

***Project Managers' Identity: An Interpretive Phenomenological
Perspective***

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Matija Djolic declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Management Discipline Group at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Table of Contents

Dedication	6
Acknowledgements	7
Abstract	10
Introduction	12
The Becoming of Self: The Creation and Perpetuity of Identity	16
Introduction	16
The Study of Identity	18
My Life as a Project Manager: a Reflexive Tale	18
Identity Formation: An Ontological Inquiry into the Onset of Identity Forming	24
The Sovereign Aspect of Agency: An Ontological Inquiry into the Temporality of Identity Work	34
Synopsis	47
The Purposefulness of the Autonomous Subject	50
Introduction	50
Self-critical Identity Work	52
The Problematic of Reflexivity in Identity (Work)	60
Self-identity and the Crises of Project Management	67
Research Questions	76
Conclusion	81
The Stratified Ontology of Self-induced Reality	83
Introduction	83
Ontological Position: The Claim for the Ontology of Self-notions	84
<i>The Phenomenology of Stratified Ontology of Reality</i>	85
Paradigm: The Stratified Ontology of Critical Realism	95
The Interpretive Lens: The Integration of the Study's Ontology and Paradigm	104
Synopsis	115
The Map of Self-experience	117
Introduction	117
Design Frameworks	118
The Focus on the Experience	122
Sampling	124

Research Context	127
Data Collection	128
<i>Semi-structured Interviews and informal interviews</i>	130
<i>Observation</i>	132
Coding and Data Analysis	135
Reflexivity	138
Ethical Considerations	139
Limitations of The Research Design	141
Conclusion	141
The Superimposed Truth: The Vail of Perpetuating Self-ideas	143
Introduction	143
Depth Phenomenology of Being-in-the-world of Work	143
<i>The primary phenomenon of self-referential and self-reinforcing being-in-the-world of work</i>	144
<i>The epiphenomena of corrosive being-in-the-world of work</i>	152
<i>The secondary phenomenon of self-preservation in being-in-the-world</i>	160
The meta-phenomenon of a distinctive self-idea: the organising idea(s) of situated experiences	168
Synopsis	176
The Journey of the Distinctive Self	178
Introduction	178
<i>The (Non-)Emergence of Self-identity: The Journey of the Self-Idea</i>	179
<i>The 'Intentionality' and 'Distinctiveness' of the Self-Idea</i>	190
<i>Research Questions</i>	201
Conclusion	206
The Self as the Centre of the Universe	207
Introduction	207
Contributions	208
Is Identity a predicate of sociality or a purely situated and fragmented phenomena?	208
Is (distinctive) self-identity a discursive illusion?	215
Is the self in a dichotomous relationship with 'society'?	222
Is identity-work a discontinuous and a single-dimensional predicament?	228
Synopsis	235
The Self-fulfilling Prophecy of Existential Dilemmas	237

Introduction	237
What is (Un)successful Identity Work?	237
(Un)successful Identity Work, the Crises of Project Management and Existential Therapy	245
Limitation of the research and findings	251
Future research agendas	253
<i>For Project Management Practice</i>	253
<i>For Archer's Meta-Reflexivity</i>	255
<i>For Phenomenology of Unselfconsciousness</i>	256
Conclusion	257
Synopsis	258
Conclusion	260
Bibliography	266
Appendices	277
Formal Documents	286

Dedication

To my *mother* and my *father*

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Abstract

The elementary building block of identity is meaning since that which is meaningless is also invisible to the self and others (Peterson 1999). However, the shifting nature of meaning inscribed in the multiple contexts of self, the other(s) and discourses, has rendered various academic analytical attempts to highlight a distinctive self-identity rather inconclusive. Consequently, many identity-related studies conducted under the umbrella of social constructivism define self-identity in terms of a fragmented ontology in which the links between everyday agency and 'pre-existing' self are discontinued and seemingly non-referential. For example, by positioning identity as a predicate of discontinuous identity work, the subjective antecedents of identity work become 'concealed'. Empirical manifestation of self-identity is reduced to (impermanence of) meaning *in* discourse in such cases. On the other hand, essentialist attempts to define self-identity have led to a reified depiction of the self, in which case, agency is stripped of its *emergent* qualities. Therefore, unless one resorts to a 'fixed' and 'permanent' depiction of objects, entities and concepts, the fundamental inconclusiveness of (distinctive) self-identity positions all that precedes self-expression as either analytically inaccessible or ontologically indeterminate. On that note, to make the antecedents of identity work visible, this study draws on the 'depth ontology' of critical realism so as to highlight self-identity as a 'distinctive entity' (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), that is, as a 'subjectum' (Heidegger 1953) of one's being-in-the-world of work. Further and more importantly, by highlighting self-identity as a distinctive entity that *informs* identity work, the study draws attention to the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of existing self-definitions and the self-defeating proclivity of self-referential/reinforcing forms of perception. By demonstrating how adopted identities 'create problems' (Beech et al. 2016) on the 'empirical level' (such as producing the

experience of negative emotional states) the study develops a critical inquiry into the adopted self-notions highlighting the *problematic*, in addition to the precarious, nature of self-identity.

Introduction

The study of identity has attracted multidisciplinary interest in line with the postmodern and post-bureaucratic shift towards interpreting the individual as an irreducible 'building block' of any given system of organising. The widespread interest in studying one's identity is also an outcome of the social sciences' shift away from models derived from natural science and positivism, towards a more constructivist and interpretivist epistemology of social organisation. The central premise in the shift is the positioning of the phenomenon of 'meaning' as forming the basic element in the processes of human organising. Consequently, identity has become a central concept in facilitating cross-disciplinary and multi-level research, encouraging nuanced, contextual analysis (Brown 2018). However, the 'liberation' of self-identity from the deterministic 'confines' of positivistic epistemology also introduces new challenges. The dynamic and ephemeral nature of 'meaning' has presented many problematics with regards to identifying the self as a 'distinctive entity' as meanings continually shift and morph in 'liquid' (Bauman 2000) social arrangements. On that note, studies of processes of identity formation, conceptualised through the notion of *identity work*, have proliferated in breadth and depth. Therefore, the central premise behind the complexity of identity is captured in the 'paradox' of one's desire to retain a coherent sense of self while also seeking *continually* to 'improve' and 'develop'.

To attend to the paradox embedded in the notion of a 'distinctive self', one thus must first delineate the 'origin of meaning' as purported by the extant literature. As will be demonstrated in the following pages, the extant literature on self-identity, which is predominantly founded on the social constructivist and poststructuralist epistemology (O'Mahoney 2011, Marks & O'Mahoney 2014), suggests that the notion of 'coherence' in identity is inconclusive since the meaning of things is dependent on where you

sit (Clegg 1975). More specifically, this view ties ‘contents’ of one’s identity with the ‘contents’ of discourse one is participating within. Subsequently, these studies offer a fragmented characterisation of the ‘self’ given that the self ‘forms’ and then (immediately) vanishes with discourse (O’Mahoney 2011, Marks & O’Mahoney 2014). In this instance, identity formation becomes a *precarious* process of ‘externally’¹ (that is, within the domain of discourse) normalising the hegemony of discourse to protect a ‘fragile self’. Contrary to the view of social constructivists and poststructuralist, essentialists argue *for* the distinctiveness of the self; however, their arguments explain away any notion of conscious choice—necessary for the *intentional* construction and formation of a particular self-identity—by virtue of automatic psychic modalities and/or neurological processes that pertain to *all* individuals equally. On that note, the study argues that positioning the struggle for distinction of the self within the domain of discursive concordance (inadvertently) explains the individual away, since all that precedes discourse, or exists outside its domain, is either analytically inaccessible or ontologically indeterminate (O’Mahoney 2011, Marks & O’Mahoney 2014). On the same token, locating the individual within reified ‘traits’ divorces the process of identity formation from subject’s intentionality which also offers a largely impersonal rendition of self-identity. On that note, the alienation of the self occurs on both sides of the argument because the individual is stripped away of his discretion for meaning-making.

The (self-identity) literature (Brown 2018) founded on either social constructivist or essentialist epistemology thus creates various unresolved problems with respect to the phenomenon of self-

¹ The term ‘externally’ denotes the dissolution of the individual into ‘language games’ wherein the self gets relegated to the domain that is external to individual’s subjectivity and exclusively within the domain of discursive concordance. As confirmed by Marks and O’Mahoney (2014) in their critique of the social constructivist approach to self-identity: “as a strong discursive approach dissolves all notion of the individual into language games, it generates an anti-humanism which is impotent in explaining how resistance is possible in the face of discourses generated by organisations, professions, or governments” (p. 67)

identity: the problematic of pre-existing and distinctive self-identity and the problematic of intentionality in the process of identity formation and identity work. In acknowledging this problem, the study will attend to requests made by researchers that call for a more *critical* inquiry into the processes of identity formation and identity work. It will do so by considering situated experiences as outcomes of *internal* soliloquy (Archer 2000, Archer 2003, Brown 2018), while not obviating recognition of the effects of social arrangements on delimiting and shaping the thought tendencies that precede self-expression (Bardon et al. 2012, Brown 2015). Highlighting a 'pre-existing' view of self-identity, that is, a view of identity as a 'distinctive entity', the study will contend that any process of identity work and identity formation therefore already 'contains' an import of an established self-identity. By demonstrating how adopted identities 'create problems' (Beech et al. 2016) on the 'empirical level' (such as producing the experience of negative emotional states) the study thus highlights the *problematic* in addition to precarious nature of self-expression in everyday being-in-the-world of work. More importantly, by highlighting the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of established self-notions, the study will delineate between successful and unsuccessful forms of identity work which will affect and shape how academia and/or everyday laypersons deal with existential dilemmas.

The study will attend to the antecedents of identity work by way of a phenomenological analysis of experiences of anxiety in project-based work arrangements. The focus on the *experiences* of anxiety is influenced by Archer (2000) who considers negative emotional states as a 'window' into one's subjective make-up. In attending to the 'outliers' of everyday interaction, such as the experience of anxiety, the study therefore aims to 'peek' into the contents of one's adopted self-notions to assess how they affect and shape situated experiences. Perceiving self-identity through the lens of critical realism, the study will therefore emphasise the emergent and stratified ontology of self-identity and in

doing so will provide a bridge between dominating epistemologies that polarize the relationship between the self and society (O'Mahoney 2011, Marks & O'Mahoney 2014). Overall, the aim of the study is to foreground arguments that extend beyond dualistic forms of theorising which offer a largely non-humanist rendition of self-identity.

The Becoming of Self: The Creation and Perpetuity of Identity

Introduction

Personal experiences gained from being a project manager led me to question dualistic approaches to making sense of self and the surrounding professional world. Since the project management profession has emerged from the requirement of having to balance different professional objectives to deliver a 'project', the subjective aspect of conflicts, misunderstandings and disagreements in doing so are evident. Especially, these become pertinent in the context of performance management and more specifically, in the context of understanding the value one brings to the overall organisation. For example, since project managers are only as good as their last project, it becomes evident that 'competence' is not an objective attribute of action but is rather subjectively attributed to a particular subject. On that note, one can argue that one's perception of self-worth and the self-worth of others is also shaped by one's interests and objectives. Noting this, it becomes valuable to consider how much our personal identities, our view of the self and view of others, affects how we act within and experience our professional surroundings.

On that note, the chapter will seek to address contentious issues and thematics in the extant literature on self-identity. It will begin by highlighting why the study of self-identity is theoretically significant and how inquiry into self-identity can help one not only understand the individual subject but also make sense of the process of organising in professional environments. From this springboard, the chapter will highlight the ontological and epistemological hurdles that have an impact on how self-identity is currently defined. This section of the chapter will focus on the 'ontological divide' between different

paradigms deployed in the interpretation of identity-related phenomena in the extant literature. More specifically, it will highlight how such an 'ontological divide' in theorising has led to polarising views with respect to different matters of self-identity; specifically, the matter of 'distinctive' self-identity and the intentional and wilful nature of agency. On that note, the chapter will address the literature with an inherent aim of dealing with the thematic contentions associated with concepts of distinctive self and intentional agency; namely the literature concerned with the notion of *identity formation* and *identity work*. The chapter will conclude by highlighting the problematic nature of arguments promoted in the extant literature and will demonstrate how such arguments reinforce the current state of dichotomous and dualistic theorising in the self-identity space.

The Study of Identity

My Life as a Project Manager: a Reflexive Tale

If I am I because you are you, and if you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you.

(Alan Watts, cited in Knights & Clarke 2017., p. 337).

I was always interested in how our subjective constitution shapes and delimits our daily experiences of circumstances, the self and others. By experience is meant our conceptual and emotional 'response' to what we 'encounter' in the world; the highly personal and subjective *is* and *is-not* (sense of) circumstance, the self and the other. By subjective constitution is meant our subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world (of others); the 'body' of the mind's content we use to make sense of the 'world' and ourselves in the world of others. This 'body' of the mind's content subsumes all our past experiences and the knowledge and self-knowledge that emerges from (past) experience. It also contains that which we have not experienced yet but strive towards in our daily activities, such as our (personal) goals, desires and objectives. In the context of interest, the notion of subjective constitution is thus synonymous with the notion of self-identity, since any definition of self-identity cannot preclude our goals, desires, objectives, motivators, interest and (past) experiences (see Watson 2008). As noted by Peterson (1999):

The maps that configure our motivated behaviour have a certain comprehensible structure. They contain two fundamental and mutually interdependent poles, one *present*, the other *future*. The present is sensory experience as it is currently manifested to us—as we currently understand it—granted motivational significance according to our current knowledge and desires. The future is an

image or partial image of perfection, to which we compare the present, insofar as we understand its significance. (p. 28)

The relationship between this subjective world and everyday experiences came to be particularly relevant in the project management organisational settings, where I spent the last 15 years of my professional career. Riddled with stress and anxiety, project managers struggle on a day-to-day basis to manage expectations of numerous project stakeholders. Stakeholders internal to the organisation (such as colleagues, immediate supervisors and executives) expect the project manager to deliver a high-quality product, analogous to the 'image' of the organisation, all the while maximising the project's profitability which ensures the perpetuation of the (entire) organisation. As such, the 'destiny' of the organisation and its employees is in the hands of the project manager whose 'success' is cognate to the success of the project. Project managers are, as such, only as good as their last project (Clegg & Courpasson 2004). On the other hand, project managers are also required to manage expectations of clients and other project stakeholders (for example, the design team and public and council representatives) external to the organisation. In addition to the necessity of delivering the project within the nominated timeframe and to the 'predetermined' particularities of the design brief², being a project manager thus also means being bound by the visions, interests and emotionality of many *different* project constituents and the general public and its representatives³.

² The design brief is a short document composed by the person wanting to invest in building a dwelling (also known as 'the client') and a team of designers or other superintendents (for example, client-side project managers) who assist the person with transforming the idea into 'words on paper'. The design brief is usually a short document that encapsulates the client(s) desires and the design requirement of the dwelling.

³ Public relations management has become a major aspect of project delivery and management since the construction and completion of new projects affects and shapes pre-existing communities.

The self-worth of the project manager is, as such, shaped by ‘external forces’. The same can be said about the *contingent* notions of (organisation’s) ‘prosperity’ and ‘success’⁴. On that note, the sheer arbitrariness of notions defining the project manager’s professional (self-)worth is relational to the plethora of diverging views on ‘reality’ that are put forward by those who control the *flow* of ‘truth’. For the project manager, the people in these ‘positions of power’ live on both sides of the project’s control group⁵ ‘spectrum’—on the one side, they include the senior management of the organisation whom the project manager ‘represents’. On the other side of the spectrum is the client, who is financing the project, but also stakeholders who are controlling the project’s design⁶. As such, in addition to being shaped by legislative and contractual obligations, the project manager’s professional identity is largely influenced by the thoughts and opinions of different project stakeholders (for example, the client, the design team, the public and local government representatives).

On that note, it can be said that the project manager’s subjective constitution is ‘dependent’ on the *perceived* (by others) ability to satisfy all of the ‘requirements’ necessary to deliver a ‘successful’ project. However, since the judgement of professional worth is relative to the needs and desires of the stakeholder making the claim⁷, notions such as ‘success’ and ‘quality’, even notions such as ‘time’ and

⁴ As the adage goes—beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. On that note, prosperity and success can mean different things to different people, especially in the context of project management. For example, maximizing profit at the cost of relationships can be defined as success for some while not for others.

⁵ Project control group or PCG represents the individuals and their respective organisations that are involved in the design development and the construction of the project. They include the builder, the client, the design team (architects and engineers, for example) and/or public representatives, among many others.

⁶ For example, the architect and the engineer.

⁷ The executives of the organisation have different interests to the client and other project stakeholders. More importantly, these interests are often contradictory in nature. For example, the organisation’s executives want the project to make as much money as possible while the client wants to get the highest value for money ratio. This means that if any of them were to render judgement about the project manager’s professional capability, they would do so from the vantage point of their interests, needs and objectives.

'project manager', appropriate inverted commas simply because of the highly relative nature of the definitions that can be ventured by different project constituents. Therefore, since definitions of capability, quality and success are also 'relational and activity dependent' (Archer, 2003) to the needs and desires of different project stakeholders, it can be said that my professional experiences as a project manager, my professional identity and notions of self-worth, are largely shaped by the subjective constitution of people I interact with throughout the project lifecycle. *My professional experiences of myself as a project manager are thus shaped by the (project) stakeholders' experiences of me* especially when perceiving *and recognising* the stakeholders as the 'gatekeepers' of my 'ability to perform'. However, acknowledging this is the same as saying that their experience of me and my performance, to a large extent, begins with their own personal and professional objectives, goals and desires⁸. If this line of reasoning is extended, it can be said that my experience of me as a project manager should also be, to an extent, shaped by my objectives, needs and desires, especially if my 'professional purpose' is to attain the praise and approval of the gatekeepers of my 'performance'⁹. My purpose, as such, becomes one that 'binds' me to their judgements and observations. This suggests that the stakeholders' judgements and observations of my 'performance' also matter if I *choose to perceive* them as important, warranting and plausible¹⁰. As such, it can be said that the project manager's professional experience is contingent upon the self-identity of those individuals interacted with throughout the project lifecycle¹¹

⁸ This is not to say that there are no objective representations of quality and success such as those encapsulated in the Building Code of Australia and other legislative measures, for example. The point of these claims is one that seeks to emphasize that interest-based decision-making is as accurate a description of reality as one stipulated in the contractual arrangements between parties to the building contract. Precluding one would ignore a fundamental aspect of everyday decisions.

⁹ Project stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

¹⁰ This is not to say that what matters is only an outcome of perception since there are, for example, legal implications if the project manager produces an unsafe structure. What is important to note, however, is that even the legal implications are experienced differently by different individuals with respect to that which matters in the life of the subject.

¹¹ This assumes that one's goals and desires comprise and are indicative of one's personal identity.

in as much as this relationship is instantiated by the project manager as an important aspect of professional identity.

On that note, my judgement of myself and my judgement of others as well as the other's judgments of me seem to all be a matter of *relative perception*, distinctively based on intentions, objectives, needs and desires of the subjects doing the perceiving and not *inherent* to that which is being perceived. Subsequently, a discussion of anxiety and stress in project-based organisational settings, that is, a discussion of project manager's everyday experiences, must not exclusively be a discussion of 'onerous' working arrangements and 'unreasonable' demands of project stakeholders (which is sometimes referred to in the literature as *subject/object binary thinking*) (see Bateson 2002)¹². Rather, it should also be a discussion of the problematic nature of our subjective constitution with respect to the effect it has on situated experiences but only in so much as it is approached from the vantage point of non-binary thinking which (analytically) *begins* with subjectively constituted views of the self and the surrounding world of others¹³. For this reason, in the context of project management and my extensive experience as a project manager, a particular relationship of interest emerged:

Self-identity ↔ everyday agency ↔ situated experience

¹² Subject/object binary thinking suggests that both the subject and the object exist irrespective of the other as objective attributes of the world. The subject/object binary thinking places little to no weighting on the constructive aspect of perception and suggests that things in the world contain inherent qualities that can be objectively measured, curated and totalled.

¹³ This is recognised in the literature as non-Cartesian split thinking. Cartesian split thinking is indicative of phenomenology of reduction through which one places the subject or the world in 'brackets'. It originates from Descartes but was however further developed in Husserl's phenomenology and it supports a binary relationship between the subject and the object or the subject and the world (Cohn 2002). When such thinking is considered in the context of interpersonal relations, either the self or the general or specific other assumes a dominant role in which case either the subject or the object becomes phenomenally inconsequential. This study, however, strives to bridge subject/object binary thinking in the context of self-identity and consider the relationship between the self and sociality in dialogical terms. This way, the study contends, one can theorise the self as both a subject and object of situated experience.

The relationship between self-identity, everyday agency and situated experience, in the context of project management, is thus of fundamental interest for this study. More importantly, this relationship is also an 'Achilles' heel' in the identity-related literature. In a systematic review of the extant identity literature, Brown (2018) notes the following:

There are surprisingly a few papers that recognise identity as an issue central to understanding processes of social communication, negotiation, entrepreneurial behaviour, leading and following, decision-making, and strategizing. Even those literatures for which identity is a core concern, such as sensemaking, are more readily content to treat it as a predicate than to explore its rich possibilities. (p. 11)

On that note, to answer calls made by Brown (2018) and position self-identity as a subject of sociality, the study will first need to address the arguments that seek to determine **1)** how one's subjective constitution¹⁴ is shaped within the context of interpersonal arrangements (**aim 1**). To do this, the study will address the extant literature concerned with the *identity formation* process. From this springboard, the study will determine how the literature has convinced of the relationship **2)** between one's subjective constitution and everyday agency¹⁵ (**aim 2**). To do this, the study will address the extant literature concerned with the notion of *identity work*. Finally, understanding how identity is formed and reflected in action would provide a sound foundation for considering its limiting attributes, particularly how **3)** existing self-notions permit *certain* experiences and forms of agency (**aim 3**). Generally, the aim to develop a more 'personal' rendition of everyday processes of communication and decision-making

¹⁴ The terms 'subjective constitution', 'personal identity' and 'self-identity' will be used interchangeably since all are indicative of the contents of one's mind with respect to the perception of the self and the surrounding world (of others).

¹⁵ In other pages, everyday behaviour will be referred to as everyday identity work or everyday being-in-the-world. Both concepts will be explained with respect to their relevance for this study.

adds to (dominant) Foucauldian approaches that draw on the 'power of discourse' to make sense of identity and situated agency (Brown 2018). More importantly, by 'personalising' situated action and experience, the study will also add to the extant project management literature concerned with the negative effects of project-based 'institutional isomorphism' (Baker & French 2018).

Identity Formation: An Ontological Inquiry into the Onset of Identity Forming

Beginning with the study's aim(s), to **1)** develop a better understanding of how one's subjective constitution is shaped within the context of interpersonal arrangements, one must begin by acknowledging how self-identity, or our subjective constitution, is thus *formed*. Extant literature has approached the identity formation process from two opposing ontologies: one which emphasizes personal power in forming one's *own* self-identity; the other, focusing on the power of particular structural arrangements, within which the individual dwells. As noted by Brown (2018):

A range of work either implicitly or explicitly assumes that individuals have considerable agency in matters of identity Other studies take a contrary stance and emphasize the extent to which identities are the effects of relations of power which operate variously to seduce, insinuate, insist, restrict or even coerce both people's identity options and their choices. (p. 14)

These opposing ontologies of the identity formation process have, however, introduced numerous ambiguities at the theoretical level of arguments proposed. Given one's *inconsiderable* agency in matters of identity, self-identity becomes rendered as an outcome, that is regarded as a *predicate* of social interaction, or what Brown (2018) terms 'the effect of relations of power'. The assumed responsibility for the formation of individual identities is thus shifted onto the arrangement of structured role relationships since the normative 'content' of these contexts provides *all* the 'resources'

for thinking and self-expression (for example, *I am* a project manager and in being so *I am* a lateral thinker, cost and time conscious and personable). As affirmed by Snow and Anderson (1987):

From this vantage point, the source of identities resides not so much in self-concepts or the improvisational aspects of the self but in the roles we play and in the social relationships in which we are embedded. [This] conceptualizes identity as internalized positional designations that constitute the self and *that exist insofar as the person is a participant in structured role relationships* (emphasis here). (p. 1366)

On a deeper level, 'role identity theory' (Snow & Anderson 1987) suggests that even if one recognises one's predispositions for active choice making in the identity formation process, the attributes of the self thus appropriated are predetermined by the limiting number of possibilities provided by the normative notions of right and wrong, for example. In the instance of this 'outsourced' (self-)volition, the notion of identity formation becomes more sensible as identity *regulation* since 'meaning, culture or ideology are articulated by and implicated in structural configuration of control' (Alvesson & Willmott 2002, p. 619). As confirmed by Thornborrow and Brown (2009) in their ethnographic study of a British Parachute Regiment:

'Paratroopers' conceptions of their selves and processes of self-formation constituted, in Foucault's terms, a 'discursive formation', a naturalized system of giving meaning to the world, which enacted a high degree of consent to arbitrary institutional arrangements. Paratroopers were subject to a discourse that limited, defined and normalized the 'vocabularies of motive' available in the Regiment 'for making sensible and accountable what it is that people should do, can do and thus do'. (p. 370)

Role identity theory (Snow & Anderson 1987) thus produces a *situated* rendering of the identity formation process. In addition to being a predicate, in this instance self-identity also becomes a *precarious* and *fragmented* predicament (Beyer & Hannah 2002; Collinson 2003; Ibarra 1999; Kaufman & Johnson 2004). Fragmented, since there exist innumerable 'structured roles relationships' that an individual participates within (for instance, being a father, a friend, a Manchester United supporter or a tax agent). Precarious, in that what is formed in situ becomes 'obsolete' and fleeting with every passing moment. The fragmentary and precarious view of self-identity (Backer 2010; Backer 2011; Watts 1951) seems to eradicate the meaningful relationality between different context-specific selves. This is because there is no sensible avenue by which one can conceive of an 'intentional' relationship between one's professional behaviour and (distant) social 'selves' (Pratt et al. 2006). The unrelated nature of different context-specific selves is founded on the variance in the normative content 'offered' by the structural arrangements (for example, that of family and work) within which the self(s) participate. As such, since self-identity is *produced* by the normative order, different context-specific selves are siloed by virtue of normative *separation* between the contexts that provide their inhabitants with the 'possibility' of existence. As noted by Becker et al. (1961) '*students do not take on a professional role while they are students* (emphasis here)' (p. 420). The same is acknowledged by Knights and Clarke (2017) who state:

Consequently, history cannot be 'read off' independently of current concerns, as Wittgenstein made clear in speaking about indexicality, for the meaning of any concept is tied to the context of its use, and thus to our present anxieties and preoccupations. (p. 341)

Normative determinists such as Parsons and Turner (1991), however, disagree with the notion of 'unrelated context-specific selves', suggesting instead that the link is one of socialization into a 'central

value system'; in its Marxist mirror image, this is interpellation by a dominant ideology. This position, however, still makes it highly inconceivable to envision a capacity for "*considerable* (emphasis here) agency in matters of identity" (Brown 2018., p. 14). As such, notwithstanding the relevance of these claims in the context of arguments *for* social identity, both normative determinists and supporters of fragmented epistemology minimise personal causal efficacy (Archer 2000; Archer 2003) in the identity formation processes and do so by challenging one's sovereignty through exercises of "power that constitute us" (Knights & Clarke 2017, p. 338). In both instances, self-identity becomes an epiphenomenon of structural and cultural modalities which, on a microscale¹⁶, severs the *meaningful* connection between different 'context-specific' selves (Knights & Clarke 2017). As confirmed by Knights and Clarke (2017):

In failing for this illusion of a fully autonomous self, we readily take identity for granted as a real and achievable goal for stabilizing meaning and reality, obscuring how it is partly an effect and exercises of power that constitute us as this or that kind of a subject. (p. 338)

On that note, the complexity of understanding the relation between being a 'socially inept, number crunching' tax agent and a ferocious 'Red Devil'¹⁷ supporter, for example, thus becomes one of developing an 'independent criterion of knowledge' (McHugh 1971). The independent criterion of knowledge can be said to be reflected in one's 'craving' for meaning which seeks arrangement of 'unrelated' identities into 'the life of the subject *as a whole*'. In this instance, identity becomes a phenomenon that *forms* from a 'retrospective gaze' (Schutz 1945; Schutz 1967); a meaningfully

¹⁶ Individual's perception and *their* value system, as opposed to the 'macroscale' of central value system promoted by Talcott Parsons (1991)

¹⁷ Red Devil supporters are football enthusiasts supporting the team from English Premier League called Manchester United.

organised narrative of one's *life history* (Down & Reveley 2009; Ibarra & Barbulescu 2010; Watson 2008). As affirmed by Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010):

Organizational scholars concur that stories are uniquely suited for making sense of ambiguous or equivocal situations because they selectively distil fragmented or contradictory experiences and information into a coherent portrait. (p. 137)

The reconstructed story of the self is, however, a highly subjective and *narrow* 'self-portrait' since "our mind *singles out certain features from the perception filed* (emphasis here), conceiving them as well delineated things which stand out over against a more or less inarticulate background or horizon" (Schutz 1945, p. 2). The *narrated identity* is, as such, an 'abstraction' that can be said to invoke the self arbitrarily for the sake of "stabilizing meaning and reality" (Knights & Clarke 2017, p. 338). The invoked self-identity is thus—as suggested by post-structuralist proponents (see Diver 2012 Knights & Clarke 2017)—an illusory prospect given that much of what we call 'the self' is, in the first instance, dependent on the 'other' to be recognized as true and plausible (Driver 2012) *before it serves as an import into the 'abstracted' self*. As noted by Knights and Clarke (2017):

Identity, then, is the unending and recursive perceptions of others' perceptions of the self, and the identities of others are constituted through exactly the same process (emphasis here) So, every presentation we make is some kind of claim to, although never a guarantee of, a particular identity, but these are ordinarily proxies for a wider symbolic order in that they reflect and reproduce as well as challenge and reconstruct the broader social and cultural norms. (p. 341)

Association between different context specific selves can therefore only be explained in terms of a core self. On the one hand, in this instance, everyday behaviour is reduced to a **1) fixed** repertoire of action

reflecting solid boundaries of our 'central essence' (Harnad & Skinner 1988). Therefore, some arguments for the core self (Ashforth & Mael 1989) imply that everyday action is *predetermined*—a proposal that has been rendered as absurd by many poststructuralist proponents (see Alvesson et al. 2008; Burr 2003 Driver 2012; Knights & Clarke 2017)—which inadvertently makes it difficult to conceive of social change since every act is reduced to a *repeating* and *limited* set of possibilities. On the other hand, the core self can be separated from “the identity of the I maintaining itself in the multiplicity of its experiences” (Heidegger 1953, p. 126). This 'separation' can only be invoked by virtue of active choice-making on behalf of the subject (supporters of active choice-making are Archer et al. 2015; Bateson 2002; Clark 2013; Heidegger 1953; Higgins 1987; Jung 1959; Nietzsche 1973; Nietzsche 2001; Panksepp 2005; Peterson 1999; Sartre 2018; Snow & Anderson 1987; Velmans 1999). The capacity for active choice-making (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2010) suggest that, *given perceived circumstances at hand*, the person **2**) consciously demonstrates some 'fragments' of one's identity all the while being private with respect to others. In this instance, responses to the external stimuli, for example, are not circumscribed by fixed repertoires of action, the subsequence of which is the possibility of novelty emerging within the domain of the self and the domain of normative orders.

In contrast to the 'role identity theory', therefore, the arguments for a 'sovereign self' emerge from the 'processual perspective' which “assigns relatively greater significance to the self in the construction and avowal of identities, a conception that also resonates with several current strands of theorizing in both moral philosophy and psychology” (Snow & Anderson 1987, p. 1366). The 'processual perspective' thus lends an element of *personal* strategy to the identity formation process. As asserted by Müller, Jedličková et al. (2022), “individuals cannot be reduced to these specific roles but must be treated as complete human beings” (p. 20). The implications of these arguments are that they establish a co-

dependable relationship between the *core self* and *intentional agency*. Considering these contributions, any discussion of identity formation (seemingly) cannot obviate matters of personal discretion (Brown 2018) when ‘appropriating’ self-notions. On that note, the self-notions come to be scrutinised as *befitting* one’s self-identity, or otherwise. A discernible and conscious subject therefore ‘must’ exist if the identity formation process is to be rendered as a *selective*, intentional predicament. With this in mind, the supporters of the processual perspective thus imply a stratified notion of the self where situated identity positions are connected by an organising phenomenon, that is, a core and centralised self-identity. As noted by Cerulo (1997):

Identities emerge and movements ensue because group members consciously develop offences and defences, consciously insulate, differentiate, and mark, cooperate and compete, persuade and coerce. In such context, agency encompasses more than the control and transformation of one’s social environment. (p. 393)

In light of the above, notwithstanding that the proponents of the processual perspective advocate for active choice-making on behalf of the subject, they, however, leave the question of (ongoing) development within *both* domains (self and society) largely unaddressed. Cerulo (1997), for example, suggests that “*subjective definitions imprison individuals in spheres of prescribed action and expectation (emphasis here)*” (p. 388). In line with Cerulo, for Harnad and Skinner (1988), the self is a *repertoire of behaviour* appropriate to a *given set* of contingencies. Jung (1966), on the other hand, reifies the self by complete separation from the context of situated action. More specifically, Jung (1966) purports an ‘archetypal’ nature of the self and recognises, akin to Heidegger (1953), that identity is not a phenomenon of the same order as that of the self. As noted by Alvesson et al. (2008), some “identity studies often reflect a range of tacit and explicit positions on this matter, for example, depicting

identities as hierarchically integrated into dominant notions of self” (p. 6). Therefore, although celebrating the intentional nature of agency, Cerulo (1997) and Jung (1933), for example, provide little avenue for understanding how the plethora of ‘subjective definitions’ come to pass as ‘formative forces’ that delimit agency. On that note, arguments put forward by proponents of the processual perspective of identity formation are open to accusations of narcissism (Knights & Clarke 2017) since they leave unexplained, or purposively ignore, the influence ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000) has on *(re)formulations* of one’s ‘subjective definitions’ (Boussebaa & Brown 2017; Kuhn 2006). More importantly, assigning dominating qualities to aspects of the self inadvertently reifies ‘modernity’ given that situated action remains contingent upon its (the self’s) *fixed and solid* boundaries.

