going to do and how we are going to make it sustainable".

Then I further asked, "How could you know the answers to the two questions, and how could you show them to the staff and students in this business school?" Coral answered,

"I think different people want different answers, I think the students are worried about the sustainability; they worry: 'Will they help me? Am I treated fairly?' So that would satisfy the students. I think some of the staff, nothing would satisfy them; because they are quite conventional. That's no problem, no problem. I think some of the staff will say, 'Oh, that's interesting, but not for me'. No problem. I think some of the staff will say, 'oh, really good idea, let's see where we can go with it.' So for me, it's important to have a group willing to move forward, engaging with it. That will make me satisfied."

Then I asked, "Since there are so many people involved, how could

My annotation

One decision making problem was analyzed using the SAST.

At first, Coral talked about stakeholders' assumptions very roughly.

Coral reflected on her own measures of the success of the decision.

Coral tried to interpret stakeholders' assumptions further, more accurately. And she identified the group who were important for her.

Coral's way of collecting information.

you know all of their voices?” Coral answered,
“You can’t... I want to know the students voice, so all the students involved in the pilot, I asked their opinions. With the staff... I didn’t talk to all staff... so just different individuals.”

Coral didn’t listen to all the voices of the stakeholders, so I asked, “How could you find out those people who needed the service?” And this question aroused our second topic.

5.3.1.2 I Cannot Ask and I Will Not Ask

Coral thought the new service may be helpful for academics, but she would not ask if any academics needed it; and she explained the reason:

“But if I say to people then what they might feel is ‘she’s saying I’m not good enough at my job’. I won’t say that, but that would be the underlying message. So it’s quite subtle.”

And then Coral told me she would take different tactics to deal with different groups in the organization:

“So we haven’t had a group of academic staff on the staff development course, many thought was really good and fun. If I decided to go down academic staff to the staff development, they might not, that’s the hardest bit to go. Because academic staff are quite conventional, and very very time pressured. They have habits of working. And this (the new service) would say: ‘Change your habits’. And for me, in terms of my time of inputting to this, I would go from the easy wings. Because if the students are really happy, marketing staff really happy, I’ll go with them, and then begin sharing the results.”

Coral showed me that sometimes management was an art rather than science. I cannot image what would happen if a public debate was held.

5.3.1.3 Which Is Worse, Opposing Or Ignoring?

When I asked Coral, “Would you worry about someone who opposed this?” Coral said:

“No. I quite like people opposing it. If somebody opposes it, and it’s very strong in opposition, it sounds to me like they feel a lot about it. So I enjoy the discussion. And sometimes people who oppose things, if you get them to change their minds, they become real champions. It is

Collecting information could be a subtle thing.

Academic staff’s assumptions were further revealed.

Coral decided to start “from the easy wings”

An unexpected situation was exposed: the marginalization may be the choice of the organizational members rather than the managers.

Coral’s tactic of dealing with the ignorance by people: “I just live with that.”

<p><i>people who ignore it or are not interested in it that are hard to work with, in my experience.”</i></p> <p>And then Coral summarized her attitude to these different responses of stakeholders:</p> <p><i>“I just live with that. I don’t feel I need to make everybody satisfied. And for me it’s, if I worked too hard making everybody satisfied, it would be wasting a lot of my time. So I just think what do we want to do, who are the key stakeholders, and I work with them...”</i></p> <p>Finally we tried to summarize the problem situation, classifying all those stakeholders and their assumptions with the labels of “important”/ “unimportant”, “certain”/ “uncertain”, then Coral said:</p> <p><i>“I think what is uncertain for me is how the students will reply... different groups respond differently... so for me there’s a lot of uncertainty there.”</i></p> <p>5.3.1.4 Continue To Be the Deputy Dean</p> <p>In the second part of this meeting, I talked with Coral again about her decision of whether or not to continue as the deputy dean and she said,</p> <p><i>“I signed the contract yesterday.”</i></p> <p>One thing I was interested was the tension between Coral’s managerial identity and academic identity because she mentioned it in our first meeting; so regarding her choice of continuing to be the deputy dean, I interpreted and checked, “So you think it’s more suitable for you to be a senior manager rather than a lecturer” And she said:</p> <p><i>“Yeah, I enjoyed my job.”</i></p> <p>Then I asked: “But you are very busy.”</p> <p>Coral said,</p> <p><i>“I like being very busy, I would be bored if I wasn’t.”</i></p>	<p>SAST reminded Coral to consider where the uncertainty existed.</p> <p>Compared with her academic identity, Coral thought managerial identity was more significant for her.</p>
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5.3.2 Discussion

5.3.2.1 Problems of Exposing Different Assumptions

Some critics point out that “SAST depends for its success on the willingness of participants to have their assumptions exposed” (Jackson, 2003, 152). In this case, it was found that the willingness of participants may be problematic. When those academics showed low interest in the decision that Coral was making, she could not even try to communicate with them; because “it’s quite subtle”. Coral dealt with the

difficulty by ignoring those stakeholders when she initially made the decision, and she felt she only needed one group's support to put the decision forward.

5.3.2.2 Using SAST to Aid Reflection

Although it has some problems, SAST is still a useful approach to assist people in making reflection. In this case, Coral's interpretation of stakeholders' assumptions became more and more clear along with the discussion, and she also realized that there was some uncertainty needed to be further considered. Coral summarized that: "I think that works, because it helps you to think a little bit differently."

5.3.2.3 Using SAST to Assist Identity Regulation

The case can also be seen from another perspective: Coral was conducting an identity regulation practice. As the writer residence project was a part of the staff development programme, and its main aim was to 'change your habits'; it can be seen as that Coral/the organization was encourage the staff to reconstruct their work identities, incorporating in some new skills and values offered by the organization.

In this identity regulation practice, SAST was used to assist Coral surface and evaluate the assumptions of related stakeholders; so that different tactics were made. Therefore, SAST may be a useful tool for identity regulation, it can help organizations understand their employees better.

5.3.2.4 The Development of Manager's Work Identity

I also observed that Coral had reformed her work identities, and now the managerial identity had become more significant for Coral compared with a few months ago. Let us compare the two excerpts from our meetings:

"For me, it's really a challenge; I was involved in things because I loved them. I won't have that luxury as an acting dean, so I'll put these things aside... I got an agreement that I can have a part time research assistant, so my mind can focus on the business school's business, but at the same time I am able to keep my research moving"
(Records of Meeting 1, February 17, 2011)

"Yeah, I enjoy my job...I like being very busy, I would be bored if I wasn't." (Records of Meeting 3, 16 November, 2011)

In November, the tension between managerial identity and academic identity disappeared. One reason may be that Coral came back to her previous position. But it should be noticed that the interpretation of Coral on the ‘business’ brought by her managerial identity had changed: from ‘a challenge’ to ‘an enjoyable work’; and she even felt that without being busy, she would get bored. So we may infer from this interpretation that Coral had redefined her work identify, and the managerial identity had become more significant for her; besides, Coral now had a need to continue developing her managerial identity through keeping busy; if this need could not be satisfied, she would get bored.

Then another question emerged: since Coral’s managerial identity had been developed further, would a mismatch between identity and role arise? And how would Coral resolve the mismatch? It was mentioned in Section 5.1.1 that getting bored was a theme in Coral’s life, and she resolved it by changing jobs. If the mismatch appeared, would Coral find a new way to resolve it? The topic was a little subtle and we did not discuss it in the meeting; in next story, the introducing of lean approach may provide another chance for us to review Coral’s role and her identity.

5.4 Story 4: What Was Ignored In Lean’s Application?

Lean was applied by Coral in her management practice in Mode 2 and 3; this application experience is reported in Section 5.4.1, and related themes derived from the experience are presented in Section 5.4.2.

5.4.1 Story and Findings

<p><i>Tuesday, Nov 29, 2011</i></p> <p>We met 2.00pm in Coral’s office today. The theme of today’s meeting was the use of lean system thinking.</p> <p>5.4.1.1 Being the Bad Person</p> <p>Coral decided to use lean to examine the project of “staffing modules” which was about arranging the workload for all the staff in the Business School (Mode 2).</p> <p>The main goal of the project was defined as “making things work without problems”. And then Coral explained the key business processes of the project:</p> <p><i>“So the first procedure is that we have to decide on the</i></p>	<p>My annotation</p> <p>The goal and procedures of the project were identified</p>
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workload... that's every job needs doing within the business school... So we agree it in theory, so that takes three months. Then we look at everyone's research, and we agree the workload for research... and then we move on to teaching and learning... then go to our workload manager... And it might go backwards and forwards a few times. And I have to approve it ...and then it runs. ”

About the people's responsibility in the project, it was identified as:

“...so the dean has the whole responsibility, I'm responsible for its operation, director of research is responsible for research allocation, director of learning and teaching for learning and teaching, and the head of subjects and line managers, they are responsible for negotiating with colleagues.”

Then I focused on people's performance in the process and asked: “Do you find some of them are good at arranging those things and some of them are not?” Coral said:

“Well, it depends what you call good, doesn't it? ...because it's a mixture of techniques... it depends how people understand workloads, and how they understand people, and also how they understand tricks people play”

Then Coral told me an interesting event that had happened in the morning:

“...because I have been here long time I know the tricks. I can know sometimes what's going on here. Now, see this person, I had that this morning when somebody was getting 35 students on one module, 3 on another. It's not going to be an option. So he is trying to get students to go, the 35 to the 3, so he teaches two modules... People try working for the best for themselves; my job is: it's best for the business school. ”

I asked, “But shouldn't the head of subjects resolve the problem at their level?”

Coral answered,

“They should, but sometimes they are too friendly with people, and they want to keep people happy. So sometimes they'll say: 'Yeah ', when they should say: 'No'. So I'm the bad person”

And Coral signed: “Life.”

I asked, “Is there any way to require them to deal with it?”

People's responsibilities in this process were exposed.

However, the measures of performance were not clearly defined; because people have different assumptions on the same issue.

An example was discussed to show the common problems existing in the project.

The cause and the resolution of the problem.

It's difficult to erase the cause.

Coral answered,
“Well, it can be quite hard, because that’s all very subtle...when I say, ‘I think you are doing this because you are too friendly with people’, they will say, ‘No, I’m not.’ And it comes a lot of reasons.”

5.4.1.2 What Should Be Emphasized?

In this part, we reviewed Coral’s current job with the lean approach (Mode 3). Firstly, her work statement was discussed:

“My current position statement? I’m the deputy dean, I think I do a good job, and I’m valuable to the business school and the university.”

I asked, “How?”Coral said,

“In terms of my knowledge expertise, about having operation works, and my ability to make things happen.”

In order to arouse reflection, I tried to ask Coral review it from another angle, and I said, “Ok, then how does your line manager evaluate your performance?” Coral answered:

“Because I’ve got a new line manager, and he, I’ll meet him in the 20th of December... but my guess is...in terms of my achievement, um, ... so, for the EQUIS accreditation is coming up, next week, in terms of my work on that, I have helped to produce the documents, so I just have done the briefing for staff, I have written a lot of policy documents, and he has said things like ‘Thank you, that’s excellent’. So I assumed he’s telling the truth.”

I said: “Yes, that’s the main task of this year. Then what’s the main task of your next year’s work?” Then Coral said:

“We’ve got the accreditation, and it’s looking at recruitment and internationalization,”

I tried to get a review of her work more systematically, and then the table provided in the worksheet was used:

Table 5-1 Main activities of Coral's job

Activity	Time Cost (hours/month)	Emphasis in Management
Big jobs (Accreditation, recruitment, internationalization)	30%	High
University issues (i.e. running the P programme)	10%	Moderate

Coral was satisfied with her work performance.

She recognized her management merits as ‘having operation works/ making things happen’

Coral thought the new dean would appreciate her worth through her achievement, especially her work in the EQUIS accreditation.

The main jobs of Coral were identified, however, 30% of her time disappeared.

Strategy/Business school	10%	High
Policy	10%	Moderate
Research	5%	High
Other things (i.e. dealing with emails)	5%	Low

I accounted the activities and said: "That's 70%." And Coral answered, "I don't know where the rest goes." I checked: "You don't know where the 30% goes?" Coral said: "No." And we both laughed. Then I said, "Ok, let's focus on the 70%."

I asked, "Do you think these three jobs (accreditation, recruitment and internationalization) would be the criteria the dean will take to evaluate your performance?"

Coral said, "Partly, yes." I asked, "How much?" And Coral answered:

"I don't know. I think there the thing I do is participation, so work with the schools, the colleagues...I think all of it is, because I evaluate it in different ways. So for example, the university will evaluate it in terms of research. "

Then I asked: "According to the table, where you think the new dean could see your achievement?" Coral said:

"That's interesting, because a lot of what I do, I don't have a product; some making things happen, some opening doors, and stopping things from happening sometimes."

I said, "Then how could you show your achievement to people?"

Coral said,

"Um, I don't think I need to. I think they know, I think they see what it is...I think it's subtle, really, I think in terms of old deputy dean, she was very good at paper work; I'm not so good at paper work, but I think I'm good at making things happen and I'm good at sorting out people's problems."

I said: "Sometimes that's just people's feeling, but how to show it? Because sometimes, if you move to a higher level position, or to another business school,"

Coral said:

"Yes, very good questions. Um, so the EQUIS (accreditation) and research, they will be interested in. It's the high things."

About what should be emphasized in Coral's work, different people have different views.

Through discussion, Coral found her work did not have a product, therefore it can only be felt rather than talked about.

EQUIS and research may be considered first when others (who cannot 'feel') try to evaluate Coral's performance.

5.4.2 Discussion

Based on Coral's application of Lean in Mode 2 and 3, two themes emerged from data analysis, and are addressed in the following two sections; my own reflection on the conduction of the project is presented as the third one.

5.4.2.1 The Forgotten Customer

In the case of managing staffing modules, Coral found she became the 'bad person'; and she thought she had to be because staff worked for their own interests while Coral's job was to protect the school's interests. In her argument, the conflict of interest of two parties was identified: the organization and its members. Obviously, this system cannot be a lean system in which workers are empowered and have high commitment to their organizations.

Coral thought the problem was caused by the different beliefs in dealing with problems; for example, some managers said 'yes' while they should say 'no'. And therefore Coral had to stand out to identify and remove those wastes existing in the system.

However, was the 'waste' defined in the right way? From the view of the lean approach, it is "the need to satisfy customer demands and reduce the frequency of demand failure requires the elimination of waste" (Jaaron and Backhouse, 2010, 150). In other words, whether or not customer needs are satisfied should be the criterion of identifying waste. In the project of "staffing modules", the students should be the customers, but their needs were not much considered. People may argue that this project was more related to internal management rather than customer service; however, lean thinking should be integrated with internal work rather than being separated from it. Jaaron and Backhouse (2010) claim that lean systems thinking "is based on designing the organisational systems around customer demand instead of in functional hierarchies at which customer demand is analysed over a period of time to collect information about what customers want and expect and what matters most to them." (p150) Therefore, the project of "staffing modules" could be seen as a good chance to design each employee's work to serve students' needs better. For example, when dealing with the staff who tried to run two modules instead of one, there can be two different perspectives. One view is that two modules mean more cost, and should be condensed to one. Another view may be focusing on which way could provide our students a better education, a big class or smaller one?

Jaaron and Backhouse (2010) point out that in service organizations, cost is often focused by managers while “the concern used at the customer interface level is of service quality and customer satisfaction” (p149). This argument may help us to understand the problem that Coral was faced with. But on the other side, another possibility should also be considered, that is, there are some staffs and even some managers who work for themselves rather than for the organizations. If the lean principle cannot be implemented in all levels of the organization, it is hard to achieve a lean organization. About how to deal with this problem, a discussion was made in Section 4.5.2, and the issue will be further addressed in Section 6.4.2 and 8.2.3. At the moment, it is just argued that Lean can be used as an approach to challenge people’s management approach, assisting them to make reflection on how to do management work.

5.4.2.2 Lean Approach and Identity Reflection

Coral was satisfied with her current work statement. And along with the reflection with lean, two issues were identified:

Firstly, Coral was familiar with the important tasks she was doing and planning to do, but did not review them in a systematic way. Lean can help her to make an overview, and remind her to look for the 30% of time that disappeared in the list.

Secondly, there were some other criteria for evaluating Coral’s performance, which she had not paid much attention to before. For example, Coral mentioned in our second meeting:

“I think I get respect in the business school, I think the university is not very good at rewarding people in management jobs like mine”

And the reason was exposed today: the university placed more emphasis on research.

Besides, some other stakeholders’ assumptions were exposed too: the new dean may emphasize EQUIS accreditation; and outsiders may have more interest in the EQUIS (accreditation) and research.

In Section 5.2.1, when talking about whether Coral decided to continue to be the deputy dean, she said:

“I don’t know, because I’m not interested in others’ measures of success”

In this meeting, with the reflection with Lean, Coral thought it was “very good question”, because her managerial identity and her management capability were both issues that can only be felt rather than expressed; it was through the work activities that people could observe and evaluate them. In other words, action was the stage of identity display; and Lean could be a good approach not only improve the effectiveness of actions themselves, but also help people display their identities effectively.

It also needs to be noticed that different parties have different boundary judgments and value judgment on the issue of role definition/ work identity construction; therefore people needs to reflect critically on the ethics of drawing role/ work identity boundaries; and in this reflection process, systems approaches such as CSH, SAST and Lean may be helpful.

Finally, analyzing Coral’s main activities also provided a chance to interpret her work identity. For example, in Table 5-1, research only took 5% of her time, although the emphasis was high; it can be inferred from this figure that now the academic identity was less significant for Coral compared to her managerial identity.

5.4.2.3 Assisting Reflection

The experience in this meeting encouraged the researcher to be more active in fostering managers’ reflection by asking challenging questions. For example, when talking about her current job, Coral did not realize there was any problem in her work. But when the researcher challenged her: “then how does your line manager evaluate your performance?”, “sometimes that’s just people’s feeling, but how to show it?” Coral started to reflect on her previous understanding on this issue. Those questions were all based on one principle of Lean that is “Specify value” which was addressed in the introduction package of lean; and as a management researcher, Coral knew the theory well. But sometimes there is a gap between knowing and using; this gap could also explain why management is a kind of professional skill that is learnable, coachable, but not teachable. Thus reflection, especially doing reflection with a critical friend, may be useful for people to link theory and practice, because it may bring in new perspectives.

From this meeting, the importance of conducting reflective discussion was further realized, and the way of conducting the meetings was redefined: I was not just a listener, listening to the managers’ stories of management and reflection; I could create stories with the managers through joining in our critical discussion.

5.5 Story 5: Simple or Complex?

Coral also applied SD into her management work in two ways (Mode 2 and 3); the experience and findings achieved in this application are reported in this section.

5.5.1 Story and Findings

Monday, December 19, 2011

In today's meeting, we discussed Coral's use of the causal loop diagrams technique (CLD), an important tool of SD.

5.5.1.1 Is It Really So Simple?

Coral chose the "development of a new programme" as her problematic management activity (Mode 2). Actually I also talked with Alton about his development of a new programme, and the process was quite similar. But the difficulties that Coral met were different from Alton's:

But the difficulties that Coral met were different from Alton's:

"...each one (programme) is different; normally the difficulty is matching what the staff want to do with what is marketable. Because the staff want to do interesting studies, but we want the courses that students want to come on. So that's the difficulty."

Then I asked Coral how she resolved the difficulty, and she drew a picture for me:

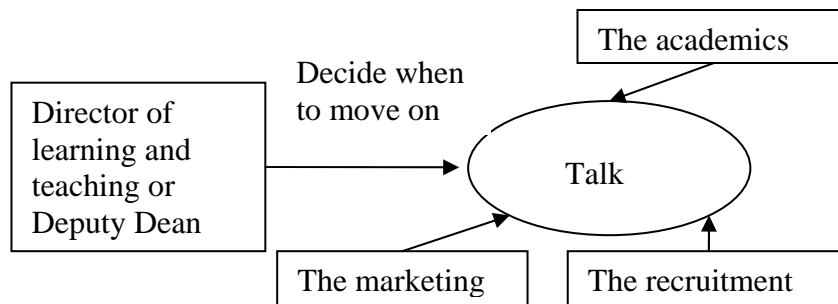


Figure 5-1 How to resolve perspective differences

Coral explained the processes to me:

"The academics, the marketing and the recruitment, those three must talk. And then, I or the director of learning and teaching decide how to move on; so it is decided through discussion"

Then I asked Coral the reasons for the different perspectives. Coral explained:

"The reasons are the interests. The marketing people, their reasons are research and evidence. The recruiters, their reasons are experience and

My annotation

A problematic activity was identified.

The related stakeholders and the processes of the activity are made explicit.

instinct.”

And then I hoped to find out how an agreement can be achieved between these groups, Coral said,

“We just talk: ‘Do we get agreement?’”

This answer was too simple and I could not make sense of it, so I asked again, “Talking. Um, but if I go there, I cannot get the achievement. Why, why can’t I but you can?” Coral answered,

“It’s just the way we do things, we’re used to talking to each other, listening to each other, looking at each other’s evidence. ”

It seems that for Coral it was such a simple thing to do and did not need to be explained. I could not get further information even though I tried more probe questions. Based on this explanation, Coral drew a simple casual loop to describe the process of new programme development:

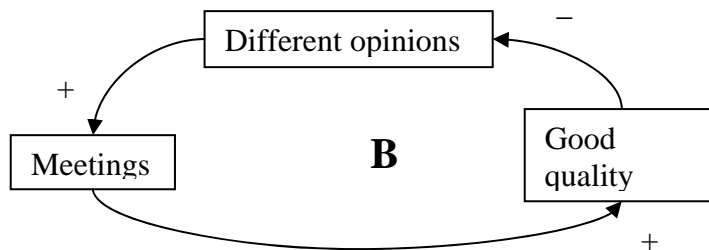


Figure 5-2 The diagram of resolving perspective differences

As the diagram was too simple to make any point, Coral made her reflection:

“I think perhaps using it in a complex situation, and complex situation, it would help you to analyze it. So I will use it for that. Perhaps I chose something that was too simple.”

But I thought the problem was that we did not deepen our discussion, because the secret behind “meetings” had not been exposed. I felt there must be some skills owned by Coral in managing those meetings, but unfortunately, they were not unearthed in this meeting.

5.5.1.2 Where Did My Belief Come From?

In the final part of this meeting, we reviewed Coral’s work identity (Mode 3). And Coral summarized her core values as “about fairness, respect for others...hard work.” Then I asked Coral where these beliefs come from, and Coral said:

“No key incidents, no; lots of little incidents.”

We chose “hard work” as an example, and tried to find out its origin.

CLD did not work well in analyzing the activity; the problem may be that we could not deepen our discussion to reveal those skills used by Coral in promoting the agreement, thus the causal loops underpinning the practices were not exposed.

Coral reflected on the conduct of this meeting and suggested that CLD was suited for resolving complex problems.

‘Hard work’ was identified by Coral as her core value

<p>Coral said, <i>“I cannot remember, I think I always thought it. That’s a thing about values and beliefs... I worked hard at school. I went to a strict school, so very hard teachers; so if you didn’t work hard, they beat you. Seriously!”</i> But Coral was not sure if the experience in that school was the reason for her belief in “hard work”; because she also mentioned her that father worked hard too. When doing this review, we found it was too difficult to draw causal loop diagrams to describe the formation process of Coral’s beliefs, because this was a really long and complex process. And Coral said, <i>“the model doesn’t quite fit our work”...if you look at the causal loop diagram, I think it is too simplistic”.</i></p>	<p>and a component of self-identity. Coral’s narrative revealed that this belief came from her previous life, but she could not identify its origin. Coral thought that CLD did not fit with our work.</p>
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5.5.2 Discussion: Different Complexities

The meeting with Coral made me reflect on the usability of the SD approach and on the design of the intervention project. In the meeting, faced with the failures in drawing some useful casual loop maps to analyze the development of a new programme and to describe Coral’s identity reformation process, I thought the reasons were that I had not ask proper probe questions to deepen our discussion and that Coral had not spent enough time in doing her reflection. When reviewing meeting again in the data analysis stage, I realized that Coral’s criticisms may be reasonable. Specifically, the strengths of SD rest on its claim that “the structure is the main determinant of system behaviour and that structure can be described in terms of the relationships between positive and negative feedback loops” (Jackson, 2003, 78); by identifying the multitude variables and their interactions, SD can help managers see beyond the surface presented by individual events to the ‘structures’ that underlie complex situations (Jackson, 2003). However, the complex situations that SD could deal with were limited; in this case, two examples of other possible complexities were revealed:

Firstly, in the ‘development of a new programme’, participants’ complexity was more important than the structure. We saw that Coral drew the process of the development in a very simple map; although the key factor of achieving agreement was identified as “Meetings”, Coral could not make explicit how these meetings should be organized so that agreement could be achieved. One reason may be that although Coral knew how to do it, this skill was so subtle and related to cultural, ethical and political issues in the

organization that she could not identify all those key points in language and then describe their relations in a few feedback diagrams.

If we recall Alton's argument that "*so on the surface, the process is clean, but different people with different stakeholders' interests, eh, you know, could interfere*", it may be easier for us to make sense of why Coral felt hard to draw casual loop diagrams to describe the structure behind the meetings. According to Coral's claim ("*normally the difficulty is matching what the staff want to do with what is marketable*"), I infer that the complexity in developing a new programme did not exist in the structure of the decision process, but in dealing with the different stakeholders' assumptions. Since SD assumes that participants share a common purpose and similar interests, it cannot be a good approach to analyze this problem

Secondly, in the topic of 'life history and identity construction', time complexity may be the main difficulty of applying SD approach. Jackson (2003) points out that "it is regarded as impossible to mathematically model the relationship between all the variables that 'on the surface' appear to be involved in what system does. You can, however, determine the most important structural aspects that lie behind system viability and performance." (p21) However, "determine the most important structural aspects" had become an impossible task when Coral reviewed her life history, because her identity kept changing in the past fifty years; and in different phases the key factors and patterns of her identity construction may be different; and the changes in patterns and their causes may be subtle and imperceptible. SD is good at dealing with the complexity of systems caused by a large number of subsystems and their interactions, but not at dealing with the complexity brought by elapse of time and changes that happened in that long period of time. If we can identify those patterns of identity construction one by one, and the related variables of each pattern, then SD may be a good approach to compare these patterns and analyze the problems existing in them; however, we cannot even complete the first step of identifying variables.

I am not arguing that SD cannot be applied in this problem situation, but arguing that multiple tools may be needed to support each other when dealing with a problem consisting more than one kind of complexity. SD was good at dealing with structure complexities while SAST and CSH could deal with different complexities in participants; and there are some other tools that could be used to analyze time complexity. So if we could identify the complexities existing in a problem first, and

then choose tools to do analysis, it would be much easier to understand the situation and can bring the advantages of different approaches fully into play. If it is hard to identify all the complexities in the beginning, along with the analyzing process, practitioners could consider introducing other approaches to deal with newly emerged complexities.

In summary, working with Coral made me reflect on the design and conduct of the research project. It is recognized that more attention should be paid to the practical limitations brought by the philosophic assumptions of systems approaches. I also decided to take more flexible tactics in applying these approaches, to figure out some way to overcome the negative influence brought by their limitations. The way I dealt with the time complexity will be discussed in the stories of Berta and Delilah.

5.6 Summary

In June 2012, Coral left the organization and found a new job in a higher position. It seems that Coral had successfully reformed her identity to adapt to organizational change; and during this process, some development was achieved in her work identity which helped her achieve further development in her career.

When reviewing the journey with Coral, a few themes are summarized:

Table 5-2 Themes derived from Coral's stories

Coding Number	Themes	Category
5.2.2.1	CSH can provoke and assist self-reflection which may catalyze identity reformation	CSH; Mechanism
5.2.2.2	Organizations should not be excluded from the process of work identity construction; otherwise, the boundary judgements made by individuals on their roles may be challenged by organizations that hold different values	Practical Implications; Mechanism
5.3.2.1	When the willingness of participants is problematic, SAST needs to be applied in a more flexible way.	SAST
5.3.2.2	SAST is a useful approach to assist reflection; people are encouraged to consider different possibilities of their work plan by revealing others' assumptions.	SAST
5.3.2.3	SAST may be a useful tool for identity regulation; it can help organizations understand their employees better.	SAST
5.3.2.4	If people feel they need to develop their identities further, it is a signal that they may get bored on current roles.	Match
5.4.2.1	Lean can challenge people's approach to problem-solving, assisting reflection on how to work.	Lean

5.4.2.2-1	Action was the stage of identity display. Lean could be a good approach not only to improve the effectiveness of actions, but also to help people display their identities effectively.	Definition; Lean
5.4.2.2-2	SAST can help people to identify different boundary judgments while lean can assist people linking those judgments with their routine work activities.	SAST; Lean
5.4.2.2-3	Analyzing people's work activities with Lean provides a good approach to interpret people's work identity construction.	Lean
5.4.2.3-1	Doing reflection with a critical friend may be useful for people to link theory and practice, because it can bring in new perspectives.	Project
5.4.2.3-2	The role of the researcher was redefined: Researcher was not just a listener of managers' stories; researcher could also create stories with managers through joining in the critical discussion.	Project
5.5.2	A practical problem may contain multiple complexities; therefore more attention needs to be paid to the practical limitations brought by the philosophic assumptions of systems approaches, and flexible tactics should be adopted when applying these approaches	Project

In the next chapter, a reflective journey of a middle manager will be discussed; because of her age, position and experiences, this journey may be a little different from the previous two.

6 Berta's Stories

Berta engaged in the intervention project deeply; we held nine meetings in total, because Berta felt that she needed enough time to fully understand and reflect the application of the systems approaches. She consistently devoted herself to the reflection process and completed all the worksheets timely. Besides, Berta was promoted during the conduction period of the project, which provided a good chance to observe her identity construction process.

In this section, five stories of Berta will be presented; one focuses on the life history of Berta, and the other four about the four systems approaches' applications.

6.1 Story 1: Berta's Profile

6.1.1 Story and Findings

Friday, May 6 th , 2011	My annotation
<p>6.1.1.1 Background and Previous Work Experience</p> <p>Berta started her career in the flame retardant industry as a researcher (1996-1998), which was valued highly by Berta. But the first job was a temporary one, so even through Berta loved it, she had to move to another company, working as a quality director; she did it for 18 months, then resigned and moved to H city in March 1999. Berta said:</p> <p><i>“It wasn’t great, and it wasn’t horrible. But you know, I thought I could do different things and better things. So it’s my choice, change.”</i></p> <p>In the next 12 years, Berta worked in H University, just moving from one position to another. Firstly she worked in the engineer department; after five years, Berta felt she wanted a more settled and permanent job, so she came to the Business School in July 2004. She worked as a postgraduate manager for just six months, and then the School decided Berta’s skills were more suitable for the position of information & systems manager, so she moved to her current position. Berta also commented on her current job:</p> <p><i>“It’s quite hard, quite labour intensive... but interesting... I like to help people, making their life easier.”</i></p>	<p>Berta’s previous work experience was reviewed.</p>

Berta also presented her style of doing this job:

“You’ve got to think, you know, how I can do these things, finding a different way to solve that problem; that’s what I like to do the problem-solving, you know, making things better rather than, you know, some people just plod on, do things (in) the same way all the time. That’s not my style; I like to improve on these, make things streamlined.”