The contingent nature of theoretical abstractions therefore polarises arguments on the formation of self-identity. For example, if a concept of sovereign agency is moot, since its exclusive possibility is provided for by the normative standards, the literature argues that same for the notion of self-identity. On the other hand, if identity is reflected in a fixed arrangement of subjective definitions, outcomes of interpersonal interaction come to be predetermined since a subject can act only by virtue of ‘prescribed action and expectation’. Social change, in this instance, becomes *delimited* by predictability. These arguments, therefore, reduce epistemology to ontology (Archer 2000) and suggests that the ability to define one element of self-identity simultaneously implies that such defining categories transpire within all aspects of the identity-related phenomena. More importantly, these arguments, as the study contends, explains away ‘reality’ since they do not conform to the immediate and personal nature of *everyday experience* where one feels himself to be the ‘creator’ and ‘steward’ but also a mere ‘participant’ within structured role relationships. As noted by Archer (2010):

Crucially, what is missed *inter alia* by such co-determinism is the *double morphogenesis* (emphasis in the original) in which actors themselves change in the very process of actively pursuing changes in the social order. (p. 274)

On that note, the extant literature does not appropriately conceive of the relationship between the subject and the object; between the conscious agent and the normative arrangements of the context in which that agent dwells. The ramifications of reducing the subject to normative standards or reifying sociality by virtue of the core and transcendental self are those that always pertain to the ‘theorising power’¹⁸ (Clegg 1975) of diverging ontologies—it positions identity *either* as a subject *or* as a predicate of sociality (Bourdieu 1990). Therefore, those who position identity as a subject of interpersonal arrangements support a transcendental disposition of the self that nullifies the effect of ‘structured role relationships’. On the other hand, those who suggest identity is a precarious epiphenomenon of structural and cultural modalities position self-identity as existing only for the sake of ‘stabilizing meaning as a resource for security’ (Knights & Clarke 2017); a self-defeating predicament in which to be. Advocating for *dominance* of one over the other, one cannot conceive of change in the agent's subjective constitution and/or pervading normative order because the relationship between two entities remains unidirectional. Subsequently, it can be said that extant identity formation literature foregrounds numerous tensions: **a)** the tension between the notion of the self that develops and the self that is experienced as coherent and continuous (by the self); **b)** the tension between the sovereign self and the socialising power of structured role relationships and **c)**, the tension between the distinctive

¹⁸ Clegg (1975) notes that “... consensually shared rules thus exercise a ‘theorizing power’ over the theorist, in that he has first to submit to the collectively recognised grammar before whatever he produces can be ‘warranted’ in the ordinary course of affairs” (p. 10)

or central self and the ('social') self that is normalised by prescribed standards of right and wrong. On that note, the second gap in the identity (formation) literature can thus be recognised as following:

- 1. Gap 1:** Identity and identity formation processes are conceived, in the extant literature, in the context of a Cartesian split. This way of theorising begs for a more balanced ontological position and one that highlights a dialogical relationship between the subject and the object; the self and the other; the self and the pervading normative order. Focusing on the dialogical relationship between the self and other-as-representing-the-context permits for self-identity to be explored both as a *subject* as well as a *predicate* of interpersonal interaction. This permits for a more nuanced **1)** understanding of how one's subjective constitution¹⁹ is shaped within the context of structured arrangements (aim 1 of the study).

In light of the arguments made, the following section will delve deeper into numerous tensions arising from the polarising ontological foundations of the identity formation literature. It will do so by inquiring into the literature concerning itself with the notion of 'identity work'. The identity work literature attempts to resolve the inherent disputes of personal power²⁰, or lack thereof, in forming one's own self-identity. Inquiry into these tensions is essential for the aims of this study (see page 15 and 16) and to answer calls made by Brown (2018) that urge for richer explorations of different 'possibilities of self-identity' and the effect self-identity has on everyday patterns of communication and decision-making.

¹⁹ The term 'subjective constitution', 'personal identity' and 'self-identity' will be used interchangeably since all are indicative of the contents of one's mind with respect to the perception of the self and the surrounding world (of others).

²⁰ Also referred to as one's intentionality.

The Sovereign Aspect of Agency: An Ontological Inquiry into the Temporality of Identity Work

To address the study's aims²¹, one thus must do so by “attempts to resolve the inherent disputes of personal power, or lack thereof, in forming one's own self-identity” (p. 29). The ‘identity politics’ (Brown and Toyoki 2013; Brown 2015; Brown 2017; Brown 2018; Wright et al. 2012,) arguments, for example, deal with the notion of ‘individual sovereignty’ by attempting to rationalize individual behaviour in the light of guiding ‘power constellations’ (Koveshnikov et al. 2016). The constellation of powers, the literature notes, are not exclusive to structures but also pertain to ‘autonomous’ beings. As noted by Brown (2015):

Considerable attention has focused on whether identities are chosen by resourceful and autonomous being or ascribed to individuals by historical forces and institutional structures. (pp. 25-6)

In line with the processual perspective to identity formation (see previous section), one facet of identity politics highlights the primacy of one's ‘psychology’ in affecting decision-making (Archer 2000; Archer 2003). Recognising the relationality between ‘psychic modalities’ and decision-making intimates that everyday agency is an outcome of an assortment of cognitive (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Tajfel & Turner 1986) processes *pertaining to the individual* (Grotevant 1987). The advances of psychoanalytic theoretical traditions for a concept of a ‘sovereign self’ have revolved around the *irreducible* properties of our psyches and/or (fixed) “abilities and orientations that individuals bring to bear on the identity

²¹ to **1**) develop a better understanding of how one's self-identity is shaped within the context of particular interpersonal arrangements); **2**) to develop a better understanding of the relationship between one's self-identity and everyday agency; **3**) to be able to examine how our self-identity permits for *particular* (situated) experiences and *forms* of agency.

formation process” (Grotevant 1987, pp. 204-5) (also see Berzonsky 1989, Berman, Schwartz et al. 2001). As noted by Brown (2017):

For (at least some) social identity theory and self-categorization theory scholars, identification is enacted through socio-cognitive processes, such as ‘categorization’, ‘depersonalization’, and ‘social comparison’ *which involve active choice-making* (emphasis here). (p. 250)

This literature thus suggests that individuals must “have considerable agency in matters of identity” (Brown 2018, p. 14). Extending the normative determinist’s arguments (Parsons and Turner 1991), this literature asserts that socialisation into a central values system is done by virtue of *active choice-making* (Brown 2017) as opposed to being a ‘reaction’ to normalising forces of social orders. Therefore, one’s capacity to choose to act *in light of one’s own personal qualities* (Giorgi & Palmisano 2017) limits propositions that, for example, associate social identity with ‘renounced sovereignty’ on the grounds of ‘group-think’ that underlines an arrangement of ‘like-minded’ individuals. More specifically, *perceiving* difference and similarity between the self and the groups we belong too implies that the subject is aware of their attributes and those of the group as *distinctive* (Bateson 2002) on account of which (group) ‘identification’ becomes a form of conscious self-expression. As noted by Ashforth and Mael (1989):

To identify, an individual need not expend effort towards the group’s goals; rather, an individual need only perceive him- or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group. (p. 21)

Opposition to the literature emphasizing the power of one’s psyche in shaping agency came in the form of claims that suggest the assortment of cognitive processes function automatically (Brown & Starkey 2000; Brown & Toyoki 2013; Gabriel 2000; Hoyer & Steyaert 2015). For instance, ‘one’s ability to

exercise agency in matters of identity' is not 'conscious', but rather habitual (Bourdieu 1990). Here, habit denotes "what William James termed 'sequences of behaviour that have become virtually automatic' or what Giddens designated as actions that are 'relatively unmotivated'" (Archer 2010, p. 279). As observed by Mark Twain, 'if everyone is thinking the same, then nobody is thinking'. More importantly, since the habitual perspective reduces the possibility of an unpredictable outcome (of interaction), the automaticity of psychic modalities inadvertently instantiates a reified context which, as such, pays little tribute to the fact "that identity is routinely dependent on unpredictable and often impetuous 'others' for confirmation of its claim to validity" (Knights & Clarke 2017, p. 338; also see Boussebaa and Brown 2017; Kuhn 2006). The instantiation of active choice-making by virtue of psychic modalities reduces the contents of our minds to ubiquitous psychological processes which says nothing about the *conceptual* difference or similarity between subjective constitutions of different individuals. The question of 'conceptual content' and its distinction thus remains unaddressed if active choice making, in matters of self-identity, is founded on the assortment of cognitive processes that pertain to all equally.

Theorization of self-identity and agency from without, however, cannot obviate discourse as the field of analysis 'holding' the phenomena under scrutiny (for instance, self-identity). Before moving onto highlighting the implications of such a position, it is important to note that "the use of the term 'discourse' ... incorporates not just language but practice too" (Burr 2002, p. 63). Discourse, in the context of this study, frames how the "language available to us set limits upon, or at least strongly channels, not only what we can think and say, but also what we can do or what can be done to us" (Burr 2002, p. 63). The notion of discourse is thus taken to signify macro social constructivism in that it extends beyond the immediate context of language use (Burr 2002). Subsequently, locating the

sovereign agency argument in the domain of symbols and language cannot ignore that any discussion of self-identity must also include the larger domain of social, cultural and institutional symbols that 'construct' subjectivity. In the context of self-identity, any theorization that considers the fluid and dynamic nature of the social and professional world cannot obviate the 'rules' of shifting language games (Clegg 1975), upon which self-descriptions are founded. In the context of project management, for example, statements such as "I am a perfectionist" must also be addressed considering the norms of the 'structured role relationship' that *reward* high attention to detail. Considering that how we define ourselves can be 'borrowed' from "contextually sanctioned normativity" (Archer 2000) suggests that discussions of 'personal power in forming one's own self-identity' are rather moot, since nothing about the self can be conceived in complete isolation from *structuration* of contexts (Bateson 2002; Heidegger 1953; Sartre 2018). The 'unavoidability' of the general (and specific) 'other' (Heidegger 1953) in shaping one's self-conceptions is subsequently ventured as the founding argument of one's questionable sovereignty and active choice-making in matters of identity (Knights & Clarke 2017): if everything we do is because of something or someone else, if our goals and desires have been induced by dictates and demands for social adaptation, then a separation between the core and centralised self and the other becomes rather difficult to defend as a sound and plausible argument (Butler 2011; Thomas & Davies 2005; Trethewey 1999; Weedon 1987). As confirmed by Karreman and Alvesson (2001)

Rather than following from biology, early childhood, life history and/or a set of sociological standard-sheet categories, identity is partly a temporary outcome of the powers and regulations that the subject encounters. (p. 63)

Considering the above, the tension between **b)** "the sovereign self and the socialising power of structured role relationships and **c)**, the tension between the distinctive or central self and the ('social')

self normalised by social normativity” (p. 24) thus remains ontologically inexplicable or underexplained in the identity literature. For example, contending that everything about ourselves is ‘borrowed’ from the world that surrounds us from birth does not furnish one with the understanding of how and by whom was the ‘external world’ of discourse created from which personal scripts are ‘borrowed’? By the same token, should agency be conceptualized as automatic action, it remains inexplicable by whom these involuntary ‘programs’ and memorized behaviour(s) were created, unless one is to adopt a Freudian perspective that sees all agency as ultimately shaped by uncontrollable biological urges (Jung 1933). As such, one cannot conceive of discretionary and sovereign agency in a context of analysis that, on the one hand, highlights the inherent dependability between self-conceptions and the world of discourse (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Burr 2002)²², while on the other suggest that 95% of everyday action is subject to involuntary ‘programs’, memorised behaviours and habitual emotional reactions (Dispenza 2012). In any case, a genuine discussion of self-identity becomes futile since both positions alienate the individual—one by virtue of automaticity and unselfconsciousness while the other by ‘outsourcing’ the self to discourse (Cerulo 1997). On that note, the second gap in the identity literature can thus be recognised as following:

²² The dependability between self-conceptions and the world of discourse undermines the notion of distinctiveness when theorizing of self-identity. However, it is this ontology of relationality that permits theorization of distinctive self-identity, as this study contends. The distinction, however, does not suggest that the individual is separate from the world of discourse. Descriptions of the self require abstracted comparison against others based on sameness and difference and given the contextual specificity of our identities, the distinctions made on the back of sameness and difference tend to produce an idiosyncratic individual who, in relation to the external world, has managed to construct himself into what he *perceives* as a distinction from others. As such, what this study claims is that there can be a discussion about distinction albeit not in mutually exclusive terms with social normativity; but rather distinction as an aspect of the dialectical relationship between the individual and sociality. The same arguments are made by Archer (2000; 2003; 2010).

2. **Gap 2:** The identity politics and identity formation literature cannot seem to explain, ontologically, the possibility for a distinctive self and the distinctive other in the context of liquid modernity.

The persisting tensions in the identity literature are thus reduced to a single argument: one which cannot seem to obviate an explanation of a self-conscious distinctive self without imprisoning it in “spheres of prescribed action and expectation” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 388). In this instance, intentional agency remains largely inexplicable and with it any appropriate conceptualization of a (distinctive) self-identity, both of which are necessary, according to Brown (2018), to assist with positioning identity as an irreducible subject of sociality. As noted by Down and Reveley (2009):

A pivotal point of contention has been the extent to which human agency shapes self-identity in the context of wider discourses and other social structures. (p. 382)

The ontological impasse of the extant self-identity literature thus emerges in light of locating the argument for the individual-specific significance in everyday action within either the ‘vacuum’ of discourse or an assortment of ubiquitous cognitive processes. An alternative approach to deal with the impasse would be to address the ontological foundation of the ‘retentive’ and ‘protentive’ aspect of situated agency, as referred to by Dostal (1993)²³. The *identity work* literature attempts this (Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016; Brown & Toyoki 2013; Brown 2015; Brown 2017; Clarke et al. 2009; Down & Reveley 2009; Ezzy 2016; Giorgi & Palmisano 2017; Ibarra & Barbulescu 2010; Karreman & Alvesson 2001; Koveshnikov et al. 2016; Miscenko & Day 2016; Pratt et al. 2006; Snow & Anderson 1987; Thornborrow and Brown 2009; Watson 2008). Identity work, for example, “refers to *people being*

²³ Any moment is what it is in virtue of what it retains from the past (retention) and what it anticipates from the future (protention) (Dostal 1993., 146).

engaged in (emphasis here) forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence [and distinctiveness]" (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165). Identity work portrays agency as an arrangement of 'situational stratagems' (Down & Reveley 2009) aimed at reducing inconsistencies in the (perceived) unity of the self. The definition of identity work thus suggests that action is a purposeful enactment aimed at self-realisation. Subsequently, the notion of identity work does not exclusively promote the "internal self-focused process" (Down & Reveley 2009, p. 384) of identity formation but also seeks to address the "ongoing cyclical interaction between [self] narration *and action* (emphasis here)" (Ezzy 1998, p. 251). As such, notwithstanding that 'objectivity' of self-identity cannot be sustained with the inconclusive and impermanent nature of language, the identity work literature does not discount the *foresight* of positioning ourselves in the 'world of discourse' *in terms of who we believe we are*. As noted by Down and Reveley (2009), "the concept of identity work accommodates the agential powers of *identity seeking* (emphasis here) individual" (p. 383).

On that note, the identity work literature highlights a distinction between the process of *self-narration* or what is regularly referred to as narrative self-identity, with that of *dramaturgical* identity work, that is, identity work performed in face-to-face interaction (Down & Reveley, 2009). In doing so, the identity work literature acknowledges that narrated self-identity cannot avoid being "translated into academic universes of discourse" (Archer 2010, p. 291). Subsequently, by separating narrative self-identity from dramaturgical self-identity, the literature suggests that daily identity 'performances' are imbued with personal interests that pertain to (everyday) professional interactions. On that note, dramaturgical identity work purports that action is a purposeful enactment that begins with a preconceived idea of what 'should' happen or what is desired to happen by the 'identity seeking individual'. Noting the

significance of the *protentive* aspect of agency, dramaturgical identity work thus recognises that action is not only intentional but more importantly, that it emerges from the (previously) *retained* subjective content which subsumes both the idea of the self and what the self wants as well as the idea of the other with whom that self interacts. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

every idea of a 'subject'—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum ontologically* (emphasis in the original) along with it, no matter how energetic are one's ontic protestations against the "substantial soul" or the "reifications of consciousness. (p. 46)

However, the subjective content that represents the retentive and protentive aspects of agency can be said to be distinctive not simply because agency is aimed at a pragmatic end. Saying agency is intentional does not delineate a discernible subject because, to paraphrase Porpora (1989), 'the causal powers of interests *are*, in fact, also embedded *in* structured role relationships'. For example, in the context of project management, interest in completing the project on time and within budget can be said to be not only a personal desire but also an institutional requirement, which places under scrutiny the sovereignty and distinctiveness of agency that seeks to fulfil the particular interest. Subsequently, intentional agency would imply a discernible subject (or a conscious agent) only in so much as it is performed on account of the perceived distinction in the personal needs and those of others; one's own desires and the (perceived) requirements of the normative order in question. This can only be possible if two project managers have different *ultimate* desires. For example, imagine a circumstance within which one's striving towards the fulfilment of (project management) KPIs can be said to be done based on wanting to prove 'others wrong', while others could be motivated by a pay rise or a promotion. In both cases, the intention is in a relationship to the rules of the professional roles that individuals play

within the organisation; however, their respective ontological foundations are quite specific because they encapsulate the 'life histories' (Watson 2008) of the respective subjects. On the one hand, the subject places significance on intrapersonal growth from interpersonal competition, while on the other, the emphasis is on financial security and status.

Following this line of reasoning, what needs to be considered is not only the purpose of performing a task, but also the purpose of performing the task in a *particular* way specific to the self doing the performing. The tension between what is 'prescribed' by the structured role relationship and what, considering the prescription, is also desired and performed by the individual is where one can begin to locate the distinctive self and the distinctive other. The theoretical significance of this position is that it provides for the possibility of a centred self whose situated identity positions, albeit seemingly fragmented, intentionally *work* towards the idea of a "coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity" (Watson 2008, p. 129). However abstract, this idea shapes materiality since it delimits agency by virtue of its vision. In doing so, it subsumes both dramaturgical and narrative (identity work) attributes. The identity work literature thus seems to acknowledge the significance of this position by suggesting that identity performances are imbued with individual-specific interests which are sometimes in discord with the structured roles relationship that 'pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives' (Watson 2008). As argued by Watson (2008), identity work:

involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives. (p. 129)

The arguments for the retentive and protentive aspects of agency in the identity work literature thus assist with delineating ‘a **2**) conscious agent capable of (a sovereign) choice, that is, capable of perceiving and comprehending oneself and others and acting in light of that insight’. Furthermore, in addition to providing the possibility for a distinctive subjective content, the retentive and protentive properties of agency highlight the significance of dialogue in the process of identity formation since only a dialectical relationship between two subjects, or between a subject and an object, can produce the varying epistemology of ‘before’ and ‘after’ (Fairclough 1993; Fairclough 2013; Silverman 2013) (also see Berger and Luckmann 1991). As acknowledged by Burr, “humans continually construct the social world, which then becomes a reality to which they must respond” (2003, p. 185). The significance of ‘before’ and ‘after’ of situated identity positions is thus suggestible of malleable subjectivity since agency cannot be said to have retentive and protentive properties if the content exchanged or assimilated remains perpetually fixed. The change or the exchange of (pre-existing) subjective content in situated interpersonal interaction is thus supportive of temporality missing in the identity formation literature (see previous section). More importantly, temporality in self-identity is necessary so that one does not sacrifice the background of liquid modernity at the cost of a distinctive self and a distinctive other and vice versa (**gap 2**). So, how is temporality (or dialogue) then conceived in the extant identity work literature?

Akin to identity formation literature (see previous section), the position of the identity work literature on the notion of temporality is opaque (Bardon & Josserand 2010). The reason behind this is that the literature does not consider the relational arrangement between both aspects of agency (for instance, retentive and protentive). For example, since identity work signifies an agential medium between discursive reproduction of structure and purposeful enactment of the self, self-identity comes to be

positioned as a by-product of this struggle. As demonstrated by Alvesson et al. (2008) people can be seen to engage in practical accomplishment of identity when the *routinized* (emphasis here) reproduction of a self-identity is *discontinued* (emphasis here) at times of pressures and uncertainty (p. 15). In this light, Identity work signifies a process of 'crafting' oneself in respect to demands of normative orders. This suggests that self-identity is an *outcome* of an *unanticipated* change in the structural arrangements to which the individual adjusts by way of identity work. Although seemingly inconceivable at first glance, in this instance, normative demands serve as resources into self-identity *and* identity work. This undermines the significance of the retentive aspects of agency thus inadvertently limiting the possibility for ongoing and conscious self-identity 'strategizing'.

To avoid reduction of the individual to discourse, the identity work literature thus focuses on the side of *outcomes* of situated interaction for a possibility of a coherent and distinctive self at expense of, however, a pre-existing subject. This position invokes an ontological separation between structural arrangements and the individual which serves to embed and maintain duality between subject perceiving and the 'structural' object being perceived. Subsequently, looking closer, the strategic orientation of the identity work process stresses the *productive* nature of the situated engagement (Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016) without attempting to highlight how 'tensions' and normative demands come to be perceived to warrant attention by the subject in the first instance. Subsequently, the retentive and protective aspects of agency are abstracted since there is no conscious agent at the centre of a situated decision for the notions of 'before' and 'after' to be assumed *pertinent* in epistemological terms.

Aiming to avoid reduction of individuals to society, however, the literature inadvertently reduces one to the other since 'structures keep acting upon agents irrespective of agents' perception of structures'.

This suggests that norms have an effect on agents without being related to the agents' (personal) needs, goals and desires. The identity work literature subsequently arranges the interaction between the self and the perceived normative orders by considering the subjects' reactivity. Doing so, the literature cannot escape positioning the normative order as ontologically prior to the subject which renders their confluence an arrangement defined by causality, not dialogue. As such, the move away from the notion of temporality in the literature is an outcome of academic attempts to reconcile the tension between the sovereign self and spheres of prescribed action and expectation *from the springboard of binary thinking*. This means that only a predicament which permits both a coherent subject and a predicate of situated interaction, in a two-directional relationship, can sensibly address temporality in identity work and the question of the identity seeking individual.

The ontological polarisation that emerges from subject/object binary thinking leads to theoretical divergence with respect to notions of self and agency. While the implications of this are many, respective to the study's aims, the importance of such ontological divergence is that the subject is transmuted into a predicate, a precarious one at best, while identity work becomes a sporadic and therefore an atemporal predicament. Because of this, the question of *what happens* and *who exists* in-between sporadic identity work episodes remains ontologically inaccessible in the extant identity work literature. As noted by Brown (2015):

One focal area of contention is the importance of the identity work that occurs more-or-less continuously in the course of organizational life, triggered by run-of-the-mill events.... researchers play-down the significance of this 'mundane' identity work, referring to it as automatic and instinctual, effortless and unselfconscious and as involving only minor tweaks and edits. (p. 25)

Gap 3 in the extant self-identity literature is embedded in the failure to delineate agency as intentional and proactive, emerging from the dialogical relationship between the conscious agent, with a 'head full of *pre-existing ideas*', and the perceived world of subjects and objects. For this to be possible, the literature, however, needs to appropriately address implications of *subjective antecedents* on everyday agency, simply because the subjective world of objects and norms is, in an ontological sense, the 'primordial world' *first* encountered by the subject (Peterson 1999). As noted by Brown (2015):

Further fine-grained research is needed [also] to appreciate nuances in how, why and with what implications identity work is engaged in by people in organisations... Researchers could also attend valuably to the identity work that connects past, present and projected future selves, the continuities and disjunctures between them, and the historical context in which they are embedded.
(pp. 31-2)

By failing to capture the continuous nature of "social communication, negotiation, entrepreneurial behaviour, leading and following, decision-making, and strategizing" (Brown 2018, p. 11), the literature, as confirmed by Brown (2018), capitulates to conceiving of self-identity as a phenomenon imbued with everyday organisational life. Extending these academic limits will permit for a better understanding of the relationship between one's subjective constitution, everyday agency and situated experience (**aim 1, 2 and 3**).

Synopsis

The preceding arguments demonstrate the complexity of the self-identity predicament. While it has been leveraged as a proxy to understanding the process of organising (Alvesson et al. 2008; Corlett et al. 2017; Miscenko & Day 2016; Ybema et al. 2009), professional or otherwise, the lack of ontological consensus in studies concerned with the notion of self-identity has brought into question the plausibility of arguments provided thus far. The main point of contention upon which any subsequent disagreements are ventured revolves around the credibility of the theoretical and empirical notion of the 'distinctive self-identity' (or the conscious agent) and 'intentional agency'.

On the one hand, the psychology-oriented management literature contends that the 'self is a repertoire of behaviour appropriate to a given set of contingencies' (Harnad & Skinner 1988). Such a position reifies the self in such a way that everyday agency becomes treated as an empirical manifestation of a fixed number of traits pertaining to the individual in question. The implications of such a view is that the individual retains the power of decision-making. This means that at every juncture of structural or social change there is a distinctive and sovereign individual as a 'subjectum' (of change) (Heidegger 1953). Processes such as identity formation and identity work are at the discretion of the individual who proactively shapes oneself and the surrounding environment.

There are, however, numerous shortcomings in the arguments ventured by supporters of this 'entitative' epistemology. First, by emphasizing the reified nature of one's 'psychology' by way of a fixed repertoire of behaviour, essentialists downplay the inherent malleability of self-identity that results from the unpredictable nature of social interaction(s). In this instance, the entitative epistemology does not permit *intentional agency*, since abstract deliberations have been reduced to being an epiphenomenon

of a reified psyche. It is because of this that the subjective antecedents of everyday agency (Archer 2000; Archer 2003) remain largely unexplained in the context of self-identity. The self-identity thus formed cannot be said to be in one's 'possession' since it is more of an inborn attribute than an intentionally acquired prospect.

The social constructivist and poststructuralist literature, on the other hand, goes further in explaining the complexity of everyday behaviour and the implications that shifting meaning structures have on the formation of self-identity. Much of the literature in recent years has highlighted the importance of considering the general and specific other (Brown 2017; Brown 2018; Knights & Clarke 2017)—also represented in socially sanctioned normativity—in shaping our self-perceptions. Albeit a rather commanding position at one level of analysis, such a view can be considered as narrow simply because it imprisons the 'search for identity' within the domain of norms, symbols and language. This realisation is also supported by Brown (2017) who highlights that much of the work produced in the *Organisation Studies* journal focuses primarily on discourse, drawings on contributions of Foucault, as the dominant domain for analysing self-identity²⁴. The inescapable conclusion about such an approach is that analysing identity through discourse or social normativity cannot obviate its impermanence and decentralisation, rendering any possibility for identity as a subject of sociality, unless for a fleeting moment, thus inconceivable.

In doing so, the postmodern arguments have put into question one's sovereignty in decision making and have subsequently placed doubt on one's level of personal causal efficacy in the identity formation

²⁴ The study will use the term self-identity because it contends that the notion of the self and identity cannot be ontologically separated by way of understanding boundaries of one as different to those of the other. For this reason, the notion of self-identity encapsulated both the notion of self and the notion of identity which is used interchangeably in the previous and following pages.

process. As such, challenging the notion of *intentional agency* 'through exercises of power that constitute us' (Knights & Clarke 2017), much of the literature highlights as self-defeating any attempts to theorise distinctive self-identity. In the domain of these arguments, the self becomes highly fragmented since agency, devoid of idiosyncratic self-criteria, emerges from a reaction to demands for social adaptation. Although such a position might explain the 'power' of modernity, it is inconceivable to dispel intentional agency simply because what we say is not plausible unless reflected in some form of 'objective' and consensual reality, whatever that might be.

If we invert the argument so that we do not begin with discourse or social normativity but rather approach the predicament from the vantage point of the particularity of subjectivity, we might be able to conceive of 'conceptual drivers' behind everyday agency and experience and place self-identity as a subject of sociality. Any deliberation about the notion of self-identity must not preclude a discussion about the subject's 'interpretive repertoires', irrespective of whether one aims to develop an argument for or against a distinctive self. The aim should be to locate a conscious agent with personal causal efficacy making 'reactive' or 'proactive' decisions as, otherwise, one is unable to conceive of self-identity as anything other than an abstract convenience for theorising of organisations (Clegg 1975; Driver 2012; Knights & Clarke 2017). On account of this, the study will now shift onto literature exploring the theoretical significance of subjective antecedents on everyday agency.

The Purposefulness of the Autonomous Subject

Introduction

The previous chapter has explored the ontological foundation of identity formation and identity work for the purpose of better understanding, as suggested by Brown (2018), the everyday nature of decision-making, entrepreneurial behaviour and situated patterns of communication in organisational settings. Doing so has highlighted the notions of distinctive self and intentional agency, as *subjects* of those processes, as rather contentious. This conclusion is reached with respect to the largely polarizing arguments put forward thus far: on the one hand, much of the literature fails to explain self-identity without imprisoning it in the spheres of prescribed actions and expectations of socially sanctioned normativity. On the other hand, the essentialists' arguments alienate the self by reducing it to immutable and ubiquitous psychological processes. Each of these positions thus undermine the plausibility of the 'conscious agent' argument (see page 7 and 8). For this reason, to understand everyday organisational life in terms of self-identity, the study must shift towards a more nuanced inquiry into the ontological foundation of action encapsulated in one's subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others. To do so the study will explore literature on the subjective antecedents of identity work. By focusing on that which precedes everyday agency, the following chapter will thus attempt to highlight how much of what we say and do is of our own choosing and how much of it is only a reflection of the normative order within which one participates. On that note, the following pages will begin by first probing into the literature concerned with the 'introspective' or self-critical aspect of agency. This will provide the appropriate sequence for addressing how the notion of reflexivity has been conceived and explored in the extant self-identity literature, given its significance

in shaping situated decision-making. Nuancing the problematic of self-expression is aimed at highlighting a discernible and autonomous subject without explaining away the possibility for liquid modernity. The chapter will subsequently conclude with an inquiry into the extant project management literature and its dealings with the problematic of self-expression and the notion of the distinctive and autonomous subject.

Self-critical Identity Work

Considering previous arguments, the alternative approach to conceiving of the relationship between ***self-identity*** ↔ ***everyday agency*** ↔ ***situated experience*** without reifying the external environment would be to consider agency or everyday identity work in terms of their subjective antecedents. By moving the confluence between structure and agency to the domain of inner dialogue, one would be provided with an opportunity to consider the influence normative demands have on self-image without obviating the reflexive precondition of sovereign agency (Archer 2000; Archer 2003). For example, examining our own thoughts, reactions and motives, prior, during and after action provides one with the possibility to discern the subjectively embedded distinctions between our reasons for action and those of others. By understanding situated identity claims in light of one's *perceptions* (of self and others), one inadvertently combines one's 'psychology' and discourse to address self-identity since the reflexive being-in-the-world inadvertently subsumes both subjective and intersubjective processes (Archer 2000; Archer 2003). The important thing is to begin with the understanding of one's subjective constitution, however, to make sense of the impact an intersubjective relationship has on one's sense of self. In any case, to reach a conclusion about the distinctive and autonomous self, one needs to attempt to 'peek' into one's subjectivity to determine how much of what we say can be said to be of our own choosing. For this reason, understanding what precedes identity work is imperative to attend to this study's aims (see page 6 and 7) and to conceiving the relationship between ***self-identity*** ↔ ***everyday agency*** ↔ ***situated experience*** (Haslam 2004; Haslam et al. 2017) while avoiding the sacrifice of the mailable epistemology of self and society.

The impetus for understanding one's subjectivity can be found in literature that focuses on the self-critical and self-questioning aspect of identity work (Brown 2015; Brown 2017; Brown 2018; Ellis & Ybema 2010, Marks & O'Mahoney 2014). As noted by Ybema et al. (2009), there are "few empirical studies that privilege the potential analytical purchase and subtleties of indecisive, insecure, critical, self-depreciative identity talk" (p. 312). Notwithstanding that some literature brings into view tensions and struggles of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Alvesson 2010; Brown 2015; Brown 2018), the 'focus in these studies remains on the organisational actors' solutions' (Beech et al. 2016, p. 507); their 'tensile positioning' (Ellis & Ybema 2010, p. 279) or their preservation of an authentic self (Costas & Fleming 2009) all of which does not serve in highlighting the stratified relationship between subjectivity and situated action that can be accessed by virtue of *self-inflicted* self-criticality (Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016).

A noteworthy example of this is Beech et al. (2016), who highlight the "self-questioning rather than self-affirming identity work" of indie musicians (p. 507) and Ahuja et al. (2018) who, drawing on the discursive positions of junior architects, underscores the participants' doubt of their subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others. For example, Ahuja et al. (2018) underline how "cynical and self-depreciating emotional talk of CAD monkeys constituted a pejorative identity that expressed feelings of frustration, isolation and disillusionment" (p. 1002). Further, while Ahuja et al. (2018) emphasize the role emotions play in *enacting* self-identity, Gill (2013), on the other hand, highlights the role emotions play in *constructing* self-identity in response to the subject's vision of "losing a position in social hierarchy deemed valuable" (p. 309). In addressing self-questioning (Beech et al. 2016) and dejecting (Ahuja et al. 2018) aspects of identity work, the literature thus inadvertently foregrounds the existence of *constitutive* elements of situated self-expression which in case of Beech

et al. (2016) and Ahuja et al. (2018) are negative emotional states such as anxiety, fear and stress (Gill 2013; Gill 2014; Gill 2015; Panksepp 2005).

These exceptions to the extant literature thus assist with questioning the prominent 'resolution/outcome oriented' narrative of identity work and identity formation and do so by bringing to light an individual who makes a choice at his own expense. As stated by Beech et al. (2016), "we show how, in contrast, some actors' self-questioning neither honours nor forgives and neither aims for nor achieves redemption or resolution" (p. 509). The importance of positioning emotions as 'inputs' into self-expression is such that it intimates the existence of 'experimental' precursors to situated action (Panksepp 2005). More importantly, it highlights a stratified ontology of situated action rendered moot in the extant identity formation and identity work literature (see previous chapter). The studies thus hint that the empirical manifestations of agency are preceded by psychological deliberations that are inherently riddled with struggles and contradictions that, as their subject, have 'one's view of the world in terms of the self'. As noted by McHugh (1971), "no institution can go outside itself to a world of independent objects for criteria of knowledge, since there is no other way except by its own rules to describe what's being done with regards to knowledge" (p. 335). As such, the 'self-destructive' aspects of agency reintroduces the possibility for proactive action and active choice-making in matters of self-identity which was eliminated with the argument in regard to the 'powerless' agent (see previous chapter).

Notwithstanding the importance of these arguments in the context of this study, looking closer, it is important to note that Gill (2013) and Ahuja et al. (2018), however, position emotional responses as an

outcome of structural influences²⁵ on subjectivity. In this instance, although negative emotions can serve as inputs into situated self-expression, their emergence is perceived as a subject's reaction to normative demands. For example, Beech et al. (2016) who advocate 'aimless' and 'boundless' identity work fails to consider the self-questioning identity work of indie musicians as conducted under the 'umbrella' of meta-discourse of 'creativity' which indie musicians seek to align themselves with in their act of 'self-critique'. In doing so, the studies locate the purpose of work in-work thus rendering invisible the subjective properties (Brown 2018) that provide frameworks for the subject's conceptualisation of 'purpose'. More on this will be said later but for now it can be said that the studies' support the stratified ontology of situated self-expression, doing so by positioning the normative order, or intersubjectivity, as ontologically prior to the subjective 'construction' of 'norms' and 'order' (Bardon & Josserand 2010; Bardon et al. 2012; Winkler 2018). As noted by Ahuja et al. (2018):

We conceptualise emotions as discursive *resources* (emphasis here) for junior professionals' identity work, as they seek to navigate discrepancies between idealised notions of professional identity and their situated experiences of work. (p. 993)

Treating emotions as *subjective resources* of agency thus requires a more nuanced or a better elaborated position as to their emergence. In cases of being 'discursive resources', as suggested by Ahuja et al. (2018), they cannot escape becoming divorced from the subject's particular 'life histories', given the impersonal nature of 'discourse'. This position pays little tribute to the subjective origin 'discretion' and its undeniable implication in the particularity of situated experiences, negative or

²⁵ The question of hierarchy in Gill's case and the 'discouraging' and 'degrading' work arrangements in the case of Ahuja et al.

otherwise. On account of this, treating something as an antecedent of agency (or as a subjective resource for agency) requires a consideration of ‘the ontological structure of situated experience’ since what we see in the external world is “not a veridical representation of its structure” (Fields et al. 2017, p. 187). This would suggest that an ontological framework of self-expression subsumes both empirical and sub-empirical dimensions (such as, internal soliloquy) that are, most importantly, epistemologically heterogeneous (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Marks & O’Mahoney 2014). As suggested by Archer (2000):

The emotions stand neither in the role of the Freudian Superego nor of the Id: *they retain their part as commentaries upon something other than themselves* (emphasis here) ... Thus, the dialogue cannot be constructed as driven either by *logos* (emphasis in the original) or by *pathos* (emphasis in the original): instead, they intertwine within the [internal] conversation ... Nor do the ‘I’ and ‘You’ represent one or the other (thoughts and feelings), for although in [internal] conversation *logos* poses questions and *pathos* gives its commentary, both the present and the future self make use of each of them. And this is how it must be, for the whole purpose of the [internal] dialogue is to *define what we care about most and to which we believe we can dedicate ourselves* (emphasis here). (pp. 230-1)

The literatures’ lack of consideration for the aptitudes of interpretation, or the ontological significance of what, in the words of Archer (2000), the individual *cares about*, thus relegates the processes of identity work to an overemphasised domain of an unselfconscious *reaction* (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Snow & Anderson 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003; Watson 2008) which inadvertently diminishes the personal and emergent (Archer 2003) nature of perception and decision-making (Archer 2003). For example, the study of junior architect’s positions (Ahuja et al. 2018) ‘begins’ with ‘emotional talk’ per se and as such instantiates the ‘discouraging’ and ‘degrading’ work arrangements as an ‘a priori’

premise. As asserted by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014), an account in which all conceptual tools must ultimately be reducible only to discourse, weakens the theoretical potential of social constructivism in explaining how identity is created, altered or destroyed (p. 67). It is because of this that the present study objectifies prevailing work arrangements by 'bracketing' (Husserl 1982) all that precedes 'emotional talk' as inconclusive or ontologically inaccessible. As aptly argued by Archer (2003):

Because the properties and powers of 'internal deliberations' pertain to people, they cannot be expropriated from them and rendered as something impersonal ... Thus the 'interiority' of the internal conversations cannot be exteriorised as 'behaviour', which could be impersonally understood by all. Similarly, the 'subjectivity' of inner dialogue cannot be transmuted into 'objectivity', as if first-person thoughts could be replaced by third person ideas. Finally, *the personal cause efficacy* (emphasis here) of our deliberations cannot be taken over by the forces of 'socialisation': this would be to replace the power of the person by the power of the society. (p. 94)

Given the above, an alternative view would be to suggest that 'dejected selves' (Ahuja et al. 2018) or 'self-questioning selves' (Beech et al. 2016) are a strategy of 'superimposed' self-affirmation aimed at safeguarding the participants' desired self-notions. For example, in the case of dejected selves (Ahuja et al. 2018), the negative talk centred around perceiving junior architects as 'CAD monkeys' can be seen as a way of 'distancing' oneself from *others* (that is, other junior architects) in the act of 'realisation' that exalts that particular individual above the 'group' defined by such a concept of professional degradation. Such an interpretation would thus position the newly introduced 'CAD monkeys' discourse as a leverage for aligning, as opposed to distancing, the person entertaining such observations with the *ideal* of becoming a 'starchitect'. Contrary to this, the processes of self-questioning or the self-critique

that junior architects (Ahuja et al. 2018) or indie musicians (Beech et al. 2016) engage in would be rendered as 'non-dialogical' since it remains devoid of the 'internal conversations' which serve as a platform for reflecting the particular social conditions of existence and a distinctive subject, simultaneously (Caetano 2014, Caetano 2016). For example, being critical of oneself (Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016) involves a form of meta-reflexivity (Archer 2003) that necessitates reflexive critique of one's own internal conversations. As such, true self-critique would make one ask oneself: 'am I just highlighting my superiority by being critical of existing work arrangements? Do I do it because I think I am more competent than other juniors? Am I even a 'junior'?' (Archer 2003). The one-dimensionality of the 'discursive focus' thus cannot escape but position the 'starchitect' identity as an a priori property of any context populated by architects.

The *dialogue* incumbent in the process of self-critique is also missing in the case of Beech et al. (2016) who fail to consider whether the creative identity 'required' in the world of indie musicians encourages precariousness *for the sake of the ideal* (Heidegger 1953) of creativity. If this was plausible, in the case of Beech et al. (2016), the 'hardship' can be said to be self-inflicted *for* creativity more so than being a strategy for distancing oneself from onerous demands of the music profession (exemplified in acts of 'rebellion') "in order to protect the fragile self" (Ahuja et al. 2018, p. 1003). This interpretation promotes self-questioning episodes not as an act of discord or work of a dejected self (Ahuja et al. 2018) but rather as a relationship between 'the particular social conditions of existence' and reflexive action; a form of self-questioning *for the sake of* self-realisation. Although being only a side note to their contribution, this is evident in the following statement made by Beech et al. (2016):

The indie musicians in our study invest so much of their sense of self into their work They fall into self-doubt and deliberately step into self-critique in these processes. However unpleasant, frustrating and infuriating at times, for their sense of who they are the struggle is essential, not the outcome. (p. 509).

The preceding arguments thus suggests that the spoken words cannot be simply collapsed into a ‘consensual interpretation’²⁶ of reality. Suggesting such would reduce epistemology to ontology. On the contrary, the spoken word should be considered as a ‘multidimensional’ phenomenon in that the statements can have one meaning for the ‘other’ while another altogether for the self who utters them. Such an interpretation would allow discretion in agency and would do so by acknowledging that an act of concordance with contextual normativity can be a ‘strategy’ deployed in speech that is contrary to what the individual ‘really’ thinks²⁷. This insight was implicitly affirmed by Beech et al. (2016)—although only forming a side note to their emphasis for people’s’ pursuit of incoherence—in the following paragraph:

Drawing on Romantic ideals, they *framed themselves as tortured artists* (emphasis here) for whom writing, arranging and performing music required them to heroically conquer artistic depression, difficult band-work or stage fright. *By identifying themselves this way, perhaps at a meta-level, indie musicians did achieve a sense of coherence in their conception of who they were* (emphasis here)

To achieve this, struggling is at the heart of their identity work. *This article thus suggests that the identities actors take on or aspire to may not simply be a solution to a problem; they can be*

²⁶ For instance, by always having a mutual understanding that what was said is also what was meant.

²⁷ This stance permits for notions such as lies, sarcasm and irony that would remain inaccessible in the direct correspondence between meaning and discourse.

problematic in themselves or create problems of their own, obliging people to keep working on, and questioning their 'selves'. The musicians could remove themselves from these contexts, but that would be to stop being an indie musician (emphasis here). (p. 519).

The argument thus persists that to consider agency or everyday identity work in terms of their subjective antecedents, one has to address the problematic of reflexivity in identity work. This way, everyday speech becomes an outcome of individual deliberations as opposed to being an epiphenomenon of discourse or personality traits. More importantly, such an approach would allow for identity to be a subject of sociality without sacrificing the fluidity within the social domain. It would do so by providing a more nuanced conceptualisation of the stratified ontology of situated action which, on the one hand, proceeds from the subjective constitution of the self and surrounding world while, on the other, it also reflects the particular conditions of existence devoid of which it (action, that is) cannot be conceived as sensible. The problematic of distinctive and autonomous self thus becomes the problematic of reflexivity in everyday social and organisational life.

The Problematic of Reflexivity in Identity (Work)

The preceding arguments would thus suggest that much of the identity work literature fails to consider the 'multi-dimensional' nature of situated self-expression. The literature does so by positioning identity work as *either* self-affirmative (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Snow & Anderson 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003; Watson 2008) *or* self-questioning in nature (Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016; Gill 2013)²⁸. The either/or dichotomy of identity work, although seemingly inconsequential, renders the

²⁸ The same is achieved by the entitative view of self-identity since a single response is a direct, or not, representation of one's traits.

individual docile as it does not conceive of speech as an outcome of *interpretive* aptitudes that permits one to ‘say one thing but mean another altogether’. In this instance, there cannot be anything else that represents self-identity other than what is embedded in the *external*²⁹ domain of structure/agency confluence. The study thus recognises the single dimensional or monological nature of identity work as the by-product of the literature’s inability to explain the possibility of a distinctive self and distinctive other in the context of liquid modernity (**Gap 2**). On that note, the problem of the monological subject sits at the core of academic tendencies that eventually reduce the individual to society or vice versa (see **Gap 2**).

The main attribute of the literature which makes the problem of the monological subject possible is that it does not consider identity work as a *reflexive predicament*. The ‘nullification’ of reflexivity has two important implications: it ‘relieves’ individuals of the internal ‘dialogue’ and places the society as an internal interlocutor in its stead (Archer 2003). Such a shift is evident in the literature’s concern for the ‘outward’ and ‘forward’ facing gaze in the analysis of identity work and the focus on ‘externalities’ [(for instance, “situations where strains, tensions and surprises are prevalent” (Brown 2015, p. 30)] as ‘resources’ or ‘triggers’ of identity work. Further, placing the society as an internal interlocutor subjects the nature of self-development and self-critique to the *exclusive* sanctioning of the ‘generalised other’ (Archer 2003, Heidegger 1953). The implications of personal emergent power in development of ‘self-knowledge’ are thus reduced, replacing individuals’ causal efficacy with social causal efficacy (Archer 2003) as the ‘uncritical’ self is replaced with a critical ‘other’. In this instance, “we become the *trager*

²⁹ The term ‘external’ signifies the domain ‘outside’ of individual subjectivity such as empirical behaviour and discourse.

(emphasis in the original) of society rather than active and deliberative agents who are ultimately the makers of society” (Archer 2003, p. 94). As further noted by Archer (2003):

This undoubtedly gives us a dialogical partner within the inner conversation, *but at the high price that it ceases to be ourselves to whom we are talking* (emphasis here). The problem here is to retrieve a strong enough person (who is also a social self) such that she can conceive of projects within society and also deliberate about the conditions of their relations, without society orchestrating the discussion from within. (p. 95)

Externalising the dialogical ‘axis’ is what positions the individual as ‘monological’, only capable of simple reflexivity (Archer 2003). Such an individual would be adamant in his or her ‘confession’: “therefore, I know *what* (emphasis in the original) I know and also *that* (emphasis in the original) I know that I know it” (Archer 2003, p. 97) and I know that what I know is also *plausible for all*. More importantly, positioning the society as the internalised interlocutor suggests that ‘variance in meaning’ depends exclusively on the linguistic fallacy of error³⁰-in-language as opposed to being a by-product of (in)appropriately capturing one’s thought tendencies (Archer 2003). As noted by Marks and O’Mahoney (2014):

... as a strong discursive approach dissolves all notions of the individual into language games, it generates an anti-humanism which is impotent in explaining how resistance is possible in the face of discourses generated by organisations, professions, or governments. (p. 67)

³⁰ It is important to note that in the circumstance of society becoming an internalised interlocutor, the notion of ‘error’ becomes inconclusive as it attaches to the shifting nature of discourse.

The reduction of the subjective domain from dialogical to monological is not only the result of the 'strong discursive approach' (Brown 2019) in the extant self-identity literature, but is also and more importantly rooted in the inadequate or short-sighted conceptualisation of *reflexivity* which began with Immanuel Kant (Kant & Meiklejohn 2018) and Auguste Comte (1830). Both Kant and Comte argue for an impossibility of one simultaneously being an observing subject and the object of observation. As noted by Kant (Smith 2008):

That I am conscious of myself is a thought that already contains a twofold self, the I as a subject and the I as object. How it might be possible for the I that I think to be an object (of intuition) for me, one that enables me to distinguish me from myself, is absolutely impossible to explain, even though it is an indubitable fact. (p. 73)

In support of these claims, Comte (1830) further notes:

The thinker cannot divide himself into two, of whom one reasons while the other observes him reason. The organ observed and the organ observing being, in this case, identical, how could observation take place? (pp. 34-8)

Noting the insightfulness of these theorists, self-development (characteristic of identity work), however, cannot but be considered as a predicate of reflexive self-examination aimed at reducing the intensity and frequency of 'strains', 'tensions' and 'surprises' (Brown 2015) that colour the unpredictable nature of social engagement (Archer 2003). This argument is aptly supported by Archer (2003) who states:

In a nutshell, if I am to have any self-knowledge, I have to be both the one who knows something, but also the one who knows that she knows that – and can thus report it to herself ... If we could not fulfil both roles, then we would be self-blind like Sydney Shoemaker's George, who believed and desired certain things but was incapable of knowing that he did so. This makes him non-functioning because he cannot shape the thought 'I want X' to himself – he can only produce such a sentence by imitating others. Without the capacity to be both subject and object to himself, he becomes his own worst enemy, since he cannot know his own wants and thus pursue them. (pp. 95-6)

As such, it seems that the identity literature's shallow regards for the mechanisms behind everyday agency (May & Perry 2017) is at the core of the problem regarding the distinctive and autonomous subject. Archer (2003) provides a recourse (for this problem) by suggesting that the stratified ontology of situated action revolves around the significance of the inner dialogue. As explained by Archer (2003), **1)** situated agency is 'tied' to the **2)** ongoing nature of the internal commentary which purpose is to assess the **3)** surrounding environment to protect one's most **4)** valued *concerns* (Archer 2010; Archer et al. 2015). This means that the surrounding environment is discerned in terms of one's concerns, the confluence of which gives rise to the inner dialogue, the contents of which highlight, most importantly, the reality *first encountered* by the subject. As noted by Archer (2000):

The 'internal conversation' is a personal emergent property (PEP) rather than a psychological 'faculty' of people, meaning some intrinsic human disposition. This is because, inner conversations are *relational properties* (emphasis in the original), and the relations in question and those which obtain between the mind and the world. As emergents, our 'reflexive deliberations' belong to the personal domain of activities, *especially our continuous sense of self* (emphasis here). Without our

individual minds they would not exist, just as there could be no culture without ideas and no structure without resources. (p. 94)

The lack of temporality within the existing 'model' of identity work (see previous chapter) thus occurs because the 'model' does not conceive of situated action in terms of identity resources that are *always* present. It therefore seems that a temporal notion of identity work is thus dependent on the distinctive and autonomous subject since a mind devoid of pre-existing meaning structures (such as personal beliefs, concerns, values, objectives and desires) cannot give birth to reflexivity. Such a mind produces a world populated with insignificance which is qualitatively and phenomenally impossible. On that note, although the 'discontinuous model' is useful in ascertaining how individuals' deal with pressures from the environment at times of uncertainty—such as 'disruptive' events—it nonetheless fails to show how identity is interpolated within everyday organisational life. On the contrary, it can be said that the importance of a disruptive event, in an ontological sense, is not subsumed within the event itself but rather and more importantly, within the subject's criterion for discernment of an event as disruptive. This is simply because one's classification of unfamiliarity provides access to the subjective resources which form the ontological foundation for ongoing being-in-the-world of work. On that note, 'limits' and 'boundaries' of our subjective worlds are therefore interpolated within what we consider unknown and unfamiliar in the external environment, highlighting the subjective constitution that also operates within the domain of familiarity³¹ (Heidegger 1953). As noted by Rolfe et al. (2017), it is only under conditions of disruption that the background patterns of familiar sense making become explicit (p. 741). As such, by discounting the subliminal presence of 'self-criterium', the literature highlights a lack of

³¹ For this reason, the phenomenal importance of a disruptive event in the study's research will be framed in the methodology chapter.

concern for the ontological aspect of adopted self-notions and their 'ability' to circumscribe and *delimit* behaviour. More importantly, downplaying the ontological aspect of adopted self-notions is in line with the literature's inability to delineate agency as proactive and emergent since both properties require a (dialogical) relationship between one's distinctive subjective constitution and the (perceived) world of other subjects and objects (**Gap 3**). As further noted by Jung (1933):

Just as the lion strikes down his enemy or his prey with his fore-paw, in which his strength resides, and not with his tail like a crocodile, so our [habitual] reactions are normally characterised by the application of our most trustworthy and efficient function; it is the expression of our strength. However, this does not prevent our reacting occasionally in a way that reveals our specific weaknesses. The predominance of a function leads us to construct or to seek out certain situations while we avoid others, and therefore to have experiences that are peculiar to us and different from those of other people. (p. 88)

In the context of these arguments, identity work should be approached from understanding that the subject's conceptualisation of the *external* context is nothing other than a reflexive constitution of his inner world (Jung 1957). As succinctly put by Jung (1957), "consciousness is a precondition of being" (p. 48). On account of this, it can be said that identity persists at the foundation of the reflexive application of its tenets (Archer 2003; Archer 2000). On that note, self-identity is not so precarious but problematic (Brown 2017; Brown 2019) in that it circumscribes situated experience (McAdams 1993). The lack of clarity, however, on the problematic aspect of adopted self-notions in the extant literature calls for a more nuanced rendition of situated experience and one that begins with the subjectively constituted 'social conditions of existence' (Bardon & Josserand 2010; Bardon et al. 2012; Mills 1959,) as opposed

to the a priori social conditions of existence. Doing so has numerous benefits: it complements the study's aim to explore the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*. Theoretically, however, it permits for a two-directional relationship between the distinctive and autonomous subject and liquid modernity. Inadvertently, this provides a continuous and stratified rendition of identity work; a more dialogical relationship between self-identity and 'society' but also a more ontological conceptualisation of adopted self-identity (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Heidegger 1953; Peterson 1999). Overall, it loosens the tensions dominating the extant self-identity literature that are reducible to an uncomplimentary relationship between a self-conscious distinctive self and "spheres of prescribed action and expectation" (Cerulo 1997, p. 388). Finally, it answers calls made by Brown (2018) which seek recognition of "identity as an issue central to understanding processes of social communication, negotiation, entrepreneurial behaviour, leading and following, decision-making, and strategizing" (Brown 2018, p. 11)

Self-identity and the Crises of Project Management

With respect to the previous arguments, how has the project management literature conceived of a relationship between situated experiences and self-identity? The reflexive tail outlined at the beginning of chapter two would suggest that the context of project management provides many challenges that shape the formation of one's professional self-image and self-worth (Baker & French 2018; Clegg & Courpasson 2004; Clegg et al. 2020). This is also supported by the extant project management literature which foregrounds the largely onerous demands placed upon project managers in fulfilling their day-to-day professional duties (Gale and Cartwright 1995, Buckle and Thomas 2003, Lindgren and Packendorff 2006, Chasserio and Legault 2009, Chasserio and Legault 2010, French, Lloyd-Walker et al.

2013). The literature stresses “time pressure, expectations from many stakeholders, project assignments combined with tasks employees have in their regular position in their base organisation” (Clegg et al. 2020, p. 462) as factors that induce high levels of role ambiguity and uncertainty. As noted previously, Clegg and Courpasson (2004) underlines that project managers are only as good as their last project. These work arrangements bring about feelings of stress, anxiety and burnout (Love and Edwards 2005, Clegg, Skyttermoen et al. 2020) and in doing so shape the project manager’s situated professional experiences. It is because of the systemically embedded pressure and uncertainty that it can be said that ‘being’ a project manager is conducive to constant self-questioning and self-doubt:

Lack of structure, unclear goals and high levels of uncertainty can put a lot of strain on the project manager in a difficult situation with regards to the progress and coordination of tasks for the project team.... The project manager may be exposed to a conflicting pressure from key stakeholders who wish to influence delivery or enforce clarifications and completion. (Clegg, Skyttermoen et al. 2020., p. 466)

Given these arguments, the project manager’s situated experiences, notions of self-worth and self-image are largely shaped by the instrumental factors of the project management professional ‘tradition’ (Clegg 1975). For example, Baker and French (2018) discuss how institutional project-based management tactics have “been offered as an explanation for women’s career challenges in project-based organisations” (p. 801). By the same token, Clegg et al. (2020) suggests that the systemic scarcity of resource allocation in project management “often causes a burden on employees and can lead to negative feelings such as stress and burnout” (p. 462). Lindgren and Packendorff (2006) go further by arguing that project management work practices serve to reproduce ‘lived experiences’ by instantiating

“devotion to work and commitment to the profession of project management” (Baker & French 2018, p. 801). The arguments of Lindgren and Packendorff (2006) are also acknowledged and supported by Buckle and Thomas (2003) and Collinson and Hearn (1998). Subsequently, if one is to argue these positions critically, it can be said that institutional practices of project management regulate the expression of individuality.

Ontologically, however, these arguments place the ‘social conditions of existence’ in a dominant position to personal volition and choice. In doing so, the social conditions of existence are foregrounded as a priori. In being ontologically prior, they subsequently circumvent the significance of project manager’s goals, desires and objectives in bestowing individual-specific particularity to the pervading normative order. For example, Baker and French (2018) suggest that the masculinity of the project management profession has been institutionalised in such a way that it obstructs the ambitions and progress of female project managers. Notwithstanding the potential validity of these claims, this talks little about the subjectively constituted view of enablement and constraint to (female) project manager’s self-realisation (Archer 2003). As noted by Archer (2003), for something to be considered as an enablement or a constraint, we first must care about it enough for it to matter. Contrary to Archer’s (2003) view, by suggesting that nothing can really be done by female project managers to improve their chances of obtaining executive or other senior positions, unless the practice of project management itself is altered, the literature does not account for the *delimiting* nature of meaning attributed to norms by the subject. The argument for the delimiting nature of meaning attributed to an order would suggest that the subject’s *perceptions* of organisational normativity *moderate* the number of possible choices that can be exercised by the subject and, as such, cannot be ignored when discussing one’s professional situated experiences. As noted by Archer (2000):

Society holds out innumerable norms without these gaining universal take-up. It is perfectly possible to be wholly indifferent about school achievement, whilst dispassionately recognising the standards and expectations involved. Thus, in order to say something more precise about the emergence of social emotions, we need to go further into the nature of society's normative evaluations and into what individuals themselves bring to the relevant situations - which together account for the emergence of emotionality in the social order. After all, if no importance is attached to the subject's concerns we end up with yet another 'oversocialized view' of the social subject, and would not be talking about emergence but about unilateral causality. (p. 217)

On that note, whether the change in the attribution of meaning to the normative order would make a difference to females' progress is another matter; what is important in the context of this study, however, is that by not attending to the meaning ascribed by subjects to their immediate surrounding world, situated experiences of stress and anxiety remain outsourced to and thus reified within prior conditions of existence. For example, Clegg et al. (2020) suggests that to avoid project management toxicity, "all parties involved in project execution need to be competent and well informed about their roles and responsibilities" (p. 466). As such, notwithstanding that "stress is about misalignment between the individual's ability to master certain challenges and the challenges facing the individual" (p. 462), the importance of 'knowledge' in reducing stress and toxicity in project management says little about the implications of stakeholders' interests and objectives in defining what is recognised as 'relevant knowledge'. This is also confirmed by van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019) who, in their analysis of the extant project management literature, suggest that "there is an inherent subject-object dualism with the soft-skills paradigm given its focus on skills that can be acquired and improved" (p. 364). As supported by Clegg (1975) elsewhere, "the problem, however, is not that 'what you see depends on

where you sit', but rather that 'nothing is more difficult than to know exactly just what we do see'" (p. 28). On that note, what is recognised as a 'competent' or 'well informed' position will largely depend on the 'subject's concerns' (Archer 2000, p. 217) and, as such, cannot be said to exist as an *independent* body of knowledge. As noted by McHugh (1971):

... a finding is true (or false or ambiguous) ... only after applying to it the analytic formulations of a method by which that finding could have been understood to have been produced ... *an event is transformed into the truth* (emphasis here) only by the application of a canon that truth seekers use and analysts must formulate as providing the possibility of agreement. (p. 332)

By taking little regard for the (subjective) world first encountered by the subject, the extant project management literature thus provides an impersonal rendition of situated experience. First, **1)** this is problematic when considered in the context of arguments for identity formation. As was discussed in the previous chapter, to avoid reducing the self to society (and vice versa), the identity formation process should be conceived as an intentional predicament founded on a dialogical relationship between a distinctive and autonomous subject and liquid modernity. In this instance, identity becomes both a subject and predicate of interpersonal arrangements. Simply explained, this suggests that the subject approaches situated interaction with pre-existing self-notions which can be changed, altered and redefined because of that interaction. However, the project management literature positions institutional factor, such as unavailability of resources, lack of structure and role ambiguity, as sources of self-regulation, thus disregarding or downplaying, from an ontological standpoint, the personal causal efficacy of the identity seeking individual. As advised by van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019):

This 'lived experience' perspective focuses on appreciating the actuality (how it is experienced by the practitioner) of what occurs in project work rather than what should or is exposed to occur, and it recognises that project management is more than the contents of the bodies of knowledge. This 'lived experience' perspective is complemented by one focus of the critical perspective of project management agenda, which is to provide a socio political critique of the instrumentalist project management guides. (p. 364)

Second and more importantly, **2)** by placing the 'social conditions of existence' in a dominant position to personal volition, the studies explain away one's ability to manage the effects of negative emotional experiences. As such, although the extant research says plenty about the limiting nature of institutional 'forces' upon one's ability to exercise choice, it does not provide a recourse for managing institutional isomorphism on a personal level. This is particularly pertinent in the context of arguments for the 'conscious agent'³² (see previous chapter) since the 'soft despotism' (Clegg & Courpasson 2004) of the project management tradition favours the struggle for self-preservation. However, dealing with situated experiences of anxiety remains difficult from the 'conscious agent' standpoint if the experience and the root cause of experience remain divorced from individual's perception and circumscribed within the institutional modalities of the profession. This subject/object binary thinking thus drives a wedge between an individual's experience of anxiety and his *ability* to deal with such negative experiences leaving the notion of identity work, in the context of project management, largely inexplicable³³. As noted by van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019), "more contemporary perspectives of

³² Being a conscious agent is being a person capable of (a sovereign) choice, that is, capable of perceiving and comprehending oneself and others and acting in light of that insight.

³³ Identity work "refers to *people being engaged in* (emphasis here) forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence [and distinctiveness]" (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003., p. 1165)

project managing recognise that such Cartesian thinking can limit our conceptualisations of project work and how it is managed” (p. 364). The central issue within the extant project management literature, therefore, remains entrenched within the notion of personal causal efficacy and its ability to shape situated experience.

Given the preceding arguments, an alternative approach to addressing personal experiences within the context of project management would be to begin with the experience itself (as opposed to beginning with institutional modalities of the profession). On that note, it is important to say that this bottom-up, phenomenological approach is gaining momentum through recent project management studies. For example, Drouin, Müller et al. (2021) adopt a phenomenological philosophical stance to develop the theory of ‘balanced leadership in projects’. Sewchurran and Brown (2011) use phenomenological concepts to analyse information systems projects, while van der Hoorn and Whitty (2015) draw on Heidegger’s (1953) *Being and Time* to examine project work. Finally, Rolfe, Segal et al. (2017) promote the use of existential hermeneutic phenomenology (also known as EHP) for assisting project managers in coping with experiences of onerous demands of project work. Outside of the project management discipline, but still within the domain of the focus on practice, there are numerous studies that have argued for a shift from the “intellectualocentrism of practice” (van der Hoorn & Whitty 2019) as a way of accessing the tacit, that is personal, aspect of situated professional performances. For example, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980), using Heidegger’s (1953) being-in-the-world ontology, develop a skill acquisition model that stresses the importance of ‘situational awareness’ and the relationship between action and one’s perception of circumstance. On the same token, Muller, Sankaran et al. (2015) and Drouin, Müller et al. (2021) develop a ‘socio-cognitive theory perspective to leadership’ which “affirms that personal..... influences cause human behaviour” (p. 2). These arguments are also supported by

Benner (1982), Cicmil (2006), Gibbs and McRoy (2006) and Lum (2003). As such, in addition to enabling “discussion and examination of the facets of practice that are beyond the purely rational or instrumental and which may not be explicit” (van der Hoorn & Whitty 2019, p. 367), the importance of these arguments is that it establishes a link between situated experiences, agency and the value one assigns to circumstantial particularity. As noted by van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019), “what we *care* (emphasis in the original) about frames our *world* (emphasis in the original) and we are *solicited* (emphasis in the original).... to behave in a certain way.” (p. 366)

Albeit promoting the significance of situated experience in the understanding of ‘praxis’ (Bourdieu 1990), these studies, however, fail to nuance that the nature of ‘praxis’ and the surrounding world begins with the subjective constitution of the same (Müller, Jedličková et al. 2022). For example, simply suggesting that “comportment reflects the integrated nature of Dasein³⁴ with the world” (van der Hoorn & Whitty 2019, p. 366) runs the risk of reducing self-identity to social identity. This is what Heidegger (1953) termed as ‘being absorbed in the domain of the *they*’. This, however, explains away the intentionality of comportment and its relationship with the nature of situated experiences or what Heidegger (1953) recognises as ‘one’s ability to choose himself in his being’. On that note, if one establishes a connection between the subject and the world, or as noted by van der Horn and Whitty (2019), between Dasein and the world, without doing so in terms of the subjectively interpreted world (also referred to as the world first encountered by the subject), then agency becomes an outcome of, as suggested by Archer (2003), ‘unilateral causality’ and in becoming so loses its emergent and

³⁴ Dasein is a term used in Heidegger’s (1953) *Being and Time* which defines the nature of being of a being. In essence, to be is to be with and amongst other things in the surrounding world. It emphasizes a relational ontology between beings and between beings and things (in the world) suggesting that mutually exclusive definitions of phenomena are impossible.

intentional attributes. In this instance, situated experience gets to be rendered “with yet another ‘oversocialized view’ of the social subject” (Archer 2013, p. 217) which risks the alienation of the individual in much the same way as in the identity formation and identity work literature (refer to previous chapter for arguments).

The argument, as such, is that intention is not something ‘in the mind’, as van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019) argue to be erroneous; rather and more importantly, it is that intention is an emergent property of the reflexive relationship between the subject’s mind, with a head full of concerns, and the meaning attributed by the subject to the pervading normative order. By locating the confluence between the self and society within the confines of the inner dialogue, as discussed in the previous sections, the argument avoids the subject/object dualism that van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019) suggest occurs when evoking the ‘primacy’ of the mind or the subject. In doing so, the study delineates its ‘underlying philosophy’, “which assumes that reality is socially constructed” (Drouin, Müller et al. 2021., p. 3). More importantly, however, by positioning the subjective world as ontologically prior to the intersubjective world, the argument provides a personal rendition of situated experience which is essential for supplementing strategies for ‘coping with the lived experience of project work’ (Rolfe et al. 2017). As asserted by Rolfe et al. (2017):

Whereas phenomenology is the art of becoming attuned to the lived experience, part of hermeneutics, in Heideggerian terms, is the art of becoming aware of our pre-conceptual attunement which informs our lived experience. Existential anxiety is the basis of becoming attuned to lived experiences and is the basis of hermeneutic inquiry into *the pre-conceptual attunement which underpins lived experience* (emphasis here). (p. 742)

While the focus of Rolfe et al. (2017) is on the functionality of the EHP³⁵ model and the model's adequacy in "dealing with the crises of [project management] practice to which the normal language of that practice offers no comfort" (p. 739), this study will attend to the stratified ontology of situated experience³⁶ and in doing so will extend the endeavours of the EHP model. **Gap 4** in the extant project management and identity literature can thus be summarized as the inadequacy of conceiving of individual-specific orientations to managing 'onerous demands of the project management practice'. By exploring the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*, the study will thus provide an opportunity to understand how our subjectively constituted world delimits agency and experience. In the context of these arguments, identity work ceases to be an agential medium between structural demands and personal interests but rather a process that can be scrutinised in terms of its success, or lack thereof, to minimise the emotionality of 'constant self-questioning and self-doubt'. Such a more 'responsible' rendition of situated agency would assist endeavours seeking to address institutional isomorphism, in the context of project management, and would do so on a more personally relevant level.