Berta thought her background had some influence on her current approach:

“...because I have done a chemistry degree, and you have to be organized and plan things, and plan your priorities of everything. So my skills as an administrator have come from it... I just like to make everything to be the best it can, you know, the most efficient way... I always ask... ‘there must be an easier way than this’.. And that’s just my mindset.”

6.1.1.2 Incident 1: Learn To Stand Up For Yourself

Many key incidents were identified by Berta; the first one was about what Berta learned in her current position:

“I suppose some jobs I have done are more challenging than others, I suppose it gives you the ability of how much you can handle and how much you can take...It makes you, I suppose, learn when to stand up for yourself, not always say ‘Yes’.

I used to be a “Yes” person. Now at work, you are asked to do things with people, certainly the academics around here, everybody expects everything (to be done) very quickly...you have got to say: ‘When would you like this back?’ The answer is always ‘Tomorrow’. You know, there’s nothing unfair about asking ‘When do you really need it back?’ Sometimes, you then find it out that actually they don’t need it for two weeks, for the deadline, in which case you could give yourself a lot more, you know, better time to do it, and you know, pace yourself better and do a better job ...”

6.1.1.3 My Scientist Heart

When I asked Berta “Is there anything make you re-examine your

Berta’s current job was hard but interesting.

Berta had developed her own way of doing the job.

The embedded logic of this approach was developed in her previous life.

Berta learned that she needed to recognize her own capabilities, and stand up for herself. It was a reflection on herself and on the approach of dealing with human relations.

approach to be a manager?” She told me another reflection she had made:

“When you are first going to management, it’s very hard to know how to handle different personalities... You could tell someone “you are lazy”, but other people you couldn’t... So there’s probably one point, maybe I’m a bit direct, my scientist heart; so I’m very factual based, so now I’m getting a bit more fluid... seeing positive not just how I address things. But people management skills were just developed with experience, I suppose.”

And then Berta revealed that it was working in H University that triggered this change:

“Teaching was completely new to me... The way you manage industry was very direct, that was a very male-dominated environment, who straight talking ‘This needs to be done’ or ‘This is how we do it, let’s do it’. Well, as you come in to education, it’s very much more a laid-back style... in university, you have to, everything takes so much longer, so I think you become more “laid-back”, so I think everybody becomes kind of, “Oh, would you mind doing this?” ...you have to learn and you learn that pretty quickly. So you think it’s just softly softly, um, focusing on the positive, making sure you get best results from people.”

6.1.1.4 The Forthcoming Change

We also talked about the forthcoming organizational change, and Berta was a little worried about it:

“I honestly don’t know where my job will be. We are all in the same feeling, we don’t know what the new dean will do; very much in the University’s history, people would come in, they just want to change it, they want to do it in their way.”

And Berta hoped her main work (managing the workload system) would not be greatly influenced by the change:

“Which (I) hope this person does, hope they leave it a year at least and then decide to make change... I think it would be silly to get rid of it (the workload system) completely since it has worked well for so many

Berta was still learning about the people management skill. She found some of her beliefs did not work well in this aspect.

One reason may be that educational institutions have different discourses: the ‘laid-back style’.

Berta’s worries and expectation for change.

<p><i>years, but who knows; they have the authority to do what they want.”</i></p> <p>But Berta still had a positive attitude to the possible change:</p> <p><i>“So if the workload system didn’t continue as the same way, and that my job would go back to be more about research rather than supporting the research within the business school.</i></p> <p><i>I think it is just a change, I don’t think it would be worse. Eh, may be, then, I also like to change, so in that aspect it might be nice to do something different, I have done this for six years now. So, I could quite happily change.”</i></p>	<p>Berta’s plan for dealing with the possible change in her work.</p>
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6.1.2 Discussion

Berta was the youngest manager in this project; and she had not been formally promoted as a middle manager when we first met. Although Berta had spent 12 years in H University, her three years’ work and previous study in chemistry had great influence on her, forming her ‘scientist heart’, ‘direct style’ and her pursuit of ‘the most efficient way’. Berta needed to quickly adapt her work identity to fit the ‘laid-back’ discourse in the H University, and she also learned to stand up for herself when dealing with work relations; but Berta still felt that there were many skills she need to learn in her further management practices.

In order to assist Berta in learning from her work practice, a few systems approaches were introduced to provide her with some different perspectives in analyzing and reflecting those management problems that happened in her work. These learning stories are presented in the following sections.

6.2 Story 2: Can My Voice Be Heard?

Berta also applied CSH in Mode 2 and 3; and some new themes emerged from our discussion. The discussion and the themes identified will be presented in this section.

6.2.1 Story and Findings

<p>Friday, November 11, 2011</p> <p>When CSH was introduced to Berta, she found it was inspiring but hard to link with her work:</p> <p><i>“It does provoke you to think about your own job, but I also found it</i></p>	<p>My annotation</p> <p>CSH gave Berta a</p>
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quite hard to do; purely because, I don't know, just trying to think of a specific problem then relating it into that., just, don't know...it did make me think, make me sit to reflect on the job, which we don't always get chance to do on a day-to-day basis".

In order to resolve the problem, we chose the "Timetable review" which Berta was working on, to be analyzed in our discussion with the CSH approach.

6.2.1.1 Woo, Maybe That Was Why It Did Not Happen

The first step that Berta took was to identify the clients and purpose of this decision. She thought "Staff & Students of H Business School" were her clients, and the purpose was to get "Accurate Timetables". Berta then explained the situation: the Student Administration Services (SAS) operated the timetable system which was used by all the schools of the university. Each year, SAS collected feedback from different schools to update the system and make improvement. This year, the deputy dean was responsible for H Business School's feedback, but it was Berta who operated it.

Berta said that her main goal was to achieve "Reduction in queries relating to timetables", and she had got some idea about what amendments should be made. But when I asked her, "I believe you have done a lot of work and analysis, but how could you make sure the suggestion that you made would be taken and implemented in the system updating?" Berta said,

"How do I make sure it happens? En, that's a very good question, because it didn't happen last year."

Then Berta thought for a while and told me her solution:

"I think this time it's going to be through regular feedback or update; so (I'll) make sure we keep in touch with people to make sure things are actually progressing, they are actually doing it..."

I felt Berta did not consider what were the necessary resources for the decision, so I questioned her again: "Yes, but I'm still not very sure, when you make some good report to the university, how will they use it?" Berta told me,

"I don't know; I hope they do use it. I hope Coral will argue on our behalf, I hope they do use it, that the relevant heads of different areas that need to be involved take it seriously... but the way they divide it makes it hard to see who can take the point forwards...So it's very

chance to sit down and reflect on the job; but she felt some difficulty in linking it with a specific problem.

The context of the decision.

The stakeholders in this decision.

SAS was identified as the "decision-maker", and Berta was "expert" and "affected".

Through my critical questioning, Berta realized that her influence on the decision-making process was limited.

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<p><i>complicated, so, woo, maybe that's why it didn't happen.</i></p> <p><i>Because they don't have overall responsibility for that division, if you like...so it doesn't involve a lot of cooperation from different places. So it needs to be a top-down operation to cover all the different areas. That obviously is how it's done at the end of the day..."</i></p> <p>After Berta's reflection, the problem situation was made explicit; it was the stakeholders' complexity that caused the failure of last year's review. And we continued to focus on what Berta could do in the decision process this year. Berta hoped to promote one improvement this year: linking the workload system and the timetable system. Berta believed this improvement could save a lot of time for the staff, and decrease mistakes in students' timetables. Then I asked Berta if she had considered the possible influence of the improvement on others. Berta said:</p> <p><i>"(If the improvement could be made) the system would be easier for all of us."</i></p> <p>But then Berta realized, there were some other people who may have different opinions:</p> <p><i>"The hard thing is for the cooperating people. It is up to them to make the system talk to the timetable system."</i></p> <p>Then I asked Berta how she would communicate with these people to make the improvement happen. Berta said,</p> <p><i>"I may use the emotional tactics: 'You really let me down last year, don't let me down again.' You know, see if that works. But yeah, we do talk to them, but they are so pressured from other commitments that, eh, you know, they just didn't do it...there must be from a higher perspective, from their bosses to them, make sure it's a priority for them to do that... "</i></p> <p>I also asked Berta if she had talked with people in other departments who may also be influenced by the improvement. Berta found she had never thought about this problem and thought my question was "a very good point".</p> <p>Finally, Berta wrote in the worksheet:</p> <p><i>"Be aware of the bigger picture i.e. outside of the H Business School"</i></p> <p>6.2.1.2 I Am Safe Now</p> <p>We also talked about Berta's current job, to update my information from our pre-change meeting.</p>	<p>resources were controlled by different people, and nobody could take the point forward.</p> <p>Berta hoped to promote one improvement this year.</p> <p>She did not realize that there may be other opinions at first.</p> <p>Some other affected were identified, and Berta started to consider how to manage them.</p> <p>CSH helped Berta broaden her view.</p>
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<p>Berta's main work was still "planning & recording workload model", but now she needed to do some new jobs, including "timetabling, reception, placements, and appraisals". Actually, at this moment, Berta had started to manage a team of staff, but not got promoted formally. Berta told me the threat to her job had disappeared:</p> <p><i>"We are now going under an administrative review within the business school... the new dean has been tasked by the central university, see what roles we do, see whether we duplicate any roles in the business school and the central, which means workload doesn't get duplicated...So now, I'm actually not under threat. The dean actually wants to review the workload..."</i></p> <p>And Berta mentioned that she may be promoted in next year, and she was preparing for it:</p> <p><i>"It would be nice; fingers crossed. And I think having this review and looking at your own purpose, I could find something to do as a part of the administrative review. My line manager said to me: 'Look at your role, look at the way you'd like to take it, look how you can direct it.' So one of my things to do is looking at the strategic plan for the university to see whether Workload actually has a purpose within that or not; you know a part of 'the big picture'."</i></p> <p>When talking about the promotion, Berta mentioned the role model:</p> <p><i>"I know one of your questions is 'Do I have a role model?' No, I can't think why you use a role model; because the job I do, I never find anybody else who does a similar role...I suppose a role model is somebody who you should follow exactly, that way, yeah? Within the school, I can't find anybody whose style I should adopt...and none in the University..."</i></p> <p>It was interesting that Berta did not feel she needed a role model when she was facing to a promotion; she may have her own way to adapt to her new role; and I may pay more attention to this issue in later meetings.</p>	<p>The statement of Berta's work: she had not updated her work emphasis although now she had a team to manage.</p> <p>The threat had gone.</p> <p>Because of the forthcoming promotion, Berta found it was necessary for her to do some reflection and find a way to interpret and play her new role.</p> <p>Berta did not have any role model when she was trying to reform her work identity.</p>
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6.2.2 Discussion

Two themes emerged from the applications of Mode 2 and 3 respectively, and they are presented in the following sections.

6.2.2.1 The Emancipation of View

Different from Alton and Coral, Berta represented the role of 'expert' in this decision process; and she may also be the 'affected' people who had been offered a chance to participate in the decision making process. That situation provided a new perspective to evaluate the usability of CSH for personal reflection. Berta's knowledge and views were obtained in her work: She took charge of reception issues and the workload system, so she knew there were many students who came to the reception to complain mistakes in their timetables. Berta thought the problems were caused by the workload system and the timetable system being out of phase, and then she proposed her scheme.

However, Berta's knowledge and solution were all concentrated on her work field; she did not consider much about other stakeholders' assumptions. Of course she knew them in practice (about who were involved) and also in theory (when she read the introduction to CSH); but until I questioned her in the meeting, she had not linked them together. That is the gap between theory and practice. Therefore it is argued that in order to achieve better decisions as CSH expects, it is the view of people that should firstly be emancipated. Unless the affected people can see 'the big picture', they cannot fight for themselves effectively. If they can see things from a more systemic way then they can make stronger argument and let their voice be heard in the decision process.

For example, after our critical discussion, Berta realized she had to make further effort to influence the decision-making process; she also started to reflect on the reason for last year's failure.

To some degree Berta's case provides a clue for answering those questions asked by critics of CSH, such as "why should the involved bother to take account of the view and interests of those who are affected but not involved?", "which class, group or agency has the power, will and interest to bring about a rational society in which the better argument wins through?"(Jackson, 2003, 227).

Alton's case made me feel that that "values and beliefs are related to the political and economic aspects of the totality" and "power, deriving from the very structures of society, determines that certain ideologies dominate at particular times" (Jackson, 2003)(p227), but Berta's experience made me realize that not all the decisions were dominated by the power relations; this case fitted more to a 'pluralist' assumption. Even

in a 'coercive' context, the affected people could also emancipate themselves if they have got emancipation on their view.

CSH may be a great approach to provide practitioners with a framework to make a systemic review and broaden their view. However the difficulty is that people cannot make sense directly from the theory, they need examples and critical friends to assist them in linking specific problems and the 'big picture'.

6.2.2.2 Role Model and the Newly Created Role

Berta had already started to play a new role before this meeting. Although she had not got promotion formally, she had done some work contained in the new role: the timetabling, reception, placements, and appraisal issues.

So Berta was experiencing the role transition; but she had not yet updated her identity formally; and the workload management was still seen as the main function of her role. On the other hand, the identity work was already starting to some degree; and the way Berta did it was by looking for the possible link between the workload management and the strategic plan for the university; and I infer that she did this to relocate herself in the organization, to assist herself in making sense of her new role. The new jobs were not mentioned a lot in our discussion; one reason may be that Berta was still trying to make sense of them, and had not incorporated them into her work identity.

An interesting finding was that Berta had never had a role model and did not prepare to find one in the period of role transition. This finding does not match up with previous studies. For example, Pratt (2000) reveals that Amway helps its new distributors to adapt to their roles by asking them to establish relationships with mentors. Ibarra (1999) studies a group of professionals in transition to senior roles; and indicates that professionals' adaptation starts by observing role models to identify potential identities. However, in this case, Berta thought she could not find anyone whom she would like to follow. One speculation is that the new role that Berta will play had just been created or had not been set up (according to Berta's talk she needed to bring things together by herself); therefore nobody knew how to play it. This was quite different from the cases that Pratt (2000) and Ibarra (1999) study, where those positions are well developed professional roles that most senior staff in the organizations had played before. And because the role was newly created, Berta needed to define it gradually through interactions with other people; and she also needed to find a coherent narrative set for

all those sub-jobs she did currently to help herself construct her own work identity. What she did now was reinterpreting the workload management, trying to see it as a part of the big picture. She may need more time to interpret other parts of her work and then define her new role and complete her identity reconstruction.

Berta's way of reconstructing her work identity to adapt to the new role will be discussed further in Story 4. Moreover in the stories of Delilah (see Chapter 7), also had similar experiences in creating a new role by herself.

6.3 Story 3: I Would Take the Leadership Role If Nobody Else Stands Out

SAST was used by Berta to surface and evaluate the assumptions within her preferred timetable updating plan (Mode 2), and to reflect on her plan of 'using workload more strategically' which aims to renew her work identity (Mode 3). Her experience and themes from her experience are addressed in this section.

6.3.1 Story and Findings

Thursday, November 24, 2011	My annotation
<p>6.3.1.1 I Would Take the Leadership Role</p> <p>Berta decided to continue reviewing her timetable updating plan (Mode 2), which has been analyzed two weeks ago with the CSH approach. Under the framework of SAST, Berta made a list of the people who may be influenced by her plan and who may have influence on the implementation of her plan. The results were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Timetabling in Student Administration Services</i> • <i>Academic Information System (AIS) Programmers in corporate Systems</i> • <i>Deputy Dean</i> <p>Berta mentioned that she learned a lot in this step; she said, <i>"I'm a quite often, quite individual character, eh, I like to think I can do everything by myself, I know it isn't true. That is one thing I found made me think, you know, I should have thought of full joint-alliances, get people on side and get their support, you know; it not just who see anything, you know, a collective party that supports my argument would</i></p>	<p>The "Workload update" project continued to be analyzed.</p> <p>Three groups of stakeholders were identified.</p> <p>Berta reflected on her approach to problem-solving, and realized the power of 'full joint-alliances'</p>

<p>decided to analyse her plan of making ‘workload to be used more strategically’ to make this plan more feasible.</p> <p>Firstly, Berta identified three groups of stakeholders who may be affected by or may influence her plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Heads of Subjects</i> • <i>Deans / Deputy Deans</i> • <i>Programme Leaders / Module Leaders”</i> <p>She explained that “Heads of Subjects” would be affected because “using workload more strategically” meant she would influence the workload assignment of learning and teaching, which was currently overseen by the deputy dean and operated by Heads of Subjects and programme leaders.</p> <p>Berta thought she could provide those programme leaders with much more useful information, especially on how the teaching could be delivered; for example she can build some model to analyse the correlations between teaching types and the feedback of students.</p> <p>Then Berta tried to make assumptions about these stakeholders:</p> <p><i>“Heads of Subjects – Positive would be it would save their time, negative it would devolve responsibility</i></p> <p><i>Deans / Deputy Deans – Not an administrator’s job / responsibility</i></p> <p><i>Programme / Module Leaders – Gives them responsibility / more ownership of their programme / Module”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dean</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Programme Leaders</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Head of Subject Groups</p> <p>After the above analysis, Berta identified something she needed to do to implement her plan:</p> <p><i>“Talk to Head of Subject Groups and programme leaders to find out if</i></p>	<p>Berta developed a new work plan and the embedded value was ‘making it a part of the big picture’</p> <p>Again, related stakeholders were identified, and their assumptions were exposed.</p> <p>Based on the analysis, two tasks were identified to</p>
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<p><i>they would support the plan for change and ask them for arguments as to why it would be better but also any negative responses that I might receive.”</i></p>	<p>make the plan more robust.</p>
<p>Finally, Berta commented on her use of the SAST approach “‘The graph was a good visual representation and aid for deciding what you could do with the assumptions”.</p>	<p>Berta thought highly of the SAST approach.</p>

6.3.2 Discussion

6.3.2.1 The Distance between Cause and Resolution

In the case of updating timetable system, I noticed that the cause of the problem and the difficulty in resolving the problem were quite different.

Based on Berta’s comments, two reasons for the problematical timetable system were identified: (1) The system was provided by the external servicer, so people in the H University were still trying to learn and update it. (2) The system was related to other parts of the information systems, and its poor linkage could cause problems. Therefore, the updating of the systems was actually resolving a systems problem caused by ‘structure’ complexity in the computer systems.

However, the difficulty in resolving the problem was not centered on the ‘structure’, but on the stakeholder complexity. Berta mentioned that there were too many managers involved who took charge of one related issue, at the same time nobody took the overall responsibility to push the issue forwards. Therefore last year’s updating failed.

SAST may not resolve ‘structure’ complexity directly, but it can be a good approach to assist managers in interpreting stakeholder complexity. However, Berta used the SAST in reverse of its philosophy: she argued that we did not need to involve everybody in the decision process, instead we should only keep the important stakeholders involved (while the SAST emphasizes that “the only way we can get near to a view of the whole system is to look at it from as many perspectives as possible” (Jackson, 2003, 139). Berta’s opinion may be caused by the difficulty in achieving ‘integration’ in dealing with complex systems problems (especially ‘structure’ complexity). In ideal situation, synthesis may be achieved easily through dialectical debates; however, in practice, its cost may be higher than the benefits the ‘full participation’ could bring. Therefore only involving important stakeholders in the decision process could help practitioners obtain a satisfying rationale with an acceptable cost.

SAST's argument is sound, encouraging and orientating a participative problem management style is an effective way for management development; however this style does not fit with each problem situation; sometimes fast decision-making is more important than best decision-making. Therefore, we should use this approach more flexibly; following it in spirit rather than the formally.

6.3.2.2 The Combination of CSH and SAST

In this study, SAST is used as the following and supplementary approach of CSH; realization of this combination is also the reason of introducing these four systems approaches in such an order. CSH shared some common ideas with the SAST: both of them emphasize the involvement of different stakeholders and the exposing of their assumptions. Besides, SAST can provide some supportive tools for the CSH. Flood and Jackson (1991) accuse CSH of having few well-tried methods and tools to support its users to realize its emancipatory interest. In this study, doing reflection with the CSH made Berta recognize that she needed to make some effort to implement the change that she hoped to, but at that time she did not form a systemic idea about how to facilitate this change. By introducing the SAST, Berta could think further: who are the most important people I should consider? Is there any other information I should get to understand the problem situation better? It is in the stage of applying SAST that Berta made a specific plan for herself, about what she could do to get more power to influence the decision-making process.

6.3.2.3 The Power of Systems' Thinking

Some CSH researchers argue that "the witnesses need only state their concerns in everyday language since the 'polemical employment of reason' in itself will be enough to reveal that the social systems designs of the involved are based on challengeable assumptions" (Jackson, 2003, 220). Ulrich claims that although the affected may lack expertise and objectivity, it would not cause any difficulty; because all designers cannot justify themselves without boundary judgements that are cynically or unreflectively (In fact, if designers and affected citizens come together and make a debate on their boundary judgements, they would find out that it becomes a kind of value judgements about what assumptions should influence the plan and what outcomes are desirable; for value judgements, designers are no better off than the affected citizens)(Ulrich, 1983, reprinted in 1994, Ulrich, 2003). However, these arguments are based on an assumption that all the problems are caused by presuppositions of the systems designers, therefore

the best solution should be to reshape and redirect the purposeful systems by involving the affected people in the decision process.

As mentioned above, 'simple-coercive' is only one kind of context assumptions; it does not fit with all problem situations. In other contexts, such as the 'complex-pluralist' context that Berta was facing, it is important for people to make strong arguments in the decision process; because none scheme in itself will be enough for justification. Besides, even in a 'coercive' context, if the affected people could understand the participants' complexity and then direct their own behaviours in a more effective way, they could fight for themselves rather than waiting to be empowered by others, because they cannot expect that in every decision there will be someone to emancipate them.

Therefore, it is argued that introducing systems thinking to those affected people may be a better way to apply CSH. If people's thinking could be emancipated, they will use the tool they learned to pursue 'fairness' by themselves; and they could also contribute their intelligence in other complex systems decisions.

6.3.2.4 Identity Construction and the Systems Approaches

About Berta's personal development, we could see that some new progress was achieved in this stage. Berta now felt the responsibility to stand out and take the leadership role to make the change happen; and about her own work, she was trying to make her plan of "strategic use of the workload model" more feasible. All these phenomena indicate that Berta now did not just play the role that the organization gave her, she was trying to re-define her work role, and to some degree create a new one; thus her work identity was reforming now.

Although CSH and SAST did not provide direct help to Berta during this process, as mentioned above, they may emancipate her thinking, reminding her not just to focus on her routine work but see her job as a part of the whole systems. After these reflections, Berta showed more commitment and enthusiasm to her job and the organization.

Another thing that needs to be noted is that crafting one's identity is often an interdependent rather than an independent process. Bartel and Dutton (2001) point out that "the identity work results in a social fact that is accepted by all participants involved in the interaction" (p128). Therefore people's claiming of their identity and others' granting it are both necessary. If the granting is absent, then people cannot complete their performance and end the identity construction process. In this way, CSH

and SAST may be useful tools to assist people’s identity construction, because they could assist people to analyze those related stakeholders in their identity construction process, and then obtain the necessary external validation more actively and artfully.

6.4 Story 4: A Reflection That Changed My Work Immediately

Lean was used by Berta to rearrange the work assignment of her team (Mode 2) and to review her work role (Mode 3). Her experience and the results of data analysis are presented in this section.

6.4.1 Story and Findings

Wednesday, December 07, 2011	My annotation
<p>6.4.1.1 With the Same Team, We Could Work Better</p> <p>Before the meeting, Berta told me she thought it was harder to apply the lean approach in administrative processes than in manufacturing processes, but she wanted to try to use the lean approach in her work (Mode 2). The work assignment of her team was identified as the problem needed to be analysed. Berta told me some academic staffs complained that they could not get support easily; sometimes they had to go to see two or even three administrators to complete a task. It was also hard for these administrators to manage their work. For example, Berta said,</p> <p><i>“We also had people that were doing too many things at the same (time); one lady did all the research seminars that may come all at once, so that poor lady had a greater workload in one minute than a day’s workload of someone else.”</i></p> <p>Then we tried to apply lean to guide us to rearrange the work of the team. Berta firstly defined the main aim was to review staff workload levels and responsibilities. Then she identified seven key business processes of her team and the seven staffs’ responsibilities. Thirdly, Berta linked each process with related staffs and their performances. Based on this analysis, Berta summarized some problems and their causes:</p> <p><i>“(1) There were three key business processes which are related with each other, but these processes were split across three staff (each one</i></p>	<p>Berta always pursued ‘the most efficient way’, but she had never thought the lean approach could be used in the administrative management which was also a part of her work.</p> <p>Problems in the system were identified.</p>

takes charge of one process)... And this arrangement made administrators unable to define their responsibilities clearly.

(2) Even Reception management is a simple business process which could be done well by one person, but when it was covered by three people together, it became a nightmare... because nobody liked to do the reception.

(3) Even in total the workload of the ‘Organisation of Research Seminars’ was all right for one staff to run... but because it had peaks and troughs... SJD found it was very hard to manage her time.”

Through the reflection under the framework of lean, Berta re-arranged the workload for staff in her team. And she said:

“Overall this move gave steady flow of work plus peaks and troughs to each person making it more manageable.”

6.4.1.2 The Ambiguous New Identity

Then we moved on to the second topic: Berta’s work identity. Berta felt she had already made a lot of effort to make her work more efficient, and she showed me many examples, such as the management of fee processes, and her redesign of the worksheet used in the workload system, which saved a lot of time.

Based on Berta’s talk, I felt that she emphasized the efficacy of each activity, rather than the general efficiency and effectiveness of her work. Then I tried to question her from these aspects (Mode 3 of Lean application). The first question I asked was: “Do you know what the main goal of your work is?” Berta told me,

“It’s hard really. I suppose the main goal is changing really. I suppose my main goal originally was being to do the workload systems... so that would be my main goal previously... But now I don’t know any more, because I’m managing a team of people, is that more about my responsibility? Because it takes a lot of time. And I do feel the responsibility of making sure people are doing their job correctly, that we are not getting a lot of complaints about people, um, because we did...”

It seemed that Berta was making sense of her new role, and tried to incorporate the new work identity implied by those new functions into her work identity.

And Berta also explained her feelings in dealing with this transition:

“I have mentioned earlier, if I wanted to get promoted to the next level,

By checking processes against staffs’ responsibilities, some unreasonable arrangements in the system were identified.

Berta felt she should change her main goal, but was still not sure.

I had to fill all those forms in. Again, going through it, this was a nightmare. But, I determined to go through it, giving my role a change, so that's what a senior HR person said to me: 'Go through it since you have already taken those responsibilities'...r"

In this process, Berta felt some challenge in doing her new job. She said,

"A lot more responsibilities... it was very hard work to go from managing nobody to managing seven people. So a lot of work. And they had their roles change, had their own problems; and I helped them sort out their problems.

I have been tasked with teaching somebody else how to use my own systems...Whereas now, I manage them to cooperate in place with myself... when I first did it, I just, 'Oh my god, what the hell have I done, basically.' And we didn't get any support from my own manager, who just, 'Oh, no, you've got to do this', basically, this was the answer. And I got told 'Oh, no, other people in the ground school do the same '...other people, they don't have seven people in four places to manage".

Berta was a little disappointed at getting less support than she needed; she had to find her own way to play the new role. And in this process, she also did not find a role model; one reason may be that she felt less similarity between her own role and others' jobs.

Monday, December 12, 2011 (This is a continuation of the previous meeting)

6.4.1.3 The Value and the Cost

In order to help Berta make sense of her new role, the lean approach was applied.

Based on the reflection made in the last meeting, Berta redefined the main goal of her job:

"To ensure the smooth running of the Business School Services team and the workload from planning through to fees."

Then Berta identified four key activities of her routine work (showed in Table 6-1). This time, managing her team was recognized as one of the most important functions of her role.

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A's feelings about her role transition.

Managing was a new skill for Berta, and she did not get enough support for developing this capability.

Berta redefined her main goal after reflection.

Lean was used to assist Berta review her work activities.

Table 6-1 Berta's reflection on her role

Activity	Time Cost (hours/month)	Emphasis in Management (low, moderate, high)
<i>Fees</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Workload</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>Moderate</i>
<i>Project / Quality</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Management of Staff</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>Moderate</i>

Berta summarized that “workload” was a big part of her job, costing most time; but it was hard to evaluate her performance through this aspect. At the same time, Berta thought that although “Project / Quality” (managing some small projects) only took 20% of her time, it was the easiest way to develop and display her capabilities and skills as a manager. The “fees” was identified as the problematic one, because this activity was very trivial, and much time was wasted on waiting for signatures. Berta hoped to make some improvement in the fees management.

At the end of this meeting, Berta told me now she thought lean approach was also useful for administrative management. She said: *“You can see how you can use it with them, eh, how’s got of placing within management of administrative processes rather than just physical processes. That’s probably what I get.”*

The management emphasis of each job was exposed, and now Berta could use them to interpret her role rather than the time cost.

A problematic activity was identified.

Berta changed her opinion to the lean approach.

6.4.2 Discussion

Three themes emerged from the application experiences of Berta, they are addressed in this section.

6.4.2.1 Review of Lean from the Perspective of CSH: Emancipating Your Staff

In the stories of Alton and Berta, it was argued that Lean was problematic because it tried to resolve systems’ complexity by making full use of human intelligence, which was also very difficult because of the stakeholder complexity. CSH and SAST were identified as useful tools to analyze the stakeholder complexity, but at that time, the specific ways of resolving the complexity had not been made explicit. In this case, Berta’s way of redesigning the work assignment of her team gave me some clue: introducing the CSH approach and emancipating the affected people.

In this case, Berta focused on two issues when applying the lean: providing the academics with better service; and giving each staff member a steady workload to make

it more manageable. Here the interests of academics and team members were both carefully considered. As academics were identified as customers, according to the lean thinking, their needs should be focused on throughout the process. Then why did the internal staff get equal attention?

If we take the view of the CSH, it can be found that the administrative staff were the affected people in this decision process. Their opinions were important for Berta to understand the problem situation; and their understanding and support were critical for the implementation of the new designed systems. Therefore, it was necessary to emancipate the staff in Berta's decision process; and by doing this, the unsolved participants' complexity in the lean thinking found its solution.