Research Questions

In summary, the extant literature, as such, does not attempt to consider the possibility of an *integrative approach* to theorizing self-identity; one that studies the 'power' of contextualization, albeit not at the cost of a distinctive and autonomous self. As noted by Brown (2018):

³⁵ Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology.

³⁶ To reiterate previous arguments, the stratified ontology of situated experience is reflected in a relationship between one's pre-existing self-notions, inner deliberations and situated action.

While we may be upbeat about the prospects of increasingly engaged debates in principle, it is noteworthy that with the exception of some ethnographies and in-depth case studies, most scholars have as yet adopted a single, often somewhat narrow approach to the study of identities, in part at least because of entrenched ideological assumptions.... [as such] theory development and constructive dialogue in the identities field is being hindered by a 'lack of construct clarity' and that it would be more likely to benefit from synergies between different designs and theoretical perspectives... (pp. 14-15)

For a more 'inclusive' argument, the literature, as such, would have to reconceptualize self-identity so that it can be discussed as being a *subject* and a *predicate* to sociality, simultaneously. For identity to be a subject of sociality, however, the study would need to concern itself with, or better nuance, that which the individual brings to bear to situated interaction. In matters of identity, that which the individual brings to bear in situated interaction is one's pre-existing sense of self and others. On that note and furthermore, the study would also need to investigate the effects of situated interaction on our sense of self since a predicate, as defined by Oxford Languages dictionary, is "something which is affirmed or denied concerning an argument of a proposition". As such, even though the primary concern is to recognise "identity as an issue central to understanding processes of social communication, negotiation, entrepreneurial behaviour, leading and following, decision-making, and strategizing" (Brown 2018, p. 11), one cannot discount the effects of situated interaction on our sense of self since the 'revised self' is always the new 'subjectum' of subsequent interactions. As such, this suggests that the research questions should serve to capture the 'retentive and protective' aspects of self-expression:

1. How does one's self-identity shape one's situated professional experiences?

This question will assist in elucidating what is valued and meaningful to the individual within specific contexts. Doing this permits the study to highlight a relationship between that which is found in the world as forms of 'objectivity' and that which is described by the subject as exclusive and private rationalisations. Highlighting a meaningful relationship between perceived subjectivity and perceived objectivity will permit for making sense of situated experiences in terms of their subjective antecedents.

2. How do one's professional experiences (re)shape the process of (re)articulating (professional) self-identity?

Considering the findings developed from investigating the problematic and implicating nature of adopted self-notions in attribution to circumstantial particularity, the second question will address how the particularity of one's experiences shape the (re)constitution of professional identities and subsequent agency.

The aim of these questions is to turn the analytic gaze inward and elucidate the 'intra-psychic' structure of situated experience (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Brown 2015; Heidegger 1953; Husserl 1982). In doing so, the research positions identity as a topic preceding identity work; as content that informs everyday behaviour. This approach 'returns' volition back to the individual that has been nullified by the high levels of fragmentary ontology present in postmodern and post-structural studies of identity (Giddens 2013; Knights & Willmott 1989; McAdams 1993). More importantly, by highlighting the subjective resources of self-expression (Husserl 1970; Husserl 1982), the study aims to provide a more temporal

and intentional rendition of identity work forming a counterweight to the unnecessarily discontinuous and monological 'deposition' of the process in the extant literature. Due to the 'conscious agent' argument, the study also permits for problematizing adopted self-notions, given their 'ability' to affect and shape situated action. This will serve to extend the literature's exclusive focus on the precarious nature of self-identity (Bardon, Clegg & Josserand 2012; Brown 2015; Brown 2018; Mills 1959) The arguments' 'road-map' can, as such, be summarized as follows:

- 1) By highlighting the subjective antecedents of identity work, the study will demonstrate the intentional aspect of agency which will provide a more temporal rendition of identity work and will do so by way of adding to the reactive conceptualisation of action that dominates extant self-identity literature.
- 2) Doing this will position identity as a subject of sociality, thus adding to the literature's existing orientation aimed at the significance of predicates of interpersonal interaction. It is important to emphasise at this juncture that by positioning identity as a subject of sociality, the study does not aim to compromise the mediating effects of contextual particularity on our sense of self. The study argues that the individual and the normative order interact by virtue of the subject's grasping the normative order in particular terms. In doing so, the study does not conceive of their relationship in light of relations of power that cannot avoid reduction of the individual to society or vice versa.
- 3) Highlighting the intentional nature of identity work and positioning self-identity as a subject of sociality enable one to argue for the distinctive nature of self-identity that has been explained away by poststructuralist proponents as a discursive illusion.

- 4) More importantly, positioning the distinctive self as a subject of sociality, whose being-in-the-world is a purposeful predicament, will enable addressing the problematic, as opposed to precarious, aspect of adopted self-notions respective to their 'ability' to circumscribe experience. Such a position will permit for rendering of identity work in light of its success to 'form, repair and strengthen notions that instil a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165).

With respect to the delineated summary of arguments, it can be said that the central point of contention for this study is the literatures' inability to provide an explanation of a discernible and autonomous subject in the context of liquid modernity. The study's ability to deal adequately with this contention will help to explore how one's self-identity is shaped within the context of particular interpersonal arrangements (**aim 1**) all the while providing for the possibility to examine how one's self-identity subsequently delimits agency and experience (**aim 2 and 3**). Attending to this 'ontological hierarchy' is necessary to appropriately conceive of the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*. The study will shift onto the methodology deployed in conducting this research project in the chapter that follows. (Please refer to **Appendices** for literature review matrix.)

Conclusion

The aim of the chapter was to dig deeper into literature that attempts to address the subjective antecedents of everyday agency. These attempts addressed the extant identity formation and identity work literature's inability to conceive of a distinctive and autonomous subject without explaining away liquid modernity. Attending to the self-critical and dejected aspect of identity work, it became clear, however, that the extant literature's short-sided conceptualisation of situated self-expression stems from the philosophical arguments against reflexivity. Suggesting that one cannot be both a subject and object of reflection (or self-reflection) the literature, as such, is unable to conceive of a circumstance within which a subject can say one thing but mean another altogether. These tendencies cannot escape reducing the individual to society or vice versa since a monological subject is merely an analogous reflection of meaning embedded in discourse or normativity. In this instance, an individual is reduced to being an 'automata', since their speech serves only as a medium between norms and the proper execution of their 'objective' tenets. By reducing ontology to epistemology, the literature does little to explain the highly personal and intentional nature of everyday behaviour.

The foundation of this position stems from the binary nature of the extant literatures' arguments. For example, as was highlighted in the chapter, the literature attempts to position emotions as inputs into situated self-expression; however, in doing so fails to recognise that the view provided of emotionality is strictly sensible in terms of the a priori demands of particular normative orders. Everyday agency, in this instance, is not emergent because it does not stem from one's volition upon which ontology the (subject's) perceived difference between the demands of the normative order and personal interests is hinged. In any case, the significance of reflexive agency is sidestepped because the extant self-identity

literature does not recognise there being anything distinctive and permanent enough about one's subjectively constituted view of the self and others to argue for an intentional nature of agency. Such a position makes inexplicable the personal aspect of organisational life and subsequently incapacitates one's attempts to apply a critical assessment of existing self-notions' ability to affect and shape situated experiences. In this instance, situated identity work cannot be understood through its 'purpose' in attending to the (in)coherence in the sense of self. On account of this, the extant literature fails to recognise the ontological aspect of adopted self-notions and their implications in situated experiences which is particularly problematic in the context of "dealing with the crises of [the project management] practice to which the normal language of that practice offers no comfort" (Rolfe et al. 2017, p. 739). With this in mind, the following section will explicate the philosophical arguments deployed in researching the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*.

The Stratified Ontology of Self-induced Reality

Introduction

This chapter outlines the philosophical arguments applied in pursuing the research aim which is centred around positioning self-identity as a subject of organisational life. Drawing on the tenets of critical realism, the chapter will explain the possibility of 'reality' within which the relationship between entities is not defined by deterministic dualism. Proposing that societies and individuals are different kinds of entities, the critical realist paradigm will explain the philosophy behind the *stratified* ontology of reality and its effect on interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, by suggesting that the stratified ontology is an enduring aspect of reality, critical realism also invokes a distinction between empirical and sub-empirical manifestations of self-identity. On that note, the chapter will also focus on clearly articulating the framework of the stratified ontology of self-identity (or situated experience) and its effect on perception and speech. The aim of this section of the chapter is to highlight an 'in-order-to' relationship between speech and its subjective possibility and in doing so demonstrate how our ideas of the self and the surrounding world delimit what we perceive in the world. Pre-existing self-notions can be framed as individual-specific ontologies without which exploration of situated experiences would not be possible since they precede our ability to comprehend. In addition to chapter two, this chapter provides philosophical arguments that frame how the researcher will make sense of the field material. Highlighting how the study's ontology and paradigm intersect, the chapter delineates the study's interpretive lens thus forming a 'bridge' between the study's ontological arguments and the study's methodology (which will be discussed in chapter six).

Ontological Position: The Claim for the Ontology of Self-notions

To begin with the subjectively constituted view of the self and the subjectively constituted surrounding world of others, which is necessary for understanding the relationship between self-identity ↔ everyday agency ↔ situated experience, one needs to ‘leverage’ an ontological framework that is congruent with such aims. Before moving on to explicating the details behind the ontological foundation of the study, it is important to highlight what becomes presupposed with the forthcoming arguments: the study’s ontology recognises **1**) a non-dual (for instance, *dialogical*) relationship between the subject perceiving and the object being perceived and in doing so sees the individual as a **2**) conscious agent capable of (a sovereign) choice, that is, capable of perceiving and comprehending oneself and others and acting in light of that insight³⁷. For example, as noted by Fields et al. (2017):

According to interface theory of perception (ITP), the perceived world, with its space-time structure, objects and causal relations, is a **2**) virtual machine implemented by the coupled dynamics of an organism and its environment. Like any other virtual machine, the perceived world is merely an **1**) interpretive and semantic construct; its structure and dynamics bear no law-like relation to the structure and dynamics of its implementation.... [Thus] *perceptual systems, in general, provide only an organism-specific “user interface” [of] the world, not a veridical representation of its structure* (emphasis here). (p. 187)

³⁷ For a definition of ‘insight’ this study draws on arguments made by Bernard Lonergan and his work *Insight* (1992). Lonergan notes that “what we have to grasp is that insight 1) comes as a release to the tension of inquiry, 2) comes suddenly and unexpectedly, 3) is a function not of outer circumstance but of inner condition, 4) pivots between the concrete and the abstract, and 5) passes into the habitual texture of the mind” (p. 28). The utility of this definition with respect to the study’s aims is that an individual, in the perception of his immediate circumstance, reaches conclusions or generates answers to his identity question, which then recedes in the ‘habitual texture of the mind’ thus forming the structure of his ‘operating systems’ that serve as a foundation of his everyday being-in-the-world. As such, insight, in the context of these arguments, is a phenomenon that emerges when a person begins to see meaning and relations in personal experiences (Jung 1933; Lonergan 1992)

Notwithstanding that there exist aspects of the self which are inaccessible to cognition (see Schutz 1967), the study recognises the significance of *subjectively mediated* interpersonal interaction (Brown 2015; Brown 2018) that at its core subsumes a *distinctive subject* interpreting the surrounding world *in reference to oneself* (see Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Peterson 1999). On that note, the study ascribes to a view that sees agency and experience as an intertwined phenomenon, closely related on the grounds of (both) being a subjectively mediated predicament. Thus, the study embeds itself within a multi-layered ontology, incorporating Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger 1953); Peterson's notion of *goal directed behaviour* (Peterson 1999) and Archer's notion of *personal causal efficacy in agency* (Archer 2000; Archer 2003) to produce an 'intra-psychic' (Brown 2015; Brown 2018) rendition of situated action *and* experience.

The Phenomenology of Stratified Ontology of Reality

Our way of looking at things is conditioned by what we are. (Jung 1933, p. 117)

The argument Jung (1933) is making is closely related to Heidegger's (1953) notion of being-in-the-world³⁸. Heidegger (1953) suggests that one's being-in-the-world is not to be acknowledged as "the objective presence of a corporeal thing 'in' a being objectively present' (for example, akin to a bench is in the lecture hall, the lecture hall in the university, the university in the city, and so on until: the bench

³⁸ The notion of being-in-the-world suggests that one's agency is motivated towards an 'ideal' and that things do not have intrinsic qualities in and of themselves but are rather classified based on their significance and relevance to the individual. It is a form of ontology that positions the subjective world as the primary aspect in analysing everyday behaviour "challenging as it does the Cartesian split between subject and world which in many ways still dominates" Western thinking (Cohn 2002, p. 5).

is in “the cosmos”) (Heidegger 1953, p. 54) but rather existentially as something that ‘dwells’ near *familiar* things in the process of *taking care* (of something). As noted by Heidegger:

In contrast to these prescientific ontic meanings, the expression ‘taking care’ is used in this inquiry as an ontological term (an existential) to designate the being of a possible being-in-the-world. (1953, p. 57)

The notion of ‘taking care’ (of something) is thus signifying a *meaningful* enactment. Performing that which *means* something allows for seeing of the surrounding ‘world’³⁹ (Heidegger 1953) as a reflection of the relationship between *significant* things. This position connects seemingly ‘objective’ things ‘in’ the world into a *totality of relevance* within which each thing is significant only because of its relationship with other significant things. In this instance ‘things’ are connected to one another by virtue of their meaningful reference. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

there always belongs to the being of a useful thing a totality of useful things in which this useful thing can be what it is ... [This] structure of ‘in order to’ contains a *reference* (emphasis in the original) of something to something. In accordance with their character of utility, useful things always are *in terms* (emphasis in the original) of belonging to other useful things. (p. 158)

Since the notion of significance or usefulness is a relative construct; relative to each person’s needs and objectives that is, what is significant about this contribution is that the ‘objective’ arrangement of meaningful things in the ‘external’ world is analogous to one’s subjectively constituted view of the self. The ‘subjectively constituted view of the self’ thus gives ‘shape’ to the surrounding world of things,

³⁹ The phenomenon of the world is to be considered as a structure and hierarchy of meaning which constitutes what we term ‘reality’.

events and people. As such, heedful circumspection is thus predicated upon the notion of *personal* value which brings things into being on the grounds of their 'serviceability' of personal objectives; in the words of Heidegger (1953), something 'in order to' for something else⁴⁰. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

the circumspect dealings in the surrounding world needs a useful thing at hand which, in its character of being a useful thing, takes over the 'work' of *letting* (emphasis in the original) things at hand become *conspicuous* (emphasis in the original) ... what is encountered within the world is freed in its being for heedful circumspection, for taking matters into account. (pp. 79-82)

Individual's reality (or the world of the individual), as such, is essentially the *surrounding world*; a collection of individual-specific circumstances (which subsumes things, events and people) encountered as that which is meaningfully *nearest* (Heidegger 1953). For example, in the act of opening the door, we encounter the doorknob. As such, the act of opening the door brings into view the doorknob 'for which sake' the being of the door as that which allows for one's 'encountering' of other spaces has been 'brought within our perceptual boundaries⁴¹'. The referential totality of the doorknob, the door and rooms as space on either 'side' of the door is what constitutes the surrounding world made 'visible' by

⁴⁰ Modelling behaviour as that which is 'something for something else' is not to be perceived as Machiavellian endeavour. It is to be considered as an ontological term (as existential). What this term is aiming to elucidate is the connectivity of things based on meaning that underlines the phenomenon of existence and not to be considered as merely an association of ontic, objectively present 'things' or 'events' and their objective characteristics which, in their objectivity, are made sensible and thus exist. As explained by Heidegger, "understood ontologically, letting something be relevant is the previous freeing of beings for their innerworldly handiness. The with-what of relevance is freed in terms of the together-with-what of relevance. It is encountered by heedfulness as this thing at hand. When a *being* (emphasis here) shows itself in general to heedfulness, that is, when a being is discovered in its being, it is always already a thing at hand in the surrounding world and precisely not "initially" merely present "world-stuff" (1953, p. 84).

⁴¹ In terms of Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world (1953), it can also be said that the space on the other side of the door have been brought into 'existence' by the door knob.

the heedful act of opening the door *'for the sake of' completing a meaningful task that initiated the process of traversing the space, in the first instance*. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

Beings are discovered with regards to the fact that they are referred, as those being which they are, to something. They are relevant *together with* (emphasis in the original) something else. The character of being of things at hand is *relevance* (emphasis in the original). To be relevant means to let something be together with something else. (p. 82)

The implication of subjectively conceived 'objectivity' is such that one's world of meaning, with its relational totality, exists *prior* to the totality of relevance being highlighted through 'using things at hand' in everyday heedful circumspection (Heidegger 1953; Peterson 1999). This means that the relevance of a single thing is 'disclosed to us' by our prior knowledge, understanding and *awareness* of the *totality* (of relevance) of things to which they belong. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

Which relevance things at hand have is prefigured in terms of the total relevance. The total relevance which, for example, constitutes the things at hand in a workshop in their handiness is 'earlier' than any single useful thing, as is the farmstead with all its utensils and neighbouring land. (pp. 82-83)

This highlights a notion of pre-existing motivational significance (that can be called 'purpose') that characterises a thing or a being at hand as 'useful' or otherwise and that connects 'mere' present things in the 'external world' based on their relevance. It suggests that situated circumstance cannot be considered as devoid of the self's pre-ontological 'motivational factor'. That which matters to a subject is thus pre-ontological to the 'ontology' of things via which they attain their 'objectivity' (Heidegger 1953). At its core, Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world thus suggests that meaningless things exist

outside of our perceptual boundaries⁴². Furthermore, ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ things observed in the ‘external’ world are things that *have been made* conspicuous on account of the subject’s motivational significance. Finally, useful and meaningful things become ‘nearest’ by way of their *utility* in the fulfilment of subjectively conceived *pragmatic ends*. Heidegger (1953) thus suggests that those things that matter to a subject are formative of individual-specific ontologies by virtue of which they act.

Peterson (1990) further extrapolates the notion of motivational significance and utility by suggesting that everyday agency is always *goal directed behaviour*. The notion of goal directed behaviour suggests that everyday heedful circumspection reflects an endeavour aimed at the attainment of individual-specific desires and objectives. This means that (situated) self-expression is not only shaped by past experiences since it contains elements of all ‘potential’ (future) ways of being. Individual-specific ontologies (for instance, that which matters to a subject by virtue of which she acts) are thus also highly subjective and abstract predicaments. As noted by Peterson (1999):

We posit a goal, in image and word, and we compare present conditions to that goal. We evaluate the significance of ongoing events in light of their perceived relationship to the goal. We modify our behavioural outputs—our means—when necessary, to make the attainment of our goal ever more likely. We modify our actions within the game but accept the rules without question. *We move in a linear direction from present to future* (emphasis here). (p. 29)

The meaning of things, events and people, which provides for the possibility of the self’s particular “immediate” surrounding world of others, is not exclusively shaped by one’s existing body of self-knowledge but also encapsulates self-knowledge *derived from the imagined world* (Peterson 1999, p.

⁴² This is also supported by findings in analytical psychology (see Jung 1933 and Peterson 1999).

28). The relational ontology of meaningful 'objective' things in the 'external world' transpires within subjective constitution as an arrangement between *perceived* past and present and the envisioned future (self). Based on this, it can be said that *the relational ontology between subjectively conceived past, present and future underpins one's ability to produce the meaningful surrounding world of connected things, events and people*. This ontological foundation permits individual-specific experiences of the external world. As noted by Dostal (1993):

Any present moment.... has what he [Heidegger] calls 'retentive' and 'protentive' aspects. In other words, any moment is what it is in virtue of what it retains from the past (retention) and what it anticipates from the future (protention). *Every present moment carries these two aspects as essential to its being what it is as present* (emphasis here). (p. 146)

The implications of this are that the world first encountered is thus highly subjective. For this reason, a study of the relationship between ***self-identity*** ↔ ***everyday agency*** ↔ ***situated experience*** cannot but first address the subjective possibility of this relationship. For example, if one is to construct an *ontological foundation of everyday action*, it would thus subsume any arrangement of current self-knowledge accumulated from past experiences, as well as *potential* self-knowledge extrapolated from an *envisioned or anticipated way of being*. This ontological foundation thus assists with making meaningful things in the external world (consciously) conspicuous to the subject. More importantly, this also suggests that the 'properties' we find in the world cannot be distinguished from this ontological foundation⁴³. Therefore, "being-in [the surrounding world] cannot be clarified ontologically by an ontic

⁴³ This stresses the centrality of human beings in addressing questions of existential nature (for example, who am I?) and positions the individual both as subject and object of analysis in the study of personal identity. It also challenges the Cartesian split in Western thinking (Cohn 2002) that has dominated studies of personal identity which ontologically separate structure and agency and/or self and the other by highlighting their discontinuous relationship (see chapter one for explanation).

characteristic, by saying for example: being-in in a world is a spiritual quality and the ‘spirituality’ of human beings is an attribute of its bodiliness which is always at the same time ‘based on’ corporeality” (Heidegger 1953, p. 56) but rather as an existential modality of intimately and intuitively knowing the world on the basis of one’s pre-existing subjective content. As noted by Peterson:

We compare our interpretations of the world as it unfolds in the present to *the desired world, in imagination* (emphasis in the original), not mere expectation; we compare what we have (in interpretation) to what we *want* (emphasis in the original), rather than to what we merely think *will be* (emphasis in the original). Our goal setting, and consequent striving, is motivated: we chase what we *desire* (emphasis in the original), in our constant attempts to optimise our affective states. (p. 28)

Heidegger’s being-in-the-world thus suggests that everyday heedful circumspection is prefigured with one’s purpose (or that which matters). The notion of goal directed behaviour, on the other hand, extends Heidegger’s being-in-the-world by highlighting the *diachronic content* subsumed within the ‘motivational significances’ of action. The ‘contents’ of our motivational significances enables delineating an ontological foundation of the self from which springboard we self-express. More importantly, however, in addition to highlighting what is at the core of one’s *sensible* decision, both Heidegger (1953) and Peterson (1999) begin to shine light on subliminal antecedents of agency. Since our concerns about what *could* happen adjust our ongoing actions to ensure the possibility of the ideal

Positioning the pre-existing subject as indispensable in aiming to understand everyday social interaction and/or identity work is also in line with Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world—which forms the study’s central ontological argument—which highlights an inherent relationality between the subject and object and in doing so emphasises the primordial notion of ‘subjectivity’ that must not be obviated when attending to question of personal identity.

future (Peterson 1999), that which precedes agency can be said to emerge from our desire to preserve what we perceive as necessary for self-realisation.

Nuancing Heidegger (1953) and Peterson (1999), Archer (2000; 2003) therefore suggests that being-in-the-world and goal directed behaviour is a *reflexively mediated personal causal efficacy*. Before going into explaining what is meant by 'reflexively mediated personal causal efficacy', it is important to note that its significance in the context of this study is that it lends plausibility to the conscious agent argument; namely that we are "capable of perceiving and comprehending oneself and others and acting in light of that insight" (p. 32). This suggests that there always exists a distinct subject preceding interpersonal interaction and situated experience. As suggested by Archer (2000; 2003), the subject transmutes the mere things present in the external world into meaningful things perceived and experienced in the 'external world' by reflexively considering their enabling and/or constraining nature towards their innate desire for self-realisation. In support of Archer (2000; 2003), Heidegger (1953) notes:

Dasein⁴⁴ always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein either has chosen these possibilities itself or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. (p. 33)

⁴⁴ Dasein essentially represents everyone that lives within a society and interacts with other individuals in their everyday being-in-the-world. As explained by Cohn (2002): [Heidegger] does not speak of 'human beings' but of 'Dasein'... Heidegger, in using it to characterise *human* beings, pays attention, as he frequently does, to the literal meaning of the word: this is 'there-being' or as we usually say 'being-there'. (p. 8)

The subject, as such, reflexively ‘refers back’ to ‘depositories of meaning’ (Archer 2003) (recognised as the ontological foundation of the self) in terms of which situated judgement is rendered. Archer (2000) confirms this by stating that ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ are “thus relational to something, which is what gives them their emergent character, and that something is our own concerns which make a situation *a matter of none-indifference to a person* (emphasis here)” (p. 195)⁴⁵. On that note, for the notion of *significance* to exist (in the ‘external’ world), one cannot obviate the distinctive and discernible subject (or the ‘pre-existing’ ontological foundation) lending meaning to ‘problematic’ and ‘challenging’ circumstances. This is also affirmed by Heidegger (1953) who recognises that:

every idea of a ‘subject’—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum ontologically* (emphasis in the original) along with it, no matter how energetic are one’s ontic protestations against the “substantial soul” or the “reifications of consciousness”. (p. 46)

The ‘matter of non-indifference’ to a thing, event or a person, to which we subsequently ‘react’⁴⁶ is thus made possible by the *irreducible properties of reflexivity* (Archer 2000) which instantiate a relationship between the perceived aspects of the social world⁴⁷ (Archer 2000; 2003; 2010; Jung 1933) and our subjective ‘depositories of meaning’. As such, while Heidegger (1953) and Peterson (1999) provide for

⁴⁵ Otherwise, if there was no pre-existing self which is brought to circumstantial particularity, prior to every decision made one would have to ask another ‘what is at stake’ and correspondingly be instructed of the ‘best possible alternative’ for action. Simply, one would not be able to think *for oneself*.

⁴⁶ A more appropriate way of conceptualising this is that we do not react to a thing even or a person but rather we construct or produce the circumstance within which a thing, an event or a person assumes specific attributes.

⁴⁷ Although it might be perceived as an oxymoron to state that properties of the external world are subjective, considering contributions of Archer (2003), Peterson (1999) and Heidegger (1953), only meaningful things in the external world are conspicuous since what is meaningless exists outside of our perceptual boundaries. In this respect, one cannot talk of ‘objectivity’ without considering that one’s subjectivity first renders things as being objective.

the ontological foundation of our being(-in-the-world), which subsumes a diachronic property of that which matters to a subject, Archer (2000; Archer 2003) extends this by introducing the selective and discretionary aspect of agency. As introduced by Archer (2000):

The present approach is equally opposed to 'Society's Man'... where everything that we are, and this includes our full emotionality, is itself a gift of society. Again, the object is reverse: namely to show how irreducible properties of our human selves interact with our sociality and that their interplay is significant *by virtue of the inner dialogue* (emphasis in the original) and its outcomes. (p. 195)

What is significant about this position is that it suggests that situated experiences are an empirical manifestation of a largely stratified ontology. The stratified ontology of situated experience suggests that internal dialogue and agency are dependent on the ontological foundation of the self and its diachronic content. The stratified ontology of experience thus presupposes that our thinking is shaped by what we need, want and desire which subsequently affects how we act upon 'structures'. Furthermore, the pervasive structures 'act' upon our thinking through the meaning we *ascribe* to (*perceived*) normativity of a particular context of interpersonal arrangements. More importantly, however, the meaning we ascribe to the perceived normative order cannot obviate that which we need, want and desire in the first instance: *the world first encountered by the subject is thus defined by these attributes*. Archer (2000) explains this by saying:

Different clusters of emotions represent commentaries upon our *concerns* (emphasis here) and are emergent from our human relationships with the natural, practical and discursive orders of reality respectively. Matters do not finish here. Because of our reflexivity, we review these emotional commentaries. Articulate them, monitor them, and transmute them; thus, elaborating further upon

our emotionality itself. This occurs through the inner conversation which is a ceaseless discussion about satisfaction of our *ultimate concerns* (emphasis here) and a monitoring of the self and its commitments in relation to the commentaries received. (p. 195)

The preceding arguments thus position one's subjective constitution as the subject and object of an inquiry into situated action and experience. Since the study's aim is to discern 'how our subjective constitution permits for *particular* (situated) experiences and *forms of agency*' (aim three), the nature of the inquiry into *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience* is thus ultimately *ontological*. On that note, the study will seek to foreground an interpretive lens that highlights the ontological aspect of one's subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others.

Paradigm: The Stratified Ontology of Critical Realism

The study aims to address identity from the critical realist paradigm. Before moving onto highlighting the implications of the critical realist paradigm on framing the study's interpretive lens, it is important to point out its benefits in studies of self-identity. The paradigm provides a more integrative approach to studying self-identity (see Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2010; Archer et al. 2015; Bhaskar 1989; Caetano 2014; Caetano 2016; Marks & O'Mahoney 2014; O'Mahoney 2011). First, it does so by suggesting that the 'sensibility' of everyday speech should be considered in view of the substantive frames of reference that pertain to every individual (in different ways). As noted by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014):

.... impressions created by people may reflect internal thoughts, on other occasions impressions may be entirely false. Individuals can distance themselves from organisational scripts. So, what they are feeling is separated, or can be separated from their performance. (p. 76)

Critical realism, as such, recognises the existence of truth within one or all domains⁴⁸ of reality (Marks & O'Mahoney 2014). With respect to the individual, the notion of truth constitutes a thing known by the subject to be true *for* her by virtue of which her actions and words are rendered as personally meaningful. Although the study takes no interest in the objectivity of truth, the recognition of 'personal truth' thus supports the possibility of a *known*⁴⁹ epistemological variance between the contents of self-expression and subjectivity which is in line with the 'conscious agent' argument that this study recognises as fundamental for understanding self-identity (see chapter two). More importantly, it is the recognition that something describes one more appropriately than other things that foregrounds the possibility of highlighting the 'in-order-to' relationship between one's thoughts and actions which is necessary for 'puzzling' together the pieces of one's 'self-ontology'. As supported by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014):

... such a position is conceptually more sophisticated because it avoids collapsing identity into discourse (downward conflation) or assuming that identity is simply an assemblage of component parts (upward conflation). Second, without the existence of identity *as a distinctive entity* (emphasis here), humanity (and the rights associated with it) becomes either an assemblage of parts or is 'disappeared' to mere fantasy suspended betwixt and between subject positions. (p. 70)

This 'depth ontology' of critical realism thus makes the question of self-identity highly 'personal' since the individual takes 'centre stage' when considering the process of *appropriating* self-notions from the 'surrounding world'. This suggests that professional norms can be adopted, *albeit not completely*; that the self is a representation of culture, *albeit not completely*: both rest on an individual's discretion to

⁴⁸ Subjective and/or Objective domains.

⁴⁹ Known by the subject.

produce a particular *hierarchy of meaning* that shapes their perception and experience of conditions of existence. However axiomatic this may sound; studies of identity have been divorced from the individual per se by way of ‘surrendering’ the formation of identity to the domain of discursive concordance or by turning identity into an analogue of group attributes (see chapter two). The weakness of these polarizing positions, as such, ‘hides’ in the ontological arguments forwarded thus far. As noted by Marks and O’Mahoney (2014):

The weakness of both the constructivist position and the social identity approach to identity emerge, primarily, from their ontological commitments. In relation to post-structuralists, the failure to distinguish between ontology and epistemology results in an ‘invisible’ self that can only collapse into discourse resulting in explanatory weakness and emancipatory importance. For STI, individual identity appears to be solely determined by group membership with little variation in the individual characteristics held by group members ... A critical realist account of identity addresses these weaknesses. (p. 69)

Archer (2010) further notes the following:

As an explanatory framework, the morphogenetic approach endorses a stratified ontology for structures, cultures and agents because each has emergent and irreducible properties and powers—and explains every social outcome as the products of their interplay. Outcomes, which can be broadly reproductory or largely transformatory, depend upon the intertwining of structure, culture and agency, but not by rendering them inseparable, as in “central conflation” of Giddens, Bourdieu, and Beck, which makes for an amalgam precluding the examination of their interplay. Nor is this co-determinism, implying a dualistic—literally a dual-factor—approach; it is never anything but analytic dualism. Critically, what is missed *inter alia* by such co-determinism is the *double morphogenesis* in

which actors themselves change in the very process of actively pursuing changes in the social order.

This can be viewed as one of the principal non-Meadian ways by which the social gets inside us. (p. 274)

Furthermore, it is important to point out that in addition to positioning the individual centre stage in studies of self-identity, the critical realism paradigm does not, in any sense, explain away sociality. This is because it recognises that social conditions of existence delimit the expression of 'truth'. The critical realist paradigm subsequently suggests that the notion of personal truth be considered in light of the limiting field of possibilities provided for by a particular context. In this instance, the stratified ontology of the self is extended to include one's *interpretation* of social normativity since meaningful and sensible speech is not only dictated by its subjective possibility but also by the 'language game' (Clegg 1975) of the project management profession, for example. As noted by Archer (2000):

We do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing. Our placement in society rebounds upon us, affecting the persons we become, but also, and more forcefully, affecting the social identities we can achieve. (p. 10)

In supporting the stratified ontology of reality, the critical realist paradigm, as such, argues *for* the distinctive individual and intentional agency without compromising the effects structured role relationships have on our sense of self. Drawing on Archer Muller, Sankaran et al. (2015) recognise that "structural influences are mediated to people by shaping the situation in which they find themselves" (p. 87). The critical realist paradigm thus deals with the ontological weaknesses of 'polarising arguments' that tend to promote the individual at the cost of society or vice versa (see chapter two for arguments). Subsequently, the paradigm bridges the chasm between structure and agency that

pervades studies concerned with identity work and identity formation (see chapter two and also Archer 2000; Marks & O'Mahoney 2014). As noted by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014):

Agency is central to the critical realist conception of the social world as it is the point by which *the person and social structure, and therefore, personal identity and social identity are reproduced and transformed* (emphasis here). Such an account enables richer and wider explanation than might a purely discursive account. (p. 72)

Lastly, Fletcher (2016) argues that very few empirical studies concerned with the process of organising and management have been conducted from the foundation of critical realism. This suggests that not many studies of management and organisations have taken account of the significance of the stratified ontology of reality which forms the backbone of critical realism. Furthermore, more importantly, there have not been many empirical studies of self-identity utilising the lens of this paradigm for its interpretive and analytical framework⁵⁰ (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2010; Archer 2015; Archer et al. 2015; Bhaskar 1989; Caetano 2014; Caetano 2016; Fletcher 2016; Marks & O'Mahoney 2014; O'Mahoney 2011). This study intends to address this paradigmatic impasse.