6.4.2.2 Review of Lean from the Perspective of Identity: Considering Role Complexity

One improvement made by Berta in this reflection process was clarification of the responsibilities of each person, avoiding overlapping. But this improvement conflicts with some arguments of the lean researchers. For example, Seddon (2005) argues that managers are making a mistake when they assume they should hold their workers accountable for the work they do, because if workers were given more freedom, they would freely act, learn, experiment, and even build relationships with customers; then the system would increase its ability of absorbing variety of customer demand. Jaaron and Backhouse (2010) also claim that the team should share the responsibility for the work so that it could identify the right person to solve a particular problem. Burgers et al. (2000) point out that some outward-facing entities (i.e. help desks, call centres) which are exposed to the environment directly need to be given an organic face to deal with those unpredictable demands; therefore their staff should have more freedom and ownership. However, Berta found that asking three people to cover 'reception' was a nightmare; nobody wanted to do it; and it was also bad to make three staff share three functions.

Then what was the difference between those lean systems and Berta's team? Why was Berta's lean system operated in an adverse manner? One difference I found was that in those previous research studies staff were doing similar work (e.g. staff of the call centre); but in Berta's team, those staff often had more than one function to take care of. For example, the three staff who did 'reception' work, also took charge of issues like

‘running seminars’, ‘supporting academics’, ‘timetabling’. Besides, Berta’s team was founded recently, those staff were adapting to their new roles.

Therefore, individuals in this case were experiencing role transition; and they had to incorporate those different identities implied by their different jobs into their new work identities. For most people, this was a painful process, full of uncertainty and complexity; they needed to make sense of their new work and redefine themselves as members of a new team. What Berta was doing was reducing the role complexity by clarifying their responsibilities, asking them focus on one function rather than two or three.

In lean systems, organizational members are treated as intelligent agents rather than screws of a mechanical system; but little attention had been paid on how people’s intelligence should be treated and developed. Work identity provides a useful lens to understand and develop individuals’ intelligence (like what we found in this case), which is important for Lean research and practice. Besides, the difficulties that cause by role complexity on identity construction should also be more considered in identity research and practice; people who suffer from role complexity may need extra support to develop their work identity and improve work performance.

6.4.2.3 A Created Role, Role Model and Social Validation

In a previous meeting, Berta said that she did not have a role model and would not find one; I could not understand her choice at that time, in this meeting, I got a little sense of her reasoning.

As we mentioned, Berta was building a new team; besides, she took some extra responsibilities first, and then she applied for a higher level position by herself. To some degree, this position was new for both Berta and the organization, because it did not exist before. So it can be said that Berta created a new role rather than accepted one.

So the main difficulty Berta met was how to put all those responsibilities that she was taking together, and then set a coherent narrative set for them. In this process, nobody else had better knowledge than Berta herself. Therefore, a role model was not as important for Berta as for those people who accepted a role which was already existed in the organization structures. In such cases since the functions and meanings had already been given to the role by its previous owners, therefore these seniors could be

chosen as role models by junior people, and then teach them those informal and underlying principles which are not written in position description documents.

Because of the lack of a role model, it was not only hard for Berta to learn potential identities, but also hard to validate her new work identity. Since it is argued that feedback and role model are the main channels to complete the social validating of a new identity (Pratt et al., 2006). Therefore, feedback (i.e. granting on her identity) became more important for Berta, because she had to finish her social validation process through this channel. From this view we could understand why she identified the HR manager as a supporter and complained of her line manager's less support: the HR manager gave her consent while the line manager did not give valid feedback.

Few studies have paid attention to those people like Berta, who go through some untraditional career ladder and create her own role. Berta's case may provide some experience for people who work in some similar situations, such as freelance professions, some senior managers and self-employed people.

In summary, untraditional role transition (i.e. creating a new role) may lead to unusual work identity construction paths; for example, role model may lose its effectiveness in assisting people completing their identity construction, while social validation plays a more important role.

6.5 Story 5: Journey to the Centre of the Earth

Berta used CLD to analyze her fee management work and her own behavior pattern in career development. Her application experience and emerged themes from her experience are discussed in this section.

6.5.1 Story and Findings

Thursday, December 15, 2011	
6.5.1.1 Looking For the Key Point in Drawing Causal Loop Diagram	
As "fee management" was identified as a problematic activity, SD and its tool CLD were used to analyze the problem of this process (Mode 2).	A problematic activity was chosen.
Berta listed three actions contained in the fee process: request is submitted firstly, then approval was obtained for the request, finally a	The procedures of the process were listed.

formal contract was developed and offered to the person who asked to get the fee.

Berta also explained difficulties in each step:

In the Request step: if a new person was hired, the applicant (normally the head of subject) needed to check related HR regulations or laws (i.e. visa issues); besides, the application form needed to be completed accurately. But sometimes people cannot do it, so Berta had to spend extra time to obtain the necessary information.

In the Approval step: too many signatures were required (normally four), and sometimes two or three weeks were spent waiting for a signature.

In Contract step: people in HR and financial offices could not complete the related work on time; they often had other work to do.

Before we started to draw a causal loop diagram for fee management, I asked Berta the aim of doing this analysis. Berta told me the purpose was “obtaining efficiency”, and the core problem was “too much time used”. The next thing we did was looking for the reason. “Delayed response” was thought to be an attitude problem, because people did not give fee management enough priority. About the “incomplete information”, Berta thought it was also because heads of subjects had too much other work to do and would not spend much time in filling the application form.

Then I asked Berta, “I found all those problems were out of your control, what is within your control?” Berta told me they were: “my quick response”, “provide a summary and put documents in order”.

Based on this analysis, a causal loop diagrams was drawn:

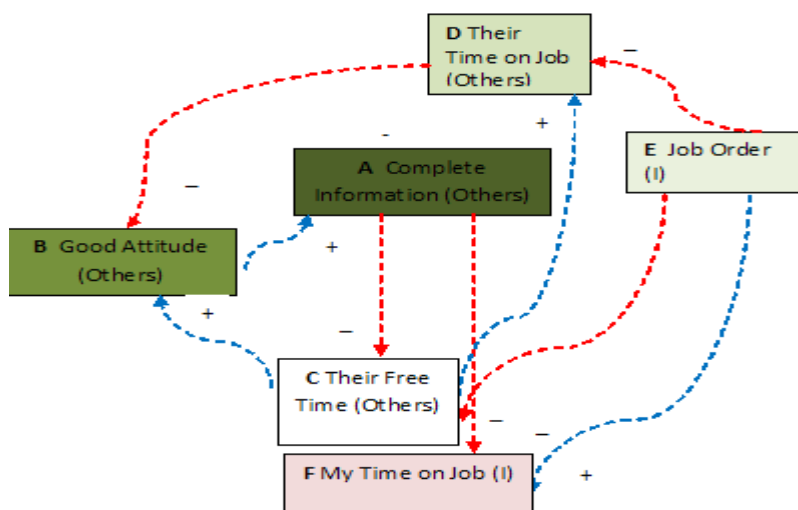


Figure 6-1 A problematic casual loop diagram

Note: Dotted lines indicate strong links between variables.

The problems in each step were identified.

The purpose and causes of problems were further exposed.

A first picture was drawn to present the process. However, it did not make a point.

This picture tells a story: Berta tried to put the application forms in order, so that people in the HR and Finance offices could deal with them easily. That saved a lot of time for them (E->D); therefore people would have a better attitude to the fee work (D ->B), and then would like to provide more information on time (B -> A), and that could save Berta's time (A ->F). At the same time putting forms in order meant that Berta needed to spend more time on work (E->F); so we did not know what were the influence of "Job Order" on "My Time on Job".

This diagram was problematic; it did not help us make sense of what was happening in the fee management process.

Thursday, December 22, 2011

In order to find out what was wrong with our analysis, I started to reflect on our objective; I asked Berta, "What's the objective you want to achieve?" Berta said,

"My goal is to make it quicker... try to reduce the time on response."

Then I checked again, "Whose time do you want to save? Your time, their time (other staff), or the applicant's time?" Berta answered:

"The process time. I try to shorten the process time...It doesn't save anybody's, overall a person's time, as I'm doing it or they are doing it. So we try to shorten the process, try to shorten people's response time, I suppose, rather than the actual physical time."

Based on this reflection, the aim was clearer now; to some degree Berta hoped to achieve lean in this system: shortening its response time and providing better service for its customer. Based on this understanding, a new factor (system efficiency) was put in, and a new diagram was drawn:

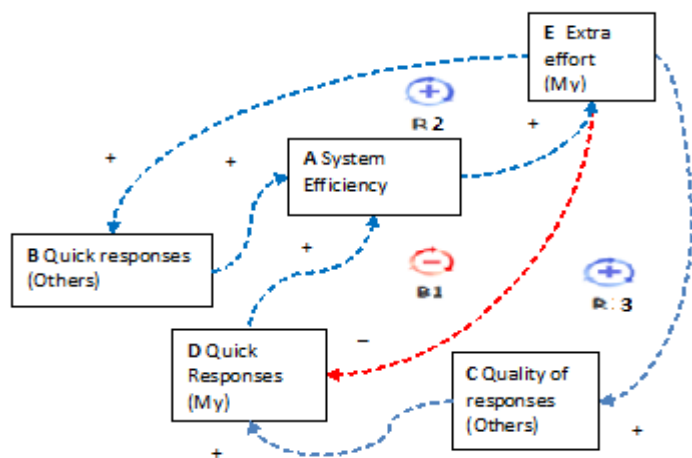


Figure 6-2 The final copy of casual loop diagram of fee management

A further reflection was made, to make explicit the purpose.

A new diagram was drawn based on that reflection.

<p>In this picture, three loops are presented (B1, R2 and R3).</p> <p>The balancing loop (B1, D->A->E->D) tells a simple story: if Berta took further effort on fee process management, she needed to spend more time and then decreased the efficiency of the whole system; and the bad effects may decrease Berta's willingness to make extra effort.</p> <p>The reinforcing loops R2 (E->B->A->E) and R3 (E->C->D->A->E) indicates that if Berta takes extra effort, it is easier for other people to make responses and improve their response quality, so the efficiency of the system increase, and Berta's passion will increase too.</p> <p>Achieving this diagram, Berta and I made an advance in the understanding of the fee process management. The turning point is the identification of the main goal- improving system efficiency. Besides, Berta found that the influence of B1 was much less than R2 and R3; therefore she decided to keep working on to push fee management improvement.</p> <p>6.5.1.2 Looking For Structures Underpinning My Choice</p> <p>Friday, December 23, 2011</p> <p>We had reviewed Berta's life history in our first meeting, and this time we tried to analyze it with CLD (Mode 3).</p> <p>Firstly, we made a brief review of her career again: Berta's first and second jobs were all about doing chemical research, but she liked the first one and hated the second. Then she moved to the H University, did another two jobs before working in her current position: the first one was related to external co-operation; the second was working as an undergraduate officer.</p> <p>Then we focused on the problems that Berta met in her career. I asked, "I believe some of your colleagues in the second company which you worked in liked that job. Why didn't you?" Berta said:</p> <p><i>"... it is just personality, that is, whether it is nice to have something that's, eh, I like something that moves quite fast pace rather than a slow pace."</i></p> <p>I also asked why she liked her third job which was completely different from the first one that she really enjoyed, and Berta said:</p> <p><i>"Yes, I enjoy it. That is a different aspect of my job to be able to go well...Because I also found it quite educational, you were learning ... I found that quite interesting to learn..."</i></p>	<p>The analysis result proved that Berta's action had positive influence, and Berta was encouraged to continue.</p> <p>Berta's career experience.</p> <p>A key step of this analysis: revealing the reason underlying each choice, and the criteria of each judgement on jobs.</p> <p>To some degree Berta's comment on her job was decided by the matching</p>
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And then Berta compared her first and second job again and emphasised that the second one was boring because of its slow pace. Based on Berta's comparison, I summarized my interpretation and checked with Berta: "Is it like, eh, you make a judgement on the company, if it could satisfy you, that's ok, (you may say) 'I will accept your principles and values'. But if it is not so good, it's easy for you to feel bored." Berta said: "Yes, I thought it was boring."

Based on the discussion, a causal loop diagram was drawn to describe Berta's behaviour pattern in treating her jobs.

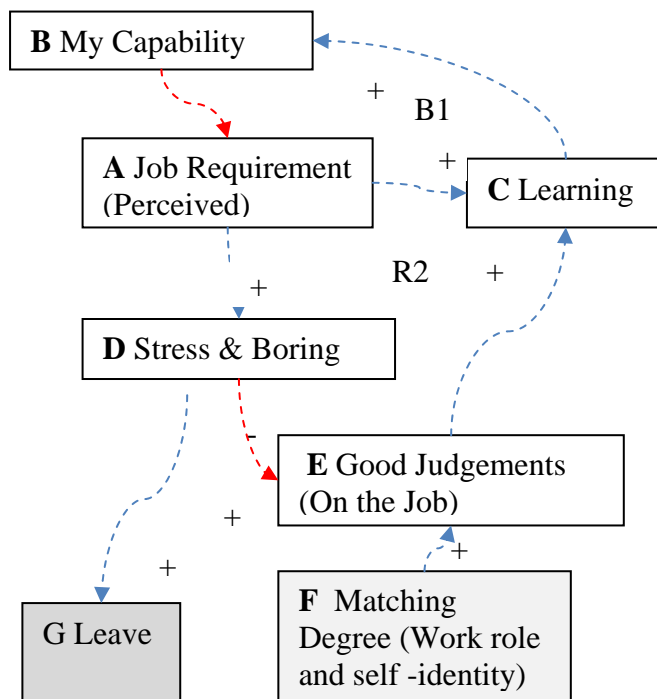


Figure 6-3 PA's behaviour pattern in previous work

During the process of drawing the picture, Berta started to reflect on her own personality, saying:

"I'm a very patient person, but with myself, I'm not. I'm patient; if anybody tries to learn or something else, I would spend all the time I have to help them understand, explain. But in terms of my own personality, I like to be moving, moving, moving, you know, aiming for that, move on to the next job. "

In the diagram shown above, there are three loops, Balancing loop 1 (B1), Reinforcing loop 2 (R2).

B1 (A->C->B->A) shows that each job may have some requirements on one's skills and knowledge, thus Berta needed to learn to adapt to a new job; this learning would increase her capabilities and then she felt

degree of role and self-identity.

Berta's core belief embedded in her self-identity.

Berta's behaviour patterns were summarized and presented in a causal loop diagram.

less demand from the job. This loop was simple and showed the ideal situation; but some important factors were not included.

R2 (C->B->A->D-> E->C) may fit better with Berta's life: when Berta started a new job, having a low opinion of it, then she would not like to learn for or from the organization; therefore she felt it was hard to do the job and the requirements of the organization were unreasonable. Then she would feel stressed and bored, which in turn decreased her judgement on the job. Because this is a reinforce loop, things would become worse and worse, then Berta may decide to leave. This story could be seen as Berta's experience in her second job. On the other side, if the first impression of the company was good, R2 became a reinforcing positive loop, as Berta experienced in her first and third jobs.

The Key point here is the Factor F, the matching degree of role and self-identity; it determines people's initial judgement on a job.

6.5.2 Discussion

Two themes derived from Berta's experience are addressed in this section.

6.5.2.1 Reflect on Your Thinking Pattern

Even through the fee management process was not complex; its analysis still took us much time. In order to draw a useful causal loop diagram, Berta and I held two meetings, each of which lasted 90 minutes.

SD asked people to identify the deeper structural patterns which give rise of the problems" (Jackson, 2003); but it did not provide its users some simple methods to find out these underlying patterns, or there was no simple method to achieve that. The CLD tool we used was actually one method it recommended, but its use still needed quite a lot of skill. Therefore, I felt that the SD may not be a feasible approach for individual users to analyse day-to-day work, unless they are willing to make great effort in mastering the necessary skills.

However, when I reviewed the analysis process we went through, I reached some different conclusions. I felt that making explicit of the purpose the analysis was the milestone in our analysing process. Reflecting on our objective made our focus move from Berta's interest to the system's efficiency and effectiveness, and then our view was widened; it was like 'turning a corner'. Many difficulties we met in drawing the

diagrams were not caused by the complexity of the fee process or the SD approach, but caused by the way we did the analysis and the way we thought about things. To some degree, it was the SD that pushed us to keep thinking and then find out we needed to reflect on our previous thinking pattern first before we moving on. Berta commented on the SD application:

“If I spend time on it (SD), I will meet it (the goal of SD)...It probably makes you dig deeper rather than what you would normally do, like you say, normally you look things on the surface or what you know, don’t you? But this is exploring further; so I wrote on my summary to you, that this is really like mind maps...”

I learned more from the analysis process than from the analysis results; and doing analysis with CLD and keeping in my mind the idea of SD (looking beyond the surface) made me reflect on my ways of thinking. And to some degree, I think the difficulty of ‘looking beyond the surface’, the difficulty of applying SD were concentrating on: how to look beyond your own ways of thinking?

Some SD researchers argue that the power of computers could help people overcome the limitation of their thinking and therefore identify the counter –intuitive aspects of complex systems (Senge, 1999). The computer is powerful, but its performance still depends on the quality of the initial model that people build. Some researchers point out that for complex systems it is hard to build a precise model; and I also met this problem when working with Coral. But now I found the most difficult thing was building the right model rather than building model right. If we cannot overcome the intuitive aspects in our mind, the model we build may obstruct a computer to achieve the goal of the SD.

6.5.2.2 The Match of Role and Identity

If we compare the experiences of Alton and Berta, it can be found that they have great similarity in treating their jobs: they would refuse to take a role which had poor degree of matching with their self-identities. On the other side, if the matching was good, they would love the job, and construct their work identities based on that role.

This finding is a little different from some previous research, which argues that people’s work identities are constructed through interpreting and adapting to their social roles (Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Pratt et al., 2006, Snow and Leon, 1987), although people may take different approaches to achieve that. There are many reasons

for our different conclusions, one reason may be that those studies focus on people's adaptation process for one job, and do not consider the influence of people's life histories; although self-identity is mentioned, none of them try to make explicit what those people's self identities are. Besides, the samples of their studies come from people who successfully complete their role transition, but those people who choose to leave are not included.

My arguments fit more with the findings of some other studies (Pratt, 2000, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) that pay more attention to the failure of identity construction. But the reasons they summarized are quite different. For example, Pratt (2000) points out that if people feel satisfied with their current life, they would refuse to accept the organization's 'brainwashing' and then fail to construct their organizational identity; even if they feel unsatisfied with current situation, if they cannot accept the meaning offered by the organization, they would hate or be ambivalent toward their organizational identity; however Pratt does not explain why people cannot accept the meaning given by organizations. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that it is the conflict between the functions contained by a role that people feel difficult to deal with and makes them struggle in constructing work identities.

Based on the cases of this research, it is argued that most difficulties and failures of work identity construction are caused by the learning problem. Firstly, if the match between role and self-identity is low, people would have a negative attitude to learning for and from the organization (including values and skills), and then the construction of work identity would fail or at least have problems. This situation happened in Berta's second job, Alton's attitude to short classes, Coral's decision to continue as a deputy dean. Even those people who argue that they are satisfied with the current situation in Pratt's (2000) study, to some degree are saying that the new role cannot make them have a better life because it does not match with their expectations embedded in their self-identity; those people who refuse the meaning offered by the organization, may also feel the mismatch between the role and their self-identity, especially in value/ belief aspect. Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) study tells a similar story: a manager who prefers creative style pays more attention to the culture and strategic issues, but refuses to do the operational management which is emphasised by her organization.

Secondly, even if the matching is good, people can still meet other difficulties in their learning process: for example, they cannot develop necessary capabilities required by

their jobs; and then they may emphasize those functions that they are good at and de-emphasize those functions that are difficult for them. This happened in Alton's case of dealing with international issues.

6.5.2.3 The Combination of CIT and CLD Methods

In this study, Berta's life history was reviewed with CIT which helped us summarize some beliefs deeply embedded in her self-definition ('moving, moving, moving'); and in turn, the disclosure of this self-identity was used to explain those behaviours of Berta in her previous work life. Then by introducing CLD, these behaviour patterns were visually presented and helped us further understand Berta's career choice. Compared to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) who conduct 46 interviews, many informal discussions and attended 14 meetings to explore one cell manager's self-identity, we achieved a similar objective in two meetings. Hence the combined use of the CIT and SD approaches may be a powerful tool for exploring identities.

6.6 Summary

Based on the nine meetings with Berta, a number of themes about identity construction were obtained:

Table 6-2 Themes derived from Berta's stories

Coding Number	Themes	Category
6.2.2.1	CSH can assist individuals in making a systemic review on problem situation, which may lead to reflections on work approaches and identities. To achieve this reflection, a critical friend may be helpful.	Definition; CSH
6.2.2.2	Role transition may contain different types and paths, for example, creating a new role. And role models do not work well in these untraditional role transitions.	Mechanism
6.3.2.1-1	An organizational problem may contain multiple complexities; SAST cannot resolve structure complexity directly, but could be used to assist managers in interpreting stakeholder complexity.	SAST
6.3.2.1-2	Sometimes the cost of achieving 'integration' may be higher than the benefits the 'full participation' could bring; therefore SAST should be used more flexibly, following its spirit rather than the form	SAST
6.3.2.2	SAST could be used as a following and supplementary approach of CSH, to assist people in making a specific plan for realizing the change objective generated from CSH analysis.	SAST

6.3.2.3	Emancipating the affected people's thinking could be a possible way to apply CSH. People could use CSH to pursue 'fairness' by themselves; and they could also contribute their intelligence to complex systems decisions	CSH
6.3.2.4-1	People do not just play the roles offered by organizations; they could also re-define their work roles, and to some degree create new roles in the process of work identity construction.	Mechanism
6.3.2.4-2	CSH and SAST could emancipate people's thinking, reminding them to see their jobs as a part of the whole system; so that people may consider more organizational needs when constructing their work identities.	Mechanism ; CSH and SAST
6.3.2.4-3	External validation is necessary for people to complete their identity construction process.	Mechanism
6.3.2.4-4	CSH and SAST are useful tools to assist people analyze related stakeholders in their identity construction processes, and then obtain necessary external validation more actively and artfully.	Mechanism ; CSH and SAST
6.4.2.1	CSH and its idea of emancipating the affected people can be introduced to Lean, for nurturing and developing human intelligence which is critical for the success of lean systems.	CSH and Lean
6.4.2.2-1	The perspective of identity can support Lean practitioners to understand and develop individuals' intelligence.	Identity perspective and Lean
6.4.2.2-2	Role complexity may cause extra difficulty in people's identity construction; extra research attention and practical support should be given to this issue.	Definition; Role; Mechanism
6.4.2.3	Untraditional role transition leads to unusual work identity construction paths, in which role models lose their power while social validation becomes harder but more important.	Role; Mechanism
6.5.2.1-1	The main difficulty of applying SD is how to look beyond people's thinking pattern so that they can build the right model rather than build the model right.	SD
6.5.2.1-2	Applying CLD is useful for making people dig deeper in a problem situation; and if the application process is conducted in a reflective way, people may also have chances to reflect on their ways of thinking; and that is helpful for identity development.	CLD
6.5.2.2-1	The match between role and identity is critical for people's career development. A poor match causes people to refuse a role while good match encourages people to construct an work identity based on that role.	Match; Mechanism
6.5.2.2-2	The match between role and identity includes the match between organizational values and personal beliefs, and the match between skill demand of a role and work capability of people.	Definition; Match; Mechanism
6.5.2.2-3	The mismatch between role and identity can be resolved through learning; while people's learning attitude is influenced by the degree of match between values and beliefs.	Match; Mechanism
6.5.2.3	The combined use of CIT and SD is a powerful tool for exploring identities.	CIT and SD

Berta also made reflections on her applications experiences. She summarized:

- CSH, it helps me to question what I do;
- SAST, it makes me take a new value- “alliance”;
- LEAN, it makes me question my definition of my work identity;
- SD, it makes me question what I do and what I should do.

In the next chapter, another manager, Delilah, who had similar experience to Coral and had developed a path for her career, will be introduced.

7 Delilah's Stories

Delilah was the only person who asked to be involved in the action research project; she had an interest in the issue of reflection, and hoped to conduct a similar intervention project with students.

Because VM joined in the project in November 2011 (when the new dean had worked in the H Business for three months), it was not possible to do a pre-change interview with Delilah. Instead, I tried to learn about her life history and her beliefs during our reflective discussions. In this chapter, we will start with a brief review of Delilah's career, and then the four reflective stories with systems approaches will be presented.

7.1 Profile of Delilah

Delilah came to the business school about seven years ago. Her feeling about this school was expressed as:

"The culture is the same; people are well supported, given opportunities."

Delilah got her first permanent job at the NHS, taking charge of e-learning issues (before that, she had held two short duration jobs); she enjoyed the job. She left it when the work became routine; Delilah hated routine things and was easily bored; on the other hand, she liked development and trying new things.

Delilah had worked in her current position for about four years. She felt that there was a lot of opportunity in her position, because the university and the business school were paying more and more attention to the issue that she was doing. However there was a forthcoming review inside the organization (this review was started in February, 2012 and finished in April, 2012), about administration and management; Delilah was not sure what influence the review would have on her job. At the time of our second meeting at January 13, 2012, the outlook was quite positive for her position, but the next six months would be crucial for the direction about where they would go. Besides, Delilah still could learn new things from her current job, but she was not sure whether she would get bored after a few years. She thought the forthcoming review might bring some new things, but now she needed to wait for the results and then decide her career choice.

About her definition of herself, Delilah said,

“I’m not sure I’d like to be a leader, I like being maybe deputy leader.”

Delilah explained that she had tried to play the leadership role in her previous career (in the NHS), but she was not sure if that was comfortable, because she needed to work extra hours and at weekends. Delilah said she hoped to keep the balance between her expectations in work and in life. Delilah also emphasized that becoming a manager was not her goal or choice, but the results of her development in her career. So she summarized:

“My drive factor is what I do rather than the management part of it.”

After getting some basic understanding of Delilah’s background and beliefs, I tried to encourage Delilah to make reflection on her current work identity and look for potential changes that she could make to improve her management and her current situation. To achieve this, Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) was introduced to Delilah in our first meeting, and our reflective story is presented in the next section.

7.2 Story 1: Is That Really a Waste of Time?

Delilah applied CSH to analyze a problematic project (Mode 2) and her work identity (Mode 3). A few themes were identified from her experience. In the next two sections, our reflective discussions and the results of analysis will be presented respectively.

7.2.1 Story and Findings

Friday, January 13, 2012	My annotation
<p>Delilah chose to use the CSH approach to analyse a project conducted by her recently; and her purpose was to identify:</p> <p><i>“What workshops to organise as part of WoW which students will want to attend and which will be beneficial into their understanding and preparedness for the WoW.”</i></p> <p>(WoW (World of Work Week) was a project organized by Delilah to promote students’ employability; it was held every year).</p> <p>When I read the worksheet (an excerpt is shown in Table7-1), I noticed that Delilah’s understanding of her client may be problematic.</p>	<p>Delilah saw the problem from her own perspective rather than the student’s (client).</p>

Table 7-1 An excerpt of Delilah's worksheet

	<i>Questions in the worksheet</i>	<i>Delilah's answers</i>
Q3	<i>How will the client judge the success/failure of the decision?</i>	<i>Attendance at the event and feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the event.</i>

I thought her clients, the students, would not judge the decision according to attendance; it was Delilah who used this criterion. I asked Delilah if she noticed this problem. Delilah said,

"I suppose the students judge the success by what they get out of it. Don't you think or you thought something else, have you? I don't know, I'm, eh..."

It seemed that Delilah did not get my point; so I asked in another way:

"Since all the students should be your clients, why would some students like to come to the WoW, but others won't?" Delilah said,

"That's a very good question, and to be honest that's one we find difficult to get an answer to. Obviously, we thought about: Can we send something out to all students saying, 'If you didn't attend, why didn't you attend?' Um, but as you know, students are not very keen to answer ..."

Attendance was then identified as the main problem, but Delilah did not know what was going wrong and she also felt it difficult to find out the answer. Facing with this situation, Delilah had her way of dealing with the problem:

"I don't know if you've organize things like this before; but sometimes, initially you need to make decisions and do things to get it started, to almost promote that, either attendance, non-attendance, (we) aren't able to start that debate..."

From Delilah's view, they needed to start the project first, and then sat down to make reflection and improvement. And Delilah did do that in her work:

"We probably struggled in the last couple of years to get students' involvement... And I think it's that transition we are trying to enable now, because exactly as you say, at the moment we only touch on a small group of the students, we are making assumptions about what's the interest, and what they want to come along to, and it's how we

The question 'how will the client judge the decision?' was interpreted as 'why didn't the client come?'

Delilah argued that in practice, people often had to start working without sufficient thinking.

Delilah tried to improve her work by getting students' involvement, but this strategy did not work well.

move more to that point of being much more student-centred”

But Delilah immediately reflected: “But is that the thing they want?”

Delilah made this reflection because she found sometimes her approach did not work:

“Um, I know an interesting thing last year, at least one of the events, perhaps both were organized by students. They were really worrying about (if) students attending those events, although they were organized by the students. So it’s a big challenge, no matter how much involvement of the students there is, getting students to come along.”

Since students did not show much interest to the WoW project, why was it still being run by the H school? Delilah explained the reason:

“Because we’ve spent a lot of time and effort doing it, but actually, as you’ve probably aware, since there’s a big focus on employability: the government is really looking what universities are doing. So we have to do things around employability.”

The government was another stakeholder who had great influence on the decision making. Even though it was the government rather than students who asked for the project, Delilah still thought the students were the beneficiary of the project :

“Sometimes, making things happen and putting them in front of students, presetting them in front of students can actually open their minds to other things...perhaps the students haven’t asked for them, but we want to try them out. And I think if we open them to students, actually they are interested in it.”

In order to ‘open their minds’, Delilah tried many ways and hoped to improve her approach:

“Now I worked with communications department to help me with this, but I also tried to engage in some students to help me with that too... So again I try a few different ways... as you asked, I bring in the people as experts, if you like, to help me with that”

In this process, Delilah identified herself as the decision maker, and summarized her purpose as “improving students’ employability”. In order to reveal Delilah’s assumption further, I asked: “What could you provide and get in running WoW?” Delilah said, “Oh that was very challenging”; she listed a lot of things, but finally summarized them as “the engagement of the students and the employers”.

I realized that employers were another stakeholder. Delilah also

Another stakeholder was identified, and their assumptions were exposed.

The purpose of this decision was exposed (assumptions of Delilah): it is the perspectives of governments and the H Business School that dominated the decision process.

Students were identified as clients, although they did not show much interest. Delilah looked for experts to bring in new knowledge.

Delilah was identified as the decision maker, and her objective was exposed.

Employer was another important stakeholder.

Delilah believed

<p>revealed the assumptions of employers:</p> <p><i>“...they want to recruit our students; they want to get involved in what we are doing.”</i></p> <p>And then Delilah further explained why she hoped to engage employers and students”</p> <p><i>“...So that’s part the reason of why I run the WoW: bringing employers in , so face to face, they can tell the students directly; or I meet with them, and I can pass the message on to the students.”</i></p> <p>But it seemed that the students did not show much interests in getting more connection with employers:</p> <p><i>“...if it’s not a good time for them, or they are distressed by other things, they don’t engage with that even though you think they should. That’s the challenge of doing things like this... That’s the whole point... I also speak to other universities, it’s a common thing.”</i></p> <p>I interpreted Delilah’s point, and said: “That’s the gap between ‘how do they judge the decision’ and ‘how should they judge it’...They can’t see the benefits ...we need to educate them”. Delilah said:</p> <p><i>“Correct, explaining the benefit. Yeah, exactly... in future we’ll try to help them understand why it’s important.”</i></p> <p>7.2.1.1 I expect the change</p> <p>After having a discussion on the management problem Delilah met (Mode 2), we paid attention to Delilah’s work identity (Mode 3), about which I still knew little. Firstly, Delilah talked her feelings about her job and future:</p> <p><i>“Pretty good I think, because there’s such a focus on employability, there’s scope to do more. So I see a lot of potential for my own future.”</i></p> <p>Then Delilah explained the source of the potential: there was going to be a review in the school. Delilah saw the possible change as an opportunity rather than a risk, because she was confident of her capability on employability issues:</p> <p><i>“I just happened to be the person who began that. And I have been successful with it, and that’s recognized. So therefore, I have been given additional support perhaps.”</i></p> <p>Delilah said she had developed some skills and knowledge in this position, which gave her a chance to develop further:</p> <p><i>“I suppose I’ve got different experiences now, because I’m working in</i></p>	<p>engaging employers and students would bring benefit to students, but students still showed little interest in it.</p> <p>The core problem was identified: students cannot see the benefit. A possible solution: education.</p> <p>Delilah had a positive attitude to her job and future.</p> <p>Delilah thought the ongoing review may offer some new opportunities for her to develop further.</p> <p>Delilah thought she had achieved great</p>
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<i>a different area, I'm working with people in the teaching and learning environment; I have actually completed myself... So I suppose I probably broadened my skills and knowledge base. And there are things and potential opportunities I could follow up, if I decide I want to change what I'm doing or progress in a different way."</i>	development and wanted to develop further.
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7.2.2 Discussion

A few reflections are made in this part, on the application of CSH, the problem situation that Delilah faced, the conduction of the project, and the analysis approach of the thesis. The four themes will be addressed one by one.

7.2.2.1 The Unsuccessful Emancipatory Systems

The problem situation faced by Delilah was unexpected: although it was a ‘simple-coercive’ context (the governments and university’s assumptions dominated the decision), but they did hope to involve the students in the process. The main difficulty was that students showed little interest in the related events and the decision process.

Delilah struggled to communicate with them, getting more students involve; and she also looked for people who could bring in new knowledge, but until now, she had not obtained a satisfactory answer.

During the reflection process, we realized that the main problem was caused by the gap between the students’ perspective and the school’s perspective: the school and government believed that improving employability was critical and should be done as soon as possible; while students did not think in the same way. Delilah said:

“...the key point of that is, it’s about something when students are receptive, when they are ready, when they see it as appropriate to them, and obviously the timing of that may differ... a lot of students who come to these things are final year students. No, to be honest... it’s a bit late to do some of this when you are in your final year. You should have been working towards that through a three year programme to try and find out.”

It can be seen that these two parties did not have conflicting interest; they only saw things from different perspectives. However, in dealing with such a simple conflict, participative debate involving all relevant stakeholders may lose its power here: firstly, students who showed low interest would not come; secondly, the school needed to welcome some new students every year, therefore it would be a long-term task. In order

to reveal the core problem underpinning the conflict, a perspective of identity research was brought in; and .a discussion is presented in the next section.

7.2.2.2 An Underpinning Identity Issue

When reflecting on the different perspective between the school and students, I realized that there may be an identity issue underlying the difference.

To some degree, the employability was talking about the role transition from students to professionals; and the WoW or other employability development projects wasing try to arouse and assistant the identity work of students to prepare for role transition. More specifically, these projects are trying to improve the degree of match between a student's new role and self-identity; because as we reviewed in Berta's Story 5, this match had great influence on a new employee's socialization process.

However, there are two difficulties in completing this employability development from the perspective of identity construction:

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 5, identity work is hard to arouse when people are satisfied with their current situation. In other words, in order to arouse identity work, it is necessary to introduce a sense of seekership in people, to disrupt people's sense of self and create a meaning void that must be filled. But this process is often painful and therefore hard to complete; the process may be even more difficult for those new students who are experiencing role transition and struggling to construct their identities as university students.

Secondly, successful identity work needs to incorporate new meaning into one's self-identity, and normally people complete it by learning from role models and from doing practical work. However, the university and the WoW project could not provide such a learning environment for students.

Therefore, in order to improve the WoW project and employability development, people may need to pay more attention to the identity problem underlying the issue.

7.2.2.3 Read the Originator to Read the Text

Interpreting the words of Delilah on her personal development issue were done many times; firstly when I wrote the reflective diary, then when wrote the transcriptions, and finally when I did the analysis. I often got some completely opposite conclusions. One example is showed here.

Delilah said:

“I think what I’m saying is (I’m) probably quite happy with what I’m doing and the opportunities I have currently. But I have got some ideas about things I could do, and some of them may begin some additional knowledge and skills to help me move in these directions. But I’m not sure which of these I want to progress at the moment, so I’m just waiting them over, and continuing as I am at the moment and see what will happen in the next six months.”

At first I thought she was satisfied with her current situation and had little intention to make change in her current work, because she said she was ‘quite happy with what I’m doing and the opportunities I have currently’.

But when I wrote the transcription of the meeting, I thought she might not seek to make a change, but was preparing to react to the possible changes brought by the ongoing organizational review.

Finally, when I finished our fifth meeting with the causal loop diagram method, I found Delilah was trying to tell me in euphemistic language that she hoped to make a change and was waiting for opportunities. And many words Delilah said here had some implications. For example, when she said: “But I have got some ideas about things I could do”; she may have been referring to the job opportunity offered by a hunting-agency as director of career service; although Delilah had refused that offer, it made her think about how to progress in future.

But I did not really read Delilah’s message in this meeting and even in our second and third meetings; and that made me miss some chances to probe deeper in our reflective discussions. This reflection made me pay more attention to my “sensitivity to context”, which was discussed in Section 3.3.7.2. And this experience also made me reflect on my approach to reading a text, as I mentioned in Section 3.3.7.2 that I started to try to read my participants to improve my reading of text.

7.2.2.4 Preparing for Making High Quality Discussion

Delilah’s feedback on the project also reminded me to reflect on the design and conduction of the project. Delilah felt confusing about how to apply the CSH in her work, she wrote in her reflective journal:

“I am not sure how the reflection on what your area of work is and how you are regarded fits in at this stage. I have not used CSH further, and feel that I go through most of this process when I make a decision, but do so implicitly. At this stage, this feels like a paper exercise which does not offer a huge amount of benefit given the time required.”

After our discussion, Delilah reflected on the application of CSH again:

“I think without this discussion, I won’t find so many beneficial. So obviously, you need to give me a couple of ideas, something to remind me, so I can try.”

Delilah thought the discussion was useful while completing the worksheets did not offer enough benefit. At first, I thought her opinion was sound, because the fruit of the discussion was better than their diary writing, and I had already received similar feedbacks from other participants. However, after reviewing the processes we went through, I found that this conclusion may be not proper. We can work well in the meeting, because Delilah and I were able to involve in the discussion deeply. If she did not completing the worksheets in advance, it was hard for her to learn in action and master the skills of CSH; without this learning process, her attempts to make analysis using the tools would be hindered. Besides, learning by doing could help her to find out what it felt like to do them and what difficulties were embedded in the process. Thus in the reflective discussions with me, Delilah can put herself into a state of mind in which she paid operative attention to my comments and feedbacks. On the other hand, Delilah’s worksheet offered me some robust base for making higher quality critical feedback. In summary, doing exercises and completing the worksheet (by Delilah) are very important for both Delilah and me, because it could help us get more control on our discussions, and build a relationship conducive to learning.

Schön (1990) claims that the paradox of coaching carries with it a predicament: “For the student, having to plunge into doing- without knowing, in essential way, what one needs to learn-provokes feelings of loss... More often, the student’s vulnerability in the early stages of the practicum turns to defensiveness, and then the learning predicament can readily become a learning bind...coach and student may become locked in a cycle of miscommunication.” (p167) In this case, this predicament was erased to some degree: doing exercises in advance decreased Delilah’s vulnerability and increased her intention to communicate with me; Delilah’s worksheet also decreased my vulnerability caused by little knowledge about the practical problem.

Therefore, it is argued that in order to make high quality critical discussion, some preparing learning and practice are necessary.

7.3 Story 2: Be Careful, Do Not Fall Down in the Very Same Place

SAST was used by Delilah to surface and evaluate the assumptions within her preferred new programme (Mode 2). The idea of CSH about comparing the ideal and actual self was used by the researcher to observe and interpret Delilah’s work identity construction (Mode 3 of CSH). The application experience of Delilah and themes emerged from the experience are presented in this section.

7.3.1 Story and Findings

Friday, January 27, 2012	My annotation
<p>7.3.1.1 Be Ready, a New Programme</p> <p>Delilah was a little unsure about how to apply the SAST in her own work and asked me to show her an example. I told her the story of Berta; it helped her make sense of how to challenge one’s own view by analyzing the same problem from other stakeholders’ perspective. Then Delilah decided to analyze a project which was also about improving students’ employability, but worked as a part of other student development programmes, such as dissertation writing or a module (Mode 2). The purpose of the project was to provide students a chance of getting real life experience, developing skills that employers look for, and becoming more visible to potential employers. Delilah said,</p> <p><i>“We have been trying to do it, but not very successfully for a quite a few years... I was quite confident it is an important things for students... And I was trying to find out how to make the system work...”</i></p> <p>Delilah started her analysis by identifying the stakeholders in this project. There were two groups of stakeholders: people who took charge of students, (i.e. directors of programmes); people who were key persons for the employability agenda. Delilah thought the second group of stakeholders was really important, She said,</p> <p><i>“...the external influencers, they give extra support to your argument”.</i></p>	<p>The gap between the theory and practice in SAST’s application.</p> <p>The project was not very successful previously.</p> <p>Two stakeholders were identified, and their importance was considered.</p>

<p>Then I asked Delilah what was the opinion of these two stakeholders on her project. Delilah said,</p> <p>“Both of them were very supportive of that...It is the particular person who’s responsible for teaching and learning, and who’s responsible for employability, give a stronger influence...There was now, work has been undertaken to put something in place to move towards making it happen now, for the next academic year.”</p> <p>Then I further probed the assumptions of stakeholders: “Which part of the work do you think is the most difficult for you?” Delilah said,</p> <p>“... (it’s) convincing people; (helping them) make sense of trying something like that.”</p> <p>And I asked Delilah to further expose their assumptions, because understanding them would make it easier to persuade them. Delilah agreed, and said,</p> <p><i>“Sometimes the difficulty can be knowing what’s they want, isn’t it? The assumptions they are holding. You may need to overcome (them), and then influence them. That can be the difficulty.”</i></p> <p>It seems that in this case people may be not so glad to expose their assumptions. When I asked Delilah if she had found out those stakeholders’ assumptions, Delilah told me, “I think by accident, I have done.” And Delilah told me two kinds of things helped her in that process. One was external pressure (from government and university on the employability); the other was an existing module which was also a part of the student project that worked well. To some degree, it was the power and potential benefits that moved the project forwards.</p> <p>I tried to check if Delilah was confident about the quality of this decision, so I asked Delilah if she had considered that the client (students) may also show little interests in this project. Delilah responded,</p> <p>“Absolutely, I know. Actually that’s for what I have been, actually I can see even as I work through this (She pointed at the worksheet of SAST). I started again, I made a list of all of the, eh, influencers. And then I started to look at some of the assumptions, things like that. So, yeah, I, eh, it’s a continuing thing.”</p> <p>I probed, “Do you worry that the same situation would happen?”, and Delilah answered:</p> <p><i>“And to be honest, that’s it. And I know, at the moment in our last meeting, we were talking about trying to get some information from</i></p>	<p>The decision had been made, and Delilah got the necessary support.</p> <p>Delilah tried to persuade the stakeholders rather than find out their assumptions, because people would not like to expose their assumptions.</p> <p>Students were still the problematic stakeholders.</p>
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students who don't choose it...you said that before, that's something we need to try and do something about."

And Delilah also prepared some more approaches to help students understand the meaning of the new projects:

"... in the year we have a group of students who are students now in the workplace as a part of their degree programme, and now in the final year, and working quite closely with us...they might find out from the students, why they do not want to engage more. So they may be a good group to help us with some of that."

Delilah told me she had decided to try that method, and would look for other methods to understand the students' and other stakeholders' assumptions, such as communicating with other schools which had similar projects. Delilah also had written a proposal on how to make improvement in these employability-related projects, and she hoped this proposal could be discussed in the forthcoming review of administration.

Second Application

I considered that in the last meeting Delilah said she was satisfied with her current identity, I wanted to check it again in this meeting (Mode 2 of CSH): "Do you think your 'actual self' and 'ideal self' have some distance, or they are the same thing?" Delilah thought for a while, and told me:

"I think probably they are quite close together. I think there are always things that could improve things, so I have been conscious especially doing this. And actually I can make decisions better. But I feel you knew, the 'actual' and 'ideal' are not too far apart."

Then I asked Delilah what her advantages and disadvantages were as a manager, and what her line-manager's evaluation of her was. Delilah told me she did a 360 degree evaluation recently, and therefore received some feedback from her line manager, her team and colleagues:

"Actually I was quite happy with the outcome of that. I think there were things I could do to improve the situation for myself and for the other people. But I'm aware of those.

...the gap, between the 'ideal' and 'actual' and often the bridge between them is your own self development. One is self awareness, and awareness of some gaps or something you should improve on. And two is having the opportunities to learn something that could help you

Berta identified new experts and would like to make more effort in gathering necessary information.

Delilah's 'actual self' and 'ideal self' were quite close together; because she paid attention to achieve that.

By making explicit others' assumption on her approach to management, Delilah decided to keep reflecting and make improvement.

make those changes and those improvements. And I think I'm preciously conscious of them, and I'm trying to identify ways I can do things to improve them."

I probed further, "What's the gap you have identified?" Delilah said, *"I suppose one of them is I like to know things are done very well, I find it's hard sometimes to let things go... you know, go to other people, knocking and checking whether they have done certain things and so on.... I'm just being aware, trying to addressing, you know, having the awareness of yourself, trying to minimize that or change that in a more positive direction."*

And Delilah said now she always reflected on her activities and tried to become more aware of when and how she can help other people to do things and take on things. It seemed that Delilah had identified the problematic part of her management, and developed a realizable way for making improvement.

7.3.2 Discussion

7.3.2.1 Problem in Personal Application of the SAST

SAST is developed to deal with ill-structured problem situations in which sub-problems interact and then make the purposes unclear. It was not sure if the situation that Delilah was facing with was such an ill—structured problem situation; although Delilah also found difficulty in exposing related stakeholders' assumptions, she did not feel much complexity brought by unclear purposes. One reason may be that the individual users focus on their own goal; they do need to achieve some balance between their purpose and other stakeholders' requirements, SAST was used as an approach to achieve their goal.

On the other hand, the dialectical philosophy embedded in SAST and the idea of making explicit other stakeholders' assumptions are still useful for individual decision-makers. In this case, once Delilah accepted SAST's philosophy and idea, many reflections immediately were made by her: "Who do I need to think about? What are the different opinions they might have? What could be the problem in implementing that? What might stop it from happening? And what could probably help that?"

However, a change in one's way of thinking cannot be completed in one reflection; even through Delilah accepted SAST's logic, she could not apply it in other situations. For example, in our following discussion, Delilah naturally talked about persuading

other stakeholders to accept her decision, rather than trying to expose their assumptions. But by reminding Delilah of this problem, she noticed it immediately and wanted to do something to improve it in future.

This problem may explain why Delilah felt difficulty in doing the SAST analysis independently: because there was no obvious opposing perspective which could push Delilah to reflect on her way of thinking. Therefore she may unconsciously take her previous logic rather than the logic of SAST in doing the application. Based on this view, finding a critical friend may be helpful for individuals to use the SAST framework, just as we did in our reflective discussion, challenging the approach that people think.

7.3.2.2 The Identity Work Running in the Reverse Direction

The CSH and its idea of “ideal self and current self” failed to complete the “sense-breaking” task (Pratt, 2000). Like Coral, Delilah was quite satisfied with her current self; but meanwhile I found that Delilah was having a different kind of seekership.

AS discussed in previous stories, ‘seekership’ is a sense of identity-related discontentment that drives people fill that perceived gap (Lofland and Stark, 1965, Pratt, 2000); normally, people are looking for meaning. But here, Delilah was looking for a container of meaning. Delilah mentioned in the last meeting, she had achieved much personal development through working in her current position. Now she hoped to find a new direction to continue to make progress in personal development. In other words, the self-identity of Delilah had developed, and therefore the degree match between her role and self-identity had decreased; this mismatch aroused the ‘seekership’ of Delilah, to look for a new role to get a better match to her self-identity.

If we recall Figure 6-1 in Berta’s stories, where the Matching Degree (between work role and self -identity) was identified as a key factor in Berta’s career choice, we may realize now that the degree of match between role and identity not only influence the initial attitude of employees to their role, it can also change along with people’s development, and would continually influence their work attitude and turnover intention.

7.3.2.3 Predictor of Role Change

I was disappointed when Coral and Delilah told me they felt their ‘actual self’ and ‘ideal self’ were quite close to each other; because it meant they did not want to change their identity, which I had hoped to observe. However when reviewing the project, it was

found that their answers indicated that they were facing a problem of poor match between identity and role (high personal capabilities with low skills requirements of organizations), and therefore they sought to make a change on the roles rather than reconstruct their identities. My interpretation was supported later: Coral filled the gap between role and identity by finding a new job; and Delilah also started to restructure her department and her role to regain a balance (the information was got in August when we met again).

It is argued that comparing ‘actual self’ and ‘ideal self’ may be a powerful question to test the degree of match between an employee’s work identity and role. If people respond to the question as they can identify some gaps that need to fill, it means that people are still experiencing their identity work; and the reflection with CSH could help them identify the current gaps in capability-skill and belief-values dimensions, then they could focus on these gaps and complete their identity work more effectively. If people cannot distinguish ‘actual self’ and ‘ideal self’ clearly, it suggests that a role work may be started by people because they feel that they have been over-qualified for their current roles; therefore, in order to retain these people and help them to develop further, a special guide may be necessary.

7.3.2.4 Approach to Exposing Assumptions

Delilah’s case showed that when other stakeholders’ assumptions were clearly presented, the chances of provoking individuals’ reflection on themselves would become higher. It also needs to be noticed that Delilah used 360 degree evaluation to get first hand information about others’ assumptions rather than deduced their opinions according to previous experience. This direct feedback made it easier for Delilah to make sense about the difference between her way of playing the role and other’s expectation on her management style.

This inspired me to reflect that the SAST did not provide many methods for its users to expose stakeholders’ assumption, which is often hard to be done. Group forming and debating are not approaches that can be used in normal management work; and many stakeholders do not like to participate in such debate too. Therefore, it is necessary for SAST to provide more methods for its users to make their application easier. For individual users of SAST, 360 degree evaluation can be used as a supplementary method, which may assist people completing the external validation of their identity construction more easily.

7.4 Story 3: What Is The Problem?

Lean was applied to review Delilah’s work in Mode 2 and 3. Our application experience is reported in Section 7.4.1, the analysis of the experience is presented in Section 7.4.2.

7.4.1 Story and Findings

Friday, March 9th, 2012	My annotation
<p>At the beginning of this meeting, Delilah told me it was a good time for her to do the reflection with the lean approach. She said,</p> <p><i>“We have got to the point of the academic year...After the WoW Week finished last week...we started to move on to evaluating what we have done in this year... what we are going to do in the summer, thinking about how we might change things for next year... we’ve also got a new member of the team (a placement student), who will start a week on Monday.”</i></p> <p>Then we tried to review her department with the lean perspective (Mode 2). The first step was to define the main aim of the department:</p> <p><i>“The main aim of the WoW office is to act as an interface between business students and the world of work, identifying opportunities to bring the two parties together.”</i></p> <p>Then we moved to identify staff’s responsibilities, and Delilah gave a very detailed description; in short, there were four members in her team: Staff A took charge of the placement project; Staff B supported all other projects; Staff C, the new one who would provide assistance; and Delilah as the manager.</p> <p>Delilah was considering two issues in this stage: (1) If she should ask Staff A and Staff B to spend some time together, helping A to understand and learn necessary skills to manage other projects. (2) What tasks should be given to Staff C.</p> <p>We also reviewed the key business processes in Delilah’s department, and she made a long list including nine business processes. However, we met difficulty in checking processes against staff responsibilities, because too much detailed information made us feel lost. Delilah tried to comfort me,</p> <p><i>“In a way, we have done that, haven’t we? Because obviously everyone knows the jobs that they are doing and who does what, but we haven’t sat and written it all down.”</i></p>	<p>Lean analysis fitted well with Delilah’s current needs.</p> <p>The main aim was made explicit.</p> <p>The responsibilities of staff were identified.</p> <p>Delilah’s consideration about rearranging the assignment of her team.</p> <p>The key business processes of Delilah’s department were identified.</p>

<p>But the purpose of doing the analysis was to look for ‘waste’ and then improve the process. Delilah told me they also did some review and planning, but in a different way:</p> <p><i>“Actually, we obviously each have an appraisal every year (about what we agree our objectives.”</i></p> <p>And then Delilah showed me her appraisal, and pointed out those specific objectives. There were two in which Delilah had more interests: (1) Building the contact system to improve the management of information of the external employers. (2) Providing more international opportunities. Then Delilah asked me how she could use the Lean approach to help her analyze how to manage and achieve these goals.</p> <p>I felt that the goals, the business processes, and the responsibilities of staff were all muddled up together at the moment; it was hard to find the connections between them. Therefore, I decided to stop this review, and pursue our reflection from another angle (Mode 3).</p> <p>The first question I asked was, “What is the main goal of your work?” Delilah answered:</p> <p><i>“I guess the main goal is efficiently running the WoW office, to manage the work and activities the office undertakes.”</i></p> <p>Then I asked further, “If you want to achieve this goal, which activities that you have done would contribute most to this goal?” This question made Delilah stop and think for a while, and then she identified four activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>(1) Running the WoW project;</i> <i>(2) Organizing the personal development module with the MBA programme;</i> <i>(3) Delivering the placement project;</i> <i>(4) Managing the guest speaker project.</i> <p>Then I asked Delilah to identify the time spent on each activity, and Delilah said it should be 15%, 40%, 40%, 5%. We wrote all these things in the worksheet (Table 7-2):</p>	<p>Delilah had proposed some objectives but did not know how to connect them to her work.</p> <p>We became lost in those interacting sub-issues.</p> <p>We tried from another direction.</p> <p>By identifying the cost and value of Delilah’s routine activities, many reflections were aroused.</p>
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Table 7-2 Reflection on Delilah's routine work

Activity	Time Cost (hours/month)	Emphasis in Management (low, moderate, high)
1 WoW project	15% ->10%	Moderate
2 Module with the MBA	40% ->20%	Moderate
3 Placement project	40% ->30%	Moderate
4 Guest speaker project	5% ->5%	Low
5 NEW: Contacting with employers	20%	High
6 NEW: Staff supervision, support and training	15%	High
7 NEW: Reflection and make improvement	10%	Moderate

Then I questioned Delilah: If these four activities took 100% of her time, how could she manage some other tasks, or some emergencies? In response to my question, Delilah said maybe 15% time was spent on “the other things”.

Further, I asked Delilah to identify each activity’s contribution to her goal. Immediately, Delilah found that she may ignore two other important activities in her work:

“Yeah, I suppose here, in that 15% (‘the other thing’ category), there’s “staff support and development” in there. (She stopped for a while) Sorry, I’m being thinking through. Also in there, there would be “meeting employers”, things like that. So actually, certainly, I should spend more time with regard to employer contact...”

The other reflection made by Delilah was that she may be spending too much time on Activities 2 and 3, whose contribution were not as great as their time cost:

“I need to look at that actually, because the other interesting angle is the academics’ input. What happens to the study project (a module in the MBA) is that I do certain work that is normally done by the academics, that is why I spend more time on it.”

Delilah also realized that if she spent more time in training her staff, it could further free her from the routine aspects of managing those three projects. Further, she had to make effort to achieve those objectives

Delilah identified two other activities ignored by her, which should be focused on

Delilah realized some of her time was not spent effectively.

Delilah found she should also invest more in her staff and

<p>listed her appraisal rather than just complaining things “just don’t get done”:</p> <p><i>“I guess it’s adjusting some of these, isn’t it? I would say, I should spend at least 10% of my time, shouldn’t I, on reviewing?”</i></p> <p>These reflections made Delilah refresh her view of her role:</p> <p><i>“Maybe the emphasis has changed. I don’t mean the role has changed, eh.”</i></p> <p>I said, “Maybe your definition of your work role should change, about what you should do.” Delilah said:</p> <p><i>“Yeah, yes, yes, that’s it, you are right. It helps me realize my focus needs to be more on these things.”</i></p> <p>And then Delilah further reflected, and thought that the department may need to enter a new phase:</p> <p><i>“But it’s interesting that, actually... I set the service up from pretty well sorts of...I brought them together as a service...as part of that process, establishing it, bringing the staff in, getting them set in it, your focus is probably more on that initially. And I think it is much more established...the normal development of a, you know, a function, if you like, a department. As a material that moves on to a different phase... So probably before that it was more appropriate to have more time perhaps on some of those things (she pointed to the four activities initially identified), to get them established and so on. But now, it’s moved more into this (she pointed at the newly identified activities).”</i></p> <p>Now I felt that the main issues had been put in order. And Delilah was more focusing on ‘doing the right things’ rather than ‘doing things right’.</p>	<p>the strategic review.</p> <p>These reflections refreshed Delilah’s view. She planned to redefine her work role and identity to fit with the development of her department and of herself.</p>
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7.4.2 Discussion

Four themes emerged from the story, and they are addressed in the next four sections.

7.4.2.1 Step Over the Gap between the Theory and Practice

In this meeting, I felt the difficulty of linking values, logics and practices; in other words, the gap between theory and practice and the gap between objective and action blocked on our way. For example, when we tried to match business processes with staffs’ responsibilities, Delilah could not make sense, and I also could not see what we could obtain from that analysis. One reason may have been that too much detailed

information came to the fore at the same time; besides, we had too many sub-goals to achieve.

To some degree, this problem situation was 'ill-structured'; one issue that confused us most was: what was the problem? That is why we felt lost in the initial phase: although in general, I knew our goal was to identify waste to improve process, I did not exactly know what we were looking for in the specific problem. Delilah knew she had objectives to achieve, but she did not know what the lean approach could do in implementing them in her practice. The only way that could save us was to identify the critical problem from those interacting issues. We achieved that by changing our way of thinking from 'doing things right' to 'doing the right things'. It was easy to say that, but in practice, it was not as clear as the theory. In this case, we approached it by specifying values (including beliefs and worthiness) underpinning each activity. It is a little similar with the idea of SAST: exposing assumptions of each stakeholder. Here we tried to expose the assumptions underpinning each activity; and this reflection could help managers switch their attention from the operation issues to the value flow in the system, and then made a bridge between their strategic objectives and practical activities.

As Delilah was not the only participant who mentioned the difficulty of applying theories in their own work, I guess some other practitioners may face similar problems (that is, they cannot find a proper way to introduce the ideas/logics of a theory into their practical work). This study can provide some clues about how to find a break point in applying Lean: keeping reflecting on your way of thinking, focusing on the underpinning ideas rather than the specific procedures.

7.4.2.2 Work Identity and Work Activity

When reviewing this application experience again in the stage of thesis writing, another interpretation of this experience emerged: work identity and work activity are intimately linked; reflection on one of them may lead to reflection on the other, and improved understanding on one issue may bring improvement to the other.

In this case, when Delilah and I got stuck in the reflection of her work activities (Mode 2), we turned to reflecting on her work role (Mode 3), which shed new light on our understanding of her work activities. And by identify those problematic activities and those valuable ones, Delilah also achieved better understanding on the situation of her

role and her department, which lead to a potential development of her work identity and her department.

To some degree, this case may prove that work identity and work activities are intimately linked. This case also provides some support for the design of the research project: reflecting on people's approach to problem solving may support their reflection on work identities (Mode 2 is useful); while improved identity understanding may bring positive influence on people's work approach and performance (Mode 3 is useful).

7.4.2.3 Another Way to Achieve Personal Development: Redefining the Role

In the last story, it was discussed that Delilah was facing an unsatisfactory match between role and self-identity, because she had achieved much development in her identity in the past few years. Normally, mismatch between developed identity and unchanged role can be resolved by looking for a new role, and Delilah also expressed some intention to do that. However this meeting provided another option for resolving the problem: redefining the role.

Through doing reflection with Lean, Delilah realized that not only had her, but also the department achieved great development; it was time for the department to move on to the next stage. And she also had identified some new issues that could be taken as the future direction. Therefore, she could and should redefine her role.

Since Delilah had not found out how to develop those two potential new functions (employer contract and international issues), she may also need to further develop her approaches and capabilities in dealing with them. Therefore, her self-identity can obtain further development in this process; and her work identity could be enriched by incorporating in the identities implied by the two functions.

7.4.2.4 Opportunity and Capability

The application of the lean approach in Delilah's work was more successful than first anticipated. The reason may be the 'timing' of this intervention, as Delilah said she was on the point of carrying out a review and evaluation of her pervious performance. But more importantly, the 'timing' was that Delilah was facing a potential role transition that was valuable to be studied and reflected.

The main problem was how to grasp this chance provided by the 'timing'. By reflecting my experience with Delilah, two important issues were identified:

Firstly, it was the working experience with Delilah made me realize that a text can be understood better by reading the participant; and during the process of project conduct, it was important to maintain sensitivity to the context. In short, trying one's best to know and understand the participants.

Secondly, the intention of participants of exposing their inner life is essential for the success of our critical discussion. Because identity and identity work are abstract concepts that describe human beings' psychological activities, which cannot be touched but just be gotten close to when peoples are willing to expose their inner world. To some degree, the design of this research provided a good channel for approaching to people's inner life: the researcher and participants focused on the same practical questions, using the same tools to analyse questions; therefore intensive communication can be made in critical discussions, and self-reflection and cognition were exposed during this process.

These two issues indicate that organizations need to pay more attention to employees' identity construction process, so that they could also identify the 'timing' and be involved in the process more actively and positively. Besides, if organization can provide extra support to employees, guiding them completing those important transitions, they may achieve a win-win situation on the identity issue.

7.5 Story 4: Draw a Picture of My Life

Delilah applied CLD in Mode 2 and 3. Her experiences and related themes are reported in this section.