With respect to the above, what are the implications of studying self-identity through a critical realist paradigm? The most obvious implication is that studying identity through the lens of critical realism requires a recognition of reality that is 'populated' by different entities recognisable by virtue of their

⁵⁰ A search of the Web of Science database using 'critical realism' and 'identity' as key terms produces only 14 papers in categories of business and management. Out of the 14 shown, no study addresses the stratified nature of self-identity and the emergent nature of agency as the foundation of the identity formation and identity work arguments. This is affirmed when further narrowing the search using 'critical realism' and 'self-identity' as key terms which yields no results.

(imminent) distinction. For example, critical realism sees society as an entity different to the individual; or an institution as an entity different to that of the self. As noted by Archer (2010):

This is shown by the difference in their properties and powers, *despite* (emphasis in the original) the fact that they are crucial for one another's formation, continuation, and development.... As Bhaskar put it succinctly: "People and society.... Do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different things". Thus, an educational system can be centralized, while a person cannot, and humans are emotional, which cannot be the case for structures. (p. 275)

Critical realism thus recognises that the 'world' is populated with things and entities that cannot be collapsed into a unifying phenomenon by virtue of a deterministic relationship. Things and entities in the world *interact* and it is by virtue of interaction that one can discern their distinctive properties. This is what Archer (2010) calls double morphogenesis in which "actors themselves change in the very process of actively pursuing changes in the social order" (p. 274). In some way, this is also recognised by social constructivism, the tenets of which suggest that people create society to which they then must respond (Burr 2002). Looking through the critical realist lens one is permitted to consider self-identity as constituted through sociality but as also irreducible to it. More importantly, in addition to permitting for the notion of distinctiveness, the stratified ontology of critical realism (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2010; Archer 2015; Archer et al. 2015; Bhaskar 1989; Caetano 2014; Caetano 2016; Fletcher 2016; Marks & O'Mahoney 2014; O'Mahoney 2011) also foregrounds the emergent ontology of entities since interactions of distinctively interconnected properties of the world cannot be predetermined and reified. In the context of arguments of this study, critical realism thus foregrounds the distinctive nature of self-identity and emergent power of action (Archer 2000; Archer 2003) as *prima facie* of the

relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*. As asserted by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014):

A stratified, emergent ontology allows realist researchers to conceptualise different levels or entities upon which identity construction may be dependent, but irreducible to (for example, memory or reflexivity), or levels or entities which may be dependent upon, but irreducible to, identity (for example, culture). (p. 69)

The stratified and emergent ontology thus has numerous implications for how one perceives the subject's situated self-expression. Firstly, from an ontological standpoint, emphasising personal emergent power in identity work 'returns consciousness' (that is, discretion and choice in decision-making) back to the individual that has been outsourced to discourse and social attributes in studies founded on constructivist and essentialist paradigms (Archer 2000; Marks & O'Mahoney 2014) respectively. *This permits one to discern situated experiences as an individual's responsibility.* Systemically, however, returning discretion of agency to the individual thus instantiates the 'internal judge'⁵¹ as the necessary predecessor of the empirical emergence of action. The 'internal judge' classifies the surrounding world⁵² by way of an ongoing (internal⁵³) commentary that mediates between personal desires and *perceived* social demands (Archer 2000)⁵⁴. As Marks and O'Mahoney (2014) state,

⁵¹ The notion of 'internal judge' does not suggest there is a separate entity that vents decisions but rather depicts a two-tier structure that finds the subjective process of classification. As noted by Archer (2000), the first order includes the ongoing emotional commentary over one's (un)compromised concerns while the second order is the transmuting of first order information into behaviour via reflexivity.

⁵² Here, the notion of the surrounding world is considered not as a world of objectively present things with specific ontic characteristics but rather a world of things and people that surround the individual on the basis of what they mean to the individual.

⁵³ The term internal signifies 'on a subjective plain'.

⁵⁴ As noted by Archer (2000), the internal emotional commentary emerges in response to compromised concerns (first order 'mechanism') which then gets transmuted by way of reflexivity into behaviour (second order 'mechanism').

“personal identity emerges from the embodied, reflexive self, in part forged through the interests and actions of that individual” (p. 72). With respect to self-identity, the internal dialogue thus forms an aspect of the stratified ontology and it does so by suggesting that ‘recognised’ normativity is one, among other, antecedents to empirically manifested action in a particular ‘social space’. As noted by Marks and O’Mahoney (2014):

Critical realism’s depth ontology distinguishes real generative mechanisms from actual empirical occurrences, and both of these from what researchers believe they observe ... This depth allows identities to be researched as embedded within wider class or economic structures. (p. 70)

The second implication of the stratified and emergent ontology of critical realism in the context of self-identity is that the deliberate nature of action is a permanent attribute of everyday circumspection (Archer 2000). This is founded on the argument that the personal emergent power that precedes identity work is borne out of the *incessant* internal dialogue that acts as a classifying ‘mechanism’ mediating between personal concerns and perceived contextual demands, or better yet, between personal identity and social identity. The ongoing ‘vetting’ of the ‘internal judge’ suggests that every day, ‘run of the mill’ events contain one’s identity ‘imprint’. Further, the ongoing vetting by the internal judge suggests that there exists an enduring representation of personal identity and sociality amongst the minutia and the taken for granted aspects of everyday life. The implications of this position for the study are that classification of disruptive events operate from the same individuals-specific ontology as do habitual and routinized actions. The significance of this is that it dispels the necessity to recognise identity work as action that exclusively operates in the domain of the unknown, as Alvesson et al. (2008)

would suggest⁵⁵. All agency or self-expression thus becomes identity work. The sheer act of contemplation is also identity work. As such, everyday speech also becomes indicative of the stratified ontology of self-identity which amorphous structure *attains coherence* by an 'in-order-to' relationship between the spoken word and its subjective possibility (refer to previous section for additional arguments). As noted by Marks and O'Mahoney (2014):

The inclusion of reflexivity in the transformation cycle means that the tendencies generated by our psychology cannot be framed as determinants. The self is a product of emergent historical processes, but its reflection upon these means that its future is not determined by them. (p. 75)

However, to adhere to the tenets of the stratified and emergent ontology of critical realism but avoid the epistemic fallacy⁵⁶ of constructivism, one must acknowledge that the emergent power of agency proceeds from a *personal* construct and is thus limited in its grasp. As such, in consideration of the limiting⁵⁷ nature of one's self-knowledge and the particularity of subjective interpretation and agency that precedes it, a study of self-identity, from the critical realist perspective, cannot obviate a discussion of the problematics of self-identity. One of these problematics emerges from our inability to scrutinise our thinking while simultaneously thinking (Schutz 1945). For example, although one could be aware of one's internal dialogue (see Archer 2000; Archer 2003), 'participating' in it incapacitates one's ability simultaneously and adequately to scrutinise its premise, unless one does so in retrospect. Pertaining to our inability to engage in a 'double hermeneutic' assessment of (reflexive) action, while acting-in-

⁵⁵ Alvesson, Ashcraft et al. (2008) suggest people can be seen to engage in practical accomplishment of identity when the *routinized* (emphasis here) reproduction of a self-identity is *discontinued* (emphasis here) at times of pressures and uncertainty (p. 15).

⁵⁶ Epistemic fallacy reduces ontology to epistemology by proposing that the nature of reality is reducible to one's knowledge of it (and vice versa).

⁵⁷ Here the term limiting signifies that one's knowledge and interpretation cannot be all-encompassing.

progress (Schutz 1945), one is thus inclined to consider ‘incoherence’ in the sense of self in light of the ongoing identity work attempts⁵⁸. The other problematic, as such, emerges when considering the implicit nature of such ‘ontological blindness’ in negative experiences. Subsequently, researching the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience* from the critical realist perspective requires a double hermeneutic⁵⁹ approach to making sense of self-expression since an ‘in-order-to’ relationship between the spoken word and the world it constitutes as its subjective possibility seems to be hidden from the participant’s and researcher’s immediate understanding, if perception and analysis of phenomena is performed from the springboard of subject-object dualism.

The Interpretive Lens: The Integration of the Study’s Ontology and Paradigm

In truth, there can be no break between the observer and the observed. If the two are split, the reality is gone. (Lanza 2009, p. 28)

The study’s paradigm thus suggests that researching the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience* needs to take account of the ‘in-order-to’ relationship between speech and its subjective possibility. Furthermore, the study’s ontological position (see chapter two) suggests that the ‘in-order-to’ relationship between speech and its subjective possibility begins with the diachronic content (for instance, the subject’s past, present and future ideas) of that which matters to a subject. This is an important observation since returning the ‘responsibility’ for situated experiences back to the individual is the only way one can talk of identity as a subject of

⁵⁸ Identity work “refers to *people being engaged in* (emphasis here) forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence [and distinctiveness]” (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003., p. 1165).

⁵⁹ Being reflexive of one’s reflexivity.

sociality (Brown 2018). Acknowledging this is also important to understand that any attempts made at 'capturing' the objectiveness or absoluteness of the deeper and vaster reality (Bhaskar 1989) are futile since they remain only a reflection of a particular way of seeing. Its significance, however, is embedded in the realisation that the one-sided nature of descriptions of objects and interpretations of events are an indication of a non-binary relationship between the subject and other subjects and objects. As noted by Lanza (2009), "we "see" separation between objects only because we have been conditioned and trained, through language and convention, to draw boundaries" (p. 118).

The one-sidedness of one's self-knowledge is thus not to be considered as indicating non-inclusion of others' perspectives but rather suggests that one's abstractions are circumscribed by the conditions of one's sense of self (Clegg 1975; Grant et al. 2004). This argument can be understood if we acknowledge that **1)** our experience is shaped by the way we *perceive* and act upon structures and **2)** structures 'act' upon us through the meaning we *ascribe* to their pervading normative order. As such, the 'conditions' of self-knowledge provide for a distinctively described 'external world' in the same way that the world distinctively described is thus reflective of conditional (self-)knowledge. The ideas we have about ourselves and the surrounding world are thus *ontological* in the sense that they shape what we see in the world. More importantly, that which is seen (or described) in the world (that is, the world described by the subject) is also indicative of the individual-specific ontology since the 'inconceivable' or 'meaningless' is not actively perceived by the subject. As confirmed by Peterson (1999), "non-existence appears as an inevitable consequence of the absence of limitation" (p. 287). On that note and as mentioned before, making sense of (self-)expression thus becomes an inquiry into its subjective *possibility* since the social conditions of existence are not rendered meaningful with independent criteria for knowledge. More importantly, the subjective possibility of the spoken word becomes an

ontological construct because the world first encountered by the subject is the 'subjective world'. As noted by Peterson (1999):

Our hopes, desires and wishes—which are always *conditional*—define the context which the things and situations we encounter take on determinate significance; define even the context within which we understand 'thing' or 'situation'. (p. 34)

It is important to say that these arguments avoid reducing ontology to epistemology because the description ventured is not an analogous rendition of the contents of one's thoughts. For example, speaking 'untruth' suggests that the person has evoked contrasting content in the spoken word to the one retained subjectively. The 'in-order-to' relationship between the spoken word and its subjective possibility suggests that evoked *heterogeneity* in the empirical and sub-empirical domains is a 'mechanism' of self-realisation: a spoken 'untruth' could be uttered to 'protect' aspects of the self that the subject wants to keep private. The significance of this is that the epistemological variation between thinking and speech positions self-expression as a 'because-of' aptitude of the identity seeking individual. The spoken word, as such, is only a link in the chain of an idiosyncratic meaning system that reflects one's intentionality to preserve a specific view of the self and the surrounding world of others.

As noted by Archer (2003):

We would produce a 'digest' *both* (emphasis in the original) for internal consumption and for external reporting (which are also unlikely to be identical). In short, we have to interpret ourselves synthetically before we can furnish any statement for external interpretation. All this is undeniable because we are indeed 'self-interpreting animals'. (p. 156)

Before moving onto highlighting the implications of this philosophical position on approaching the research field, it is important, however, to address arguments against the importance of understanding the subjective possibility of speech in the context of self-identity. The arguments against the subjective 'ontology' are put forward by Lacan's theory of *Lack* in human subjectivity (Driver 2012; Knights & Willmott 1989; Lacan 2006; Lacan & Miller 2018). The effect this theory has on the arguments this study makes is that individual-specific ontologies, that is, *that which matters to us by virtue of which we act*, are illusory constructs and as such cannot be discerned as being fundamental to interpreting situated experiences. The 'structural condition' of lack (in subjectivity) thus suggests that we formulate a desire which we seek to realise only to find out that it was inadequately formulated, *ad infinitum*. The fundamental nature of lack can thus be described as the *motivational significance* of the identity seeking individual, in that the inability to definitely describe a subject or an object seems, rather paradoxically, to be a necessary precursor of any description ventured. As such, even though the theory implies a stratified ontology between action and its precondition (the 'lack'), it dispels any attempts aimed at conceiving the self as a subject of sociality since it recognises the ontological impossibility of 'subjectum' (Heidegger 1953). As noted by Driver (2012):

We only learn from others and through the words of others what we desire and this does not seem to fulfil what we unconsciously desire. So, when we articulate our desire, it always turns out in the end to elude us, to be a desire for nothing. We try to overcome this lack by turning the self into a definable object that knows who it is and what it wants and can therefore obtain it. However, the process of constructing ourselves in this objectifying way consciously through language leads us to be subjugated and stuck, in what Lacan referred to as, the imaginary order. The problem is that the

imaginary order is a misrepresentation and an illusion ... all we obtain in the symbolic order is an encounter with an alienated self and others ... (p. 410)

Driver (2012) further notes the following:

A sense that something is fundamentally missing in us and from our lives drives everything we do and say. Moreover, this sense of lack is not a personal shortcoming we can correct. Rather, even with psychoanalysis, the best we can do is to recognise lack as a *structural condition* (emphasis here) and find a momentary release or freedom from a narcissistic image.... Every time we feel sure that we have fulfilled a desire, we find out that there is something missing still. We want more. We want something else. We want what eludes symbolisation, or what Lacan referred to as the *object a*, the surplus pleasure that is missing from our signifiers, *the peace of the real in the symbolic* (emphasis here), the thing we really desire that they are placeholders for. We cannot say what but we know something is not right. In fact, at some level, we have an overwhelming desire that is impossible to know. But it is there nonetheless. (pp. 408-11)

On a philosophical level, the shortcomings of this position are that it conflates epistemology with ontology since Lacan (Lacan & Miller 2018) promotes the theoretical significance of our inability 'definitively' and 'exhaustively' to encapsulate one's needs and desires. The argument of this study is not whether a subject or an object can be exhaustively, definitively described but more importantly, whether self-expression is an aspect of a 'because-of' relationship with one's subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others. The question is not one of exclusive 'possession' and adequacy of self-descriptions. The question is one of 'mechanisms' that impinge on processes of identity work and identity formation and whether they reflect a distinctive subject. The argument *is not epistemological* in that it seeks to ascertain whether self-notions can be conceived in their

completeness, implying that utterances are all-encompassing and ‘objectively’ true. The argument for individual-specific *ontologies* is rather one of *how* the subject can *comprehend or interpret* the self and the surrounding world in the first instance. The possibility is founded on the relational ontology between different strata of reality since a discussion of the ‘fundamental’ nature of lack in human subjectivity presupposes perceiving ‘reality’ on the basis of some pre-existing ‘knowledge of reality’. As asserted by Bateson (2002):

Learning the context of life is a matter that has to be discussed... as a matter of the relationship between two [entities]. And a relationship is always a product of double description.... It is nonsense to talk about “dependency” or “aggressiveness” or “pride” and so on. *Only if you hold on tight to the primacy and priority of relationships can you avoid dormitive explanations* (emphasis here). (p. 124)

The discussion of the ‘ontological’ nature of lack in human subjectivity therefore becomes a discussion of our ability to conceive of our subjectivity (or an experience) as ‘lacking’, since a symbolic construct cannot exist without the subject who *leverages* the *perceived* meaning of symbolism. As such, since two things that cannot be discerned from one another are not two things and a thing with no *discernible* (emphasis here) features whatsoever, may not even be said to be (Peterson 1999, p. 287), one cannot deliberate about fundamentality of lack without considering it *in relation to* a notion that ‘gives’ it plausibility *by way of imminent distinction*. This intrinsic variance between ontology and epistemology can also be found in the relationship between the self and other(s) as well as in the spoken word and its subjective possibility. As Bateson⁶⁰ (2002) writes:

⁶⁰ Noting that Bateson is a natural scientist, the argument he is making is phenomenological and one that emphasizes the non-dual relationship between subject and object as fundamental to ‘reality’. As such, even though this study is a qualitative analysis of self-identity, the ontological arguments of this study coincide with those put forward by Bateson (2002).

To produce news of difference, i.e., *information* (emphasis in the original), there must be two entities (real or imagined) such that the difference between them can be immanent in their mutual relationship... There is a profound and unanswerable question about the nature of those “at least two” things that between them generate the difference which becomes information by making a difference. Clearly, each one alone is—for the mind and perception—a non-entity, a non-being.... A sound of one hand clapping. (p. 64)

On that note, our capacity to conceptualise lack as a ‘structural condition’ of subjectivity (or of the self as distinctive from others) suggests that its sensibility is derived not from the independent but rather the interdependent nature of concepts: anything that can be *described* cannot obviate a relational ontology of two (different) things (Heidegger 1953; Jung 1959; Jung 1966; Sartre 2018; Schutz 1945; Schutz 1967) as there is no avenue by way of which one can conceive of ideas and concepts independently from pre-existing repositories of knowledge and self-knowledge (McHugh 1971). Most importantly, this relational ontology thus *permits for our ability to comprehend* (Peterson 1999) and suggests that the ‘knowledge’ of lack emerges in terms of one’s intimate ‘knowledge’ of what it means *to have or to want*, irrespective of whether this knowledge has been obtained from an *in-situ* experience or subjective abstraction (Bateson 2002; Peterson 1999). As noted by Peterson (1999):

Before we truly master something novel, we *imagine* (emphasis in the original) what it might be. Our imaginative representations actually constitute our initial adaptations. Our fantasies comprise part of the structure that we use to inhibit our responses to the *a priori* (emphasis in the original) significance of the unknown. (p. 71)

Sartre (2018) also affirms this point when he states:

Indeed, that is the character of the unity of the three temporal ecstasies: the end, or the temporalization of my future, implies a reason (or motive), i.e. it points toward my past, and the present is the arising of my act. (p. 573)

The matter of individual-specific ontologies is not one of content's 'accuracy' nor a matter of objectivity. On the contrary, the argument for individual-specific ontologies is one of the constitutive relationships between empirical and sub-empirical stratum (subjectivity and 'truth' claim) of self-expression and their effect on agency. It is precisely because of this relationship that we can say we 'understand' something. For example, if we consider comments made by Sartre (2018) and Peterson (1999) (above), there already exists a preconceived idea about the specificity of our desired pragmatic endeavours since 'we posit a goal, in image and word and move in a linear direction from present to future' (Peterson 1999, p. 29). The process of identity formation or identity work can indeed, as Lacan would suggest, be said to occur because of a more 'desirable' description of the self and the surrounding world (Heidegger 1953). This realisation, however, gives little weight to whether what is desired is accurate and more so, to the fact that our desires instigate reflexive assessments of the surrounding world and thus shape situated experiences. What is important is not the sense of 'self-inadequacy' and incompleteness, however motivating and perpetual it may be. What is important is that the 'particular (imagined) self' is a reflection of a self-*criterion*, a criterion against which one can ('objectively') render the self '(un)realised' or 'lacking'⁶¹ and the conditions of existence one 'encounters' as 'enabling' or 'constraining' (Archer 2000; Archer 2003). As Sartre (2018) states:

⁶¹ How much of what we have conceived and realised in actuality does not only depend on the appropriate fulfilment of objective norms and standards but also, and more importantly, on the subjective experience of the fulfilled norms and standards: we can lack a thing that we desire and want to obtain, but we can also lack the desired subjective experience of a thing once obtained. Not meeting our own expectations respective to a conceived and 'fulfilled' desire, as such, should not suggest that the thing realised was in actuality not desired (and as such illusory), since it instigated heedful

Having, doing and being are the fundamental categories of human reality. Every type of human behaviour can be subsumed within them.... These categories are not unconnected, and several writers have emphasized these relationships.... *And, again, we point to a similar connection when we show a moral agent doing something in order to make himself, and making himself in order to be* (emphasis here). (pp. 567-8)

In the context of this study, situated expression is *a fragment* of a larger idea about oneself and the surrounding world but in so being is not fragmentary and fleeting (or illusory), as post-structuralism might presuppose, simply because the conditions of the spoken word and situated action cannot obviate the subjective 'context' *that pertains to each of us in specific ways*. Critical discourse proponents have considered this to be a truism ever since 'they' suggested that a body of text is read and understood in different ways by different individuals (Fairclough 1993; Fairclough 2013). The descriptions of the external world are not a *complete* rendition of one's sense of self but rather are a partial reflection of an individual-specific system of meaning without which the abstractions produced would be impossible (and also meaningless). The 'truthfulness' and 'completeness' of one's speech is a concern of a positivistic rendition of situated experience that this thesis does not share. The aim is to emphasize 'the links in the chain' of meaning and with that intent investigate how the 'in-order-to' (or 'because-of') relationship between self-expression and subjectivity serve to carve out a particular

circumspection--but should rather highlight that our anticipation of experience was incomplete or shifting. In any case, a pre-existing subjective content defines how we experience circumstantial particularity.

surrounding world from the vastness of a deeper reality, in a way that limits the number of experiences one can have in the context of interaction *thus constructed*⁶². As acknowledged by Sartre (2018):

In this way, the motive comes to learn what it is through the set of beings that 'are not', through ideal existences and through the future. In the same way as the future returns to the present and the past to illuminate it, so my projects as a whole turn back to confer on the motive its structure as a motive. It is only because I escape the in-itself by nihilating myself in the direction of my possibilities that this in itself is able to acquire the value of a reason or a motive. Reasons and motives have meaning only within a projected set that is precisely a set of non-existants. And, in the end, this set is myself as a transcendence; it is me in so far as I have myself to be, outside myself. (p. 574)

The preceding arguments thus provide parameters for discerning individual-specific self-criteriums that subjects deploy to make sense of their professional surroundings. **First**, the ontological position suggests that what we see in the world is inseparable from the diachronic content of that which matters to the subject (see chapter two). This means that interpretation of field material cannot obviate a clear discernment of the subjects' perceived past and desired future. **Second**, the heterogeneity in the empirical and sub-empirical aspects of speech suggest that everyday self-expression is shaped by an intrinsic need for self-realisation of the 'identity seeking individual'. This means that that interpretation of field material also cannot obviate the discernment of the subjects' professional concerns which subsumes what the subject perceives as (un)favourable conditions of existence. As noted by Fairclough (2013):

⁶² Subsequently, from the researcher's point of view, understanding the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience* therefore requires a process of 'puzzling' together the pieces of one's 'self-ontology' reflected in speech without having to delineate complete epistemological boundaries of one's self-identity.

From a relational perspective, any property we care to identify as significant 'distinction' in social life, including social class, 'is nothing other than *difference* (emphasis in the original), a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a *relational* property existing only in and through its relation with other properties. (p. 309)

Lastly and most importantly, the 'in-order-to' relationship between **1)** the diachronic content of that which matters to the subject and **2)** subjects' professional concerns, form the links in the chain of individual-specific ontologies 'that limits the number of experiences one can have in the context of interaction thus constructed'. On that note, the stratified ontology of self-identity that this study leverages as its *interpretive lens* is constitutive of the relational arrangement between empirical, actual and real levels of self-expression, where:

- The **empirical level** represent that which is manifested as 'identity work' or situated identity positions (for instance, everyday communication and decision-making).
- The **actual level** represents identity work in the domain of internal dialogue. The internal dialogue is a question and answer process that emerges when the subject perceives something in the external world as being an enablement or a constraint to self-realisation (Archer 2003). As such, its content is reflective of the subject's concerns in reference to his achievements, goals, desires, interests, needs, objectives etc (Archer 2003; Peterson 1999);
- The **real level** contains one's pre-existing self-notions, which subsume one's achievements, goals, desires, interests, needs, objectives etc. (Heidegger 1953; Peterson 1999). The contents of the real level permit the emergence of meaning which affects what the subject sees in the 'external' world as well as how the subject acts in the 'external' world (Heidegger 1953).

Practically, this suggests that every utterance that reflects concerns associated with self-realisation is indicative of the subject's self-identity and therefore theoretically significant for the argument of this study. Inadvertently and on that note, the concerns associated with self-realisation entail a discussion of the subject's achievements, goals, desires, interests, needs, objectives. The intersection between the study's ontology and paradigm thus assist with foregrounding the *modal* and *paradigmatic* aspects of everyday speech (Fairclough 1993; Fairclough 2013; Silverman 2013; Silverman 2017) that are essential to exploring the relationship between ***self-identity*** ↔ ***everyday agency*** ↔ ***situated experience***. These arguments inform the study's interpretive lens. More importantly, mapping out elements of individual-specific ontologies also informs the methodology and design frameworks. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Synopsis

This chapter has served presented the arguments for the stratified ontology of reality. The stratified ontology provides a recourse against polarising positions in the extant literature, positions that have removed the possibility of positioning self-identity as a subject of sociality. Drawing on the tenets of critical realism, the chapter has demonstrated the importance of the *relational arrangement* between *different* strata of reality (for instance, the individual and the society) which inadvertently dispel the requirement to conceive of entities as products of constellations of power relations. In doing so, the stratified ontology of reality instantiates a *dialogical* relationship between *distinctive* properties of reality that is fundamental for making sense of situated experiences without drawing on the rationalities in discourse for meaning-making. On that note, the chapter therefore highlights how the analytical dualism of critical realism permits a discussion of self-identity without obviating the effect

structured role relationships have on one's sense of self. Taking interest in exploring the relationship between self-identity, everyday agency and situated experience cannot obviate an inquiry into the 'in-order-to' relationship between everyday speech and its subjective possibility. Utilising the contributions of Heidegger (1953), Peterson (1999) and Archer (2000; 2003), the chapter demonstrates that any inquiry into situated experience and action cannot sidestep the significance of its subjective possibility. In the following chapter the extant literature on self-identity will be addressed.

The Map of Self-experience

Introduction

Chapter five is concerned with the study's methodology, that is, the processes of data collection and data analysis. The overall aim of the chapter is to highlight the cohesive relationship between the study's ontological and paradigmatic positions and the study's methodology. On that note, the aim of the chapter is to demonstrate how the study plans to 'map-out' the subjective context of the individual, the knowledge of which will serve in developing an individual-specific understanding of situated agency and situated experience. The chapter will first begin by highlighting the ontological and epistemological implications of Smith's *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)* (Smith et al. 2009) on how the data was collected and analysed. Given the idiographic focus of IPA, the chapter will highlight the importance of eliciting meta-reflexive accounts to mapping out the subjective possibility of everyday speech as well as the theoretical significance of 'disruptive experiences' in understanding the individual-specific ontological frameworks that affect everyday action. Focusing on emotionally disruptive experiences (for instance, the experience of anxiety), this section of the chapter will demonstrate how the study plans to access all of that which matters to the subject within a particular context of interaction by virtue of which the researcher will make sense of participants being-in-the-world of work.

The second part of the chapter will deal with the sampling process deployed in the selection of appropriate cases, both respective to the partner organisation and the study's participants. The aim of this section of the chapter is to highlight a meaningful connection between the methodology's focus on a particular experience and the criteria deployed in the selection of cases. The chapter will then outline

the data collection process. As mentioned previously, the aim is to highlight that the study's focus on a particular experience effect the strategies deployed in the data collection process. In connection with the study's ontological and paradigmatic foundation, the chapter will then outline the coding process and the effect the process of coding had on the grouping of the emerging themes. The purpose of the coding and data analysis section is to explain the effect of the study's interpretive lens on how the researcher has re-organised the participants' everyday accounts to produce theoretically significant data 'clusters'. Lastly, the chapter addresses the aspect of reflexivity, the ethical considerations of the research process and the limitations of the research design.

Design Frameworks

The study will employ Smith's *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009) to attend to the research questions:

1. How does one's self-identity shape one's situated professional experiences?
2. How do one's professional experiences (re)shape the process of (re)articulating (professional) self-identity?

In general, IPA has been used extensively in psychological research (Smith et al. 2009) and in identity-related studies, both of which are core elements of this research project. More specifically, the tenets of IPA suggest that an understanding of situated experiences cannot obviate the significance of one's knowledge and self-knowledge (Smith et al. 2009). In line with the study's paradigm, the tenets of IPA also suggest that the substantiveness of situated experiences cannot be accessed while acting-in-

progress (Schutz 1945; Schutz 1967) given the exacting task of orienting to requirements of social participation (Jung 1933). As noted by Husserl (1982):

So, when we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the psychological experience as such, in which these things are known as such. (p. 95)

The tenets of IPA place great emphasis on the significance of the 'hidden' or taken for granted aspects of the stratified ontology of self-identity, when aiming to ascertain the substantiveness of experiences and forms of perception. It is, however, important to note at this juncture that IPA methodology does not conform to the notion of 'unselfconsciousness', which suggests that one is incapable of perceiving the underlying rationale behind one's everyday being-in-the-world of work while acting-in-progress (Schutz 1945; Schutz 1967). Contrary to this argument, the study's ontology, paradigm and methodology recognises that the reflexive attribute of agency is supportive of the agent's awareness of personal interests while acting-in-progress. For example, wanting to expediently perform a delegated task can be done in earnest search of praise. IPA methodology recognises that the multi-layered aspects of situated self-expression⁶³ dictates that a subject does not have to be aware of *why* they have specific interests while acting-in-progress. Subsequently, by suggesting that one cannot be critical of one's thinking while thinking and acting, the IPA methodology nuances the notion of unselfconsciousness and highlights the significance of depth-ontology introduced by critical realism. As aptly captured by (Husserl 1982):

⁶³ The study recognises 3 strata in the stratified ontology of self-identity. Refer to chapter 4 for details.

Focusing our experiencing gaze on our own psychic life necessarily takes place as reflection, as a turning about of a glance which had previously been directed elsewhere. Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects—for instance, thinking, or in the modes of feeling and will, valuing and striving. So, when we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the psychical experience as such, in which these things are known as such. Only reflection reveals this to us. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals, and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experience in which we become ‘conscious’ of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they ‘appear’. For this reason, they are called ‘phenomena’, and their most general essential character is to exist as the ‘consciousness-of’ or ‘appearance-of’ the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth. (p. 120)

IPA suggests that individual-specific ontologies emerge by way of critical assessment of ‘references of significance that connects things, events and people into the surrounding world of the individual’ (Heidegger 1953). In particular, IPA methodology acknowledges the importance of addressing the contents of *unmet* anticipation (Smith et al. 2009). The reason behind the appeal of ‘unmet anticipation’ (or expectation) is embedded in its acute potential to disclose the hierarchy of meaning that attributes significance to a thing, event or a person. A ‘retrospective gaze’ over the particularity of situated experience cannot avoid a reflexive attitude towards the subject’s concerns, in accord with the study’s ontological framework, particularly Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world (1953), which recognises the significance of a ‘disruption’ to an ‘in-order-to’ reference between action and its subjective possibility. The ‘relationality and activity dependence’ (Archer 2003) between different stratum of the

stratified ontology of self-identity are thrust to the fore of one's conscious activity when intentions and desires remain unfulfilled. On that note, negative emotional experiences provide a way into individual-specific ontologies which operate in the background of habitual and routinized action. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

Something is unusable. This means that the constitutive reference of the in-order-to to a what-for has been disrupted. The references themselves are not observed, rather they are "there" in our heedful adjustment to them. But in a disruption of reference—in being unusable for...—the reference becomes explicit... When something at hand is missing who everyday presence was so much a matter of course that we never paid attention to it, this constitutes a breach in the context of reference discovered in circumspection. Circumspection comes up with emptiness and now sees for the first time what the missing thing was at hand for and at hand with. Once again, the surrounding world makes itself known. (p. 74)

This position provides a foundation for numerous decisions regarding the study's research design, data collection and data analysis procedures. First, in order to investigate the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*, IPA suggests that the study should focus on what the subject perceives as 'disruptive experiences'. Second, given that highlighting of individual-specific ontologies requires the subject to engage in meta-reflexivity⁶⁴, the study will need to push the ideographic logic of IPA (Smith et al. 2009). On that note, the aim of the research process is to create an environment that allows for a 'confession' by the participant: rich descriptions of participants reflections on the way they make sense of specific professional experiences. This means that the

⁶⁴ Being reflexive of one's reflexivity.

process of data analysis will need to be double hermeneutic⁶⁵ to be able to convey the depth of individual-specific ontologies while limiting the effect researcher's bias has on the significance of participants' speech. More importantly, to avoid compromising the depth-ontology of IPA's idiographic method, the number of participants recruited for the study will also have to be limited. As noted by Gill (2014), the proponents of IPA argue for single case studies "where a single participant is used to push the ideographic logic of IPA" (p. 126). The sampling process will be further explored in the following pages. First, however, the chapter will address the significance and particularity of 'disruptive experiences' for positioning identity as a subject of sociality.

The Focus on the Experience

The thesis aims to focus on the experience of anxiety in project-based professional environments (see following section for sampling strategies). In line with the tenets of critical realism and IPA methodology, the decision to focus on such 'disruptive experiences' enables access to the frameworks of meaning that substantiate self-expression (Smith et al. 2009) given their 'inconspicuous' nature in the 'everyday' of the subject's life. More specifically, focusing on events and interactions that are perceived by the subject as being emotionally charging provides a doorway into the subjective constructs that *assign* emotionality and subsequently operate in both familiar and unfamiliar domains of interaction (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Smith et al. 2009).

⁶⁵ As noted, (Smith et al. 2009), double hermeneutic process of analysis is one where "the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x. And this usefully illustrates the dual role of the researcher as both like and unlike the participant. In one sense, the researcher is like the participant, is a human being drawing on everyday human resources in order to make sense of the world. On the other hand, the researcher is not the participant, she/he only has access to the participant's experience through what the participant reports about it, and is also seeing this through the researcher's own, experientially informed lens" (pp. 35-6)

In psychoanalytic terms, anxiety reflects a psychological 'burden' (Jung 1933; Peterson 1999). More specifically, the 'psychological burden' is the perceived 'loss' that emerges when the subject is fronted with unmet expectations (or anticipations). The 'burden of loss' and the experience of anxiety foreground the existence of a subjective world that agents 'seek to preserve' to maintain the plausibility of their ideas about themselves and the surrounding world of others. The emergence of anxiety is subsequently associated with the limits of one's body of knowledge and self-knowledge since it is in the domain of the unknown where one 'meets the unexpected' (Peterson 1999). Clegg (1975), drawing on Heidegger (1962), argues that it is only when things are 'broken' that we are struck by the nature of the things we are ordinarily concerned with (1975, p. 87). Clegg (1975) goes on to suggest that "what calls us to reflection from unawareness is that moment when things strike us as they are, when we become aware of their breakdown" (1975, p. 87). As such, by reflecting on the experience of anxiety one thus chooses to reflect upon the persisting contents of one's subjective constitution which has made the experience a possibility.

By focusing on the experience of anxiety, the study, however, does not aim to 'measure' the ontic characteristics of these experiences by, for instance, addressing their causality and manifestations in psychiatric or psychoanalytic terms. The study's interest in anxiety is *ontological* since anxiety is something that *belongs* to beings in addition to being something that describes beings (Cohn, 2002). Anxiety is a phenomenon (Cohn 2020; Heidegger 1953) that reflects "specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth" (Husserl 1982, p. 120). As Panksepp (2005) states:

In sum, I doubt if emotional feelings need to be learned or extracted from dynamic memory stores.

I think LeDoux is misguided, as was William James when he suggested that the cortex is the storehouse for our emotional feelings. Thus, while LeDoux asserts that we should confine our efforts largely to traditional behavioural and physiological realms in our study of emotions within the animal brain, *I would advocate that we should, in addition, begin to study emotional feelings, indirectly, as essential foundation processes upon which many unique aspects of the human mind—from art to politics—have been created* (emphasis here). (p. 341)

In summary, analysing the subjects' experience of anxiety affords one access to interpretive mechanisms that characterise a thing or a situation as apprehensive or otherwise. Another way of saying this would be to suggest that reflecting upon 'the events and interactions that are perceived by the subject as being emotionally charging' permits one to reflect upon individual-specific ontologies.

Sampling

The sampling of the appropriate organisational context was not undertaken in a systematic manner; rather it was chosen based on *convenience* (Bryman & Bryman 2013). This is not seen as a limitation as the study is aiming to develop a situated, context-specific understanding of self-identity. Pertaining to this, the sampling of participants was done in a project management organisation that first granted access. This is an organisation in which the researcher worked previously for approximately six years. Variance in substantive elements of the context (for example, organisational structure and departments, job descriptions and responsibilities of organisational members) was attended to via *purposive sampling* (Bryman & Bryman 2013). Subjects were selected on the grounds of their

experience: only subjects who have experienced or are currently experiencing anxiety⁶⁶ in their professional careers were suitable recruits for the study. This was not seen as a limit to sourcing of suitable recruits since individuals working in project based organisational settings tend to experience higher levels of anxiety due to the unpredictable nature of their professional demands (Clegg & Courpasson 2004). More specifically, project managers live in the here and now of the project, often with a heightened sense of temporality as things do not run on time, with attendant anxieties; in addition, projects have a limited temporality, so no sooner are the anxieties about the present project receding than they begin to mount about the nature of the next one; finally, there is the anxiety of whether a succession of projects amounts to a career; each project takes one further away from the home organization where careers are forged and it is easy to become a 'rootless' project manager increasingly divorced from one's substantive knowledge community but unable to make the move into the upper echelons of management (as well as anxiety about only ever being as good as one's last project, as Clegg and Courpasson (2004) note). The purposive sampling of cases was driven by the study's ontological and epistemological tenets. The sampling approach was hybrid in that it employed an element of purposiveness and representativeness, simultaneously (Bryman & Bryman 2013).

The study also included 'being' in the workplace as a participant observer (Bryman & Bryman 2013; Miles & Huberman 2014). The aim was to observe everyday activities of different practices by members and document the theoretical significance of their interaction. This was not amenable to a particular sampling strategy as the aim was to gain a better understanding of 'everyday organisational

⁶⁶ Considering the previous comments made in respect to approaching anxiety from a phenomenological angle as opposed to psychoanalytic or psychiatric, the study will not consider the *truthfulness* of the participants' claims to ascertain whether they have 'really' experienced what psychoanalytic literature defines as anxiety and then move forward in those terms. The study explores the subjectiveness of everyday being-in-the-world and as such takes no interest in the 'objectiveness' of anxiety.

life' which would, in turn, allow for a more informed process of making sense of participants' situated reflections and observations. Furthermore, in line with the abductive process of interpretation, once the 'data trail' of theoretical significance was established, the researcher employed *theoretical sampling* to 'push' the logic of the stratified ontology of the self. As such, different approaches were used for sampling of *initial cases* compared to sampling of *additional (corresponding) cases*. As supported by Bryman and Bryman (2013), purposive sampling often involves more than one sampling approach.

The specifics of the sampling strategy can be summarized as follows:

1. Participants working in a project-based professional environment.

This criterion is important as research on project-based organisation highlights that such an approach to doing business promotes elusive and yet powerful modes of control characterised by Clegg and Courpasson (2004) as 'soft despotism'. Such environments induce higher levels of self-monitoring and self-regulation (and subsequent anxiousness) (Clegg & Courpasson 2004) in the fulfilment of everyday professional duties.

2. Participants who have experienced or are experiencing work-related anxiety and employed under project-based working arrangements.

The researcher had numerous discussions with many organisational members before identifying suitable subjects. The researcher has been able to use established relationships and reapproach individuals who, in the past, had expressed that they regularly experienced negative

emotional states in the process of fulfilling their professional duties. Their experiences make them suitable subjects for highlighting subjective antecedents of situated self-expression.

In summary, the ontological and epistemological foundation of the research project have thus introduced a 'criterion' (Bryman, 2012) for the selection of appropriate cases. Given that this study perceives the experience of anxiety as a domain of entry to 'existing self-definitions', the decision was made to focus on participants who expressed experiencing anxiety in the context of their professional duties. Once the cases were selected, theoretical sampling served to 'saturate' data (Bryman & Bryman 2013; Silverman 2013; Silverman 2017; Strauss and Corbin 1998) and develop theoretically significant themes. The study recruited **three** participants to conduct an in-depth analysis of specific experiences and deploy the ideographic logic of IPA (Smith et al. 2009).

Research Context

Mirbelia Projects (pseudonym) is an Australian owned and operated construction company which was founded in December 2001. Since 2001, Mirbelia Projects has grown exponentially and presents itself as a reputable construction firm working within the third-tier construction sector. Mirbelia Projects has dealt with top tier Project Management & Global Architectural firms assisting the delivery of major retail and hospitality construction projects. Mirbelia Projects' revenue for 2020 was \$60 Million. By 2020-21 its projected and forecast growth will be well in excess of \$80 Million. Mirbelia Projects employs ~40-50 people, which includes both office and site staff.

Mirbelia Projects' structure is divided into five departments: projects, business development and marketing, estimating and estimating administration/support, quality systems and WHS⁶⁷ and finance. Its structure is heavily hierarchical, with each department implementing a top-down system of management and control. When looking at the number of employees per department, 'projects' and 'estimating' departments command the largest workforce. The two departments are central to the organisation's operations and enjoy the highest level of resourcing and management attention. The company's Directors are actively involved at all levels of the business.

Mirbelia Projects can be said to be representative of a mid-tier construction and project management company in Australia and is thus a representative case (Bryman & Bryman 2013) of an Australian construction and project management company.

Data Collection

Data has been collected via the use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The observation was both formal and informal. Formal observation ensued from participating in meetings between the participants and other organisational members. The researcher has also shadowed (Czarniawska 2007) selected participants; conducting observations and making notes about how participants fulfil their day-to-day professional responsibilities and interact with other participants in the organisation. Most importantly, in the process of shadowing the participants, the researcher and the participants have engaged in discussions in which the purpose was to reflect on everyday interaction episodes with other organisational members. Focusing on participants' reflections has generated rich

⁶⁷ Stands for 'workplace health and safety'.

descriptions of their professional worlds, thus permitting the study to use the ideographic logic of IPA methodology (Smith et al. 2009, p. 51).

The interviews and formal observations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Producing verbatim transcriptions was not aimed at utilising the full spectrum of conceptual tools this type of analysis brings forth (Wetherell et al. 2001). Rather, focusing on the detail in free-flowing talk was aimed at developing a more pronounced insight into the strategies deployed by members in establishing the legitimacy of their claims *as reflections of their sense of self* (particular interest was taken in modality claims – see data analysis section for more on semiotic elements) (Silverman 2013; Silverman 2017). On the other hand, the informal observations and one-to-one discussions were documented by way of notes: immediately after each informal data collection episode, the researcher sat down to document the exchange verbatim, as remembered. The notes also included researcher's reflections on the meaning of the encounter with respect to the study's aims of exploring the relationship between ***self-identity*** ↔ ***everyday agency*** ↔ ***situated experience***. Any themes generated from notetaking were subsequently brought to the participants' attention in following encounters (Smith et al. 2009, p. 51).

Involving participants in reflection on themes generated was a double hermeneutic process of eliciting individual-specific ontologies, by critically rationalising their thinking the participants were encouraged to attempt to understand why they see the world in particular terms (Smith et al. 2009, p. 51). In addition to eliciting rich descriptions of their professional experiences, this inclusive strategy to 'making sense of data' has also assisted with eliminating researcher bias (Smith et al. 2009, p. 51). As such, involving the participants in the process of interpreting the data is not only in line with the idiographic approach to IPA but also conforms to the standards of ethical research (Bryman & Bryman 2013). This

is particularly pertinent in the context of this study which seeks to encourage 'full disclosure' of negative emotional experiences. Overall, involving participants in the research process and sensemaking of generated themes will not only align with 'depth phenomenology' of IPA but will, more importantly, deal with the negative effects of established views and ideas held by the researcher about participants' 'identities' (Bryman & Bryman 2013).

Semi-structured Interviews and informal interviews

In line with the tenets of IPA, interviews were conducted to "learn a great deal about a particular person and their response to a specific situation" (Smith et al. 2009, p. 51). On that note, the decision has been made to interview participants on more than one occasion, both formally and informally (for instance, having general discussions over lunch, coffee or just in passing in an organisational context). The decision to interview participants more than once has been made to permit rich descriptions of their professional experiences. Subsequently, informal interviews served in further refining the study's thematic insights generated in the formal interview episodes. As Smith et al. (2009) suggest:

In IPA, as we have seen, we are aiming to design data collection events which elicit detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from the participants. Semi-structured, one to one interviews have tended to be the preferred means for collecting such data. One to one interviews are easily managed, allowing a rapport to be developed and giving participants the space to think, speak and be heard. They are therefore well-suited to in depth and personal discussion. (p. 57)

The interview schedule consisted of 17 questions (please refer to Appendix D for the interview schedule). The first four questions focused on the subject describing their immediate circumstance. Questions such as "can you please tell me how you see your job fit into the work the organisation

performs?” and “can you please describe the steps involved in fulfilling your professional responsibilities?” thus sought to highlight first person rendition of the (*perceived*) professional context. The second part of the interview shifted away from descriptions of their immediate circumstances (which also include their professional responsibilities) towards discussing their professional experiences. Questions such as “can you please describe the difference between a good and a bad day at work?” was aimed at eliciting reflections of emotional experiences in the context of the subject’s goals, desires, objectives and concerns. More importantly, highlighting the relationship between perception and experience has assisted the researcher with developing an understanding of individual specific ‘ontologies’ or ‘hierarchies of meaning’. These ‘hierarchies of meaning’ formed the primary subject matter in the third section of the interview in which the subjects were encouraged to engage in processes of meta-reflexivity⁶⁸ (Archer 2003). Questions such as “can you describe how work-related anxiety affects your relationships at work?” encouraged the subjects to reflect on why they see things in particular terms. Lastly, the fourth section of the interview sought to attend to the problematic aspect of participants’ perceptions and experiences respective to their self-knowledge. Questions such as “how has work affected how you see yourself?” and “how do you think your co-workers see you?” were aimed at highlighting the relationship between the subject’s sense of self and how they perceived others’ perceiving them. The last section of the interview has thus permitted the researcher to close the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Smith et al. 2009) and construct a meaningful story of the individual. Overall, the tiered approach to the interview was shaped by the study’s interpretive lens, aimed at highlighting the ‘in-order-to’ relationship between:

⁶⁸ Meta-reflexivity is a term that highlights a process of being reflexive of one’s own reflexivity (Archer 2003). It involved subjects in attempting to understand why they perceive things, events and people in particular terms.

1. The subject's concerns about their social and professional conditions of existence.
2. The diachronic content of that which matters to the subject.

The primary aim of the interview schedule was to elicit the modal and paradigmatic aspects of speech (discussed in the previous chapter) and subsequently focus on reflexively unpacking emerging themes. This meant that in some sections of the interviews, the interview schedule was not followed stringently in such a way that answers were sought for all 17 questions in the interview schedule. The schedule was followed in a way that did not 'obstruct' the pursuit of participants' reflexive attitude concerning claims and assertions. The aim was to understand how the subject's self-identity shaped their everyday professional experiences.

Observation

Formal observation was deployed in the meeting where estimating and project management practices intersect. I was present in one such meeting in which the three participants were also present, an approach also supported by proponents of IPA who suggest that the primary data collection method (semi-structured interviews) should be supported with additional data sources (such as observation) to saturate and contextualise data (Smith et al. 2009). The aim of such a strategy was to 'juxtapose' claims made by participants in interviews with the free following interaction between the study's participant's and other organisational members. Theoretically speaking, this approach sought to utilise the significance of naturally occurring data (Silverman 2013; Silverman 2017). As suggested by Clegg (1975) "in a social science ... everyday life as a display of actual performance of human activity must be the bedrock for any theorising, functioning as an analogous icon to that of nature in the natural sciences" (pp. 35). Ontologically speaking, the aim of this approach was to see how much of what is perceived by

the subjects to be considered as 'truth' is shaped by the subjects' goals, desires and concerns that were highlighted in the formal interview episode. For example, a conflictual situation between the study's participant and another organisational member respective to their view on 'punctuality' was analysed not for the completeness and objectivity of the definition but rather to unearth the subjective 'context' that permitted particular views of 'punctuality'. As noted by Smith et al. (2009):

It can be useful to collect data to help contextualise the interview material. For example, participant observation can be helpful for understanding particular local contexts and activities, and the sampling of media representations can be a way of further exploring the available cultural resources for making sense of the topic at hand ... All these additional data sources can be useful resources for the subsequent contextualisation and development of your analysis. (p. 73)

On the other hand, informal observation was conducted through general observation of the organisational setting and individual interaction within it. Informal observation assisted in gaining an understanding of the space and place in which participants operate (Heizmann 2011). I spent four months in the organisation, observing, conversing and overall socialising with organisational members to gain insight into the 'everyday' aspects of the participants' organisational life. The process took account of the office set-out, socializing, flow and everyday 'banter' of organisational members. As such, informal observation assisted in uncovering 'issues' and 'demands' subjects encountered while fulfilling day-to-day professional duties. The aim of this process was to gain an understanding of symbols and language used by organisational members in self-expression. The process also assisted with understanding of the sheer subjectivity of participants' accounts of organisational life.

Informal observation also extended to *shadowing* (Czarniawska 2007). I accompanied participants to numerous events outside of the organisational settings such as site inspections, site meetings and social events. This time was used to have general discussions with the participants about their life in general, which included discussions about their past, their relationship with friends and family as well as their visions of a more desirable future. The time was taken to reflect not only on events that ensued within the organisational setting but also events that the subjects' experienced in domains outside the professional context. The aim was to enrich and contextualise the sheer subjectivity of the participants' 'truth claims', providing a more complete understanding of the substantiveness of their reasoning. As such, this approach was not deployed to ascertain truth and to render their observations within professional settings as plausible or otherwise but rather to unearth a more comprehensive meaning structure that shaped the subjects everyday being-in-the-world of work. This process of 'data saturation' is in line with the tenets of IPA methodology which suggests that:

IPA [also] requires 'rich' data. This is clearly a subjective judgement, but when we say that 'rich data' are required, we mean to suggest that participants should have been granted an opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length. (Smith et al. 2009, p. 56)

Prior to moving onto the approach to data analysis, it is important to note that because of the intrusive nature of continuous recording and its potential to induce *reactivity* (Bryman & Bryman 2013), I decided to use field notes (in the form of journals) to capture data from informal observation and shadowing. I kept an analytic and self-reflexive journal that, in addition to expanding the transcribed data corpus, has assisted with documenting the significance of my initial observations and reasonings. The journal consisted of moment-to-moment reflections of personal reactions to participants' narratives and

actions. As such, in addition to being a tool for reflecting over participants' comments, the journal also served in analysing my own reflections and observations. This double-hermeneutic process proved to be essential for generating in-depth understanding of both the participants' and my own reasoning.

Coding and Data Analysis

The guiding principle that emerges from the study's ontological and paradigmatic foundations is that exploration of the relationship between self-identity and situated experiences requires consideration of the stratified ontology of self-identity. It is important to note that any description ventured by the participants was **a)** taken to reflect the properties of their subjective constitution and **b)**, inadvertently, the limiting and one-sided nature of the world as they know it (that is, not an objective reality). For example, a subject's description of co-workers' aptitudes and competencies are theoretically significant as a 'subjective experience of the subject's immediate circumstance' as opposed to being indicative of the co-worker's fixed personality traits or objective rules of performance. This significance of *mapping out* the subjects' 'system of meaning' can subsequently be recognised as the process of 'inverse-dialectics' (Fairclough 1993; Fairclough 2013; Silverman 2013; Silverman 2017) because the study flips the direction of analysis from assertion/discourse to assertion/subjectivity (Foucault 1980; Foucault & Sheridan 2002). Therefore, although the method of dialectics pertains to Critical Discourse Analysis (also referred to as CDA), what is retained in the context of this study is the concern to highlight the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of individual-specific ontologies (Jung 1933; Peterson 1999; Silverman 2013; Wetherell et al. 2001) and in doing so permit for a *critical* examination of their delimiting nature. As noted by Fairclough (2013):

Relations in Aristotle are organised around a concept of *Relata* (emphasis in the original). *Relata* are 'of other things' (emphasis in the original), or are said to be in some manner *towards something else* (emphasis in the original). They are so designated in virtue of their relation to another *Correlata* (emphasis in the original); the master is master *of a servant* (emphasis in the original)--the servant is a servant of a master. *Relata* and *Correlata* are mutually defining; they are *simul natura* (emphasis in the original). If you suppress one of the pair, the other vanishes. (p. 309)

More specifically, the study's interactive lens suggests that participants' utterances are to be discerned for their 'in-order-to' relationship between the **1)** diachronic content of that which matters to the subject and **2)** subjects' professional concerns'. On that note, the interview transcriptions and field notes were first coded to delineate the subject's 'self-criteria' with which they discerned the surrounding world. Interview and note extracts which discussed participants' concerns, goals, desires, achievements, aspirations, objectives were delineated and arranged to construct 'the life story' of the subject. The initial aim of this approach was to delineate the subjective context of the subject's being-in-the-world of work. The subjective context of each participant subsequently provided the ontological foundation for making sense of their attempts to produce 'truth claims' (Wittgenstein 1968) regarding the perceived 'external world'. On that note, the second round of coding sought to construct the world of the subject as they know it. Interview and note extracts which discussed the participants' views of their professional responsibilities, their colleagues' attitudes to work, their relationship with colleagues and senior management as well as their relationship with clients were grouped together to produce what the subjects' described as *objective* representations of (external or surrounding) reality. The aim of the first and second round of coding was to discern the implications of that which matters to the

subject on that which they saw in the external world (refer to **Table 01** in Appendices for coding summary table).

After establishing **1)** the subject's subjective 'context' and delineating **2)** the world known by the subject, the study was able to ascertain the *paradigmatic* aspects of speech (Wetherell, Taylor et al. 2001) that served in perpetuating the legitimacy of their views. In this instance, the paradigmatic aspect of language "concerns the range of alternative possibilities available, and the choices that are made amongst them in particular texts" (Wetherell, Taylor et al. 2001). More specifically, therefore, the study was able to delineate phenomenal 'mechanisms' that permitted the expression of particular *versions* of truth. On that note, the third round of coding⁶⁹ focused on themes which highlighted strategies deployed by the participants that sought to preserve their sense of the self and the surrounding world of others (Potter 2002). The themes were grouped on the grounds of *modality* or what Wetherell, Taylor et al. (2001) recognise as "degrees of commitment to truth of necessity" (p. 242). More specifically, themes were grouped with respect to their 'ability' to endow different forms of actions and decisions with 'relevance', given *perceived* circumstances at hand (Burr 2003; Clegg 1975; Weber 1968). Furthermore, in addition to establishing the 'in-order-to' relationship between the subject's subjective context and the perceived surrounding world, the delineated *modes* of self-justification provided the researcher with an opportunity to discern the self-attributing aspect of subjects' situated experiences (of their surrounding worlds). In addition to positioning each participant as a subject of organisational

⁶⁹ It is important to note at this juncture that the study adopts a view which recognises coding as synonymous with data analysis. As noted by Miles & Huberman (2014): "We strongly advise analysis concurrent with data collection. It helps the field-worker cycle back and forth between thinking and the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data. It can be a healthy corrective for blind spots. It makes analysis an ongoing, levelly enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork. Furthermore, early analysis permits the production of interim reports, which are required in most evaluation and policy studies. So, we advise interweaving data collection and analysis from the very start" (p. 70)

life, the thematic arrangement thus permitted for a more critical rendition of their being-in-the-world of work (refer to **Table 02** in Appendices for thematic summary table).

Reflexivity

Considering the researcher's 'closeness' to the field of practice under research, the participants recruited and the extensive experience the researcher has had in numerous project management roles in his professional career, it was important to discuss any intermittent 'findings' with the study's participants. The inclusion of participants in the process of data analysis was not only decided in support of the ideographic logic to IPA, but also to avoid the implications of bias (Bryman 2012) on findings. As noted by Miles and Huberman (2014), closeness to the field runs the risk of the researcher being knee-deep in "holistic-fallacy: putting more logic, coherence, and meaning into events than the inherent sloppiness of social life warrants" (p. 307). To mitigate this problem, follow-up interviews were conducted with participants to confirm that what the researchers 'sees' in the data is also reasonable to the participants. Furthermore, since the study's interpretive lens was heavily embedded in the stratified ontology of self-identity, the conclusions drawn were not exclusively 'grounded' (Charmaz 2014) but were balanced between theory and empirics. As noted by Bryman and Bryman (2013), theoretically informed coding and data analysis is a recognisable approach of qualitative studies in general. On that note, including the participants in the process of data analysis while having a clearly defined relationship between theory and data (Bryman & Bryman 2013; Miles & Huberman 2014) has assisted with ensuring that researcher's knowledge is not imposed on participants' views. More importantly, given that the nature of inquiry into the relationship between self-identity and situated

experiences is ontological, no weighting was assigned to whether participants' claims were appropriate or correct.

Ethical Considerations

In the context of this study, the main three aspects requiring ethical consideration were: acquiring informed consent from participants, providing them avenues to deal with the emotionally charging aspects of the interview and protecting the organisational intellectual property (confidentiality). The data collection process complied with relevant ethical standards as stipulated by the UTS code on *Ethical Conduct of Research*.

At the onset, a meeting was held with the organisation's Director to discuss the research project in some detail and outline the stages of the research process. After gaining approval from the organisation's Director, the researcher sought informed consent from potential participants (prior to their participation in any research activities). The initial contact with the participants was made via email (example email attached in Appendix E). In the email, participants were provided with a summary of the project, its purpose and method of data collection. The project information sheet also provided answers to some regularly asked questions (see Information Sheet and Informed Consent form, in Appendix E). The consent form also provided information regarding the storage and accessibility of data including strategies deployed to maximise participants' privacy. Most importantly, the information sheet addressed the potentially adverse effects of discussing emotionally charging issues as well as the solutions that can assist with mitigating adverse reactions (for instance, by providing access to a counselling service). The document was distributed to senior members of the organisation and the study's participants to ensure everyone had a broad understanding of the research project. Finally, any

questions were welcomed, with employees being assured that I was available for discussion should they have any concerns about the research process. Overall, the participants were told that they are free to withdraw from the research at any point in time without further explanation or notice.

The researcher also provided sample interview questions to each participant, prior to the interview, which formed an important part of the informed consent process. The reason behind providing sample interview questions was to prepare participants in advance considering that the questions addressed or referred to their negative professional experiences. Being forthcoming with the questions prior to the interview episode provided participants with more opportunity to 'opt out' of the research process should they have found the interview questions too emotionally charging and/or inappropriate^{70;71}.

Although a formal non-disclosure agreement was not made with the partner organisation, it was agreed, with senior management, that references made to the organisation and its staff would be kept anonymous. Using pseudonyms, the write-up of the data de-identified individual participants and the name of the organisation (Bryman & Bryman 2013). The pseudonym Mirbelia Projects is therefore used throughout the thesis to protect the anonymity of the partner organisation. The researcher has also ensured that identifiable material from organisational documents is precluded. However, since only a small number of participants were interviewed and observed, the use of pseudonyms alone was not a sufficient measure to safeguard confidentiality. This was the primary reason why it was decided to provide the partner organisation with a summary report excluding quotes. Participants were also not

⁷⁰ As a side note, it is important to point out that since the interview was semi-structured, free flowing and largely driven by the participants, the sample interview questions had minimal effect on how the participants answered the questions and subsequently how the researcher analysed the data: any potential 'strategies' deployed in answering the first episode of interview questions were 'ironed out' in subsequent (unplanned) discussions and informal interviews.

⁷¹ When participating as a silent observer in meetings, the researcher also sought consent on any audio recordings from all meeting participants.

asked to read the extended version of the report which included quotes from other participants. The interviews were conducted outside of organisational settings to ensure that other organisational members cannot identify the study's participants.

Limitations of The Research Design

The main limitation of the research design stems from the study's idiographic approach to research. On the one hand, in order to produce in-depth accounts of satiated experiences, the number of participants recruited should be limited so as to not compromise the rich descriptions of their professional worlds. On the other hand, limiting the number of participants recruited affects one's capability to make comparisons across different cases (Bryman & Bryman 2013; Crang & Cook 2007; Fetterman 2010; Smith et al. 2009). This has consequently reduced the study's ability to develop what is often referred to as 'generalizable knowledge' (Miles & Huberman 2014). As noted by Harvey and Myers (1995), "until a large body of knowledge of many situations is developed, it is difficult to develop more general models of meaningful contexts" (p. 23). However, since the study's main concern was to develop a situated rendition of the relationship between self-identity and situated experiences, the significance of conclusions drawn should not be classified on the grounds of their theoretical generalisability but rather on their phenomenal significance (Smith et al. 2009)

Conclusion

This chapter has served to provide information on the study's methodology. The study's methodology was designed to provide access into the subjective possibility of situated experiences. Utilising the tenets of Smith's *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009), the chapter shows

how the inquiry into negative emotional experiences will permit for highlighting one's subjective context with which the subjects make sense of the surrounding professional world. This realisation has thus shaped how data was collected. For example, using semi-structured interviews, the study attempts to elicit in depth descriptions of participants surrounding worlds. Furthermore, strategies such as informal interviews, observation and shadowing served in homing in on why participants see themselves and others in a particular terms. The relationship between the study's ontology, paradigm and methodology has subsequently also shaped how data is grouped and analysed. As demonstrated previously, the significance of the subjective possibility of everyday speech has influenced the development of code groupings by informing which aspects of everyday speech are theoretically significant for development of themes. Overall, the aim of the chapter was to highlight how the study's research design frameworks will allow for positioning of the individual as a subject of organisational life. In addition to discussing the study's design frameworks, the chapter also provided information on the ethical implications of the study and strategies employed for minimising the risk of privacy and confidentiality breaches. More importantly, given that the study takes interest in the significance of negative emotional experiences, the chapter also discusses the significance of informed consent and the importance of strategies for managing the potential adverse effects of the data collection process. Finally, the chapter addresses the inherent limitations of the in-depth analysis of situated experiences and the effect it has on the aspect of theoretical generalizability.

The Superimposed Truth: The Vail of Perpetuating Self-ideas

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings. The aim is to highlight the depth-phenomenology of participants' perception and comprehension. By presenting extracts from the accumulated data, the chapter will highlight numerous phenomena that persist in all accounts of subjects' self-expression. More specifically, the chapter will discuss how **1)** self-referential/reinforcing; **2)** corrosive and **3)**, self-preserving forms of perception and comprehension affect and shape how the subjects define and experience themselves and the surrounding world of others. Finally, **4)**, the chapter will conclude by presenting the significance of the ontological nature of one's self-ideas which are foundational in informing one's ability to perceive and comprehend. By explaining the theoretical significance of the phenomenal findings the research questions will be answered and the contributions discussed.

Depth Phenomenology of Being-in-the-world of Work

Considering the study's interpretive lens and its focus on highlighting the effect of the stratified ontology of the self in everyday speech, which positions the individual's self-identity as the subject and object of analysis, the research has identified numerous phenomena⁷² pervading accounts of

⁷² This study aligns with Heidegger's definition of phenomenology. For Heidegger (1953) "phenomenology means.... to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58). He continues by saying: "to have a science 'of' phenomena means to grasp its object in such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly" (p. 59). This means that the study was not focusing on highlighting truthfulness or plausibility of spoken words but has however looked to unearth that which stands on its own; shines through and cannot be 'divided' further—that which lives on its own irrespective of the particularity of the spoken word.

participants' descriptions of themselves and their professional environment(s). The findings highlight modes of comprehending the self and others which are founded on the need to reference, reinforce and preserve one's self-identity. More importantly, the findings highlight those modes of comprehending the self and others that emerge from the meta-phenomenon of a distinctive (and organising) self-idea.

The primary phenomenon of self-referential and self-reinforcing being-in-the-world of work

Summary of the finding: participants' interpretations of the 'surrounding world' were 'restricted' by their self-definitions since they perceived and defined self and others based on a self-referencing modality. Furthermore, in being self-referential, their perceptions of the surrounding world further reinforced the plausibility in their sense of self and the surrounding world of others. As such, comprehending the world through a self-referencing modality inadvertently reinforces the plausibility of one's claims to knowledge and self-knowledge.

Each encounter with participants, whether it was in a formal interview setting or an informal discussion, entailed reflecting over the particularity of organisation's operations and the position participants held within the partner organisation. Considering the classification of their circumstance, participants also reflected on experiences that made them feel anxious. The 'position' held within the organisation appeared not to be classified in terms of the 'objective' characteristics of the position in question, as defined by the organisational hierarchy, job descriptions or key performance indicators (KPIs hereafter). In discussions that ensued, the role of the individual within the organisation was primarily classified on

the grounds of personal criteria (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Peterson 1999). For example, Mark, who holds a senior role in the organisation's estimating⁷³ department, described his role by saying:

The whole process feels like flogging a horse to see who will be able to sustain more of a beating... I am expected to perform miracles while other people are given a free pass. Most people are very reluctant to take on responsibility while I always put up my hand to take on new projects even at my detriment. It is always the other guy who is at fault. Take George for example, the other day he was late to a site inspection and has expressed no concerns nor has he apologized for wasting everyone's time.

Margaret, on the other hand, who works in the project management department⁷⁴ as a contract administrator, asserted:

I am expected to define scopes and negotiate contractors. But no one has ever shown me how to do that ... John just yells at me and sends me abusive emails about how I have done something wrong. Come and tell me to my face, don't send me emails. Act how a manager should act. Teach me how to do my job...

While Nick, who is a senior executive of the organisation, began with following:

I am expected to wear many hats.... I need to be both a builder but also a psychologist.. These days employees do not take responsibility for their work because they know there is always someone

⁷³ A person working in an estimating department is called an estimator. Their responsibility is to scope and quantify projects prior to the construction process. It is the estimator who estimates the construction cost of the project based on which the organisation acquires new work.

⁷⁴ Every construction organisation is predominantly divided into two key areas; estimating, which tenders projects and project management which builds projects that have been tendered successfully by the estimating department.

above them who will come in to pick up the pieces ... People in my position are expected to know everything and be on top of everything...