7.5.1 Story and Findings

Friday, 23 March 2012	My annotation
<p>CLD was firstly used to analyze the 'employer contact' that Delilah planned to develop (Mode 2). A deeper reason of the poor performance of employer management was identified: the resource limitation. Then three approaches were identified by VM for improvement: (1) speaking with experts to learn the necessary skills of managing client relationship; (2) reflecting on her previous experience and reflecting in her current communications with clients (learning by doing); (3) free up her time and focus on the employer management. Because of the words limitation, this application would not be discussed in detail.</p>	<p>Application 1</p>

<p>CLD was also used to explore Delilah’s work identity construction (Mode 3). I started this conversation by reminding Delilah that she said she did not like to play a leadership role in our first meeting. Delilah made a response to my question:</p> <p><i>“Yeah, I think that’s right. That was certainly the case in that particularly incident. Interestingly, someone has asked me about it again since; and perhaps that’s why I mentioned it, yet at the time, I don’t know. Because I was approached by a head-hunting agency last autumn and asked if I was interested in applying for a position of director of careers at LA University.</i></p> <p><i>I chose to not proceed, although it sounded like a really interesting job. And a part of the reason was I can’t commute from here to LA, and I didn’t want to...</i></p> <p><i>But I’m imagining over at the moment whether I want to apply for a position of a director of career service, or something like that. So I’m imagining over at the moment, trying to identify work I want...”</i></p> <p>Delilah’s words proved my conjecture; she did feel the decreased match between her developed identity and her current role.</p> <p>Then we started our review of Delilah’s career life, concentrating on those factors which influenced Delilah’s judgement of a job, and those actions Berta took when she did each job. Delilah started this review from her first job:</p> <p><i>“When I graduated from university, I worked for BP Chemicals; that was in H city. And I was the research librarian ... I was a part of a very small team, so I probably had quite a lot of influence on what I did. And I think that’s the environment I liked to be in...So that was my first job, I really really enjoyed it.</i></p> <p><i>... I felt the organization and the person I worked for were very professional, honest, values, you know, that’s quite important to me. So that’s my first job, I did quite a lot within that.</i></p> <p><i>... The reason I left was because they were making people redundant elsewhere within the company and bringing them to H city, so my promotion prospect was blocked ...Which meant I had no opportunity to progress...”</i></p> <p>Then Delilah talked about her second job:</p> <p><i>“I went to work for GL University...I worked for them for about 18 months. I didn’t like the organization, and I didn’t like the senior people. Because they didn’t have very nice attitude and they were not very nice to</i></p>	<p>Application 2</p> <p>Delilah provided new information: she had just refused a new job which made her reflect on what she wanted to do.</p> <p>Then Delilah started to review her previous work experiences.</p> <p>First job had good environment, which means a small team and professional colleagues</p> <p>But Delilah decided to leave when she found there was no space to progress, even though she loved that environment and job.</p> <p>Delilah hated her second job because the management team was not</p>
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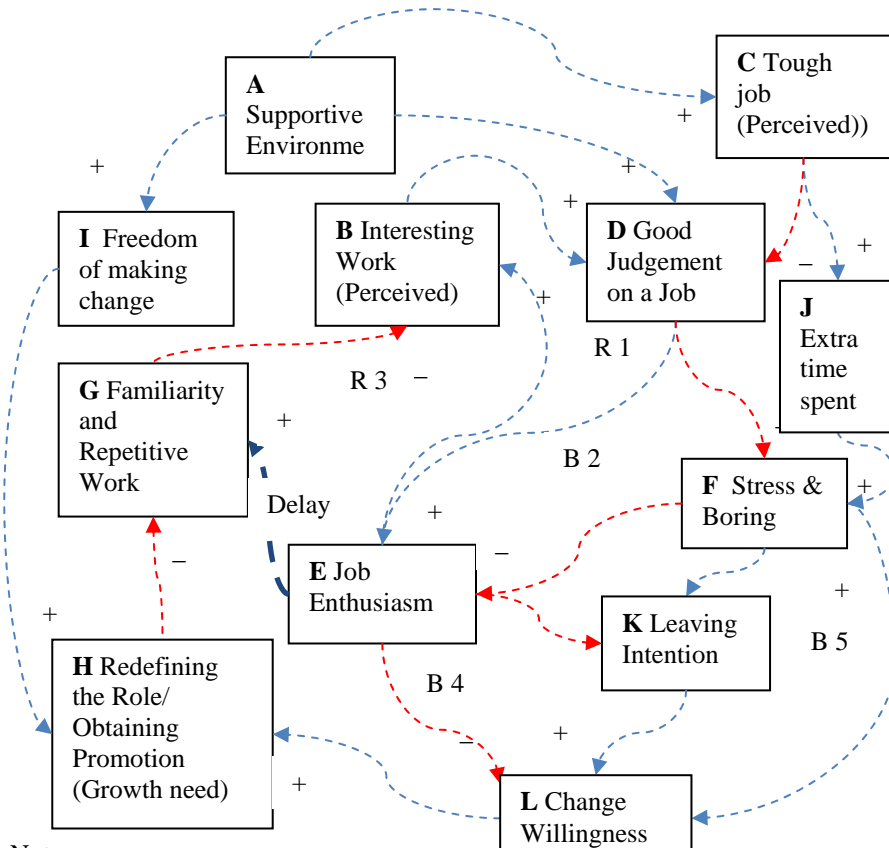
<p><i>staff. So although I learned a lot from that job, I didn't like the organization."</i></p> <p>It seems that Delilah did not like the environment of her second job, but for the job itself, Delilah learned a lot from it. In order to find out more about that job, I probed: "Exactly what job did you do?" Then Delilah told me,</p> <p><i>"I was an engineering subject librarian, so I worked in the library..."</i></p> <p>I checked with Delilah: "So it's quite similar to you first job." Delilah compared the two jobs:</p> <p><i>"Yes, in a way, eh, although different people. So in my first job, I was working with chemical engineers,... they had the need of information and they understood the value of information. In my second job, I was also working with engineering information, but they were students, they were not interested in it... they just wanted to pass the exam....So it's quite hard to sell, to work with them."</i></p> <p>I interpreted Delilah's talk and gave my feedback: "It seems that their respect, their professional skills are lower." Delilah responded,</p> <p><i>"Yes, I think, I guess... And also because the senior management team in the library I worked up, they weren't very nice, they didn't value staff, and to me that is really important. So I left the school."</i></p> <p>I checked with Delilah, "So it's the respect that did not meet your requirement?" Delilah said: "No, absolutely no, so I left." Then Delilah told me her experience in her third job:</p> <p><i>"And then I worked for another university, GG University...which was more business information; so it's about helping business relocate to Scotland... So I felt it really interested again, working in a very professional organization, people understood the need for information, they really valued it, eh, and they were generally pretty supportive staff, there was a very good culture within the organization.</i></p> <p><i>But the only problem for me in that job was my manager in the job wanted me to do really boring things, writing policies, sitting behind the desk; I'm not that kind of person....So although the environment was right, the job turned out to be wrong... I like to do things interacting with people, so I stayed there 18 months and I left."</i></p> <p>Delilah introduced her fourth job:</p> <p><i>"Then I left and I joined the NHS...And it was setting up a library service, (they) didn't have one at all...So again it was the right environment for me, a smaller organization I wanted, a professional organization, they</i></p>	<p>friendly and people were not professional and respectful.</p> <p>The third job Delilah got had a satisfactory environment: supportive team, professional and friendly colleagues; however, the role defined by her manager conflicted with her own interpretation; then Delilah decided to leave after 18 months.</p> <p>Delilah loves her fourth job, because it fitted well with her requirements on both</p>
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<p><i>really valued information, and you know the people were really nice and really wanted to develop and learn, so on.</i></p> <p><i>So I joined that organization to set up their library service. For me it was a really exciting time, because I set the service up, it functioned really well within the organization...”</i></p> <p>But Delilah chose to apply for a new job within NHS (the fifth one) after a few years.</p> <p><i>“And as a result of that, after being there may be about five or six years, I applied for a job to be part of the new team they were setting up to support the region...So they set up the new service again, a small team, very professional, and about developing something new. So that’s the sort of thing I like...”</i></p> <p><i>So I did that for a few years. But as you know, the NHS in England is always changing...Then I moved to South Y Shire, I had the responsibility for South Y Shire, not part of a team...I think I felt it quite hard, partly I think because of working in isolation, so I did that for about four years.</i></p> <p><i>...And plus, I was travelling from H city to S city most days; so a couple of hours travelling every day. So it’s quite tiring.”</i></p> <p>These two jobs were similar, and it can be found that Delilah liked to develop new things; and the reason that Delilah left the fourth job was it became ‘old’ for her. Delilah then started to look for her sixth job:</p> <p><i>“So I looked to see if I could find a job in H area; and the job came up in the University, to work as a part of the business school, and in the undergraduate office; absolutely nothing to do with library information, anything like that. But I felt there was something I could do, and there was a plausibility that it would enable me not to travel so much...so I decided to apply for it; got offered the job. I wasn’t sure of the job, but I decided to take it any way.”</i></p> <p>But it seemed that the new job was not as good as Delilah expected:</p> <p><i>“And I didn’t enjoy it initially, honestly, I have to say; partly it was that my role wasn’t clearly being sorted out, really, didn’t work very well...but then about four years ago... things were being structured, and the job I do now was put together... and I have been given a couple of support members of staff to try to get it going.</i></p> <p><i>So again, I like the new challenge, something to be put together. And it is something I’m really interested in, so I can see the logic in what I’m doing, it makes sense to me, what job I’m doing; previously it was a lot of bits that didn’t make sense, therefore I didn’t enjoy it.</i></p>	<p>environment and job itself.</p> <p>Delilah’s requirement for environment stayed the same.</p> <p>Her requirement for job content was revealed:</p> <p>developing new things, such as setting up a service.</p> <p>A new problem emerges: even through Delilah loved her fourth job, and nothing bad happened, she decided to apply for a new position in the same company.</p> <p>The fifth job was disappointing, because of its isolation and time consuming.</p> <p>Delilah also did not like her sixth job at first; but she had the freedom to redefine that role; and gradually a new service was developed and a</p>
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And now I have a clear structure, I can understand where I can make impact, and I was interested in what it was all about, and I really enjoyed the job, I loved the job.

...but I've probably got to the point where our set up is working well, there is all the staff or the other people to be doing that now. I don't want to be bothered with that, I need new challenges; so that's where I am now really, it's where I would go next, and what I am looking for..."

Delilah finished her review of the career development; and then I made a summary of all the jobs she had done, identified the reasons why she loved or hated that job (including Supportive Environment, Interesting Work, Freedom to Make Change), and what the consequences of those factors (Good Judgement On a Job, Job Enthusiasm, Familiarity and Repetitive Work, Change Willness, Refining One's Role, Stress & Burning Out, Leave). Basing on the summary, the reasons and consequences were listed on the worksheet, and then we tried to put them together to draw a causal loop diagram. The diagram developed is shown below.



Note:
Short-term loops: R1: D->E->B->D; B2: D->F->E->B->D;
Long-term loops: R3: G->B->D->F->E->G; B4: G->B->D->E->K->L->H->G;
 B5: G->B->D->F->L->H->G

Figure 7-1 The causal loop mapping of Vita's work experience

new team was developed; Delilah created the environment and job content that she loved for herself.

But now, Delilah faced the same problem that she met on her fourth job: she hoped to do some new things.

Those findings were shown in the causal loop diagram.

In this picture, two kinds of loops are represented, short-term ones and the long-term ones. Let us start with the short term loops.

When Delilah found a new job, she is used to make judgements on it; two aspects of concern to Delilah are the environment and the job itself. Delilah likes to work in a small and professional team; and she likes to do new things and something valued by others; but she does not like to commute or work overtime. Thus these factors (influence Delilah's judgement on her new job (D)); and this judgement influences her enthusiasm to do that job (E). Another thing that needs to be paid attention is if the job is tiring (including D and J), like Delilah's second position in the NHS (the fifth job, working in S city, Y shire), she would feel stressed and bored, and then decrease her job enthusiasm, and consider leaving that job (K).

Thus there are two short-term loops, reinforcing loops 1 & 2. R1 (D->E->B->D) could represent Delilah's experience in her first job; that is she loved the environment and her work content, thus she had great enthusiasm for doing that job, and found it was very interesting. R1 could also represent Delilah's experience in her second job (working in GL University) which formed a reinforcing negative loop and ended with her leave.

B2 (D -> F -> E -> B -> D) could explain Delilah's experience in her fifth job (in NHS working in S city): although she found the job was interesting, she did not have a team to support her, and had to spend a couple of hours in travelling every day. Thus her enthusiasm was defeated, and she felt she did not like that job, but still worked there for four years.

It needs to be noticed that, in short-term loops, the environment and the job are seen as stable things (A, B, C); that means Delilah could make judgement on them (D), and this judgement would influence her attitude to the job (E), but she could not influence the environment or change the job, therefore her judgement on them is stable in the short-term. This situation would be different in long-term loops.

For example, in Delilah's first job (in BP Chemicals), after working there for six years, Delilah found she was very familiar with her job (G), then the job became less interesting to her (B), her enthusiasm decreased (E). This situation would be worse and worse, because "Familiarity with the Job" is a rigid factor; in other words, without making a change, the job

<p>familiarity could only increase; then those interesting activities would become routine things gradually. So loop 3 is a reinforcing loop rather than a balancing loop. Delilah was often locked in this reinforcing loop (R3, G->B->D->F->E->G) (in her first, fourth and current jobs).</p> <p>There are two ways to resolve the enthusiasm problem: (1) finding a new role (B4: G->B->D->E->K->L->H->G), just as Delilah did in her first and fourth job (2) redefining the role, as Delilah did in her current job (B5, D->F->L->H->G->B->D)</p> <p>Now, Delilah wanted to start a new balancing loop (B5) again, because after playing the refined role for four years, she felt bored again; that is why she had reached the time point of “looking for new challenge or a new way of working”.</p> <p>This diagram may be a little complex, but it could explain all Delilah’s experiences.</p>	
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7.5.2 Discussion

Three themes emerged from Delilah’s application experience of CLD, they are addressed in this section.

7.5.2.1 Redefine the Role to Adapt To the Identity

Although I had found when working with Alton and Berta that people had some freedom in playing their role, but Delilah was the first manager I knew who successfully created a new role for herself. Delilah’s work experience, especially in her current job (the sixth one, working in H University as a WoW office manager) shows that people may not only reform their identity to adapt to their role (Batagiannis, 2011, Girod and Pardales, 2002, Ibarra, 1999, Pratt et al., 2006, Walsh and Gordon, 2008, Webb, 2005), or adapt to/resist the environment in which they stay (Harquail and Wilcox King, 2010, Jane and Oded, 2001, Klugkist, 2009, Pratt, 2000, Ruel et al., 2007, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, Walsh and Gordon, 2008, Wang, 2008, Watson, 2009), or adapt to a group that they belong to (Haaken et al., 2012, Sluys, 2010, Snow and Leon, 1987, Trent, 2010, Yonezawa and Jones, 2011); people could also create a role for themselves to fit their preferred identity. In this case, when Delilah first came to H University, the WoW office did not exist; she spent three years to “put it together” and develop the service of world of work. After three years’ work, she owned a team to support her, and had made herself become a manager doing the work she likes. It is Delilah herself who created the role to fit her requirements on environment and job content.

This is a completely different story compared with things I learned from previous literature. Does that mean similar things do not exist in those people studied by other researchers? I think it unlikely; the only difference is the way we interpret their stories. Previous researchers paid little attention to individuals' needs: organizational researchers focused on organizations' need for training qualified employees, educational researchers focus on the society's need for bringing up qualified professionals, and social researchers focus on revealing the states of special groups (e.g. homeless people, black youth who like hip-hop). My research focuses on personal development issues. Therefore I care about how people develop themselves, not only to meet others' requirements, but also to provide themselves with a better life.

7.5.2.2 A Mechanism Underpinning Identity Work

Delilah's causal loop mapping of her work experience reminds me to consider of Maslow's hierarchy of needs when analyzing the relationship between role and identity. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often showed as a pyramid, with the fundamental needs at the bottom (they are "deficiency needs", include physical, security, friendship and love, and esteem needs), and the need for self-actualization at the top (Maslow, 1987).

In this case, the problem Delilah met in her current job is that: she needed new work to satisfy her self-actualization need. The unsatisfied self-actualization need is a common problem in people's career life, (i.e. Coral said: "I got bored. That's a theme in my life, I got bored quite easily. Berta said in the pre-change interview: "I also like to change, so in that respect it might be nice to do something different, I have done this for six years now. So, I could quite happily change"). Normally, people resolve this problem by looking for new jobs; in other words, once people feel that their work identity has achieved great development, and cannot develop further in their current positions, they would seek to make changes. To some degree, this phenomenon can also be seen as a part of identity construction process: identity development causes poor match between identity and role (on skill/ capability aspect), people would look for or create new roles to resolve the match problem, rebalancing their role and identity.

7.5.2.3 Sub-Processes of Identity Construction

Four types of identity construction processes were identified in the causal loop diagrams, two short-term processes and two long-term ones.

It is found that before working on a job, people need to check the match between role and identity (on value/ belief, and on skill/ capability); good match may lead to a learning process in which people construct work identities according to their roles (R1, D->E->B->D), while poor match would cause another cycle of looking for new jobs (B2, D->F->E->B->D)).

It is also needs to be noticed that, because R3 is a reinforcing loop (G->B->D->F->E->G), it means that most people would over-develop their work identity on one position in long term, which may lead to another cycle of looking for new jobs to rebalance between their role and identity (B4, G->B->D->E->K->L->H->G). Another path to resolve the mismatch between overdeveloped identity and unchanged role is redefining the current job to create a new balance (B5, D->F->L->H->G->B->D). The benefit of the later approach is that it can avoid a new match problem caused by the difference between new values and developed beliefs.

7.6 Summary

A few themes were derived from Delilah’s experience, and they are summarized as follows:

Table 7-3 Themes derived from Delilah's stories

Coding Number	Themes	Category
7.2.2.1	The application of CSH may be problematic when sweeping in different stakeholders is hard or cannot bring in new perspectives; then some supportive tools may be necessary for bringing new views.	CSH
7.2.2.2	The identity perspective brought in some new light on employability issues: extra support needs to be provided to deal with the role transition problem.	Identity perspective
7.2.2.3	Reading the originator may improve the quality of data analysis	Research Project
7.2.2.4	Doing preparatory work is necessary for improving the quality of critical reflective discussion	Research Project
7.3.2.1-1	The dialectical philosophy and the idea of making explicit other stakeholders’ assumptions of SAST are useful for individuals to reflect on their approaches to problem solving.	SAST
7.3.2.1-2	Individual users often unconsciously take their previous logic rather than the logic of SAST in doing the application; therefore finding a critical friend is helpful for individuals to use SAST	SAST

7.3.2.2	Along with the development of individuals' work identity, the degree of match between role and identity will decrease; this mismatch arouses the 'seerksmanship' of individuals: looking for a new role..	Match; Mechanism
7.3.2.3	Comparing 'actual self' and 'ideal self' may be a powerful question to test the degree of match between an employee's work identity and role	CSH
7.3.2.4-1	SAST did not provide many methods for its users to expose stakeholders' assumption	SAST
7.3.2.4-2	360 degree evaluation can be used as a supplementary method of SAST, assisting people in completing the external validation of their identity construction more easily.	SAST; Practical implications
7.4.2.1	The gap between theory and practice is a common problem in theory applications, and this case provides an example for practitioners to make sense of their own work.	Project
7.4.2.2	Work identity and work activity are intimately linked.	Definition
7.4.2.3	Redefining the Role may be an option for pursuing personal development, resolving the mismatch between developed identity and unchanged role.	Mechanism ; Practical implications
7.4.2.4	Organizations need to pay more attention to employees' identity construction process, so that they could also identify the 'timing' and be involved in the process more actively and positively by providing support and guidance for employees' identity construction.	Practical implications
7.5.2.1	People may not only adapt their work identities to fit with their roles, they may also redefine their roles to fit with their identities.	Definition; Mechanism
7.5.2.2	Identity development decreases the match between identity and role (on skill/ capability aspect); people would look for or create new roles to resolve the match problem, rebalancing their role and identity.	Match
7.5.2.3	Four possible identity construction processes were found, two short-term processes and two long ones.	Match; Mechanism

This project also had some influence on Delilah. In August, 2012, Delilah and I met again. She said she was moving into a new office and three new members had joined her team; besides, she was trying to reorganize her department to move it to a new stage. Based on her reflections with Lean, a new manager had been introduced in to help her manage academic issues so that her time could be saved and put into developing new functions. She also continued her thinking and reflection, to lead change in her department.

In the next chapter, an overview of the four managers' stories will be made; and the themes from these stories will be summarized.

8 Discussion of Findings

In Chapters 4 to 7, a few themes derived from four managers' stories have been addressed. By classifying all the themes into categories according to the principle of IPA, five main themes emerged from these themes: definition of identity and role; trigger of identity construction, mechanisms of identity construction process, the application of systems approaches and reflections on the research project.

In this Chapter, these five main themes will be addressed in three sections. First of all, a summary of the essential findings on identity and role issues is presented, and some practical implications of the findings are discussed. Then, a reflection on the application of systems approaches and possible ways of using them in the personal development field is addressed. Finally, the conduct of the project and its theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

8.1 Identity and Role

This section focus on three main themes: definition of identity and role; trigger of identity construction and mechanisms of identity construction process. Based on an over view of these themes, a model of role/identity work is built; and the implications for practitioners are addressed.

8.1.1 Rediscover the Identity and Role

Although previous research has provided numerous of definitions for role and identity, in the field work, of this research, there were still some problems caused by the ambiguities and unconsidered aspects of existing definitions. Therefore, the findings and reflections of this research on identity and role definitions will be provided, to bring in some new interpretation of the issue (Arguments made in this section are based on Themes in 'Definition' and 'Role' categories, including 4.3.2.1, 4.3.2.2, 4.4.2.2.-1, 4.6.2.1, 5.4.2.2-1, 6.2.2.1, 6.4.2.2-2, 6.5.2.2-2, 7.4.2.2, 7.5.2.1).

First of all, one issue needs to be made explicit: as mentioned in the case studies, the role and identity can influence each other, and sometimes they adapt to one another (see Themes 4.4.2.1-2 and 7.5.2.1). Previous researchers use the term 'identity work' to represent people's engagement in a process of forming, maintaining, strengthening or revising their identities (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003); this thesis uses the words

'role work' to refer to people being engaged in interpreting, strengthening, reducing, distancing or revising their roles.

8.1.1.1 Constitution of Identity and Role

As discussed in the literature chapter, identity refers to “the various meanings attached to an individual by the self and by others”; and these meanings are based on “the social role a person holds or on personal, idiosyncratic characteristics the individual displays” (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, 137). Studies based on social identity theory and on identity theory both agreed on the close link between role and identity (Ashforth et al., 2008), but few of them make explicit what the various meanings that constitute people’s identities and roles are.

The Personal Capability-Organizational Skill Dimension

Some stories in this study may provide a clue for us to understand the various meanings attached to identity and role. For example, Alton experienced great struggle in identity work, caused by different opinions between Leroy and Alton on whether or not to concentrate on international issues. Alton refused to incorporate the identity implied by the international function, not because his belief conflicted with the value embedded in the international function, but because he doubted the capability of the department to operate this function. Therefore, it can be argued that a dimension of organizational skill requirements is actually embedded in a role; and at the same time personal capability may also be an important part of people’s identity (a similar finding was shown in Theme 6.5.2.2-2).

If we know that identity has a personal capability dimension and role has a dimension of organizational skill demands, some other phenomena can be understood more easily. For example, when Delilah considered whether to redefine her role to achieve further development in her work identity, she firstly evaluated the possibility of developing the new functions (the employer contact and the international issues), and the feasibility of developing related capabilities. In practice, considering the capability dimension of identity may be people’s first point in reflecting and developing their identity on a day to day basis. The personal capability-organizational skill dimensions of identity and role have close link with people’s daily actions, therefore can be easily touched by both people and organizations, and then build an important bridge for the communication between an organization and its members. (See Themes 4.6.2.1, 5.4.2.2-1 and 7.4.2.2)

Previous research pays little attention to this dimension, but I do feel it is an important factor which influences people's identity construction and role interpreting; without it, identity construction and development will lose their groundwork.

The Personal Belief-Organizational Value Dimension

Compared to the personal capability-organizational skill dimension, another dimension of identity and role may be less visible and touchable, but receive much more attention: the personal belief-organizational value dimension (although researchers do not label it as a dimension) (Dutton et al., 1994, Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Jane and Oded, 2001, Pratt, 2000, Pratt et al., 2006, Snow and Leon, 1987, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, Watson, 2008). One reason for the great research interest on it may be that conflict between personal belief and organizational value can cause emotional problems which are hard to resolve and may bring negative influences to organizations; while a match between personal belief and organizational value can arouse "an essential human desire to expand the self-concept to include connections with others and to feel a sense of belonging with a larger group" (Ashforth et al., 2008, 335); then as a result, some positive organizational outcomes can be achieved, such as cooperative behavior (Roderick, 2006), work effort (Bartel, 2001), work motivation (Van Knippenberg, 2000), job involvement (Yurchisin, 2006), team learning and performance (Vegt and Bunderson, 2005) and, organizational commitment (van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006).

In this research, more attention was paid to specific matching problems between role and identity rather than the general degree of match; it is found that sometimes, the negative influence of the matching problem was obvious. For example Alton expressed great resistance to the 'blame culture' and the 'parent-child' relationship. However, normally it is unapparent; for example, Coral argued: "I think the university is not very good at rewarding people in management jobs like mine", the reason was not disclosed until the fifth meeting (in which Coral exposed that "the university will evaluate (us) in terms of research"). Another reason for the great interest may be that the conflict between personal belief and organizational value has great influence on people's identification with their organization; for example, when reviewing Berta and Delilah's career experiences and identified the reasons of each leave, this kind of conflict was found as a significant cause of leaving; and when personal belief and organizational value fitted well, Berta and Delilah often showed great enthusiasm for their jobs.

The Core Definition Dimension

By achieving self-recognition on personal capability and belief, as well as interpretation of organizations' skill and value requirements of a role, people may form some general definitions of their identity and role: 'who I am?' and 'what do I do?' The definition dimension is the core part of people's identity and role, but also the hardest part to be touched and changed; it represents people's integrated understanding of themselves and their jobs. For example, Berta argued she had a 'scientist heart'; Alton saw himself as 'the small minority of people that was confident about working externally'.

It is argued that identity and role consist of multiple dimensions which represent people's self-awareness on different levels: from the practical aspect to the spiritual aspect. These aspects are closely related; lower aspects provide materials and support for higher ones (Theme 5.4.2.2-1). Specifically, people's belief is supported by their capability of implementing the belief, and their definitions are formed through integrating their life beliefs holistically (e.g. Berta was good at managing processes and making things operate more efficiently, so she developed a belief of 'moving, moving, moving', and defined herself as a woman with a 'scientist heart'). On the other hand, higher aspects guide the direction of lower aspects' development (Theme 4.6.2.1). For example, managers always choose management approaches which fit their management belief; and they never incorporate any belief which strongly conflicts with their self-definition (e.g. Coral defined herself as a professional manager who stood her ground, therefore she chose to develop professional relationship rather than affective tie; with this definition and belief, Coral chose to be the 'bad person' in the 'staff module' management, and rejected consideration of others' assumptions when she made her decision about whether to continue in her job).

The Constitution Model

The focus of the research is on the managers' identity construction and their approaches to problem solving; therefore, work roles and work identity are given more attention; self-identity is also discussed because it represents people's general self-awareness and is important for understanding people's work identity. In Figure 8-1, the constitutions of self-identity, work identity and work role are presented.

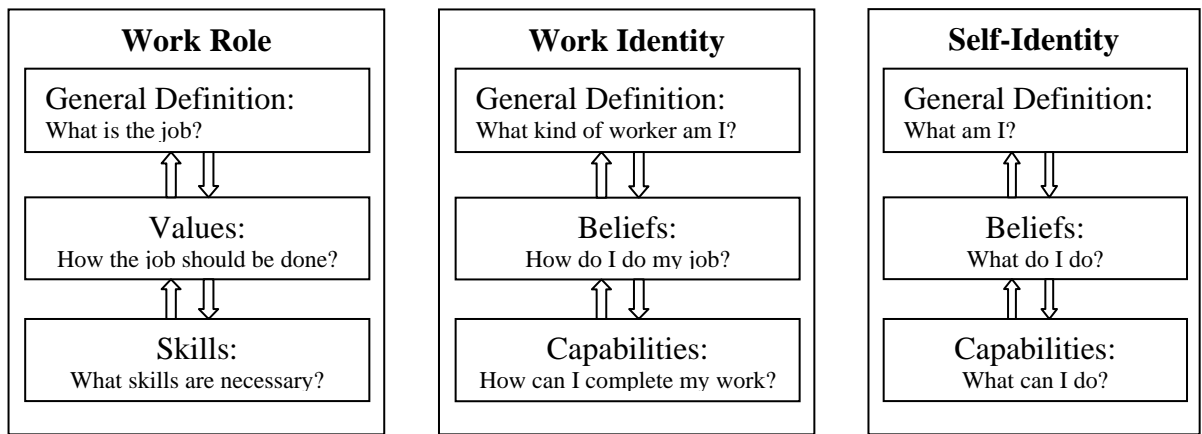


Figure 8-1 The Constitutions of Role and Identity

From the constitution perspective, it can be found that role and identity can relate each other at each level (see Themes 4.3.2.1, 4.3.2.2, 5.4.2.2-2, 5.4.2.2-3, 6.2.2.1 and 6.5.2.2-2). This structure indicates that the identification of a role may also have different levels; and this speculation fits with the view of Ashforth (2008) who presents the structure of identification as an onion, which contains a core layer, content layer and behaviour layer. However Ashforth claims that “the stronger the identity, the more that identification involves not only the elements in the first ring (I am, it’s important, I feel); but also I care about, I want, I believe, I generally do, and I can do” (content ring) (p331). The thesis does not agree that the matching between role and identity in the definition layer is easier to be achieved than the other two; the matching in this layer can only be obtained by going through the personal capability-organizational skill and personal belief-organizational value layers. But because the matching and identification have different degree, therefore people may have already identified their role/organization strongly enough even though there is still some mismatching in the other layers. That may be the reason why Ashforth argues that the core ring can be reached firstly.

Besides different layers contained in a role, there are some other attributes of role, which are ignored in previous research.

8.1.1.2 Conflict within a Role

Another issue noticed in this research is that each work role may contain some different functions, which imply different identities (Theme 6.4.2.2-2). For example, all the four managers recognized many routine activities when we applied the lean approach, and many of the activities represent different functions which ask for different skills and

may embed different values. And the complexity caused by multiple functions of a role often brings difficulty into managers' identity construction and role interpretation; for example, Coral could not list all her routine work and only identified 70% of her time spent; Delilah experienced difficulty when she tried to link her routine work with her strategic objectives because she could not review her role which, contained too many sub-functions (nine in total) from a systemic view.

Little attention has been paid to the inner complexity of a stable role while, there is a large number of studies on the macro role transition issue. Only one exceptional case: Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), point, out that the different identities implied by different functions often contain conflicting values, and therefore cause difficulty in people's identity work; they also argue that these conflicted values are caused by the different organizational discourses. However, this argument does not fit with some other problem situations. For example, Alton also had problems in interpreting the three functions of his role, but the problem was not caused by the conflict between the three functions, but caused by the matching problem between Alton's identity and two of the three sub-roles.

Before talking about the matching problem, it is necessary to address the role complexity clearly. When focusing on the inner complexity of a stable role, two causes of complexity can be identified: Firstly, number problems; when multiple functions are contained by a role, people need to spend more time and effort to interpret them and construct related sub-identities one by one. Secondly, content problems; when functions are not related to each other, more irrelevant skills and values need to be learned by the role player. Therefore, a complex role is hard to interpret, and the related work identity construction may be more difficult for people.

The inner complexity of a stable role is similar to the phenomenon studied by Ashforth et al. (2000) who focus on everyday role transitions involving home, work, and other places. They argue that "transitions are boundary-crossing activities, where one exits and enters roles by surmounting role boundaries." (p472) They also find that differential roles increase the magnitude of change, making a boundary crossing more difficult. To some degree, people also have to cross boundaries between different functions when they play a complex role; and sometimes, the failure of boundary crossing may cause an identity construction problem. Such phenomena are not only observed in this research project, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) actually discuss the same thing; but they pay

more attention to discourse analysis, and do not make explicit another core issue: role complexity.

The underpinning reason for people's difficulty in playing a complex role may be that it is hard for people to construct a coherent work identity which can cover a series unrelated sub-identities. If we review Delilah's experience in her current job, we may find that dealing with the inner complexity of a role is very hard work:

“And I didn't enjoy it (current job) initially, honestly, I have to say; partly was that my role wasn't clearly being sorted out, really, didn't work very well... I set the service up from pretty well sort of, some bites are happening...so for about four years, things were being structured, and the job I do now was putting together...”

It is argued that more attention should be given to the role complexity, which is as challenging as macro role transition for many practitioners, especially senior people who have to do lots of creative work.

After making explicit the constitution of role and identity, attention will be turned to the relationship between role and identity, which will be discussed in the next section.

8.1.2 The Matching Between Role and Identity

Identification, which refers to “the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate” (p329), and renders “the individual into a prototype of the collective or role” (Ashforth et al., 2008, 330), is a popular research topic in the identity field. From its definition, it can be found that these ‘identification’ researchers’ interest concentrates on how an identity is influenced and can be influenced by a role/organization. However, some other topics, such as the influence of identity on role and the matching between role and identity have not been fully examined.

As we found in previous chapters of findings, the matching between role and identity may be critical for people's organizational life and career choice. Therefore, in this section, this issue is concentrating on, based on themes of ‘Match’ category (including 4.4.2.1-1, 5.3.2.4, 6.5.2.2-1, 6.5.2.2-2, 6.5.2.2-3, 7.3.2.2, 7.5.2.2 and 7.5.2.3).

8.1.2.1 Degree and Type of Match

Since both role and identity have multiple dimensions, their matching also has different layers.

The matching between personal capability and organizational skill

Firstly, the matching between personal capabilities and organizational skills has great influence on people's feeling about their job (Themes 6.5.2.2-1, 6.5.2.2-2, and 7.5.2.3). If personal capabilities are lower than the skills required by a role, the identity work would be aroused: people would try to learn from different channels to develop related capabilities in order to play their roles better. For example, when faced with the requirement of developing the international functions, both Alton and Delilah made some efforts to develop their related capabilities.

On the other hand, if personal capabilities are higher than the skills required by the organization, role work would be aroused (Themes 5.3.2.4, 7.3.2.2 and 7.5.2.3): people would look for a new role to achieve further development of their identities. For example, Coral, Berta and Delilah all expressed some intention to make change in their jobs, because they felt that they had done their current job quite well and hoped to do something new.

The Matching Between Personal Belief and Organizational Value

Secondly, match between personal beliefs and organizational values also has significant influence on people's feelings about their work and their career choice (based on Themes 6.5.2.2-1, 6.5.2.2-2, 6.5.2.2-3 and 7.5.2.3).

If the degree of match of belief-value is very low, people would refuse to take the job or leave soon. For example, Berta decided to leave her second job because of its low pace which did not fit to her 'fast moving' belief (this job lasted about 18 months); Delilah hated her second job because the management team was not friendly and people were not respectful (Delilah stayed for 18 months too).

If the general degree of match of belief-value is satisfactory, but there are some conflicts on a few specific issues, then role work and identity work can be aroused at the same time, to improve the matching degree. For example, when people's belief conflicts with a specific function, the function may be devalued (e.g. Alton did this to the short course function) or the function may be reorganized to fit with people's belief (i.e. Alton refused the 'parent-child' style and asked his team to manage college partners with respect). But at the same time, Alton also mentioned that he always questioned himself during the processes, reflecting on his own management style and trying some

new ways to develop the international issues; that means that an identity work was also aroused.

If the degree of match of belief-value is high, people would enjoy their work and have great enthusiasm to learn and to do their jobs, and may show higher organizational commitment. For example, Delilah talked about her first job experience:

“I feel the organization and the person I worked for were very professional, honest, values, you know, that’s quite important to me. So that’s my first job, I did quite a lot within that... Initially I went to work for them for six months, but stayed for about six years, because they extended the contract and made it permanent.”

It can be seen from this excerpt that, for both Delilah and the company, the high degree of match made them feel good about working with each other and they benefited from each other’s support.

Thirdly, the matching of personal capabilities and organizational skills and the matching of personal beliefs and organizational values need to be achieved at the same time; one bad match may cause a whole failure. For example, Delilah’s third job had a good match with her belief but bad match with her capability, Delilah chose to leave after 18 months.

In summary, the matching of role and identity is critical for people’s attitude to their jobs and to some degree could predict people’s work performance and organizational identification. However, current documents focus more on its results (the identification) rather than its causes and processes in which much effort could be put in to improve the results (Ashforth et al., 2008, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). In the next section, the causes of decreased matching of role and identity will be discussed.

8.1.2.2 Decreased Matching Degree

Although role-identity matching has a significant influence, normally, its degree is hard to affect in the short term, unless in a period of macro role transition such as has been studied by lots of previous researchers. Besides the macro role transition period, some other situations may also be dangerous for both organization and individuals; for example, it is noticed that the degree of match between role and identity may gradually change during normal organizational life; and this change, especially a decrease, may give rise to some problems. Based on the case studies, two causes of the decrease of

identity-role matching degree were identified (based on Themes 4.6.2.3-1, 4.6.2.3-2, 5.3.2.4, 7.3.2.2, 7.5.2.2 and 7.5.2.3):

Changes-within-role

Firstly, changes within a role may reduce the matching degree of role and identity; besides, different sources of a change may lead to different results.

An example is that Alton and Delilah responded to the international strategy of the H Business School differently. Although they both felt the lack of related personal capabilities, Delilah showed positive attitudes and wanted to redefine her role and reconstruct her work identity to incorporate the international development function; while Alton showed a wait-and-see attitude and treated the sub-identity implied by the international function as a temporary one. If recalling the stories of Alton and Delilah, it can be seen that Alton was forced to run the international issues while Delilah identified the international issue as a possible future direction in her own reflection. In other words, the change-within-role represented environment uncertainty and organizational control for Alton, while it represented a space for potential personal development for Delilah. It can be inferred that coercive methods may have negative influence on organizational identification; on the other hand, if people can make sense of the values/ skills required by the organization through their own reflection, the results would be much better.

To some degree, changes within a role may be a common and inevitable phenomenon in modern organizations. Jackson (2003) claims that “change is a product of our era”; in order to remain viable, organizations have to “respond adroitly to constant shifts in their environments” (xiii). Therefore, organizations need to require their members to maintain high reflexivity and be prepared for any changes that take place within their roles. In order to help organizational members deal with change-within-role, more supporting and guiding methods should be provided to people, helping them make sense of the value/skill required by the organization in a more positive way; if problems have been raised by change-within-role, some analysis and self-reflection tools are also necessary to be offered, to help people deal with the emotional issues and reflect on the problem situation, and then to mitigate the conflicts. The reflective stories of Alton and Delilah show examples of such guidance and reflection; and a few practical implications have been summarized (see themes in the ‘Implication’ category).

Developed Identity

Secondly, the development of identity may increase the matching of role and identity initially and decrease the matching degree later, and finally lead to an intention of make change in role. In other words, people need to learn some specific skills and values embedded in roles when they enter into new roles/ organizations; and along with the learning, the matching of role and identity will be improved; but after a period of time people may feel that the work becomes routine and few things can be learned any more, which means that their self-actualization need cannot be satisfied, and then the matching will start to decrease. In short, the matching problem of high personal capability with low organizational skill requirements stimulates role work, and people normally would ask for a promotion, or they would leave and look for a new job.

Delilah's case made me rethink another possible channel of role work: redefining the role; people could obtain further development space by redefining their roles, strengthening or developing some new functions. Organizations could benefit from this redefining, because they can maintain valuable members who have achieved significant development and often had good commitment; and some functions of the organization can also be further developed, in a creative and innovative way. Individuals could benefit from it too; they can achieve the balance between their role and identity again without a matching problem brought by a new role; and they can start a new circle of learning and developing with clear objective because they have been familiar with the role and the environment.

However, this channel does not receive much attention. One reason may be that many individuals cannot see that such an option exists, or they cannot find a potential direction to redefine their role. Another reason may be that organizations do not provide their members with enough freedom and space to redefine their roles. Therefore, the cost of redefining a role may become higher than looking for a new role.

It is argued that more research and practical attention should be given to the role's redefinition issue; and some supportive tools should be provided to help people identify and realize some possible ways of redefining their roles. In this study, Delilah's stories may provide a good example.

In the next section, the detailed process of identity work and role work will be presented; when examining this process, the focus is not only on the identity work aroused by role

transition, a broader view is taken: firstly, unconventional role transition (i.e. redefining a role) and changes-within-role will be considered besides macro role transition; secondly, the identity work and role work will be examined at the same time; thirdly, both successful and unsuccessful results will be discussed.

8.1.3 The Construction Process of Role and Identity

Some models about identity work have been developed by previous researchers (Ibarra, 1999, Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010, Pratt, 2000, Pratt et al., 2006). However, their views have different respects from mine. Firstly, they see adaptation as a process in which identity adapts to fit a role, rather than a bidirectional process; secondly, they see the process as an independent event rather than a long-term and recursive spruces which may last throughout one's life (Ashforth et al., 2008). The reason for our difference may be that previous research focused on the macro role transition period, and their participants were people who were facing promotions or just starting their career or entering a new organization. In this section a more general view is taken in this thesis to analyze the identity/ role work that happen in normal organizational life, and try to identify the underlying mechanism and sub-processes (arguments made in this section are based on themes labeled as 'Mechanism').

8.1.3.1 Seekership

It has been argued in previous chapters, but is repeated and expended here, the mechanism underpinning identity work and role work is 'seekership' (see Section 5.2.2.1). Previous studies claim that identity work is aroused by meaning void (Pratt, 2000); and I found that there is another kind of lack: container void, which may give rise to the role work (looking for a new role or redefining a role) (see Theme 7.5.2.2). In other words, changes in role require people to develop new capabilities or accept new values to adapt to a changed role; changes in identity (which normally means the development of capability) may make people look for new title/ work to give full play to their current identity and provide some space for further development. But normally, identity work and role work are conducted at the same time, because the identity construction is always accompanied with a role interpretation; and role change always requires a change in identity. In the next two sections, the sub-processes of role/ identity work are presented.

8.1.3.2 The Learning and Validation Processes

Once the seeking process is started, people need to develop new capability or new belief to achieve some developments in their identity to fit with a changed role; or they need to reorganize some functions or update some values to fit with the changed identity. Therefore, identity work should firstly be a learning process; the role work should be firstly a reflective and creative process.

The process of learning and reflection

To complete an identity work, there are two sub-processes that need to be performed in the learning and reflection process: firstly, improving the approach of problem-solving. This process is to resolve problem of a mismatch in capability-skills (see Theme 4.4.2.2-1). Secondly, people need to improve their interpretation of the role to resolve the matching problem in belief-value dimension (see Themes 4.3.2.3-2, 4.4.2.1-1, 4.4.2.1-2). Normally, these two sub-processes could support each other, and improvement achieved in one level will lead to the learning and reflection in another. For example, Coral reflected on her approach of dealing with the time-table event and learned that she should not go up straight to the top; at the same time she incorporated a new management belief, 'always talk to people; solve things informally rather than formally' into her identity. The influence could also happen in the adverse direction: people learn some belief/theory first, then apply it in practice, in which related capabilities are developed. To some degree, this action project tried to achieve learning and reflection in this way. Some new professionals also learn in this way: they first learn related professional knowledge/belief in school, then apply it into practice to reflect and update these beliefs and knowledge; and people's capability can be developed during their practical doing and reflection process (Ibarra, 1999, Pratt et al., 2006). New recruiters also learn related organizational rules and values from their role models first, and then experiment with them in practice to develop their own beliefs and capabilities (Pratt, 2000).

Like Identity work, role work also starts from a reflection process. People may focus on two issues in this process: improving the operating of functions and improving the setting of the role. These can be understood as 'doing things right' and 'doing the right things'. In the action project, two sub-processes of reflection processes were gone through with the four managers; and some of the reflection assist them generate some new ideas about how to improve their approach of problem-solving (i.e. the reflections

made with the CSH and SAST approaches) and others remind them to change the management emphasis of their roles (i.e. the reflections made with the lean approach). After the reflection, people may have a better understanding about the role and also develop some ideas about how to play the role (see Themes 4.3.2.4, 4.4.2.3, 5.2.2.1, 5.3.2.2, 5.4.2.1, 5.4.2.2-2, 5.4.2.3, 6.2.2.1, 6.3.2.2, 6.3.2.4-2, 6.5.2.1-2, 7.3.2.1-2,).

The Process of Validation

On the other hand, people also need to validate the new changes they have made and make sure they are accepted by themselves and by other organizational members. Because people live in and work for an organization; essentially, the work role and work identity are developed to serve both organizational and personal interests (see Theme 4.3.2.1). In this stage, identity work and role work share the same validation process, and both need to go through two sub-processes.

Firstly, an internal validation will be conducted by individuals themselves, to check the matching in the personal belief-organizational value dimension and the personal capability-organizational skill dimension. Two important criteria are used in internal validation: coherence and continuity. In other words, people need to make sure that the new capability/ belief does not greatly conflict with those embedded in their current identities, so people can maintain a coherent sense of self (e.g. Alton refused the ‘parent-child’ style because he thought *“It didn’t fit with what has been successful in my career”*); besides, people also need to check if they can maintain a sense of continuity between who they have been and who they are becoming after incorporating in a new capability/ belief (e.g. Delilah accepted the new international function, because she felt: *“I’ve probably get to the point where our setting up is working well... it’s where I would go next”*) (see Themes 4.6.2.1, 6.5.2.2-1, 7.5.2.3).

Secondly, an external validation normally is completed through interactions with people, by obtaining feedback from others on the two dimensions (value and skill) see Themes 4.3.2.3-2, 5.2.2.2). The criteria again, are the coherence and continuity, but this time they are checked from the organization’s perspective (i.e. Leroy asked Alton concentrate more on international issues, because ‘being international’ was important for keeping the organization’s EQUIS accreditation, and also a part of the strategic plan of the H Business School; Leroy’s suggestion represent the requirement of the H Business school’s requirement on coherence and continuity).

In the process of identity construction, one group of people is specially identified by previous researchers (Ibarra, 1999, Pratt, 2000); they are the role models who may provide necessary information for people's learning and reflection, and their feedback is also critical for the validation. But in this research, it is found that role model is not necessary for those people who were not experiencing a macro role transition (i.e. changes-in-role), or who are experiencing an unconventional role transition (e.g. Delilah, Berta created new roles). Therefore, role model issue will not be further discussed in this thesis (see Themes 4.4.2.2-2 and 6.4.2.3).

In the next chapter, the outcomes of these sub-processes will be discussed.

8.1.3.3 Outcomes of the Process of Identity Construction

There are always two kinds of results, success or failure. In this study, I distinguish the short-term and long-term outcomes, and identify different kinds of success or failure for each sub-process. This effort is made to respond to the recent calls for greater attention to view the identity construction of people at various stages in their career processes (Pratt et al., 2006), and to capture the dynamics of the identity work process rather than taking 'snapshot images' of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008, 340). In the following paragraphs, different types of successful outcomes and failure outcomes will be discussed one by one; their long-term influences will also be presented.

Successful Results and Their Long-Term Influences

First of all, if the general result is successful (that means both learning-reflection process and internal/external validation process are completed), immediately, people could achieve some evolution in their identities and update in their roles.

However, if a long-term view is taken, it could be found that the continuing evolution of identity can lead to changes in identity, and then cause a new matching problem (high capability with low skill requirements); and normally people would ask for a promotion or look for a new job, then enter into a new circle of identity work to adapt to new roles; and later when they are more familiar with their jobs, role work may be started to adapt the role to fit with their more developed identity and to resolve the unresolved matching problems left by the previous identity work (i.e. most parts of the career development of the four managers followed this path) (see Theme 7.5.2.3).

There is another possible path in this process: if some supportive approaches and environment are provided to people who are seeking a new container (new role) to fit with their developed identity, they can also redefine their roles and enter into a new cycles of role work and identity work at the same time (e.g. Berta was creating a new job by including some new functions, and Delilah was considering redefining her role and also decided to enter a new cycles after completing the action research project) (see Themes 6.4.2.3, 7.4.2.3, 7.5.2.1, 7.5.2.2).

Besides, change-in-role is a more significant problem from a long-term view (Themes 4.6.2.3-1 and 4.6.2.3-2). As mentioned before, modern organizations ask their members be more flexible in playing their role to help the organization deal with great environmental uncertainty; therefore, people may choose or be forced to start a new cycle of role work and related identity work at regular intervals (e.g. the international function came to the work of Alton and Delilah); in other words, all modern employees have to enter into the learning and reflection process again and again, to meet the survival and development needs of organizations.

Failed Results and Their Long-Term Influence

Secondly, failures in different stages may lead to different results. In the following paragraphs, four kinds of results caused by failures in the four sub-processes will be discussed one by one (based on Theme 7.5.2.3).

Failure to develop capability and Failure to improve functions

Failing to develop personal capability is actually a failure to improve functions of a job; it may cause poor performance directly, and at the same time, will lock people in the cycle of identity work until they can find a way to get rid of the ‘seekership’ aroused by the gap between personal capability and organizational skill demands.

In the long term, there are two results: one is that the capability will be developed after a period of hard work. However people may feel stressed and bored in this learning process, and that could decrease their enthusiasm for their jobs; and if some other problems happened at the same time, they may choose to leave. Coral’s experience in her second job may help us to make sense of the situation:

“That was initially a huge shock, because I had never worked in a further education college before, and I went to a director role, so I very quickly had to learn... For me, that two years was very challenging, very hard.

When I got to the end of the two years, I went on maternity leave. I had a choice of going back; I decided that, it was a very very hard job. I was doing that job with a little baby, it would not work. So I resigned from the job. Friends said: ‘You are committing career suicide; you would never get such a good job again’. I was quite shocked at that, but I knew I’d made the right decision.”

The other possible result is that the function related to this capability will be distanced, until a potential chance arises; in this way, the discomfort caused by the capability gap can also be decreased. For example, Alton did this to the international function; Delilah dealt with the WoW function in this way too; and Coral also took the same tactics in the ‘writer residence’ decision.

Failure to improve the interpretation and failure to improve the setting of a role

Failing to improve the interpretation also means the failure to improve the setting of a role; it can happen in many ways.

Firstly, the failure can be caused by role complexity, and then people may spend time to make sense of their jobs until they could can a coherent set which could cover all the sub-functions (see Theme 6.4.2.2-2). Before that, people would also be locked in the identity work and role work cycle (i.e. Delilah spent four years to ‘put things together’ when she got her current job; Alton was still struggling to find a way out).

In this process, people may have some freedom in finding their own way of interpreting their roles, but it also depends on their personal capability (whether or not they can bring new values or skills into the role) and the degree of organizational control; because any change made by people has to obtain external validation and internal validation at the same time (see Themes 4.3.2.1, 4.3.2.3-1). West et al. (1987) argue that role interpretation problems can be resolved by job discretion; while Pratt et al. (2006) claim that residents in his study had relatively little discretion over how their role could be interpreted. Their different opinions may be caused by the issues ignored in their studies: the influence of external validation is not considered by West et al. (1987), for example Alton did not have enough freedom to define his role because Leroy hoped to implement the international strategy in Alton’s department; while the influence of the

capability dimension is not considered by Pratt et al (2006), because obviously residents have much less experience and capability to bring new skills/ values to their role, which Delilah could do, therefore residents cannot enjoy that freedom.

Secondly, the failure can be caused by different opinions of people about how the role should be played; in other words, conflict between different beliefs of individuals or conflict between people's beliefs and the organization's values (see Themes 4.4.2.1-1 and 5.2.2.2).

Different opinions often exist between the role player and his/her line manager; and the conflict often causes emotional problems, as well as role work and identity work; sometimes people will be locked in the learning, reflection or validation processes again until they find a way to regain a balance. One way is leaving the role (Delilah did this when she and her line manager had different interpretations of the role (her third job, mentioned in Section 7.5.1)); another way is waiting for a possible change (Alton did this and he achieved agreement with the new dean); the third way is insisting a people's belief and generating a sub-culture in their department/ team (e.g. Alton managed his team with the ethos of refusing the influence of the blame culture of the organization). Success here means an agreement between organizations and individuals on identity/ role construction is achieved through identity work and role work.

Problems of unsuccessful internal validation

People need to check if they could maintain coherence and continuity in their identities after incorporating the new belief/ capability; and if they cannot maintain coherence and continuity, their identities may become unstable. For example, Coral mentioned that she learned to 'be kind to people' from a critical event, and learned to 'be kind' from her mentor; but she also mentioned that her colleagues may feel surprised to hear that, and she chose to be 'the bad person' in staff modules management and she criticized other managers who were too friendly to people. It can be seen that 'to be kind to people' has some distance with Coral's core beliefs which included 'stand my ground' and 'keep professional relationship'; therefore it was hard for Coral to maintain the coherence and continuity of her identity.

If people cannot maintain coherence and continuity in their identities, their identity work will not stop; they may be locked in the cycle for many years, until their identities become stable.

Problems of unsuccessful external validation

Other organizational members may or may not give their feedback to people on their learning and reflection achievements; and people will feel uncomfortable and unconfident if they do not receive sufficient feedback, and will be locked in the validation process (e.g. Berta complained her line manager provide little support and opinions when she applied for and played the new role, and she showed much passion in this research project which was seen as an approach to further learning and validation her new role.)

If people receive negative feedback on their achievement that they cannot make sense of, people will feel angry and again be locked in the validation process until they find a way out (e.g. Alton was angry when the executive education project was rejected last year, which represented that his management focus and belief failed to pass the external validation process).

Failure of external validation can easily cause emotional problems, which have long term effects on people's work; and other conflicts between people may also be aroused during the process.

After exploring the constitution of identity and role, the relationship between matching problem and identify/role work, the sub-process of identity/role work and the possible outcomes a better understanding about the process of identity/role construction and development has been achieved. In the next section, a new model of identity development will be exposed and discussed.

8.1.4 The Model and Implications

8.1.4.1 The Model of Identity and Role Development

In order to assist readers in making sense of these concepts identified and their relationships, a model is presented in Figure 8-2. This model is not a generalized model, but is developed as a heuristic device to aid the researcher's own thinking and learning through readings and field work and should not be taken to be anything more- merely a stimulus to provoke reflection on what is and is not the case.

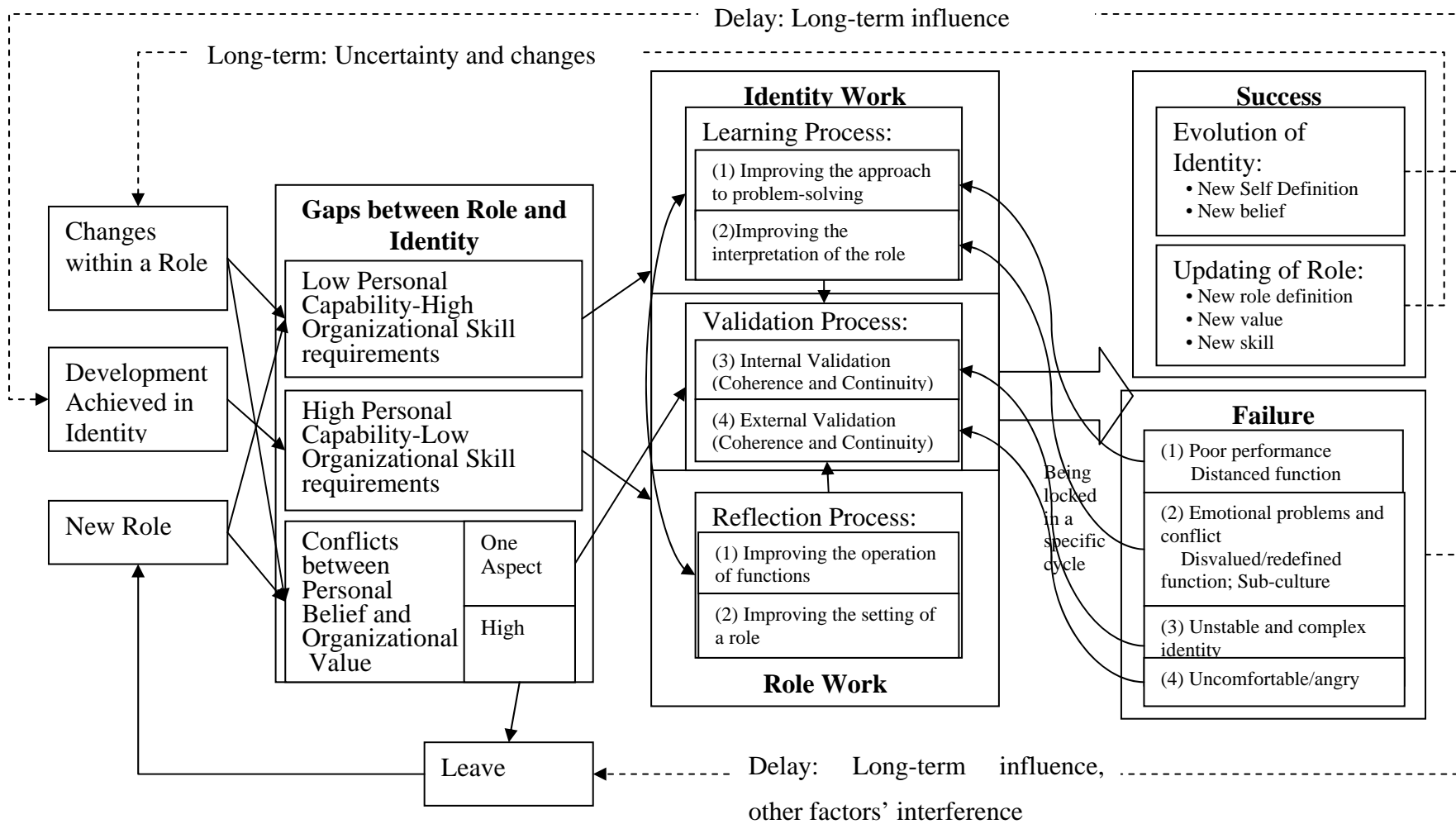


Figure 8-2 The process of identity/ role development

By linking the role and identity, it can be found that the work identity development process is actually embedded in people's career development process (see Theme 4.3.2.2). Since identity/role work are prompted by the gaps between role and identity which may always exist in people's organizational life, people have to enter into the cycles of identity/role work to fill up the gaps and achieve new balances; along with these processes, some personal and professional development can be achieved too. On the other hand, failure and imbalance may be another permanent theme in the long-term process of people's identity/career development; and sometimes people may be locked in some specific cycles for a period of time, and then jump out with a new development, or they may also decide to live with the situation or to get rid of it by leaving.

Previous researchers have argued that after reviewing the extensive literature, they felt quite vague about what constitutes the end point of the process of work role transition (Ashforth, 2001, Ashforth et al., 2008). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) claim that they have found the answer: it is "the enduring and profound amendments to one's narrative repertoires" that constitutes identity change (p149). Of course, amendments to one's narrative repertoires (stories that make a point about the narrator) could be an possible end of a specific role transition process, but as we mentioned, there are other possible outcomes of the same process; and the development of one's identity could also give rise to a new gap and then start a new cycle of identity/role work. Therefore, it is argued that identity work and role work should be seen as a long-term process; researchers may obtain interesting findings by focusing on one or more specific period/ process, but without a systemic view, the findings obtained from different processes or angles may be found conflicting and vague.

8.1.4.2 Identity Work Aroused by Unexpected Event /External Intervention

Besides regular identity work, another two issues may also arouse people's identity work, which is not included in the model.

The first one is unexpected inducements. In the pre-change interviews, the critical incident technique was used and several of key incidents which significantly influenced the four managers' identity construction were exposed, many of which were unusual events that happened in people's life. For example, Alton had to deal with the withdrawal issue when the H University decided to terminate its cooperation with G College; Coral was asked to resolve a problem that happened in the timetable, and she also met with a car accident; Berta faced a job risk brought by an organizational change,

and she needed to reconsider her future; Delilah needed to make a career choice when a head-hunter company contacted her. Some of these incidents require people to develop new capabilities so that problems could be resolved (for Alton and Coral); while others remind people to reconsider their life and reexamine their identity. People tend to reflect on such incidents, and then may update their view about their own capabilities (e.g. Alton thought he set the tone for further cooperation and showed leadership in that event), or develop some new approaches to problem-solving (e.g. Coral learned to talk with people); and they may further summarize some new beliefs and incorporate them into their identities (both Alton and Coral). On the other hand, Delilah and Berta started their reflections from reviewing their identities directly: Berta realized she may need to look for a new position or she had to prove her value; Delilah realized she needed to think about her further development direction; and these reflections prompted Berta and Delilah to further develop their personal capabilities, and they also created a new role for themselves to achieve that development (Berta tried to use workload systems more strategically while Delilah considered learning and trying to develop another two functions).

To some degree, unexpected incidents often stimulate development on one dimension (capability or belief); then the reflections cause in and on the problem-solving process will make the other dimension to be updated too. Finally a full updating of identity can be completed.

The second external intervention of the identity construction process may be learning from theoretical knowledge or learning experience from role models. Learning from theory and role models may bring in some new beliefs to individuals; however, at the same time, a gap between personal belief and personal capability may be caused, because theoretical knowledge or others' practical experience can only affect people's belief, it cannot increase people's capability immediately. Many skills are what Schön (1990) called learnable, coachable, but not teachable. Therefore, identity work may be aroused to fill the gap between personal belief and capability, and the gap between personal capability and organizational skill demands. Sometimes role work will also be aroused because the new learned beliefs cause a gap between personal belief and organizational values.