In all cases, the classification of participants' roles, and the roles of others, emerged from the springboard of their self-knowledge (or their sense of self). In case of Mark, his job has been classified as 'gravely taxing' because of *his* ability to 'perform above standard', that is, sustain and manage what others would perceive as 'unmanageable' and 'excessively onerous' professional demands. Margaret explained her inability to perform her duties by drawing on the 'poor management' of her superiors. More importantly, Margaret rendered the 'poor management' of her supervisors as an unquestionable description of their capability on the basis of her knowledge of that which can be recognised as 'good management'. On the same token, Nick's classification of his professional world did not obviate his perception of employees 'today' in reference to (diligent and hardworking) employees 'in his days', that he, in turn, represented⁷⁵. Considering the relational ontology of perception it thus becomes evident that *because* Nick *is* a 'hard worker', he can recognise (particular forms of) 'laziness'; *because* Mark 'performs miracles', *he* can recognise 'reasonable' normative 'limits' of his role; *because* Margaret *is* a 'good communicator, personable and sociable', she *can* recognise bad communication and insufficiency in the soft skills of her co-workers. As supported by Ybema et al. (2009), "the images invoked thus tell a selective, frequently stereotypical and often dramatized story which scripts the 'self' in relation to the 'other' on a stage which magnifies differences" (p. 307). The relational ontology of perception highlights those participants classify their surrounding world in terms of 'seeing' all of that which references what

⁷⁵ It is important to reiterate that this study does not aim to establish the truthfulness of claims and whether what has been said by participants is in fact 'true'. What this study aims to highlight, however, is that our classifications of the surrounding world cannot be conceived as separate to who we are (or perceive ourselves to be).

they know and perceive themselves to be. More importantly, participants' 'find' *in* their professional world 'objective' properties that inadvertently gave plausibility to their subjective sense of self. The conclusion, as such, remains: *because* of 'who I am', my classifications of the world are 'direct and objective' representations of reality without which 'who I am' would not be plausible⁷⁶.

This relational ontology of perception therefore foregrounds the phenomenon of *self-referencing* in identity work as an irreducible property of the participants' ability to comprehend self and others. As such, although participants' musings are representations of attempts to construct identity 'in situ', the specificity and particularity of their descriptions (every participant described their roles in the same way ontologically but in different ways epistemological) suggests that the classification of their roles as taxing (Mark), unreasonable (Margaret) and multifaceted (Nick) would be as arbitrary as saying their roles are 'dark', 'blue' and 'orange' (respectively), if it was not for their pre-existing body of self-knowledge that endowed particular abstractions with sensibility. Returning to comments made by the study's protagonists, their self-definitions of being 'good at my job' (Mark), 'communicative and personable' (Margaret), and 'diligent and hardworking' (Nick) 'manifested' in their surrounding world, in this instance, all that 'others' are not *in reference* to who they are. As recognised by Heidegger (1953), "the primary 'what-for' is a for-the-sake-of-which. But for-the-sake-sake-of-which always concerns the being of *Dasein* (emphasis here) which is essentially concerned about this being itself and its being" (p.

⁷⁶ It is important to note at this juncture that this study is not considering the plausibility and truthfulness of participants' claims which could highlight their claims as ego-manifesting (Jung 1933). This study is looking to highlight the phenomenal nature of being-in-the-world of work and the relationship between self-identity and situated experience. As such, it is important to highlight that the relationship between their 'mind and the world would' would ensue even if the participants opted for a reverse description of reality: that their laziness *knows* what hard work is; that their social ineptness *knows* good communication; that their proclivity to quit *can* recognise those who can persevere.

83). This suggests that specific descriptions of the surrounding world are only possible when they emerge from a foundation of pre-existing assumptions and views about that which is described, which cannot obviate a sense of self. On that note, the referencing ontology serves to connect seemingly arbitrary concepts into a meaningful observation: for example, something is 'bad' and something is 'good' because I know what is 'bad' and what is 'good' and I know this because *I am* 'good' (or 'bad').

This can be recognised in the following statement made by Mark:

It gives me great pleasure when a client compliments my work ethic to John (company's Director) ... I love to take a new client on a journey; to be given a single sheet of paper and be able to produce an estimate that encapsulates his desires. To be able to help the client express what he likes and materialise it into a project that is feasible is very rewarding. This way you learn a lot but you also add value to the entire organisation ... It takes a lot of work to do something like that ... The upsetting thing is when a project manager takes over from what I have set up and completely destroys all the good work by delivering the project late and not delivering on the quality; essentially, not doing what was promised (by me).

The *self-referencing phenomena* in identity work does not only subsume one's body of existing self-knowledge, however. As such, it is important to point out that in lieu of describing their day-to-day responsibilities in terms of what their position 'objectively' entails (for example, by referring to their job descriptions or clearly definable KPIs), the participants have also 'opted' to depict their current 'professional worlds' through the lens of their imagined self (that is, who they would like to become). In Mark's case, his goal of "gaining recognition for his achievements from the senior members of the organisation" and "maintaining high performing standard" is at the foundation of Mark's classification

of others' 'irresponsibility' and lack of effort. On the same token, Margaret's desire to become a "decision maker in her department"; to be given an opportunity to "express her creative side and leverage her soft skills" permits for a plausible characterisation of her immediate supervisors' inadequacy as obstacles to her self-realisation:

I would like to become a project manager. I am very personable and outgoing and I think this role would be very suited for me unlike the one I am in now which requires me to do 'admin stuff' only. I would like to express my creative side and manage people and clients as opposed to being stapled to a desk all the time. Project management is all about good communications skills... You cannot be shy and be a project manager who is required to interact and speak to stakeholders all day every day ... But how will I get there since no one will help me?

Finally, Nick's desire to build the business to a stage where he can "pull back and spend more time with his family" highlights in the surrounding world 'objective properties' that illuminate a self-referencing relationship between his view of others' approach to work and his view of the comportment required to attain *his* goals:

I would like to one day be able to pull back and spend more time with my family. I know I have to work hard and I don't mind doing that. My father has done the same but he has gone too far and has worked all his life. I never used to see my father growing up. I don't want to do the same but I know that in order to be in a position to pull back from work, I have to give it my all now. This is the nature of the beast ... But things have changed ... Employees do not understand that this is life and they complain about things that are normal. This makes my job harder because I have to help them psychologically while also doing things for them that they should actually do themselves.

As such, although their stories describe different circumstances, they all highlight the phenomenal relationality between subjects' existing self-definitions, future goals and desires and the 'objective'⁷⁷ properties of the world. Furthermore, what has 'been appropriated' by individuals as 'contextual normativity' (for instance, an estimator should be able to 'persevere'; a project manager should be 'personable' and 'considerate' and a director should be 'hard working' and 'flexible') is dependent on one's perception of oneself and all our 'yet to be realised' goals and desires (Archer, 2003). The phenomenon of self-referential identity work highlights that one's being-in-the-world seeks to affirm that which is known by the subject, by way of 'magnifying difference or sameness' between the self and other (Ybema, Keenoy et al. 2009). Doing this endows existing self-definitions with plausibility and subsequently renders the realisation of their future desires, *indubitable*, on a subjective level. This is also supported by Peterson (1999):

It appears, therefore, that the image of a goal (emphasis in the original) (a fantasy about the nature of the desired future, conceived of in relationship to the model of significance of the present) provides much of the framework determining the motivational significance of ongoing current events... *The point is that some desirable future state of affairs is conceptualised in fantasy and used as a target point for operations in the present. Such operations may be conceived of as links in the chain* (emphasis here). (pp. 26, 27)

The self-referential phenomenon of perception inadvertently highlights the *self-reinforcing* relationship between descriptions of the surrounding world, who 'we are' and who 'we want to become'. The 'in-order-to' relationship highlighted in speech emerges when participants' *current* descriptions of the

⁷⁷ What they perceive as objective properties which *gain* their 'objectiveness' via their existing knowledge and self-knowledge which also includes knowledge of who they *will be*.

surrounding world lend plausibility to 'what they would think' when they 'become who they want to be' by reinforcing their *existing* self-knowledge. On that note, my goals and my opinions on how to achieve them are plausible because my classification of the present moment is an objective representation of reality. Furthermore, my classification of the present moment is plausible because I perceive the present moment from the vision of who I want to become. In this instance, knowledge is 'borrowed' from their future self to classify and highlight meaning in the present moment. For example, Nick's potential realisation of his desire to 'pull back and spend more time with his family' can, *in his terms*, only be realised with 'hard work' which attains indubitability (both his 'hard work' and his goal of working less) with his ability to see in the surrounding world persisting 'forms of laziness'. On that note, Nick's 'idea' emerges as a 'certainty' by way of justifying his current observations. More specifically, without his ongoing hard work which attains plausibility through 'laziness of others', his goal, which 'requires' hard work, would be an impossibility.

The self-reinforcing relationship, as such, is multidirectional, resembling a web: his ongoing being-in-the-world 'attains' plausibility, that is, is dispelled of 'doubt', by way of reference to his goals and desires and his goals and desires 'attain' certainty by particular classification of himself and others in his ongoing being-in-the-world of work. As such, **1**) his present choices to 'work all the time' (representing his ongoing being-in-the-world), which are driven by **2**), his goals and desires, permit **3**), a particular classification of himself and the surrounding world: his goal 'makes' him see hard work and laziness while his 'ability' to see hard work and laziness *preserves* his goal, that is, permits for his 'dream to stay alive'. In support of this realisation, Nick notes:

3) I am really tired of babysitting people. I wish employees took more ownership of their work. See Nigel for example, he comes in, works and leaves at 5pm..... Mark, on the other hand, makes it a big deal that he had to come in on a Saturday and he makes sure that we all know about it... **1)** I never stop working, however, and I don't highlight it to anyone.... Even when I get home, I get phone calls about projects and things other people are supposed to be taking care of. I cannot sleep sometimes because I am thinking about what needs to be done. I don't remember the last time I took leave and went somewhere with my family. **2)** I would like to one day be able to pull back and spend more time with my family. I know I have to work hard and I don't mind doing that.

The phenomenon of self-referencing and self-reinforcing identity work also ensues in speech of other participants. Mark's choice to **1)** persevere under 'abnormal circumstances' is influenced by his goal of **2)** 'gaining recognition for his achievements' which permits for **3)**, a classification of some of his co-workers' comportment as 'irresponsible' and of himself as a 'miracle worker'. The self-reinforcing/referencing identity work is also embedded within Margaret's speech whose choice, **1)** to 'not care' and 'give up' emerges in consideration of her **2)** goal to be a project manager which is hindered or made impossible by way of **3)** her superior's 'incompetence' which 'obstructs' her self-realisation.

The epiphenomena of corrosive being-in-the-world of work

Summary of the finding: As highlighted in the previous section, subjects monitor the external world and classify the comportment of others in terms of sameness and difference to one's pre-existing body of self-knowledge. In monitoring others in terms of themselves, however, subjects also, **1)**, invoke limitations upon their sense of self and in doing so produce new information.

The self-negation or the newly perceived limits in the sense of self are not only the necessary attributes of new knowledge but also and more importantly, **2)**, necessary attributes of assigned validity of new information. The findings thus suggest that the objectivity of novelty emerges on the grounds of self-negation. Finally, **3)**, the breadth and complexity of new information emerges from the depth and scope of the significance of one's self-definitions, goals and desires.

The phenomenon of self-referencing/reinforcing identity work inadvertently eventuates in self-monitoring on the grounds of the same criteria deployed in the classification of others. In simple terms, this suggests that the way we monitor our environment also becomes the way we monitor ourselves.

In continuation of the descriptions of his role noted in the previous pages, Nick asserts the following:

This whole process of moving from a 'builder' to becoming a manager has been a steep learning curve for me. **1)** Now I need to consider how people feel in addition to ensuring we deliver quality projects and make money. Going through the strategic restructuring of the company has been a big wake up call for me. It seems I lack understanding of how people around me feel. **2)** I cannot read their emotions, and this has become very important to the role I have in the company. On top of everything, **3)** I am now expected to work on my soft skills, improve my communication, dress better and consider other people's feelings...

In my discussion with Mark about the 'difficulties of being an estimator', he also highlights 'unaccounted' significances that are (also) 'relevant' to his professional standing of being 'good at his job' and a 'high performer':

Estimators get three weeks to measure a project. We get a whole pile of documents which we have to decipher in three weeks, account for everything and also produce a competitive bid. See this job

I am working on now. Michael just came asking me whether I can fit it into my schedule. What he really expected was for me to commit to doing the job. Here I am now. **1)** There is a week left and there is so much that needs to be done: I need to finalise the design of the job with the architect, match the client's brief, get subcontractors involved in the process, make sure I cover everything on the drawings while also be able to submit a competitive bid so we can win the tender. **2)** I guess it is reasonable to expect these things considering how much I am paid. **3)** However, when you come to review with the Director's, they always find something they are not happy with which overshadows all the hard work you have done.

Margaret's' self-expression also delineates novelty within her surroundings which placed doubt on her existing sense of self (of being a good communicator, creative and personable and thus possessing capacities for being a good project manager):

The project that I am working on now actually allows me to express my creative side. Michael has this client who owns many hospitality venues which he now wants to renovate and turn into hippest places in the city. I love sitting down in those meeting and helping the client materialise his vision. I know a lot about development because my father has had, and still has, a very successful development business. **1)** But for some reason I feel like the client ignores me. He always wants to speak more to Michael than to me about the design of the project. **2)** I have a feeling he thinks I am still a junior and not a decision maker which is why he does not want to waste his time on me. **3)** I bet he would act differently if I had 'project manager' in my email signature as opposed to contract administrator. Being a contract administrator, the client probably thinks that I have no knowledge about designing and developing venues. Imagine if you were the client and you receive an email

from a contract administrator about important project matters—would you consider them seriously?

Considering previous arguments, the self-referencing/reinforcing ontology of perception, which is instrumental in the participants ability to comprehend, has preceded the emergence of contingencies placed upon their view of reality. Nick continues:

It used to be much easier: I used to consider every member of this organisation as a member of my family. I used to joke with everyone like a joke with my family and my approach to work used to inspire trust in people. **1)** Now I have a mentor who I speak to once a week who is helping me better myself in areas of 'soft skills' but it has been a steep learning curve for me. **2)** I just hope our employees can see that I care about them and if I sometimes offend them, it is not intentional. I cannot speak with many of them the way I used to ... **3)** Everything is becoming too professional and that is just not what I am used to... The other day I was told I was rude to Jessica... I would have never guessed that my behaviour was rude.

Mark also brings into question his professional capabilities, albeit in a more succinct way:

1) You always have a feeling like you could have done better. **2)** It is definitely true when they say that you are as good as the last tender you have submitted... **3)** You come to a point where anything that you do you know will be unappreciated.... What they don't realise is that I can get a job anywhere ... I can call a recruiter now and find another job ... I guess if it continues this way, I can just move to another company to do the same things for more money and with less pressure.

Margaret also follows 'the trail' of self-negation by saying:

I can just imagine what Michael (director) thinks of me. **1)** Here I am being paid 100k to do virtually nothing. **2)** Lisa, for example, is paid nearly as half as much as me and she is a gun—she just puts her head down and smashes everything out of the park ... **3)** I want to develop my projects and do that which I am good at and it looks like this will never happen in this context because there is not much I am learning—nobody helps me with things. If nothing, I will just go back to working for my dad and doing my own developments ...

It is important to note the fallibility of their knowledge is, however, dispersed throughout their claims (Archer 2003). In case of Nick, at no point has he highlighted 'objective' measures for defining the appropriateness of emotional management of employees, against which he can render his performance as 'not good enough'⁷⁸. Furthermore, there is no way to know that his 'doubtful' performance in the domain of 'soft skills' will have a negative effect on his capacity to 'work hard' and preserve the arrangement of his existing goals and desires. The same ensues for Mark and Margaret who cannot, irrespective of themselves, know for certain whether the 'client's choice to speak to Michael more than

⁷⁸ It is important to note at this juncture that given the study's positioning of the subject as central to the analysis of personal identity, and given the ontological nature of self-referential / reinforcing identity work and everyday being-in-the-world which was explicated in previous sections, even if Nick's superior or an employee expressed how 'good' or 'bad' he is in managing employees' emotional wellbeing, their classification would be done from the vantage point of their own pragmatic ends (Archer 2010). As such, for example, the company's Director could pass judgement against Nick's comportment in terms of his desire to manage the perceptions' his clients have of the organisation 'as a brand' (of which Nick is a representative). On that note, classification of Nick's comportment from this vantage point would be founded on a different set of substantive rationalities than would a classification rendered by Nick's colleague who point out Nick's insensitivity to matters of gender or cultural differences. Both represent a classification of Nick's 'soft skills' which are, however, founded on two different sets of concerns relative to the individuals making the classification. As a result of the inherent subjectivity of these classifications, they do not provide 'objective' guidelines for Nick that will assist him in managing his future comportment simply because their 'objectivity' is not referential to Nick's existing self-knowledge which 'allowed him to previously joke with employees without worrying about what he says'. What these 'unknown' (to Nick) classifications, however, do provide for Nick is an expanded domain of relevance in that they highlight what 'he did not know, or did not consider, that *actually* matters'. As such, the significance of newly introduced reference points is instantiated by Nick's desire to preserve *his* 'particular world' within which he can be a 'particular individual' and not because the colleagues' claims are objectively indisputable. As noted by Archer (2000; 2003), for something to matter, we must care about it enough by virtue of which it becomes a matter of non-indifference to us.

me about the project' and 'always feeling I could have done a better job' is an indication of their 'objective' incompetence and a sign of an irrefutable measure against which the attainment of their goals (Margaret's goal of 'becoming a project manager and expressing her creative side' and Mark's goal of 'gaining recognition for his efforts') comes to be coloured with doubt (or impossibility). As such, although the fallibility of their knowledge is dispersed throughout their claims; being subject and the object of analysis introduces a new dimension of knowledge which, in the domain of self-affirmation, existed outside of the subject's perceptual boundaries. Nick further notes:

- 1)** Michael wants the company to grow but I sometimes wish I could go back to the days when I was just working on site and not having to worry about all of these things.
- 2)** The transition from being a builder to having to also manage people has meant I am not focusing on that which I am good at—the building and quality control of our projects ... Michael (Director), on the other hand, does not have a clue about what is happening on the ground and what I have to do on a daily basis. He goes off on his little sailing boat and comes in thinking things are just running smoothly on their own ...
- 3)** When they are not, he makes a big deal about it thinking no one is doing their job properly. Essentially, I don't care, if he is not happy, I will just go back to doing what I used to do...

By engaging in referential attribution of truth, the subjects therefore expand the 'domain' of plausible knowledge with which to define the self and others. This is because a claim is rendered plausible by way of references to other claims, the connection and relationship of which permits for making inferences. On that note, self-referencing cannot avoid the emergence of new information which subjugates existing self-knowledge to a contingent reality. For example, in the recognition of the validity of her world-views, Margaret inadvertently introduces the burden of 'consensual recognition' (Archer 2003)

and in doing so 'corrodes' her self-identity of being a 'good communicator' and 'creative'. On the same token, by referencing and reinforcing his self-knowledge, Nick (Margaret and Mark) places contingency upon the adequacy of his being-in-the-world of work and his capability to realise his objectives. This is explained by Peterson (1999) who states that:

The human being, by contrast, with a head full of alternative options (the abstract residue of individual ancestral choice), can use the internalised or freely offered opinion of the group to criticise spontaneous manifestations of subjective perception and motivation—to judge, alter, or inhibit pure subjectivity itself. This ability allows the human being tremendous interpretive and behavioural possibility, freedom, but lays subjective experience, untarnished instincts, bare to insult. (p. 305)

There are three implications emerging from these arguments. First, since every position entails its negative (Sharp 1991), the findings thus highlight that self-negation (or self-judgement) is an outcome of the self-referential and self-reinforcing nature of being-in-the-world of work (Archer 2000). The participants' utterances highlight the process as follows: the self-referencing subjects tell a story that magnifies difference (or sameness). However, in the magnification of difference and sameness (my hard work gives me capacity to see and judge laziness) the **1)** self-referencing subject also produces new information, as suggested by Nick, "although I am hard working, some of my behaviour can be perceived as inadequate, depending on who we ask". This means that being a subject and an object of analysis inadvertently brings forth novelty: the self-referencing/reinforcing ontology of perception is the precursor of the shift between balance and imbalance in the claims to truth and knowledge (and self-knowledge) in the social domain of reality (Archer 2000; Archer 2003).

Second, the significance of corrosive identity work, or self-negation, is that it **2)** precedes the validity and objectivity of newly generated knowledge. Since comprehension is founded on the self-referential and self-reinforcing ontology (see previous section), *the expanded domain of reality emerges from self-negation*—the ‘new’ emerges from the negation to that which the subject perceives to be already. The ‘reality’ of the new, however, is not simply determined by way of additional references, but rather by the phenomenal nature of self-negation. The significance of the relationship between what is presumed and perceived to be plausible by the subject (for instance, one’s sense of self and the surrounding world of others) and its negation is in the nullifying of all that we know that negation brings forth. As such, it is not only that by virtue of limitation that one can be fronted with the gripping (and ‘objective’) aspect of novelty (Peterson 1999), but by virtue of importance of *implausible significance* (that is, negation) of Nick’s self-definitions, goals and desires that the notion of ‘soft skills’ attains a veil of validity and objectivity. In simple terms, the *importance and significance* of that which we are and want to become suggests that encountered information, that carries the potential of ‘discreditation’, is worth considering.

Lastly, the **3)** breadth of the newly generated information (or number of ‘valid’ reference points) emerges from the depth of significance of our goals and desires. As mentioned before, monitoring oneself on the same grounds we monitor others produces novelty. This is the same as saying that being reflexive over one’s being-in-the-world of work produces new information. The novelty then becomes an objective attribute of the world given that it brings forth a potentially implausible rendition of the subject's pre-existing world views. More importantly, the ‘corrosion’ of self-identity breaths proliferation of reference points with which the subjects can define themselves and others and it does so by instantiating uncertainty as the permanent attribute of one’s being-in-the-world of work. On

account of this, an employee that Nick *unknowingly* mistreated positions every employee as a potential recipient of his 'inadequacy'; any form of client's comportment becomes an indication of Margaret's professional 'insignificance' and every new project becomes an 'opportunity' for Mark to lose his capacity to perform 'above standard' and the title of being a 'miracle worker'. Subsequently, the findings highlight that the breadth of new information and the complexity of the surrounding world thus produced is inseparable from the depth and scope of the significance of our self-definitions, goals and desires.

The secondary phenomenon of self-preservation in being-in-the-world

Summary of the finding: The newly evoked limitations in one's self-knowledge are subsequently followed by self-preservation modalities in identity work. The subject seeks to preserve their sense of self by rearranging their 'story' to manage the particularities of the newly perceived limits. The subjects, however, do not do this by way of producing a more comprehensive and elaborate totality of reference (for instance, by expanding the breadth of information that matters to achieve 'perfection' or 'wholeness'). Contrary, the subjects 'opt out' for reducing the complexity and scope of the totality of relevance (for instance, reducing the number of reference points that matter). They do so by rearranging the network (that is, the network's scope) of their existing self-definitions, goals and desires to form **1**), a hierarchy at the top of which sits that which matters the most to the 'identity seeking individual'. Rearranging their 'subjective context' by virtue of that which is most significant, the subject 'simplifies' the surrounding world (thus *reconstructed*) and frees up action from the burden of its limits. More specifically, the single pointed aspect of (rearranged) subjectivity, **2**) limits the contingent nature

of self-knowledge ‘found in the external world’ and in doing so reduces **3**), the unpredictability of the immediate circumstance thus perceived. The *gradation* of one’s subjective context therefore reflects the self-preserving modality in the subjects’ everyday being-in-the-world of work.

What emerges from self-negation or from evoking contingency upon one’s self-knowledge is the *network-of-significance* which, in a meaningful sense, insights the boundaries of the subjects’ *surrounding* world. As highlighted in the previous section, it is “by virtue of importance of *implausible significance* (that is, negation) of Nick’s self-definitions, goals and desires that the notion of ‘soft skills’ attains a veil of validity and objectivity” (p. 137). In a network arrangement, this relationship is self-sustaining, meaning that the validity and objectivity of the ‘soft skills’ paradigm, and Nick’s limitation in the domain of emotional management, endows his pre-existing self-definitions, goals and desires with significance⁷⁹. The network-of-significance which guides behaviour, as such, subsumes all that the subject is and is not, simultaneously. It includes both the ‘breadth of new information’ and the ‘depth of significance of one’s self-definitions, goals and desires’ (see previous section). On that note, although the corrosion of our self-identity—by way of evoking novel limitations upon one’s self-knowledge—enlarges our (conceptual) world and thus makes it more complex to navigate, it also ‘pulls out’ of inconspicuousness the network of concerns, desires, objectives and goals which shape the particularity of ‘immediate’ circumstances encountered by the subject. This realisation permits one to see that it is only by virtue of his ‘miracle worker’ identity that Mark can encounter a circumstance within which his

⁷⁹ For example, should Nick’s ultimate goal be to become a songwriter, the importance placed on his performance in the newly introduced domain of ‘soft skills’ would be insignificant (or at least carry reduced significance) and the classification of his ‘inappropriate’ comportment as a non-contention simply because his self-definitions would be tied to a concern that ‘lives’ outside of the organisation’s walls.

work is 'incomplete' and 'uncomprehensive', a circumstance within which the demands placed upon him by his superiors are 'unreasonable' and 'unpredictable'.

The phenomenal implication of 'self-negation', as such, is that it exposes the *ontology* of the 'network' which remains dormant in self-affirmatory identity work (that is, identity work or agency that attains desired ends without running into 'obstacles'). The 'elaborate descriptions' of the world (as the subjects know it) are a 'because-of' rendition of their perceived inadequacies. Simply stated, it is *because-of* the story of participants that their perceived inadequacies *matter*. Furthermore, it is *because-of* their network-of-significance that the subjects and I were having these discussions in the first instance. By 'entertaining failure', the subjects therefore gave birth to a self-sustaining network of reasons, rationalities, self-descriptions, goals, desires and concerns which serves to legitimise their sense of self and the surrounding world of others. In accompanying Nick to one site inspection⁸⁰, I listened while he made the following observations⁸¹:

My father used to always work. I remember, he used to come home very late and I used to see him only on the weekends. I really appreciate that my father sacrificed himself and made sure that we have everything that we need. He is the one that instilled the hard work ethic in me. This is how I approach my work today. However, I don't want to be like my father. I thank him but I don't want to see my kids only on the weekend and be a bystander in their upbringing. **1)** This is actually why I work hard now. I would like this business to get to a stage where I can delegate and spend more

⁸⁰ In construction organisations, site inspections are carried out at different intervals of the project to ascertain progress, meet clients or assist with overall delivery. The specific site inspection in question was for a tender interview as the partner organisation was shortlisted by the potential clients as one of the preferred builders and as such the clients wanted to conduct a tender interview on the projects site.

⁸¹ Quotes by Mark and Margaret on the same topic are presented in the following section.

time with my family. **2)** However, I need to work hard now for this to be a possibility ... But it is not all about hard work these days. I miss the time where I was on tools building things with my hand. Now I have to manage other people, be attentive to their emotions, entertain clients and network with them, all of the things I have never done before and do not like doing now. Michael (Managing Director) always complains about my behaviour in these areas of work **3)** Sometimes I just want to go back to what I used to do and if Michael doesn't like it, this is what I just might do ...

The significance of self-negation, however, is not only that it exposes the ontology of the 'subjective network of meaning' which guides participants' behaviour. The significance of evoking contingency upon one's self-knowledge, is that it also adds to what Heidegger (1953) refers to as the 'numbering of the self'. Since the breadth of the 'expanded domain of relevant and significant knowledge' is founded on the scope and significance of one's network of self-definitions, goals and desires (see previous section), the 'numbering of the self' (Heidegger 1953) foregrounds the predicament in which the subject 'looks to detail for some portent of meaning' (Sennett 2011) to 'ensure' self-realisation (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Archer 2010; Archer 2015; Archer et al. 2015)⁸². In this instance, the self-referencing/reinforcing subject gives birth to a 'surrounding world' within which *everything* 'is' potentially relevant. More importantly, in this instance, the self-referencing/reinforcing subject also gives birth to a 'surrounding world' within which everything is *equally* relevant. Subsequently, when everything is *equally relevant*, the subject becomes consumed by the persisting 'uncertainty' in the

⁸² The peculiarity of novelty, as such, pertains to predictive nature of being-in-the-world which 'pushes' one to evoke every possible contingency upon a potential event (both positive and negative) to protect oneself from a 'loss of face': subjects' evoke the '(un)known' or '(im)plausible' to adapt to it in abstraction. On that note, the self gets 'numbered' by the amplified internal soliloquy which suddenly becomes populated with an expanded domain of relevant and significant knowledge 'necessary' for self-realisation. As such, in our attempt to improve our predictive capacities by way of learning more about the contingency of the surrounding world we thus inadvertently produce more points of reference that have the potentiality to 'corrode' our self-knowledge.

everyday context of interaction⁸³. With respect to the participants' accounts, this means that within every word spoken by an employee there is a potential for Nick to miss 'objective' emotional cues. This was acknowledged by Nick when he stated that "the other day I was told I was rude to Jessica [and] I would have never guessed that my behaviour was rude". Mark also perpetuates uncertainty within his daily activities by highlighting innumerable 'things' that need to be fulfilled to perform to *his* standard of being a 'miracle worker'. When speaking about the expectations of his superiors, Marks suggests that "they always find something they are not happy with which overshadows all the hard work you have done." Finally, Margaret faces 'millions of things she has done wrong and others have done right' when she 'objectifies' the unfavourable stance of her capabilities (as perceived by others, supposedly). The significance of this argument is also recognised by Heidegger (1953) who states:

As the they-self, Dasein is *dispersed* (emphasis in the original) in the they and must first find itself. This dispersion characterises the "subject" of the kind of being which we know as heedful absorption in the world encountered as closest. If Dasein is familiar with itself as the they-self, this also means that *the they prescribes the nearest interpretation of the world and of being-in-the-world* (emphasis here). The they itself, for the sake of which Dasein is every day, *articulates the referential context of significance* (emphasis here). The world of Dasein frees the beings encountered for a totality of relevance which is familiar to the they in the limits which are established with the averageness of they. *Initially* (emphasis in the original) factual Dasein is in the with-world, discovered in an average

⁸³ Peterson (1999) explains this phenomenon by stating that "It is particularly difficult to specify the value of an occurrence when it has one meaning from one frame of reference (with regards to one particular goal), and a different or an even opposite meaning, from another equally or more important and relevant frame. Stimuli that exist in this manner constitute *unresolved problems of adaptation* (emphasis in the original). They present us with mystery which is what to do in their presence... Such circumstances provide evidence that our systems of valuation are not yet sophisticated enough to foster complete adaptation—demonstrate to us incontrovertibly that our processes of evaluation are still incomplete" (p. 40)

way. Initially (emphasis here) “I” “am” not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they (emphasis here). In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially “given” to “myself”. Initially, Dasein is the they and for the most part it remains so. (p. 125)

To deal with the corrosive nature of the world within which everything is relevant (Sennett 2011), the subjects, however, engage in the *gradation of their subjective context*. To oppose the ‘numbering of the self’, the subjects first evoke alternative ways to their current being-in-the-world of work. As noted by Nick, “essentially, I don’t care, if he is not happy [with all the things I do], I will just go back to doing what I used to do”. Mark also ‘escapes’ the complexity of the world within which everything is relevant by suggesting that “if it continues this way, I can just move to another company to do the same things for more money and with less pressure”. On the same token, Margaret also deals with ‘swelling’ of the totality of relevance by suggesting that she will “just go back to working for my dad and doing [her] own developments...”.

The subjects, however, do not limit the complexity of the ‘expanded domain of relevant and significant knowledge’ by simply evoking alternative being-in-the-world of work. More importantly, they do so by developing a ‘single pointed subjectivity’ which rearranges the network-of-significance into the *hierarchy-of-significance*. This means that the relational arrangement between all that the subject is and is not simultaneously (which comprises the network-of-significance guiding behaviour) is rearranged in such a way that aspects which were corroded by self-negation are *assigned* more significance to those that emerged as ‘relevant’ through self-negation. The two remain in a relationship, only now the relationship is not one of equal *value* (as was the case in the network arrangement); rather, the relationship is one of hierarchy within which the first carries more significance for the subject

than the latter⁸⁴. The most significant aspects of the self are, as such, protected by virtue of insignificance of newly perceived limits. For example, by assigning more significance to the 'hard worker' identity, Nick inadvertently 'downgrades' (by way of 'reduced significance') all reference points associated with the 'soft skills' paradigm. The same ensues phenomenally within the speech of others. Subsequently, evoking alternative ways to his current being-in-the-world reflects a process of gradation of subjectivity which transmuted a 'complex network' into a 'single pointed' predicament. As asserted by Nick previously:

I really appreciate that my father sacrificed himself and made sure that we have everything that we need. He is the one that instilled the hard work ethic in me. This is actually why I work hard now.. [So] if he [Michael] is not happy, I will just go back to doing what I used to do.

Margaret also simplifies the encountered surrounding world by enthraling her 'management and people skills':

I want to develop my projects and do that which I am good at and it looks like this will never happen in this context because there is not much I am learning—nobody helps me with things. If nothing, I will just go back to working for my dad and doing my own developments...

Mark also escapes the 'numbering of the self' by preserving the significance of his 'miracle worker' self-identity:

⁸⁴ The hierarchy-of-significance arrangement is contrary to the network-of-significance arrangement because in a network arrangement, everything carries an equal weight of significance for the subject.

You come to a point where anything that you do you know will be unappreciated.... What they don't realise is that I can get a job anywhere ... I can call a recruiter now and find another job ... I guess if it continues this way, I can just move to another company to do the same things for more money and with less pressure.

On that note, engaging in the gradation of the subjective context does not only reduce the contingent nature of self-knowledge, but also (and inadvertently) *affects the experience* of complexity perceived in the surrounding world. When the definition of reference points of knowledge is reduced to a single paradigm (such as 'hard worker' for Nick; 'good communicator and project manager' for Margaret and 'miracle worker' for Mark), the subjects produce a circumstance that is simple to navigate. As such, by grading the value assigned to the reference points in the expended domain of knowledge (by virtue of that which *matters* the most to the subject), the subject reduces the unpredictability of the immediate circumstance and in doing so frees up action from the burden of its limits. On that note, the breadth and complexity of the surrounding world subsides with the narrowing of one's self-definitions, goals and desires. Subsequently, when subjects 'comprehend' from the self-preserving foundation⁸⁵, their sense of self and the surrounding world of others is unburdened from the referential attribution of 'truth'.