This action research project is actually another kind of external intervention in managers' normal organizational life. It introduced some new beliefs and approaches into the four

managers' lives, and challenged their current identity by challenging their own beliefs and approaches. Reflections are made in this process; both on the capability dimension and belief dimension; and some changes were aroused in managers' identity.

These two kinds of issues are not presented in the models but discussed separately in this section; because they are some unusual events happened in people's work life. And to some degree, these two issues point out where the chances are for influencing people's identity construction: providing them some opportunities to experience some challenging events in which reflection and development are easier to be aroused; introducing people different beliefs/values through learning/training/coaching mechanism so that people may reflect on these beliefs/values during their practical work, and the reflections would cause the update of their identities/ roles.

In the next section, some management implications of the research will be further discussed.

8.1.5 Implications for Practitioners

A few themes in 'Implication' category have been derived from case studies; and some difficulties and problems embedded in identity constructions have been identified in above sections; based on them, a few practical implications are summarized.

First of all, identity construction should be treated as a negotiation process between organizations and individuals.

Specifically, Theme 4.3.2.1 indicates that the role definition/ identity construction is a mixed decision; organizations and individuals both have influence on each other's activities and are also influenced by each other's activities.

Therefore, individuals should not exclude organizations from their work identity construction process; if they do, the boundary judgements made by individuals on roles may be challenged by organizations that hold different values (Theme 5.2.2.2). And in this process, SAST can be used to make explicit the difference between organizations' and their own assumptions on their work role/ identity, so that people could negotiate with organizations more actively and positively in the process of work identity construction (Theme 4.4.2.3). Besides, 360 degree evaluation can be used as a supplementary method of SAST, assisting people completing the external validation of their identity construction more easily (Theme 7.3.2.4-2).

When conflict between organizations and individuals is significant and agreement could not be achieved by them, sweeping in more stakeholders may be a choice; it can bring in new perspective so as to improving the quality of boundary debate and move the negotiation forward (Theme 4.3.2.3-2).

In the process of negotiation, people should make full use of their knowledge on their work roles; because redefining the role is also an option for resolving the mismatch between identity and role; and both organizations and individuals can benefit from it (Theme 7.4.2.3).

Secondly, two dangerous situations have been identified in previous analysis, changes-in-role and overdeveloped identity. Special attention should be paid on these two phenomena.

First, changes-in-role is a common organizational phenomenon; however, its signal is so slight and subtle that it is often neglected by both practitioners and researchers (Theme 4.6.2.3-1 and 4.6.2.3-2). Special guides should be provided to individuals, assisting them identifying the gap between role and identity and then inspire some 'seekship' of new personal capabilities or beliefs. Therefore people would enter into the cycle of identity/ role work on their own initiatives, and resistance to changes and organizational control could be minimized. A critical friend may be a feasible way to provide such support. Because they can bring new perspectives, making people reflect on their approaches and beliefs, then the sense-breaking may be achieved, and 'seekership' can be started (Theme 6.2.2.1).

Second, over developed identity is good news for individuals, but a dangerous signal for organizations (Theme 5.3.2.4). It means that the balance between role and identity has been broken, and people would start to seek a new role to match up with their identities. If an organization hopes to retain its excellent employees, it needs to pay more attention to identifying those employees who are facing to such an unbalanced situation, and provide new roles or the freedom of redefining roles.

Besides, employees of an organization may all being experiencing different kinds of identify construction process in different stages; sometimes, people may suffer from the anxiety caused by the imbalances, especially when they have been locked in a specific cycle for a long period of time (see 8.1.3.3). Organizations need to pay more attention to identity processes, so that they could also identify the 'timing' and be involved in the

process more actively and positively and providing support and guidance for employees' identity construction in time (Theme 7.4.2.4).

Thirdly, organizations could purposely ask members to deal with some challenging problems that may lead to a learning and reflection process which will help people further develop their identities (based on 8.1.4.2). Besides, some intervention projects like this research could also be a useful way to arouse employees' identity work, which may help them reflect on their previous approaches and beliefs, and then their identities can also be updated.

After summarizing the findings on the identity issue, in next section, the systems approaches used in this project will be discussed.

8.2 Reflections on the Application of Systems Approaches

Four systems approaches were introduced in this research to assist people in reflecting on their approaches to problem-solving and on their work identities. In chapters 4 to 7, some themes identified from managers' application experiences were discussed. In this section, these findings will be summarized, focusing on the usefulness and limitations of each approach. In the final part, some suggestions will be given as to how these approaches can be applied jointly to derive extra benefits.

8.2.1 CSH

Based on the themes discussed previously (Themes 4.3.2.3, 4.3.2.4, 5.2.2.1, 5.2.2.2, 6.2.2.1, 7.2.2.1, 7.3.2.3), the application of CSH in the identity field will be summarized in this section as three major issues.

8.2.1.1 Providing New Lens for Identity Research

By introducing CSH into the identity reflection process in the research project, two new explanations of the identity issue are obtained.

First of all, role definition/identity construction can be seen as a process of drawing boundaries for a role/identity; individuals sometimes exclude organizations from their identity construction processes, which may cause problems because organizations will challenge current boundaries with different values, and conflicts then may be aroused on the identity construction issue (see Theme 5.2.2.2).

Secondly, identity regulation can be seen as a boundary debate between organizations and individuals. According to CSH, sweeping more stakeholders into the process may bring in more perspectives so that better understanding on the situation can be obtained, which is helpful for achieving agreement on the identity issue (Theme 4.3.2.3).

8.2.1.2 Assisting Identity Management

CSH also is a useful tool for individuals and organizations to manage the identity construction process.

First of all, using CSH to deal with practical problems (Mode 2) can assist people analyzing the problem situation from a systemic view; which may broaden people's thinking and view pattern, and lead to reflections on their approaches to problem solving; through learning and reflection in practice, identity development can be achieved (Theme 6.2.2.1).

Secondly, CSH can assist people in reflecting on the boundary judgments of their role/identity (Mode 3), and identity reconstruction may be aroused through this reflection (Theme 4.3.2.4).

Thirdly, CSH and its idea of 'ideal self and current self' can be used to evaluate the state of the match between role and identity (the capability-skill dimension), which may predict the direction of the identity construction process (Theme 7.3.2.3). Then, people/organizations can provide/ seek related support to complete the process.

8.2.1.3 Potential Problems

There are also two issues that need to be considered in the application of CSH.

First of all, critical discussion may be helpful for make full use of the CSH approach. Sometimes people find it difficult to challenge their own assumptions, so that a critical friend may provide extra support for completing the reflection with CSH (Theme 4.3.2.4).

Secondly, supportive methods may be necessary when sweeping in different stakeholders is hard or cannot bring in new perspectives. In these situations, supportive methods which can bring in new views may assist the CSH users to find a way to redraw the boundaries, or at least to understand the situation better (Theme 7.2.2.1).

In summary, CSH is a useful approach to study and manage identity construction issues; introducing CSH to the identity field may shed some new light on current research and practice.

8.2.2 SAST

Based on the themes discussed previously (Themes 4.4.2.3, 5.3.2.1, 5.3.2.2, 5.3.2.3, 6.3.2.1, 6.3.2.2, 6.3.2.4, 7.3.2.1 7.3.2.3), the application of CSH in the identity field is summarized in this section as two major issues.

8.2.2.1 Applying SAST in Personal Reflection

SAST could assist individuals in interpreting the stakeholder complexity within their own preferred decisions and plans (Theme 6.3.2.1-1), and encourage people to consider different possibilities of their work plan by exposing others' assumptions (Theme 5.3.2.2).

However, sometimes it is hard to expose related stakeholders' assumptions; then individuals need to follow SAST's spirit rather than its form, concentrating on its dialectical philosophy (Themes 5.3.2.1, 6.3.2.1-2 and 7.3.2.1-1).

Two methods are often helpful for individuals in their application of SAST: (1) Finding a critical friend who could remind individuals that they have unconsciously following their previous logic rather than the logic of SAST (Theme 7.3.2.1-2). (2) 360 degree evaluation could be used as a supplementary method of SAST, assisting people completing the external validation of their identity construction / approaches to problem-solving (Theme 7.3.2.3-2).

8.2.2.2 Applying SAST in Identity Management

In the identity field, SAST can assist individuals in making explicit the difference between organizations' and their own assumptions on their work role/ identity, so that they could negotiate with organizations more actively and positively in the process of work identity construction (Theme 4.4.2.3).

Besides, a combined use of CSH and SAST could emancipate people's thinking, reminding them see their jobs as a part of the whole system; so that people may consider more organizational needs when constructing their work identities. This new view and consideration may bring positive influence for both organizations and individuals (Theme 6.3.2.4-2). In particularly, SAST is used as a following and

supplementary approach to CSH, to assist people in making a specific plan for realizing the change objective generated from CSH analysis (Theme 6.3.2.2).

Next, CSH, SAST and 360 degree evaluation could all be used to assist people in obtaining necessary external validation more actively and artfully, by analyzing related stakeholders' assumptions on their identity construction processes (Themes 6.3.2.4-4 and 7.3.2.3-2).

On the other hand, SAST can also be used by organizations as a method to assist identity regulation; because it can help organizations understand their employees better by exposing their assumptions (Theme 5.3.2.3).

8.2.3 LEAN

Based on the themes identified in Chapters 4 to 7 (Themes 4.5.2.1, 4.5.2.2, 5.4.2.1, 5.4.2.2, 6.4.2.1, 6.4.2.2), the application of Lean systems thinking in the identity field is summarized as three major issues, and addressed in the following sections.

8.2.3.1 A Problem Underlying Lean and the Way to Resolve It

The capability of Lean of dealing with systems' complexity depends heavily on a full use of employees' intelligence. However, Lean does not pay much attention to stakeholder complexity which may significantly influence the effective use of employees' intelligence, and is also a hard problem for organizations (Theme 4.5.2.1).

Therefore the lean approach should be used jointly with other approaches which can deal with stakeholder complexity. In this research, two approaches are identified.

Firstly, CSH and its idea of emancipating the affected people can be used as a supportive method of Lean for nurturing and developing human intelligence (Theme 6.4.2.1).

Secondly, the identity perspective can also be introduced to Lean to support employee management; because it is helpful for assisting organizations in understanding and developing employees' intelligence (Themes 4.5.2.2 and 6.4.2.2).

8.2.3.2 Applying Lean for Assisting Identity Development

Lean can be used as a useful tool for managing and developing work identity, three benefits have been identified.

Firstly, Lean thinking can challenge people's way of working, assisting people in reflecting on how to manage their work (Theme 5.4.2.1).

Secondly, Lean can not only help people improve the effectiveness of work, but also help them display identities effectively (Theme 5.4.2.2-1).

Thirdly, Lean can assist people in linking the boundary judgments of work role with their routine work activities. In this way, critical reflection can be achieved, and identity development may be obtained (Theme 5.4.2.2-2).

8.2.3.3 Applying Lean for Assisting Identity Research

Lean provides a good approach for researchers to observe people's work identity construction. By analyzing people's work activities with Lean, it can be made explicit that how people see and do different functions contained in their roles. To some degree, data achieved in this way can make researchers get close to the identity phenomenon from another angle: observing how they play a role to understand how people construct the role identity (Theme 5.4.2.2-3).

8.2.4 SD

Based on the themes identified in Chapter 4 to 7 (6.5.2.1 and 6.5.2.3), the application of systems dynamics and its tool, causal loop diagrams, in the identity field are summarized in this section.

Firstly, the main difficulty of the SD application is how to look beyond people's thinking pattern so that they can build the right model rather than build the model right. To some degree, the application of SD is constrained by its users' beliefs, which are embedded in their identities (Theme 6.5.2.1-1).

Secondly, applying CLD is useful for encouraging people to dig deeper in a problem situation; and if the application process is conducted in a reflective way, people may also reflect on their ways of thinking in this process; this self reflection is helpful for identity development (Theme 6.5.2.1-2).

Thirdly, the combined use of the CIT and SD approaches is a powerful tool for exploring identities. CIT can assist researchers in dealing with time complexity, identifying people's beliefs deeply embedded in their self-identity and summarizing people's behaviour patterns constrained by their beliefs, Then CLD could be used to

present those behaviour patterns visually, and thereby help research further understand the long-term identity construction process (Theme 6.5.2.3)..

8.2.5 Possible Combinations

In the action research project, it is found that some approaches could provide each other great support.

First of all, the CSH and SAST may constitute a good approach set (Theme 6.3.2.4-2 and 6.3.2.2). The CSH is good at exposing potential conflict aroused by different interests; however, the 12 boundary questions provide by the CSH could only make people reflect on current situation and identify the ideal one, it does not point out how to achieve that ideal objective. The three methods provide by the SAST approach could guide people think further: do I get enough information now? Who should be focused on? And people may find a way to move on after doing this analysis. On the other hand, the four groups of stakeholders identified by the CSH could provide a good framework for people to review the related stakeholders. When using them together in this project, many fruits were obtained; therefore the CSH and SAST combination is recommended.

Secondly, the CSH and SAST could provide some support for the lean and SD approach (Theme 4.5.2.1 and 6.4.2.1), because approaches build on different assumptions may provide different perspective on the same problem situation. The CSH and SAST approaches are good at dealing with ‘participants’ complexity’ while the lean and SD are good at ‘structure complexity’, therefore their combination are often fruitful.

There are some other possible ways of using these approaches jointly, a few of them have been identified and addressed in previous sections. In the next section, a summary and reflection of the research project will be presented.

8.3 Reflection on the Project

A few reflections on the research project have been made in case studies, and themes emerged from them are labeled as ‘project’. Based on these themes and the analysis made in Sections 8.1 and 8.2, a general reflection on the research project is made in this section, in which two issues are focused on: the benefits and challenges of applying the systems theories to individuals’ identity work; and the reflections on the two streams of identity research after conducting the research project.

8.3.1 Systems Approaches and Identity Work

Among the constellation of the business and management field, systems studies and identity research stand far apart from each other. This action research project explored a path between these two stars and may provide some unexpected benefits for management practitioners and academics in the two fields.

It is argued that systems approaches are useful tools for individuals' identity/role work, especially through an intervention project. The benefit that the systems approaches could provide and the difficulties that must be dealt with in the application process are discussed in this part; besides the way that this research project is also summarized.

First of all, the power of systems theories has not been fully realized in the practical application field.

Systems approaches are a mature research field in which a well-established framework has been set up, and many specific approaches are available for resolving different types of organizational problems (especially 'structure complexity' and 'participants complexity'). However, these approaches have not been fully explored by individual managers (Jackson, 2003); to some degree, this is caused by the complexity of the systems theories themselves which require huge time and effort to understand the whole framework and then make a link between theory and practice. However, once these two barriers (understanding and making a link) are removed, managers could enjoy great benefit from the tremendous achievements in the systems research field. This research project made an attempt to provide such a channel through which individuals could travel to and fro between systems theories and their practical management problems without too much suffering, the detailed way of the research will be discussed later.

The second argument I want to make is that systems theories are suitable for assisting reflection in and on experience, and therefore a good way to support people in pursuing personal development and identity development.

As mentioned in Section 2.3, experience will not lead to learning without reflection, which is also an important means of completing identity/role work in normal organizational life. Systems approaches are such a set of great methods for prompting reflection, because each systems approach is established with a special philosophic assumption and objective; therefore, applying a systems approach is actually a way of talking and debating with an expert who has a unique view and has mastered a set of

methods and therefore resolves problems in a unique way. This talking and debating between one's own view and the systemic view could help people to reexamine their own beliefs and approaches, then to deepen their understanding of a specific problem situation. In this way, reflection in or on experience can be achieved; and learning and identity/role work are also achieved through the process.

Thirdly, introducing systems approaches through an action research project or an intervention project may be an easy way of erasing the obstacles to the application of systems theories.

In this project, all the four participants mentioned that participating in such a project gave them a space to step back from their day-to-day work and then enjoy some time to think and reflect on those problems which may be let go or ignored in their busy life. Besides, Mode 2 and 3 were developed, which were easier to learn and use compared to the traditional way of using systems approaches (Mode 1), and an assistance of a researcher/ coach was provided; therefore people could identify necessary knowledge quickly from the huge body of related theories, and also be offered some help in linking the theory with practical problems.

Some other researchers have already identified the importance of providing such a guided reflection project. In the reflection research field, Schön (1990) argues that many skills are learnable, coachable but not teachable; and he also find that paradoxes are important and useful instruments for designing learning while a reflective practicum is critical for developing counselling and consulting skills. In the identity research field, Ibarra (1999) finds that junior professionals learn to play their new roles by observing and communicating with their role models and then developing and experiment ing with temporary identities obtained from that observation. To some degree, all these people (design learners, counselors and junior professionals) are all trying to make a link between theory and practice, and it is also a process of matching belief obtained from theories/role models with specific approaches to problem-solving. Pratt et al. (2006) point out that it is the violation between what medical residents think they are and what they actually do that arouses their identity work; this thesis argues a deeper issue underpinning the violation is the mismatch between people's belief and capability. In other words, beliefs of those students, new professionals and residents have undergone achieved some development through learning from theory/ role models, however, their capabilities still need to be further developed through practice to apply those beliefs.

The mismatching between belief and capability arouse the identity work; but without proper support, this identity reconstruction process would be painful and may decrease people's speed of achieving further development (see the cases of Berta and Delilah).

what Schön (1990) does and what this action project did are actually try to minimize the difficulty of making a link between theory and practice; we tried to introduce people some new beliefs and related methods, and at the same time we entered the specific problem situation on which our participants were working, so we could working on the same problem from different perspectives. Through this kind of co-work, the gap between two set of beliefs, and the gap between new developing beliefs and old approach to problem solving can be identified immediately; therefore reflection and learning can be made at the same time in the process, and the identity work can be aroused and completed quickly through this learning and reflection process.

In summary, systems approaches are useful tools for resolving management problems and assisting people's identity work. But its application may have two obstacles and therefore needs extra support to assist managers overcoming them. In this research project, two ways were adopted to provide this extra support: different modes of application were developed, which concentrate on some specific objectives (reflection on approach and identity); and critical discussions were conducted to further foster reflection. Based on these efforts, systems approaches can be used as powerful tools of identity development.

In next section, a reflection on the relationship between organizational control and identity construction will be presented.

8.3.2 Organizational Control and Identity Construction

In chapter 2, it was discussed that identity regulation or identification are argued as an important approach to realize organizational control. However, this kind of approach also receives great resistance from employees; and until now few instruments have been developed to facilitate identity regulation or identification in organizations.

To some degree, the research project can be seen as an attempt in this direction; and a new perspective is developed during the conduct of the process: instead of controlling regulating people's identity to make them become a microcosm of the organization, it is more possible and productive to treat individuals and organizations as equal parties in

the construction process of each role and related work identity (based on Themes 4.3.2.1-4.3.2.4 and 4.4.2.1-1,-2, and 5.2.2.2).

Identification or identity regulation is always bothered by two negative effects: (1) affective resistance and demoralization (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006, Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b, Beech, 2008, Kreiner and Sheep, 2009); (2) inflexibility (because employees become too devoted to a particular set of meanings and limited space is left for critical reflection) (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996, Barker, 1993, Dukerich et al., 2002, Willmott, 1997).

Three Types of Identity Control

During the conduct of the project, it is noticed that people may respond to similar identity regulation very differently from each other; besides, it is also found that some negative effects can be avoid by taking another perspective in the identity intervention process.

Specifically, Alton, Coral, and Delilah all perceived some kind of identity regulation in the H Business School. Alton felt it when the previous dean tried to persuade him to concentrate more on the international issues; Coral interpreted it as a kind of guidance /help and identified the previous dean as her mentor; Delilah interpreted that international development was an important strategy of the school, and identified it as a potential direction for achieving further development of her career.

The negative influence of identity regulation on Alton was significant; to some degree, it was caused by the emotional barriers aroused by direct control behaviour and following debating and persuading behaviour.

The responses of Coral were quite positive, because a kind of emotional attachment had built up between her and the previous dean; besides, the identity regulation was not done through direct control, but by focusing on providing support for Coral's personal development.

The response of Delilah was neutral; she identified international development as a kind of organizational discourse, and incorporated it into her identity through her own reflection. Therefore she would not be a devotee of the discourse, but think about it and apply it rationally.

Actually, Alton, Coral and Delilah can represent three types of identity regulation: direct control, emotional attachment, and cognitive option. Direct control may cause great conflict and resistance, but sometimes it does work and operate quickly (see the case of Beech (2008)); emotional attachment may lead to the highest identification, but may also cause some problems, such as demoralization and inflexibility. Cognitive option would not cause any negative effects and can realize some kind of organizational and individual development, but it may be hard to achieve. In the following paragraphs the cognitive option will be focused, and a discussion on how to obtain it will be presented.

Providing Cognitive Option and Translate it into Identity Construction

Actually, many organizations operate their identity regulation in the way of providing cognitive options; specifically, they operate it as developing related organizational discourses and managerial directions (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002b). Then the problem left is how to help people to incorporate these available options into their identities if they lack emotional attachment and without raising emotional barriers. The way this project identified was conducting critical reflective discussion between the organization (leaders) and individuals.

As mentioned in the literature review, previous writers on identification and identity regulation issues all consider asking employees to accept values offered by organization to achieve organizational control; it is argued in above section that this kind of unidirectional sense-giving cannot avoid a negative influence. And the finding of the research is that a bi-directional sense-making process of identity construction/intervention may be more productive.

Specifically, the conduct of the intervention project is an example of a bi-directional sense-making process. Managers and the researcher entered into the same problem situation with different beliefs and approaches, exchanging opinions on the situation and asking challenging questions to test assumptions. The purpose of this kind of discussion was not to eliminate any belief or advocate any approaches; the purpose was to find a better way to play the role and check if it was necessary to re-define the role. In this process, changes in belief happened naturally without much emotional resistance; at the same time, the role and even the function of a department/ organization were reviewed and sometimes updated. Therefore, it is not a process through which organization achieve control on its employees; it is a process in which individual

learning and organizational learning are pursued, and the individual and organizational development can be obtained.

To some degree, the values held by the organizations are not necessarily wiser than individuals' beliefs, even just considering the interests of organizations; besides, sometimes it is hard to say any belief or value is better than others, because sometimes it's an ethical issue; besides, the performance is depends greatly on people's willingness and capabilities to implement it. Further, practice can be a great criterion for testing any belief/ values, therefore we need to keep reflecting on practical experience and then updating our understanding through critical discussion through so that learning from experience can be achieved. For these three reasons, it is argued that both identification and identity regulation take a static view on the identity construction process; the values of the organization are over emphasised while the power of human creativity and the power of practical experience are ignored.

Based on this reflection, it is argued that organizations and especially managers/ leaders should take a 'stay back' posture when they try to participate in employees' identity construction process; because essentially, the purpose of the organization and leaders is to urge employees to play their roles in a best way, while the best way is an unknown issue for both the organization and the individuals; organizations and employees need to identify a better way and sometimes create it through cooperating with each other and combining their different knowledge. The process of identity construction is also the process of role construction. Neither individuals nor organizations can complete them independently with good quality. Therefore identity regulation/ identification cannot be a productive way to complete the process.

In summary, three types of identity regulation and their influences are summarized in this section; besides, a reflection on the essential assumptions of identification/ identity control is made and a new way to realize identity intervention is proposed. Now the findings and discussions of the research have all been presented.

8.4 Summary

Based on an overview of themes derived from four managers' experience, the process of identity construction has been further disclosed. Firstly, it is found that poor match between role and identity could be trigger of identity construction process; and different match problem may lead to different paths of identity construction. Therefore, a better

understanding on trigger of identity construction was achieved. Secondly, a few sub-processes of identity construction were disclosed; and the potential problems embedded in each sub-process were also exposed. Therefore, our understanding on mechanisms of identity construction has been deepened. Thirdly, short-term and long-term results of identity construction process were distinguished. Therefore, our view has been broadened, from focusing on the role transition period to reviewing a whole career history.

Based on an overview of themes about systems approaches, a summary of experiences of applying four systems approaches in the identity management field was made. The specific usability of each approach was identified; potential problems and possible solution of each approach were also addressed. And some fruitful combinations were summarized.

Finally, a general reflection on the research project was made; the nature and perspective of the research project were addressed.

In next chapter, a review of the whole research project will be made, and the contribution and limitations of the study will be discussed.

9 Conclusion

In this thesis, systems theories have been applied in the field of identity research to bring new light to the understanding of identity construction process. In the course of this, the motivation, content and outcomes of the identity construction process have been identified; the potential difficulties and problems embedded in the process are exposed; and a set of instruments for supporting the identity construction process have been developed, which could assist individuals in re-examination identities through facilitating their reflections on approaches to problem-solving.

In the final chapter, firstly an overview of the objectives of the study and the achievement on these goals will be presented; and then the contributions of the research to the body of knowledge will be addressed; finally the limitations and further research directions will be discussed.

9.1 Objectives Achieved

In chapter one, two research questions were proposed: Firstly, how is work identity constructed in modern organizational environment? Secondly, what kinds of instruments can be provided to support the work identity construction process?

With respect to Research Question 1, the thesis firstly investigated the dimensions contained in work role and work identity, and pointed out that identity work and role work are two related sub-processes of the identity construction process; and that identity construction has three levels: capability-skill level, belief-value level, and definition level (see Section 8.1.1).

Based on the re-examination of the definition of identity, the trigger of the identity construction process is identified: the matching problem. Specifically, four kinds of matching problem have been identified, three may happen in normal organizational life, and the other one may be aroused by external influence (see Sections 8.1.2 and 8.1.4.2). First and second, poor match between capability and skill may promote people's identity construction: low capability-high skill requirement leads to identity work, while high capability-low skill requirement causes role work. Third, high belief-value conflict may lead to resignation, while partial belief-value conflict arouses identity work. The fourth trigger is the gap between belief and capability, normally it is caused by some external intervention or unexpected events in which people's belief achieves great

development but their related capability has not yet been developed; therefore identity work will be activated to fill the gap between developed belief and undeveloped capability; of course, sometimes people may also meet a gap between developed capability with undeveloped belief, and then they need to review their experience to summarize some new belief to direct their future behaviours.

Then, the specific procedures of identity and role work are made explicit: identity work starts with a learning process while role work starts with a reflection process; and they both need to pass internal and external validation processes (see Section 8.1.3.2).

Further, the difficulties and possible outcomes have also been exposed. The possible outcomes of each sub-process are summarized, and their long-term influences have been pointed out (see Section 8.1.3.3). It needs to be noticed that role complexity is identified as a main cause of the failed results of identity construction process; the potential risks embedded in internal and external validation are also discussed. Besides, the influence of identity regulation on the process of identity construction is reviewed, and three different kinds of identity regulation and their effects have been discussed (see Section 8.3.2).

Finally, it was argued that the identity construction process is actually a long-term process which may accompany people's whole career life, therefore identity management and development should be a permanent topic in people's career. From the perspective of organization, to some degree, their employees may all be experiencing some kinds of identity construction process caused by different matching problems; therefore, identity management is also a critical topic for organizations' employee management (see Section 8.1.4).

In regard to Research Question 2, a set of instruments was developed based on four systems approaches, and they were introduced to four managers to reflect on their approaches of problem-solving and their own work identities. For all the four managers, the identity construction process was aroused by the action research project, and many of them achieved great development of their work identities and some significant improvement of their work (see Chapters 4-7). The functions of each instrument were discussed, some fruitful combinations of these approaches were identified; the underpinning mechanism of these instruments was addressed and the reflections on the intervention project were also summarized (see Sections 8.2 and 8.3).

Specifically, the four approaches can be used to serve different purpose of identity management and development. The CSH approach is a good method to identify matching problems, and it could also arouse identity work and role work by exposing different parties' interests in a specific problem-situation (see Section 8.2.1). The SAST approach is a useful tool for assisting the completion of the validation process of identity construction, because it can guide people to surface related stakeholders' assumptions on the issue of role definition/ interpretation (see Section 8.2.2). The Lean approach is a useful instrument to help people re-examine their way of playing a role, because it may challenge people's belief by distinguishing "doing the right thing" and "doing things right" (see Section 8.2.3). The SD approach is helpful for checking the coherence and continuity of the reformed identity, because it could make explicit those structures underpinning people's career choice, so that we could predict people's future behaviour based on their previous behaviour patterns" (see Section 8.2.4). Further, SD may be especially useful for researchers; combining the SD with the CIT method provides a powerful approach for academics to get access and dig deeper into people's identity" (see Section 8.2.4).

Besides, the combination of the four approaches may form an integrated and complementary mechanism to assist identity development and management, because they could improve the identity construction process from different angles. The CSH focuses on identifying gaps and can promote motivation of identity construction (trigger); SAST focuses on balancing the organizational and personal objectives in the process (external validation); Lean provides a link between people's practical routine work and their change objectives (cross the gap between theory and practice, between belief and capability); and SD could assist people to check if the new adopted belief/capability fit well with the previous ones embedded in their self-identity and work identity (internal validation).

Finally, some findings achieved in this intervention project may provide some new light for the current studies on the issue of identity regulation, and this research also provides some practical implications for organizations which are trying to manage employees with the strategy of identity regulation.

In the next section, the link between the thesis and extensive literature as well as practical business management will be further discussed.

9.2 Research Findings and Contributions

Since the thesis locates itself in the field of identity research, in this section, the focus is on the potential contributions of the thesis to identity research. First of all, the advances made by the study in the motivation issue of identity construction will be presented; secondly, the mechanisms underpinning identity construction will be discussed, the arguments of this study and will be compared with those of previous studies. Thirdly, the nature of the identity work will be discussed, and again, the differences of perspectives between this thesis and previous academics will be pointed out. Fourthly, the researchers' reflections on the introduction of systems approaches in the intervention project will also be addressed. Finally, some general suggestions for dealing with those identity problems that organizations and employees are facing will be presented.

9.2.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions

9.2.1.1 Motivation of Identity Construction

Although a huge number of studies have been conducted on identification, few of them focus on making explicit the motivations for identity construction.

Some researchers under the framework of SIT have argued that social identification is motivated by peoples' need of self-esteem (Deaux et al., 1999), the need for self-enhancement (Ashforth et al., 2008), which includes self-knowledge, self-expression, self-coherence, self-continuity and self-distinctiveness (Ashforth, 2001), and the need for self-verification (Swann, 1990). These studies identified the general needs of human beings which could explain why people identify some groups/organizations, but these motivations cannot explain and predict when a person's identity work will be aroused and which direction it will be led to.

Pratt (2000) makes an advance on this issue by identifying that 'sense-breaking' practice used by organizations may cause a meaning void, and then arouse an identity work. He argues: "Research presented here extends this work by revealing an additional motivator for identification: a need to create meaning when one is confronted with a disparity between one's current and ideal selves" (p484).

Pratt et al. (2006) make a further advance from the perspective of individuals; they find that physicians' identity work will be aroused when they face a violation between what

they think they are as professionals and what they actually do in practice. Pratt et al. point out that “Building on this research, we argue that achieving alignment between identity and work is a fundamental motivator in identity construction” (p255).

It is argued that this study takes a step further in the research of motivation of identity work, by making explicit that matching problems may be the main cause of the work identity construction process. Besides, four types of matching problems are also made explicit; each of which may lead to different kinds of identity construction process” (see Sections 8.1.2.2 and 8.1.4.2).

Since this main cause is identified, we may answer some questions left by previous research and explain previous research from a new perspective. For example, Ibarra (1999) finds that when people adopt to new roles, some of them use ‘imitation’ strategy while others use ‘true-to-self’ strategy (p785); he cannot explain the phenomenon and suggests future studies “explore how individual characteristics influence adaptation by their effect on choices among the action strategies identified here (e.g. use of imitation vs. true-to-self strategies)” (p785). Although I have had no chance to review the interview data obtained by Ibarra, my own study gives me a clue to explain the phenomenon: the degree of matching of belief and values may differ in the two groups; if the matching is good, people would like to learn values and skills from the organization, and sometimes they also look for role models; if the matching is bad, people would be more careful when trying to incorporate those new values/ skills (similar experiences could be found in Berta and Delilah’s stories, see Sections 6.1.1, 6.5.1, 7.5.1). Therefore Ibarra (1999) observes that different people take different strategies in the process of identity construction.

Another example may be the study of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). They argue that the heroine suffers from the conflicting identities implied by different functions of her role, and these functions are linked with different discourses of the organization; the self-identity is used by the heroine as stabilizer to manage those conflicted sub-identities, but at the same time, self-identity is a source of tension and pain. The story told by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) can be further analyzed with the model of this research; there are many problems existing in the heroine’s identity work process: first of all, the complexity of her role may be a main cause of her difficulty in interpreting and playing the role, therefore the identity construction may be a long and hard process for the heroine. Secondly, there is some conflict between value (organizational

discourse) and belief (which is embedded in the heroine's self-identity), and this conflict is interpreted by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) as conflicts implied by different organizational discourses. Thirdly, changes-within-role also happen in this case, and the heroine refuses to incorporate the new required functions (it is similar to Alton's case, see Sections 4.3.1 and 4.4.1); this phenomenon is also explained as discourses conflict by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). Fourthly, there may be also an invisible matching problem between value/belief and skills/capability; because on the one hand the heroine cannot operate the new function well although she chooses to do it; and on the other side, the heroine cannot prove her belief is better to other organizational members because her performance does not show people that those functions she emphasized can bring more benefit to the organization. Therefore, to some degree, the heroine is locked in the cycle of identity work and role work. She may need some extra support to identify these gaps, and negotiate with her organization about how to interpret the role and develop her own work identity.

The third case is the study of Pratt et al. (2006) who summarize that the motivation is the violation between work and identity. Their findings may be suitable for explaining the identity work of new professionals who are actually faced with the matching problem between pre-developed beliefs (obtained from previous theoretical study) and their undeveloped capabilities. However, this kind of mismatch is only one type of the four matching problems; some other employees may face other problems and decide to enter the identity construction process for other reasons. Therefore, it can be seen that this thesis may supplement Pratt et al.'s (2006) findings and provide a holistic view on the issue of motivation.

Because the findings of this research could explain cases studied not only by this research but also some previous research, the first contribution of this research is argued to be making advancement in the research of the motivation issue in the identity field.

9.2.1.2 Mechanisms of Conducting Identity Work

Previous research has proposed some different mechanisms about how identity transition can be achieved during the role transition period, and in this section, their arguments will be compared with the findings of this study, which focus on the mechanism of identity work in normal organizational life.

First of all, Ibarra (1999) points out that experience may be a main source of identity construction, and people adapt to their new roles by develop and experiment provisional identities in practice. Specifically, Ibarra argues that “The analysis presented here, by contrast, reveals the active role played by the junior person in enacting the informal environment by devoting greater attention to certain seniors and revising role-model choices on the basis of personal experiment and feedback... The concept of an adaptation repertory, therefore, extends current thinking by accommodating both stability and change in identities.” (p783) The mechanism proposed by Ibarra (which contains role models, experience and adaptation repertory of identity) explains well how people adapt to their new roles; but this mechanism needs to be further developed to explain people’s identity work in a non-role-transition period. In this study, mature managers did not always need to develop provisional identities basing on role models when conduct identity work in their day to day work, instead, they reflect in and on their practical experience to develop some new subtle capabilities or summarize some new approaches/ beliefs (see Theme 4.4.2.1-2). Therefore, it is argued that reflecting in and on experience is the main mechanism used by employees for identity construction in their routine work.

Ibarra (1999) also finds that networks may be a useful facilitator of identity construction process; he indicates that “adaptation is facilitated by networks that include both a core of close ties premised on similarity and identification as well as a broader set of more distant relationships that may lack an affective quality but expose the individual to new, even unanticipated possibilities” (p786). In this research, I did not carefully observe what kinds of networks were used by participants, but I did find that experience obtained from people’s personal life, previous education and career all have significantly influence on people’ self-identity and sometimes on work identity (see sections 4.2., 5.1, 6.1, 6.5.1 and 7.5.1). The function of networks is actually as a channel for people to see and receive different values held by other people; it is similar to the function of school education and the intervention of this project, and fit the idea of CSH, ‘sweep in more stakeholders’ (see Section 8.1.4.2 and Theme 4.3.2.3-2). The aim of all these activities is to bring different values into people’s minds, so people may reflect on their own beliefs, and sometimes try new ones. Identity work may be aroused through this kind of activities, and people may try to test these new incorporated beliefs in following practices and also develop related capabilities; and then a complete cycle of identity work can be achieved.

Secondly, Pratt (2000) points out that sense-making is the main mechanism of identity construction, but he also interprets the process as a one-way process, “sense-giving”. It is argued by this thesis that sense-making process of identity construction should be a bidirectional process. Two-way communication should not only be used in the sense making process between employees, but also should be adopted in the communication between employee and the organization. As discussed in Section 8.1.4.3, critical discussion between organization and employee could not only assist people completing their identity work, but also could arouse some kind of role work which may lead to organizational learning and innovation.

Thirdly, previous research has concentrated on the identity work and few researchers try to examine role work (Simpson and Carroll, 2008). One reason may be that many identity studies focus on the macro-role transition period (Ibarra, 1999, Pratt, 2000, Pratt et al., 2006), and therefore role is seen as a fixed set of requirements that people must adapt to. However, some other studies that focus on the conflicts between organization and individuals on identity work ignore that roles can be redefined (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006, Anderson, 2012, Beech, 2008, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). It is the neglect of role work that limits researchers’ view; therefore the identity construction process is often interpreted in previous research as a fight between individuals and organizations on the right of control. If we take role as a changeable factor, it can be seen that organization and employees could cooperate with each other, to find a better way to interpret and play the role, and then achieve personal development and organizational development at the same time.

Based on the above analysis, it is argued that the second contribution of the thesis is making some advancement on the research of mechanisms of identity work.

9.2.1.3 Outcomes of Identity Construction

As discussed in the previous section, little attention is paid to role work in the process of identity construction; therefore most studies see the results of adaption of identity as the outcomes of identity construction.

Specifically, Pratt (2000) reports three possible outcomes: de-identification, dis-identification, or ambivalent identification with the organization. Ibarra (1999) indicates that the possible adaptation outcomes include: “speed of adaptation; degree of self-concept change; degree of role innovation; effectiveness in the new role” (p787). Pratt

et al. (2006) think there is only one outcome, identity customization. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) summarize two kinds of results: if work role transition is successful, the new role identity will be internalized by the person and accepted by role set members; if transition fails, the new role identity will be rejected by the person and other members.

It can be seen that all these studies make quite abstract descriptions of the possible outcomes of identity construction. This thesis discusses in detail about those possible outcomes of each sub-process of identity construction, and the long-term results caused by those outcomes (see section 8.1.3.3).

Another sub-issue about outcomes is the popular question, “what predicts when an individual will adopt a role (become a role custodian) or change it (become a role innovator)?” (Pratt et al., 2006, 256). Nicholson and West claim that job discretion and job novelty could be the predictors (Nicholson, 1984, West et al., 1987). Pratt et al. (2006) argue they make progress by suggesting that “identity change can be more incremental. Instead of adopting a whole new identity, an individual can enrich an existing identity, patch together two (or more) identities, or use another identity as a temporary splint” (p256). This study makes further progress on the basis of the study of Pratt et al. (2006). Firstly, it is shown in this research that the matching of capability and skill could predict the direction of identity construction. If people’s capability is higher than the skills required by a role, people may have more freedom to redefine the role so that the outcome is a role change; and it is also indicated that identity work may be aroused as a following process to develop new capability to play the renewed role. On the other hand, if people’s capability is lower than the skills required, people may have less freedom to change their role, and identity work may be more significant in the process of identity construction (see Section 8.1.2.1).

Because of the two advances achieved on this issue, it is argued that the thesis also makes some contribution in deepening our understanding of the short-term and long-term results of the identity construction process.

9.2.1.4 The Nature of Identity Construction Process

Previous researchers also have different views about the nature of the identity construction process; they use different metaphors to describe the process.

For example, Pratt (2006) sees identification as a process of mass customization; he argues that “the customization process described herein appears more akin to mass customization, a process whereby goods are produced on an assembly line but tailored to an individual’s needs. Here, members can be said to have been able to pick and choose from various identity elements—as if choosing from an identity “menu”—to make sense of their work, but these choices were highly constrained by the organizational context” (p257). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) pay more attention to the conflicts in the process; they said: “this study argues for identity as struggle. Individuals are assumed to strive for comfort, meaning and integration and some correspondence between a self-definition and work situation” (p1188). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) see identity construction as a process of pursuing evolution of narrative repertoire which is also thought as “the end point of a work role transition” (p149).

These three studies actually represent three kinds of perspective on the nature of identity construction: mass customization, struggle, and evolution. To some degree, these three studies also represent three kinds of views on the relationship between organization and individuals. The first view emphasizes organizational control; the second view emphasizes the conflict between organization and individuals; and the third view emphasizes the individual agency in organizational life.

In this study, each of the three views could explain some cases of the research but does not work well with others. As I have discussed previously, identity work may be a long-term process that continues throughout people’s career life and contains many sub processes; and within an organization, people may be involved in different types of identity work and faced with different problems; therefore focusing on one or more specific phases and specific groups could only grasp some small part of the whole process. Besides, because of the neglect of role work, none of them consider the possibility of co-construction of identity/ role by organizations and individuals, which may lead to both personal development and organizational development.

Therefore, it is argued that this thesis sheds some new light on the cognition of the nature of identity construction process; this is the fourth possible contribution of the research.

9.2.1.5 Instruments for Assisting Identity Construction

As argued in the literature chapter, although some studies have achieved progress in summarizing the strategies used by organizations and individuals in the process of identity construction, it is hard for practitioners to apply those abstract principles in their work immediately. Besides, no professional tools have been developed for assisting identity development. Therefore, the four systems approaches introduced this research and the way that they are applied in the intervention project may provide a good basis for other researchers and practitioners to make sense of how to make further progress in this direction.

Therefore, the fourth contribution of the thesis lies in creatively applying the systems theories and approaches to the identity development field.

In next section, the implications of this study on management practice will be discussed.

9.2.2 Response to the Practical Problems

In Chapter One, it is claimed that modern organizations and individuals are facing serious identity problems caused by newly emerged economic and social phenomena. In previous chapters possible problems and difficulties embedded in the process of identity construction have been pointed out, and some specific suggestions also have been provided. In this section, I will present a general proposal about identity management and development for organizations and for individuals, based on my own experience obtained in the research project.

9.2.2.1 Organizational Management on Identity Issue

There are four suggestions provided to organizations to assist them understanding and managing employees' identity construction.

First of all, it is necessary for organizations (represented by line managers) to identify what are the matching problems existing in each employee. As discussed in Section 8.1, there are many kinds matching problems which may lead to different kinds of identity work, and therefore they need different tactics in dealing with them. (Theme 7.4.2.4)

Secondly, according to the specific problems of each person, organizations and an individuals may negotiate with each other about how to fill the gap. Some specific objectives may be proposed, and even a work plan can be made. (Theme 4.3.2.3-1)

Thirdly, the identity construction process may be a hard and long process, and sometimes, individual needs extra support to overcome the learning and reflection problem; therefore it is necessary to keep in touch with each employee to identify the specific difficulties and provide related support (Theme 7.4.2.4).

Fourthly, conflict is inevitable in the process, and a good way to deal with it may be testing the potential options in practice; when there is problem in obtaining feedback from practice, broadening the network may be another channel to obtain more resources for identity/ role work. In short, new experience (from practice or other people) provides a more solid foundation for reflection and learning and therefore could advance identity work (Theme 4.3.2.3-2).

9.2.2.2 Personal Management on Identity Issue

Individuals may also benefit from purposeful identity management. There are also three suggestions for individuals:

First of all, individuals also need to make a space for themselves to reflect in and on their work, so that experience could be transferred into learning. During these reflections, some systems tools could be used to diagnose the matching problems existing in their current identity and role definition, so that a purposeful identity work can be done (see Sections 2.3; themes labeled with systems approaches).

Secondly, individuals need to deal with identity regulation and other organizational control more actively. Resistance should be used as the final tactic, before that, people could analyze the problem situation with the tools provided by this research, and propose their own approach to the problem-solving based on that analysis. Therefore, people may take a better position in the negotiating process with organizations, and then have more influence on the identity construction process (see Section 8.2).

Thirdly, people can create a career ladder for themselves. It is mentioned in Section 1.1 that a clear career ladder has disappeared in many organizations because of the changed organizational environment; this research project indicates that people could rebuild the ladder by themselves. Specifically, besides asking for a promotion or looking for a new job, people could also redefine their roles to provide themselves a new position. In order to achieve that, people need to have good understanding of themselves and also of their roles, and some approaches like the lean systems thinking could also be used to assist people's reflection (see Sections 8.1.5).

Although these suggestions are made based on a small sample, they are a summary of the thick experiences of these participants; and it is also believed that the stories and findings achieved in this research can be shared as some meaningful experiences.

After reviewing the possible contributions to theory and practice, the limitations of this research and future directions will be discussed in next section.

9.3 Limitations and Further Research Directions

As with previous research on the issue of identity construction process, this study also attempted to “build and elaborate theory from a limited sample” (Pratt, 2000, 259).

Given the limitation of four participants and a theory generation approach, it has to be said that the ideas proposed by the research remain speculative, and the model developed in the study still needs further testing.

Caution is particularly needed when generalizing these findings to other organizations. For example, this study was conducted in a high educational institution where collective and creative discourses take a dominant position; therefore, some business organizations that have different cultures may have different ways in managing employees. Besides, all the four participants are managers; therefore, their identity construction processes may differ from first-line workers. The sample of the research may also be biased by the oversampling of female participants (three of the four participants are female), some other factors like nationality, education, profession and age may also have influence on the research findings.

Despite these problems, I still think the validity of the research findings is not heavily threatened; because firstly this research does not aim to predict the results of the identity construction process; instead, this thesis pursued to identify those possible processes, problems and outcomes of the process; to explain why people in the same organizational environment respond to the change in different ways; and to explore if the new developed set of tools could provide some assistance for people’s identity construction. In short, this is an exploratory research rather than a confirmatory study. Secondly, as I argued in Section 3.3.7, the rules of action research and IPA study have been strictly followed; threats to reliability and validity were considered and eliminated as far as possible. Thirdly, by linking this study with previous research, many arguments made by the study could also explain those cases studied by previous

researchers well; and the generalization to other studies may prove the validity of my findings to a degree.

Due to time and funding constraints, the research project could not address many issues as deeply as I wished. However, these issues may become the objectives of my future research.

First of all, the sample may be broadened in my future research. Participants who come from different backgrounds, professions and positions may be invited to further expose the process of identity construction, identifying other possible motivations, mechanisms and outcomes.

Secondly, the set of instruments may be developed further. On the one hand, I will keep looking for other possible approaches which may also shed some new light on the learning, reflection and validation processes. On the other hand, the use of current approaches needs to be further explored, to make them more user-friendly, and concentrate more on the identity issues.

Thirdly, it is noticed that organizational development is closely linked with individual development in the research, especially through the link between organizational discourses and identity work; that could also be a potential direction for future research. For example, in H organization, because of the changes that happened in the school (new leader, an ongoing review, a forthcoming updating of strategic plan, the changed funding policy), people experienced some kind of identity construction process; at the same time, the organization's strategy, vision and culture were also renewed in the process, along with people's identity work and role work. If more interviews can be conducted with more organizational members (especially with the previous and new leader, as well as employees from different levels), the discourses of the organization as well as the construction processes of organizational discourses can be revealed. Therefore, the relationship between organizational development and personal development can be exposed to some degree.

Fourthly, another interesting topic identified in the research is the employability of students. Two difficulties have been identified about the improvement of students' employability. Firstly, asking first year students to participate in employability related activities is actually asking students to enter into a new role transition process while they are experiencing one (adapting to the role of university students/ academics).

Secondly, successful role transition requires updating in belief and capability at the same time; however, universities cannot provide enough support to challenge students' current belief and offer them more appropriate ones (organizational values); universities also cannot provide sufficient practical experience to students to learn and reflect so as to develop practical capabilities. As I have argued, identity/role work should be a cooperation process between employer and employees, so what could we do without a clear employer?

Three questions need to be answered on the employability development issue: how to arouse seekership? How to offer new meaning? How to help students develop related capability?

Finding answers for these questions may lead to another interesting research journey.

Fifthly, it is also noticed that industry discourses, organizational discourses and personal identity work can interact with each other. For example, international issues are emphasized by H Business School; one reason is that it is a requirement of EQUIS accreditation. If more data can be collected from different schools and accreditation institutions, the dynamic process between industry, organization and individual may be disclosed. That would also be an interesting research topic.

This research project provided me a great chance to get close to people's practical experience of identity construction, and many interesting issues were identified in the process; these issues may become my further research directions, and leads to some deeper exploration on the identity topic.

9.4 Summary

Through applying systems approaches in the identity management of individuals, a deeper understanding of the identity construction process is achieved, and a set of instruments for assisting identity development is developed. Specifically, the thesis makes some advances on the research of identity by shedding new light on the understanding of the motivation, mechanism and nature of the identity construction process; besides, a set of integrated and complementary instruments is developed based on four systems approaches to assist individuals' identity development and management. Through reflecting on the thick experience of the four participants of the research project, a few general suggestions (my interpretation) are provided, as a supplementation of the detailed stories of the participants (the vivid experience), which could assist other practitioners in making sense of how to manage their own work and work identity.

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Appendixes:

Appendix 1: The Time Plan of the Intervention project

Week	Task	Date
1	Meeting to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide an overview of the programme as a whole. ▪ Introduce the Critical Systems Heuristics Approach (CSH). 	24/10/11---- 30/10/11
1/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use CSH as a problem-solving/decision-making technique and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. ▪ Use CSH to reflect on your identity as a manager and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. 	31/10/11---- 06/11/11
3	Meeting to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss your experience and evaluation of CSH. ▪ Introduce the Strategic Assumption Surfacing & Testing Approach (SAST). 	07/11/11---- 13/11/11
3/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use SAST as a problem-solving/decision-making technique and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. ▪ Use SAST to critically reflect on your plan for change and to make explicit any assumptions that would affect the effectiveness of your plan to make you a better manager and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. 	14/11/11---- 20/11/11
5	Meeting to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss your experience and evaluation of SAST. ▪ Introduce Lean Systems Thinking (LST). 	21/11/11---- 27/11/11
5/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use LST to rearrange your office and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. ▪ Use LST to check and redesign your work as a manager and record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. 	28/11/11--- 04/12/11
7	Meeting to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss your experience and evaluation of LST. ▪ Introduce Causal Loop Diagrams (CLD). 	05/12/11--- 11/12/11
7/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use CLD to aid reflection on your management processes that lock you into patterns of behaviour and then, to identify points of leverage for bringing about change. Record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. 	12/12/11--- 18/12/11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use CLD to reflect on your work identity, to identify points of leverage for bringing about change. Record your reflections on its use in your reflective diary. <p>Meeting to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss your experience and evaluation of CLM. ▪ Review the programme as a whole. 	
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However, this time plan was not strictly followed, because I often had to postpone the meetings with the participants. Thus, the action research project was actually carried out from Oct 2011 to March 2012; and the detailed information is presented in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2: The Implementation of the Project

Meetings with Alton

	Date	Purpose	Time	Length of the meeting (minutes)
1	14/04/2011	Pre-change interview with CIT method	10.30am	100
2	28/10/2011	Introduction for the project	12.00 noon	85
3	11/11/2011	Review CSH approach	11.00am	95
4	24/11/2012	Review SAST approach	11.00am	120
5	15/12/2012	Review LEAN approach (Mode 2)	11.00am	80
6	19/12/2012	Review SD approach and lean approach (Mode 3)	11.00am	120

Meetings with Coral

	Date	Purpose	Time	Length of the meeting (minutes)
1	17/02/2011	Pre-change interview with CIT method	9.00am	50
2	01/11/2011	Review CSH approach	3.30pm	30
3	16/11/2011	Review SAST approach	1.30pm	30
4	29/11/2012	Review LEAN approach	2.00pm	40
5	19/12/2012	Review SD approach	1.00pm	30

Meetings with Berta

	Date	Purpose	Time	Length of the meeting (minutes)
1	06/05/2011	Pre-change interview with CIT method	10.30am	50
2	25/10/2011	Introduction for the project	3.30pm	60
3	11/11/2011	Review CSH approach	3.30pm	120
4	24/11/2011	Review SAST approach	3.30pm	75
5	07/12/2011	Review LEAN approach (first part of Mode 2)	3.30pm	95
6	12/12/2011	Review LEAN approach (part of Mode 2, Mode 3)	3.30pm	60
7	15/12/2011	Review SD approach (Mode 2)	3.30pm	85
8	22/12/2011	Review SD approach (Mode 2)	3.30pm	95
9	23/12/2011	Review SD approach (Mode 3)	10.30am	30

Meetings with Delilah

	Date	Purpose	Time	Length of the meeting (minutes)
1	27/10/2011	Introduction for the project	9.30am	60
2	13/01/2012	Review CSH approach	10.30am	100
3	27/01/2012	Review SAST approach	2.00pm	90
4	09/03/2012	Review LEAN approach (first part of Mode 2)	10.30am	80
5	23/03/2012	Review SD approach	10.30am	100

Meetings with Roy

	Date	Purpose	Time	Length of the meeting (minutes)
1	03/03/2011	Pre-change interview with CIT method	10.00am	60
2	04/11/2011	Introduction for the project	10.30am	80
3	11/11/2011	Review CSH approach	09.30am	85

Appendix 3: The Strategy of Literature Review

Narrative review and systematic review are two main methods used to guide literature review (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012)³. Some scholars argue that narrative reviews frequently lack thoroughness and rigor, and can be biased by the researcher while systematic reviews use rigorous research methodologies to limit bias in all aspects of a review (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012, Tranfield et al., 2003). Because systematic review is generated from the medical field, which has great difference with identity research in the management field, it is necessary to take a careful consideration about how the systematic review approach can be applied in this study.

After review a few papers on systematic reviews (Barker and Hunsley, 2012, Bettany-Saltikov, 2012, Brereton et al., 2007, Denise De Las Nueces, 2012, Mair et al., 2012, Taylor and Rew, 2010, Tranfield et al., 2003), I found that it was hard to apply the systematic review process strictly in this research, while some of its principles can be introduced into the project, especially in the stages of data search, selection and synthesis. There are a few reasons for this decision:

(1) Conflicts in nature

The systematic review adopts the evidence-based paradigm, and has traditionally been applied in the field privileging a positivist and quantitative tradition, and is now “regarded as a ‘fundamental scientific activity’” (Tranfield et al., 2003, 209). Since this thesis takes the interpretive paradigm, which has different ontological assumptions on the dimension ‘convergent–divergent’ with systematic review approach (Tranfield et al., 2003, 212), the systematic review approach was not applied strictly in this thesis, especially its philosophical assumptions.

(2) Difficulty of developing a specific research question and a review protocol at the beginning stage

³ Since the systematic review approach is developed, traditional way of doing literature review is called as narrative review (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012). There are three phases and eight steps for conducting a systematic literature review. The three phases are: planning, conducting, and reporting the review (Tranfield et al., 2003). The eight steps include: (1) specify an answerable and focused review question; (2) develop a review protocol; (3) specify the objectives and inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) conduct a comprehensive and systematic literature search; (5) select primary studies, appraise study quality and then extract data; (6) synthesize, summarize and present research findings; (7) write up the review report; (8) validate, share and disseminate the report (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012).

Specifying the research question is the most critical part of a systematic review (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012). The research question is used to construct search strings for automated searches, to determine the data that needs to be extracted from each primary study, and to constrain the aggregation process (Tranfield et al., 2003).

With regard to the review protocol, it is a detailed plan for the review, including, the review question, the rationale for the proposed methods that will be used, and details of how different types of studies will be located, appraised and synthesized. According to the systematic review approach, the protocol needs to be developed before the researcher starts his/ her systematic review, and should not be changed after the protocol is accepted (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012).

However, there is a significant difference between the medical research field (in which the systemic review is generated) and the management research field: the former has high consensus over research questions while the latter has low consensus over research questions (Tranfield et al., 2003). Therefore, researchers in the management field need to look for gaps in literature first and then they can propose their own research questions. In other words, performing a comprehensive search with pre-determined guidelines would be problematical for me, because I was lack of the specific domain knowledge when I started my study (Brereton et al. (2003). In this research, research questions were gradually developed along with the literature review and field work; and the research design was changed gradually along with the conduction of the field work (an new action research project emerged after completing the first round interviews); therefore it was impossible to make a detailed plan in advance about how the literature review would be conducted. However, it was possible to make a plan for each stage of the research project, because the questions and objectives were clear for a specific stage. Therefore, instead of developing a general review protocol, this research developed a series review plans for different stages.

(3) Systematic review has difficulty to assess research quality in management field.

With regard to data appraisal, systematic reviews expose studies to rigorous methodological scrutiny (Tranfield et al., 2003). Within the management field, researchers usually rely on the implicit quality rating rather than formally applying any criteria for quality assessment; besides, systematic reviews draw upon 'raw data', while these data are often unavailable in management articles (Tranfield et al., 2003). Considering the current situation of identity research, it is hard to develop some explicit

criteria for including or excluding certain types of articles according to the principles of systematic review. Therefore, in this thesis, the ranking of journals was used to evaluate the quality of studies rather than the methodological scrutiny; the only purpose of developing selection criteria was to help the researcher search relevant papers on specific issues.

(4) The systematic review can be taken only on primary research papers

It is not acceptable to include other types of studies such as narrative reviews or opinion papers in a systematic review (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012); but those kinds of studies are also very important for my literature review, therefore they were not excluded in this thesis.

Because of the above reasons, systematic review process was not strictly followed in this thesis. However, the literature review of this thesis was still informed by some principles of systematic review, especially its beliefs of adopting a “replicable” and “transparent” process, and providing “an audit trail of the reviewers’ decisions, procedures and conclusions” (Tranfield et al., 2003, 209). In the following sections, the strategies of data search, selection, evaluation and synthesis of this thesis will be presented, which were developed based on the principles of systematic review to some degree.

(1) Data search

Data search was conducted for many times in five stages of the research, for different purposes. Common conditions for all the searches are that the databases of ProQuest and EBSCO were used as the main sources to search articles published in 1990 and after.

In the first stage, the research topic had not been decided. Therefore, the search scope was quite broad: all the articles published in the top journals in management field (Grade 4, according to the ABS Academic Journal Quality Guide) were searched, without specific keywords.

Once identity was chosen as the research topic (the second stage), “identity” was used as the keyword to search related papers in Grade 4 journals, in a few sub-fields (including general management, human resource management and employment studies, organization studies, psychology, social science, strategic management), according to the ABS Academic Journal Quality Guide. It needs to be noticed that this search was

not completed at one time, because the focused sub-fields were changed gradually along with the development of research interests and the improvement of understanding on identity issue. Specifically, the fields of strategic management and organization studies were focused on at first, because initially the focused research topic was organizational identity rather than personal identity. Since the research interest was moved to the personal identity issue, and I noticed that studies based on social identity theory and identity theory were two main streams in this field, psychology and social science were then added into the list. Because of the words limitation, I cannot make a whole review of the process of literature search in this stage.

The third stage started since the process of identity construction of individuals was identified as the core issue of this research. Then a search was made in EBSCO with keywords: “identity work & individuals”, “identity construction & process”, “identity formation & process”, “identity work & personal & process”, “identity formation & individual & process”, “identity construction & individual & process”; Similar search was made in Proquest with terms: “(identity work) AND (process) AND (individual OR personal)”, “(identity construction) AND (process) AND (individual OR personal)”, “(identity formation) AND (process) AND ((individual OR personal))”. More than 2000 articles were found in this step.

The fourth stage was started when the action research was conducted. The purpose of this search was to find out what approaches can be used to support individuals’ identity construction and how action research can be conducted in the identity research field. Therefore the keywords used include: “coach & identity”, “personal development & identity”, “professional development & identity”, and “reflect & identity”, and “action research & identity”.

The last stage was the phase of writing up the thesis. Different terms were used to search related papers on the specific issue that I was writing. For example, when I wrote the definition of identity, search terms were “work identity”, “individual identity”, “professional identity”, “managerial identity”, and “personal identity”. The search was firstly done in the database that I had developed based on previous search; if the literature achieved already was not enough to support the writing (a criterion used to make the judgement was whether all the referred articles of the selected papers on the specific issue can be found in my database), I would search again in EBSCO and Proquest, using the sub-title as the keyword.

(2) Data selection and evaluation

There were two steps for selecting papers: Firstly, all potentially relevant papers achieved through the search were read with title and abstract, the irrelevant ones were deleted. Secondly, those relevant papers were retrieved for a more detailed evaluation of the full text.

The evaluation criteria were different in five stages: in the first and second stage, the criteria were that the paper was interesting and could inspire the researcher's thinking. In the third stage, the criterion was that the paper could expose the process of identity construction to some degree. In the fourth stage, the criterion was that the paper discussed some instruments that could be used to support individual's self reflection, identity construction or personal development. In the final stage, the criterion was that the paper could improve my understanding on the specific issue.

The approaches to improve search quality were also different in the five stages: In Stages 3 and 5, the aim was to improve review quality through exhaustive literature searches of extensive literature. In Stage 1, 2 and 4, the aim was to conduct high-quality reviews of fewer studies using more selective criteria.

(3) Data synthesis

The data synthesis was based on the tabulated data achieved through reading these papers. Notes were made for all the papers stored in my endnote library, including research topic, key findings, methodology, data sources, contributions and limitations. And then these papers were classified into categories according to their research topic, which became sub-titles of the thesis latter. Under each sub-title, papers were reorganized according to their key findings and methodologies; and contributions and limitations of each paper were reported as the main content of the literature review chapter.

The above three steps summarized how the literature review was conducted in this thesis. Systematic review approach was not strictly followed, but the thesis was informed by its principles.