⁸⁵ In terms of Nick, working less and spending more time with family or 'going back to what he used to do' both preserve his identity of being a 'hard worker'; In terms of Mark, performing above standard or 'getting a new job' both preserve his desire to be recognised for his efforts of being a miracle worker; while expressing her creativity and being a decision maker remains a possibility for Margaret if she decides to 'work for her dad and do her own developments'.

The meta-phenomenon of a distinctive self-idea: the organising idea(s) of situated experiences

Summary of the finding: The arrangement of self-definitions, goals and desires in the form of a hierarchy, arranged in terms of importance in the life of the subject, was performed on based on 'in-order-to' and a 'because-of' relationship with the subjects' self-idea. The distinctive self-idea is an amalgam of what the subjects perceive as incomplete and inadequate past circumstances of their lives and what the subjects, in light of that insight, thus constructed as an ideal future self. Forming the ontological foundation of perception, the self-idea is therefore the fundamental aspect for perceiving the self and others in particular terms. Being a precondition upon which the subjects arrange and rearrange their subjective context, the self-idea is also the fundamental criteria for constructing and reconstructing the surrounding world *of the subject*. The organising self-idea thus ontologically 'precedes' the self-referencing/reinforcing/preserving modalities of one's everyday being-in-the-world of work (see previous chapter) and evokes the boundaries of the surrounding world thus perceived. The question of situated experience therefore ceases to exist devoid of the 'in-order-to' and 'because-of' relationship with an abstracted, ideal self.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter, it is by virtue of one's network-of-significance that one can comprehend and perceive the surrounding world. In case of Margaret, for example, the 'plausibility' of 'I am a good communicator' (self-description) and as such 'I want to one day run my own projects' (goal to which it relates) was established by virtue of perceiving in the external world 'good' and 'bad' acts of 'communication' and 'project management'. Engaging in referential attribution of truth, the subjects,

however, expanded the domain of relevant knowledge and self-knowledge. This has evoked an inverse relationship between the subjects' sense of self and the meaning in the surrounding world of others--the insignificance of their self-definition, goals and desires was heightened with the equal significance of everything (new) perceived in the surrounding world. On account of the subsequent 'corrosion' in one's sense of self, the subjects narrowed the 'network-of-significance' to that which matters *the most* 'in the life of the identity seeking individual', and in doing so reduced 'the breadth and complexity of the surrounding world'. For example, it is by virtue of his (perceived) 'inadequate' people's skills⁸⁶ that Nick has managed to 'recognise' and 'reinstate' the significance of the 'hard worker' identity and subsequently free (his) action from the burden of the perceived limits in his sense of self. As asserted by Nick, "if Michael (Director) does not like it⁸⁷, I will just go back to doing what I used to do". On account of this shift, subjects began to comprehend and perceive the surrounding world through one's 'hierarchy-of-significance'. On that note, amongst other (less significant) things that pertained to their sense of self, Margaret 'found' in the world *mostly* that which reflected her communications skills (or lack thereof); Nick 'found' in the world *mostly* that which reflected his 'hard work' (or lack thereof); while Mark 'found' in the world *mostly* that which reflected his capacity to (professionally) achieve what others cannot (or otherwise). Most importantly, therefore, that fact that such a shift in perception⁸⁸ disburdens the subject from referential attribution of truth matters not as much as does the realisation that the *possibility* of single pointed subjectivity is indicative of the ontological nature of (some) 'subjectum' (Heidegger 1953).

⁸⁶ This was previously referred to as the multidimensional nature of identity work and is encapsulated in the act of self-negation and self-affirmation, simultaneously. In re-arranging their self-definitions in the form of a hierarchy, subjects reinforced some aspects of the self at the expense of others.

⁸⁷ The way Nick works.

⁸⁸ The shift from perceiving the world through the network-of-significance to the hierarchy-of-significance.

The significance of 'subjectum', however, is not only embedded within the (varying) content of situated self-expression. Although it reflects a distinctive subject, what is of significance, more importantly, is the phenomenon of *possibility* of a particular subjective context (or distinctive subject). Given that each subject formulates a *particular* network-of-significance which also transmutes into a *particular* hierarchy-of-significance; the significance of 'subjectum' emerges when one considers the *intentional appropriation* of some self-definitions, goals and desires, *as opposed to innumerable others*, given (perceived) circumstances at hand. Subsequently, 'the choice' of referencing, reinforcing or preserving one's sense of self (see previous chapter) has to emerge from an understanding of the world in particular terms. This suggests that what is referenced, reinforced or preserved within speech (for example, a particular self-definition, goal or a desire) has not only been intentionally appropriated, but more importantly has, in the first instance, been intentionally attributed with degrees of valence--things emerge from the 'sea of inconspicuousness' by virtue of being comprehended and perceived by the subject as *more or less valuable because of something else* and it is these (emergent) things that form the subjects' *immediate* 'surrounding world' (Heidegger 1953). Empirically, this is reflected in the subjects' attempts to advance *specific conclusions* at the expense of others. On that note, although the arrangement within the network is self-sustaining in that self-definitions relate to and sustain specific goals, desires and vice versa; the network-of-significance is, therefore, not self-sustainable. As such, in the same way that a set of self-definitions is only sensible in terms of the goal to which they relate, the network of things that matter to a subject does not and cannot become meaningful in and of itself since such 'uprooting' of significance would not permit for *gradation* of one's subjective content (see chapter seven) given perceived circumstances at hand. As was highlighted in the previous chapter:

Simply stated, it is *because-of* the story of participants that their perceived inadequacies *matter*. Furthermore, it is *because-of* their network-of-significance that the subjects and I were having the *particular* discussions in the first instance. (p. 139)

On account of these observations, it is because of something else that the network and/or the hierarchy of significance *subsume* particular content of value and subsequently *assume* their respective arrangements. This suggests that even though our self-definitions stand in a relationship with our subjectively conceived pragmatic ends—meaning; when one is perceived to be risked, the other also emerges as a point of contention—emphasising a relationship between some more than others is indicative of an *organising phenomenon* that *provides resources* to different⁸⁹ ‘forms’ of comprehending and perceiving. What becomes evident is that subjects advance particular forms of subjective content (at the expense of others) on account of *one’s insight* about what constitutes a (more) representative, complete and adequate view of reality. In our (in-depth) discussion about his personal and professional life, Mark made the following observations:

I began learning about building as a child helping my dad with the maintenance of our property in Texas. My father also had a small carpentry business, so he took us along with him every opportunity we had. He used to always use my siblings and I to assist him with everything around the house. We had a big land, a house and a barn like a typical Texas family that we were. Considering that I am one of 8, it was possible to manage his business and the land in this way. This meant that I was on tools since I was 13 years old.... Living in such a big family also made it difficult to do what you

⁸⁹ As was highlighted in the previous chapter, when subjects ‘comprehend’ through a network of significance, their interpretation of the surrounding world is founded on a self-referencing/reinforcing modality of perception. On the other hand, when subjects ‘comprehend’ through the hierarchy of significance, their interpretation of the surrounding world is founded on a self-preserving modality of perception.

personally wanted. Everything was always done for the sake of the family and this way it was difficult to develop your own identity; your likes and dislikes. When I was younger, I was never particularly good at anything... On the other hand, my father was very good with his hands, but he never had good business sense. This has meant that all he was ever known for is fixing things, but he never took it to the next level by turning his business into more of an enterprise. He liked doing things the old way--he thought that if he knew how to fix things, this is all that is needed to sustain himself and the family. However, because of this attitude, he has lost a lot of good business opportunities and as a result has found himself struggling to pay off the house we lived in. I think he still has a small mortgage on it and he is 70 years old. I respect my father and am grateful for his struggles. He made sure we had all we needed. I will try and do the same for my kids. But--and this is the reason why I moved to Australia--I want to embrace and explore new opportunities. If I stayed in Texas, I would have lived the same life as him and all my siblings. I would never end up doing anything on my own. This is why I love what I do now because, for the first time in my life, I am finally good at something and I have achieved it all on my own. I guess this is why I associate who I am with what I do. I consider being an estimator at Mirbelia Projects as part of my identity now.

The self-definitions, goals and desires, as such, do not only reflect things that are significant and valuable for the subject in the life of the subject (given circumstance at hand), but more importantly, they simultaneously reflect our ideas about the world (and others in the world) and our ideas about ourselves; our interpretation of the past and present and subsequently our vision of the (desired) future⁹⁰. On that note and with respect to the comments made by Mark, it is recognisable that the

⁹⁰ It is important to note that the complete particularity of our self-idea(s) can only be known by the subject thus leaving much inaccessible for the researcher's analytic gaze. Irrespective of this conclusion, the rearrangements of subjects' goals, desires and self-definitions by virtue of importance is indicative of an organising phenomenon that 'sits behind the inner dialogue' and informs different modes of speech (for instance, self-referencing/reinforcing/preserving).

'conclusions' advanced in situ are supported by a narrative-like⁹¹ structure. For Margaret, for example, the perceived limits in the surrounding world that have shaped her appropriation of *self*-definitions, goals and desires relate to her perception of her father's life; his relationship with her as a child; his relationship with her mother and his professional career. Her perception of *her* 'immediate circumstance' thus served in the constitution of what she perceived as a more complete, adequate and accurate description of events that ensued: by inquiring into the life of her father (to understand her own life), she thus formulated a *conceptual framework of pros and cons* which served her in the classification of what is 'right' and 'wrong' in her everyday being-in-the-world (of work). Margaret notes:

My father is a very successful man. He worked for a law firm for a long time and managed to become a partner. He was making a lot of money and has given to my sister and I everything we wanted. But because he worked so much, we were neglected emotionally. Work was his number one priority and that has not only strained his marriage but has also meant that my sister and I never had a father figure type of influence in our lives. After leaving the law firm, he began developing property making hundreds of millions of dollars in the process. He is very business astute but as a result of his financial success, he lost the view of all of the things that really matter. My mother has left us as a result and he did nothing to stop her from leaving. On top of that, my sister has been struggling with depression for years and I cannot remember the last time I had a meaningful conversation with my father. Now, he is lost--he has all this money but is getting older and because of it, he is trying to compensate by dating younger women and buying things he does not need. See, I love my father and I love his work

⁹¹ Narrative, in this instance, does not refer to reflexive reconstruction of past events but also subsumes participants' future desired ways of being-in-the-world. For this reason, the study finds it more appropriate to refer to this self-narrative as a self-idea since ideas do not only reflect one's interpretation of past events, things and people but also one's vision of ideal ways of being. For this reason, the term narrative and idea will be used interchangeably.

ethic and his approach to business. Business wise, I want to follow in his footsteps. I want to one day have my own development company and manage my own projects. But I also want to have a family and spend time with my children and not sacrifice the things that matter for business success. I think you can have both.

In deploying different modes of producing self-identity in situ (for instance, by self-referencing/reinforcing and preserving--see previous chapter), the subjects scrutinise their fathers' (limited) being-in-the-world to reconstruct an image of oneself that encapsulates or embodies 'revised' *significances*. This *new* image, in their view, represents a more appropriately constituted *subject*. For example, Nick and Margaret retain the fathers' perceived work ethics as foundations of their self-identity, however, embellishing or extending it with the (revised) role the family plays in one's professional undertaking. Mark, on the other hand, extends his dad's way of working by being more 'business oriented'—which is reflected in the 'miracle worker' self-definition and the goal of being acknowledged and celebrated for his hard work, the aim of which is to escape the fate of an 'average' life⁹²⁹³. As noted by Jung, "when it comes to the assimilation of content, it is never a question of "this or that", but of "this *and* that" (1933, p. 21). In all accounts, as such, a new (ideal) world, with *their self-identity at its centre*, thus emerges from the perceived limits of the old⁹⁴. As aptly asserted by Jung (1933):

⁹² The study's findings do not highlight a deterministic outcome where childhood events and their interpretation *had* to lead to the current situation. The findings merely highlight a relationship between subjects experienced past, perceived present and projected future and recognise that there must be a plethora of additional interpretations, views and perceptions of one's past that have not been expressed in the participants' speech. The findings merely emphasize the primacy of subjective constructs in shaping one's situated experiences and the narrative structure of our 'operating systems'.

⁹³ The researcher's conclusions provided in this paragraph have also been confirmed by the subjects. The researcher's conclusions were first drawn and then affirmed by the subjects' as plausible in subsequent discussions.

⁹⁴ The study is not suggesting that subjects perceive the surrounding world exclusively on the back of realisations made at a particular moment in time. Nor does it suggest that the acquisition and accumulation of subjective content occurs in a

It is true that widely accepted ideas are never the personal property of their so-called author; on the contrary, he is the bond-servant of his ideas. Impressive ideas which are hailed as truths have something peculiar to themselves. Although they come into being at a definite time, they are and have always been timeless; they arise from that realm of procreative, psychic life out of which the ephemeral mind of the single human being grows like a plant that blossoms, bears fruit and seed, and then withers and dies. Ideas spring from a source that is not contained within one man's personal life. *We do not create them; they create us* (emphasis here). To be sure, when we deal in ideas, we inevitably make a confession, for they bring to the light of day not only the best that in us lies, but our worst insufficiencies and personal shortcomings as well. (p. 115)

The insight from the "drive to know" (Lonergan 1992, p. 28) subsequently served as the foundation for the constitution of the subjects' subjectivity. Furthermore, it provides the criteria for advancing some forms of (subjective) content at the expense of others. More importantly, it delineated the boundaries of their personal surrounding world(s) within which, by virtue of the *truth* of their insight, they can be distinctive individuals. As such, the 'organising phenomenon' reflected in participants' speech thus **1)** emerges as an *extension* to the perceived limitations in the world of actors, actions and contexts. The emerging phenomenon is an insight produced with respect to the question of identity (the 'who am I' and by virtue of implication, 'how should I act' question). This insight than **2)** foregrounds the formulation of one's ideas about oneself and the surrounding world of others. More importantly, to 'objectify' the insight and the self-idea, **3)** the subjects then *(re)contextualise* the emerging conclusions by virtue of pragmatic correlates (goals, desires, objectives). This suggests that subjects seek to *prove*

linear and deterministic fashion, from past to future. It however suggests that one's being in the world is regulated on the back of insight that emerges as an extension of perceived limitations in immediate circumstance.

that which they abstractly formulate. On that note, it can be said that the *novelty* of insight spearheads the ontological nature of the subjects' forthcoming ideas. On the one hand, this provides the 'insight' with context-specific applicability, sensibility and relevance, while inadvertently serving to affirm *truth* within its content. On that note, after a sensible and relevant insight is transmuted into an idea⁹⁵ (of the self and others), its contents become that which matters to the subject, which serves as a resource for assigning weighting to subsequently appropriated self-definitions, goals and desires *given perceived circumstances at hand*. More importantly, the insights that emerge from the 'psychic tension' of the identity question, and the subsequently generated self-idea, are therefore inseparable from one's ongoing experiences of the surrounding world⁹⁶ because they "recede into habitual textures of the mind" (Lonergan 1992, p. 15).

Synopsis

The preceding arguments highlight the phenomenal cycle of identity work which begins with self-referencing/reinforcing modes of perception and ends with attempts to preserve the particularity of one's self-idea. More specifically, the findings highlight that our everyday heedful circumspection

⁹⁵ The fact that the self-idea--that is, a phenomenal extension of the perceived immediate circumstance--was capable of emerging, suggests that there exists tension in one's psyche respective to making sense of the world and carving out a place for oneself in it. Whether or not there are pre-existing subjective frameworks with which the subject makes sense of circumstance is difficult to discern given the limitations of the study respective to time and scope (see Timothy Leary's *Exo-Psychology*, 2016 for the eight-circuit brain theory). These frameworks can only be assumed on the basis that one cannot explain away the mind by virtue of emptiness of content. What is, however, evident is that subjects possess an intrinsic aptitude for inquiry, or better yet, that being-in-the-world is analogous with persistent sensemaking, which cannot obviate the identity question since all sensemaking is by virtue self-referential: a system cannot go outside of itself for independent criteria of knowledge to make sense of circumstance (Clegg 1975).

⁹⁶ This does not aim to suggest that a single insight shapes one's experiences but rather and more importantly that the identity seeking individual has an ontological drive to know oneself and others and as a result incessantly generates insight which shapes one's narrative, agency and situated experience accordingly.

'begins' with the pre-existing repositories of knowledge and self-knowledge. It is in reference to these existing repositories of knowledge and self-knowledge that we make sense of the surrounding world—we classify the comportment of others as a reflection of sameness or difference to who we believe we are and would like to become. However, in perceiving the surrounding world in terms of ourselves, we therefore and inadvertently begin to classify our own comportment by virtue of rules applied in describing the surrounding world of others. In doing so, the subjects introduce novelty which corrodes their existing self-image and does so by highlighting the indubitability of 'who they are and would like to become'. Subsequently, the subjects rearrange their existing network of self-definitions, goals and desires in such a way that those assigned with lowest significance are 'sacrificed' for those of higher value and importance in the life of the identity seeking individual. The findings therefore highlight that the intrinsic desire of the identity seeking individual is to preserve the most cherished aspects of one's self-ideas.

The Journey of the Distinctive Self

Introduction

The first part of the chapter discusses the 'journey' of the self-idea the significance of which is embedded in the study's ability to delineate the phenomenology of formation and reformation of one's self-identity. The forthcoming arguments will first delineate that a subject is in the first instance incapable to work on the ideas that shape her comportment. The chapter will then go on to demonstrate that referential attribution of truth that defines self-reinforcing and self-referencing modality of perception inadvertently leads to the emergence of novelty in the perception of self and the surrounding world of others. The significance of this argument lies in the realization that it is only by virtue of self-negation that the subject becomes aware of that which shapes perception and comprehension. The chapter therefore suggests that the cycle of self-affirmation and self-questioning finally 'returns one to oneself' by way of being provided with an opportunity to make a choice that is in line with the subjects' most significant aspects of being. The second part of the chapter will discuss the phenomenon of intentional action and distinctive self-identity in the context of the study's findings. The chapter suggests that preservation of '(self-)constructed surroundings' are necessary for abstracted aspects of the self to appropriate their ontological nature. Therefore, the chapter will highlight that the phenomenon of intentionality resides in the necessary plausibility of our self-descriptions and the descriptions of the surrounding world. The chapter then discusses how one can consider self-identity as a distinctive phenomenon. The chapter will demonstrate that the distinctive nature of self-identity is not only reflected in the definitively described surrounding world, that is, distinctive content

advanced in situ, but also and more importantly, in the distinctive subjective possibility without which no-thing would be perceptible to begin with. Finally, the insights from these discussions will form the foundation for answering the study's research questions.

The (Non-)Emergence of Self-identity: The Journey of the Self-Idea

The *journey* of the self-idea is embedded in the relationship between the primary and secondary modalities of self-expression (see Chapter Six). The findings show that one's being-in-the-world cannot obviate the self-referencing/reinforcing modality (of perception) since it is by virtue of our knowledge and self-knowledge that we can 'comprehend' and 'perceive' the surrounding world. On that note, everyday agency springs from the bedrock of pre-existing self-notions which 'subjugate' comportment to the sanctioning of its *exclusive* criteria. The classification of the other-as-representing-the-context is thus ontologically *entangled* with our self-ideas. In the same way, self-definitions expressed in speech are not independent momentary musings but are reflective of the immediate circumstance we perceive (Archer 2003; Heidegger 1953)⁹⁷. This suggests that **a)** the 'who' of the person is the expression of things in the external world that are referred to one another based on relevance (for example, what is professionally onerous, hard and easy is referred to Mark's knowledge of what onerous, hard and easy professional requirements entail) **b)** that exist as such on the basis of pre-ontological motivational significance (to continue the last example, Mark's motivation to be recognised as a 'miracle worker' endows him with a capacity to classify what is a 'miracle' and what are its negations) **c)** which provides for the possibility of a particular reality populated with things and beings that are "discovered with

⁹⁷ This was evident in participants' assessment of their surroundings (see previous section) which highlighted a relationship between who they are and want to be and their opinion of others.

regards to the fact that they are referred, as those being which they are, to something” (Heidegger, 1953, p. 82) As noted by Heidegger (1953):

Dasein understands its here in terms of the over there of the surrounding world. The here does not mean the where of something objectively present, but the where of de-distancing being with... together with de-distancing. In accordance with its spatiality, Dasein is initially *never here*, but over there. From this over there it comes back to its here, and it does this only by interpreting its heedful being towards something in terms of what is at hand over there. (1953, p. 105)

The self-reinforcing and self-referencing modality of perception therefore first delineates the boundaries of participants’ worlds within which they are *being* ‘particular’ individuals. Within *their* world, the individual evokes, or in the words of Peterson, determines import, (of) a *particular* circumstance which (s)he ‘needs’ in order to ‘exist’ as a *particular* person. For example, it is the participants’ hard worker, miracle worker and good communicator identities that permit for manifestations of laziness, irresponsibility and social ineptness respectively in the surrounding world of work. This is also affirmed by Peterson (1999) who states:

The plans we formulate are mechanisms designed to bring the envisioned perfect future into being. Once formulated, plans govern behaviour—*until we make a mistake* (emphasis in original). A mistake which is the appearance of a thing or a situation not envisioned, provides evidence for the incomplete nature of our plans ... As long as everything is proceeding according to plan, we remain on familiar ground—but when we err, *we enter unexplored territory* (emphasis in the original ... This means that long-term goals have to be reconstructed, and the motivational significance in your current environment re-valued—literally *revalued* (emphasis in the original). (p. 30-46)

The self-created rules of comportment—which refer to the appropriated notions of self-identity—applied to bestow ‘irresponsibility’, ‘laziness’, ‘hard work’, ‘good communication and management skills’ (Archer 2003) or to classify sameness or difference in the other, as such, are the same rules applied in self-regulation or rendering our spontaneous daily workings as meaningful (or otherwise). The ontological entanglement between ourselves and the world, as such, inadvertently permits the emergence of ‘novelty’ since that which we see in ourselves also ‘depends on where we sit’ (Clegg 1975). The findings therefore suggest that self-realisation is imbued with *referential attribution of truth* (see Knights & Clarke 2017) which inadvertently places contingency upon that which we perceive as plausible and legitimate. As affirmed by Peterson (1999):

All representations of objects (or situations, or behavioural sequence) are of course conditional, because they may be altered unpredictably, or even transformed, entirely, as a consequence of further exploration (or because of some spontaneous anomaly-emergence). The (anxiety-inhibiting, goal-specifying) model of the object of experience is therefore inevitably *contingent* (emphasis in the original)—dependent, for its validity, on the maintenance of those (invisible) conditions which applied and those (unidentified) contexts which were relevant when information was originally generated. (p. 238)

On that note, being-in-the-world thus cannot sidestep a predicament within which every claim to plausibility in the sense of self also entails its negative (Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Sharp 1991). For example, I cannot say that I am an academic until such personal characteristics are affirmed by way of fulfilling socially sanctioned norms that would endow my claims with legitimacy. Furthermore, more

importantly, once the socially sanctioned norms of academia 'are' fulfilled, one's self-description remains subject to 'degrees of success' in the field of question. As acknowledged by Heidegger (1953):

But even when actual, factual Dasein does *not* (emphasis in the original) turn to others and thinks it does not need them, or does without them, it *is* in the mode of being-with. In being-with as the existential for-the-sake-of-others these others are already disclosed in their Dasein. This previously constituted disclosedness of others together with being-with thus helps to constitute significance, that is, worldliness. (p. 120)

The importance of this argument, therefore, does not exclusively reside in the realisation that self-constructs (for example, self-definitions) are pervious to 'corrosion' (Sennett 2011), but rather and more importantly, that the 'corrosion' (for instance, self-negating positions) 'pushes' the totality of reference which constitutes the subject's surrounding world (in a meaningful sense) to the forefront of her conscious activity. While performing acts of self-affirmation we remain 'blind' to the network-of-significance⁹⁸ which 'provides meaning' to our everyday being-in-the-world of work⁹⁹. The lack of limitations in our everyday being-in-the-world, as such, inadvertently evokes a sense of 'blinding' familiarity within the surrounding world, as most of our models of perception (and comportment) attain unquestionable validity because they are not fronted with dispute¹⁰⁰(D'Alessandro et al. 2020). As noted by Schutz (1945), "as long as I live in my acts, directed towards the objects of these acts, the acts

⁹⁸ As was highlighted in the previous chapter, the network of importance shows itself as an arrangement between the subjects' self-definitions and subjectively conceived pragmatic ends to which they relate.

⁹⁹ Simply, the notion of 'blindness', that is, being 'blind' to the relationship between one's self-definitions, goals and desires (which are also relational to the things we 'find' in the external world), is reflective of one's *unobstructed* fulfilment of daily pragmatic ends.

¹⁰⁰ This has also been confirmed by the Bayesian model of the brain which suggests that brains do little else than predicting a future and enforcing this desired future (D'Alessandro et al. 2020).

do not have any meaning” (p. 3). Said in a different way, the insignificance of the ‘familiar’ things in the surrounding world ‘cloaks’ the ontological foundation of perception, namely our knowledge and self-knowledge, with inconspicuousness (Archer 2003). As recognised by Heidegger (1953):

Something is unusable. This means that the constitutive reference of the in-order-to to a what-for has been disrupted. The references themselves are not observed, rather they are “there” in our heedful adjustment to them. But in a disruption of reference—in being unusable for ...—the reference becomes explicit... When something at hand is missing whose everyday presence was so much a matter of course that we never paid attention to it, this constitutes a breach in the context of reference discovered in circumspection. Circumspection comes up with *emptiness* (emphasis here) and now sees for the first time what the missing thing was at hand for and at hand with. *Once again the surrounding world makes itself known* (emphasis in the original). (p. 74)

On that note, the unobstructed attainment of pragmatic ends therefore ‘distances’ the knowledge of ‘why’ things are familiar from one’s understanding. As noted by Peterson (1999) “those things we *take for granted* (emphasis here)—and which are, therefore, *invisible* (emphasis here)—determine our affective responses to the ‘environmental stimuli’” (p. 34). The ‘ontological base’ of perception subsequently remains inactively perceived given the sheer simplicity and non-responsiveness of an *affirmative* being-in-the-world of work. In general parlance, the sheer ‘gravity’ of desired pragmatic ends (becoming a project manager; gaining recognition as a distinguished employee; working less and spending more time with family) becomes truly apparent only when it is brought into question (Clegg 1975; Heidegger 1953). As noted by Peterson (1999):

...non-existence appears as an inevitable consequence of the absence of limitations, or of oppositions. The absence deprives whatever constitutes the origin of a point of reference, distinguishable from itself—and, therefore, deprives it of existence.... Two things that cannot be discerned from one another are not two things, however, and one thing with no discernible features whatsoever may not even be. (p. 287)

This is also aptly described by Jung (1959) who recognises the unselfconsciousness of self-affirming:

His consciousness therefore orients himself chiefly by observing and investigating the world around him, and it is to its peculiarities that he must adapt his psychic and technical resources. This task is so exacting, and its fulfilment so advantageous, that he forgets (emphasis here) himself in the process, losing sight of his instinctual nature and putting his own conceptions of himself in place of his real being. In this way, he slips imperceptibly into a purely conceptual (i.e. imagined – emphasis here) world where the products of his conscious activity progressively replace reality (emphasis here). (p. 79)

Such realisations, therefore, suggests that a self-referencing/reinforcing subject who 'affirm[s] immediately the reality of all that is conceived' (Schutz 1945, p. 1) is, in the first instance, inhibited from seeing the significances that constitute the perceived self and the perceived surrounding world of others. As noted by Schutz (1967), "that which is irrecoverable—and this is in principle always something ineffable—can only be lived but never "thought": it is in principle incapable of being verbalised" (p. 53). On that note, the act of self-negation is not a negative phenomenon since its substance is to bring out of inconspicuousness the subjective possibility of comprehension and perception. Subsequently, while it is by virtue "of our knowledge and self-knowledge that we can

‘comprehend’ and ‘perceive’ the surrounding world”; it is by virtue of dubitability of our knowledge and self-knowledge that we get to perceive more of ourselves and others, that is, we get to *learn* more about the world previously (im)perceptible. In this instance, as noted by Schutz (1967) “the self..... is no longer the undivided total self, but rather a partial self, the performer of this particular act that refers to a system of correlated acts to which it belongs” (p. 7). On that note, it is the ‘subtraction’¹⁰¹ in the sense of self that makes us more perceptive of the surrounding world but also ‘more accountable to ourselves’. As noted by Heidegger:

But the inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify a “lesser” being or a “lower” degree of being. Rather, inauthenticity can determine Dasein even in its fullest concretion..... *Authentic being a self* (emphasis in the original) is not based on an exceptional state of the subject, detached from the they, *but is an existentiell modification of the they as an essential existential* (emphasis in the original)... [On that, note], the self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self* (emphasis in the original), which we distinguish from the *authentic self* (emphasis in the original), that is, the self which has explicitly grasped itself... If Dasein explicitly discovers the world and brings it near, if it discloses its authentic being to itself, *this discovering of “world” and disclosing of Dasein always comes about by clearing away coverings and obscurities, by breakup up the disguises with which Dasein cuts itself off from itself* (emphasis here). (pp. 42; 125-26)

This is also recognised by Schutz (1967) who states:

¹⁰¹ By way of evoking contingency upon our knowledge and self-knowledge and thus highlighting limits in self-understanding.

Living in my acting-in-progress I am directed toward the state of affairs to be brought about by this acting. But, then, I do not have in view my experiences of this ongoing process of acting. In order to bring them into view I have to turn back with a reflective attitude to my acting. I have, as Dewey formulated it once, to stop and think. If I adopt this reflective attitude, it is, however, not my ongoing acting that I can grasp. What alone I can grasp is rather my performed act (my past acting) or, if my acting still continues while I turn back, the performed initial phases (my present perfect acting). (pp. 5-6)

Perceiving 'more' of the self and others expands the breadth of the surrounding world thus encountered and in doing so introduces new points of reference (perceived as) pertinent for self-realisation, however. To maintain the integrity of the network *now* perceived (that is, the relationship between one's self-definitions, goals and desires and that which is found in the external world), the subjects permit additional forms of contextual normativity to permeate through their conceptual boundaries in order to *overcome* their 'corrosive' (or previously unacknowledged) peculiarities¹⁰² (by learning, for example). The (exacerbated) dubitability of the known, and the expanded domain of the unknown, subsequently plunges the individual into the 'spread of indeterminate means' which burdens everyday action with (perceived) self-inadequacy. As suggested by Deetz (1994), "when the unity of the

¹⁰² This means that a question. "how are you going with the project?" from our superior will be considered in a multitude of terms (positive and negative) that are in the first instance self-referential in nature. As we do not exactly know what the question is aiming to elucidate, unless we explicitly ask, the question will be interpreted and an answer ventured in our own terms, that is, in terms of all the things 'we have and have not done right' based on what we believe the 'right' thing is, that is, based on rules of comportment that resemble an individual of our perceived self-worth. The rules however pertain to all of the contingencies we 'find in the world' which we use to distinguish ourselves from others. The rules of evaluations are 'all the things we know' (and don't know) referential to our self-knowledge and knowledge of other-as-context. As such, the self-referencing subject continually places contingency upon one's own pre-existing self-definitions to, rather paradoxically, ensure their perpetuation and subsequent realisation of goals and desires, that is, to protect the pre-existing notions of self-worth. By evoking contingency upon their knowledge, all participants become acutely aware of that which is being 'jeopardised' and by coming into such knowledge, exercise their personal causal efficacy by 'devising' alternative ways of being-in-the-world with which to deal with the newly evoked limitations.

I is risked, the fixed self/other world configuration gives over to the conflictual, tension filled antagonisms out of which objects are differentiated and re-differentiated and preconceptions are given over to new conceptions” (p. 30). On that note, perceiving more of the self and others (through self-negation) inflates the magnitude and scope of things relevant in the external world the consequence of which is self-inhibition or the subject’s reduced capacity for self-realisation. This ‘loss-of-self’ is aptly described by Peterson (1999) who states:

We are protected from unpredictability by our culturally determined beliefs, by the stories we share. These stories tell us how to presume and how to act to maintain the determinate, shared and restricted values that comprise our familiar worlds.... The orienting reflex substitutes for particular learned responses when the incomprehensible suddenly makes its appearance. The occurrence of the unpredictable, the unknown, the source of fear and hope, creates a seizure of ongoing specifically goal directed behaviour. Emergence of the unexpected constitutes evidence for the incomplete nature of the story currently guiding such behaviour; comprises evidence for error at the level of working description of current state, representation of desired future state or conception of the means to transform the former into the latter ... *It is only when our goals have been destroyed that the true significance of the decontextualized object or experience is revealed* (emphasis here) ... (pp. 52-53)

However, when our representations of objects (which includes the self and others) are numbered by *ad infinitum* referential attribution of truth, the “subjective possibility of comprehension and perception” (p. 159) re-establishes itself upon *the foundation of that which is most significant*. As such, it can be said that when the world expands ‘too much’, the network-of-significance assumes the form of a hierarchy at the peak of which sits that which matters the most to the ‘identity seeking individual’.

Subsequently, while it is by virtue of “dubitability of our knowledge and self-knowledge” that we “get to *learn* more about the world previously (un)perceived”; it is by virtue of the (ever so) expanding domain of relevance that we are fronted with the most significant aspects of our self-identity. The act of self-negation exposes the “totality of reference which constitutes the subject’s surrounding world (in a meaningful sense)” (p. 156) while our attempts to preserve the ‘totality’ bring out of inconspicuousness *the ontological aspects of the self* which remains inaccessible to conscious activity ‘when on familiar ground’. As noted by Schutz (1945):

our primitive impulse is to affirm immediately the reality of all that is conceived, as long as it remains uncontradicted... In this sense, it may be correctly said that a pragmatic motive governs our natural attitude towards the world of daily life. (pp. 1-2)

Subsequently, by highlighting limitations in the capabilities of others, the subjects inadvertently place their own capabilities into question¹⁰³. Evoking contingency upon *our* truisms however, permits one to escape the inconspicuousness of familiarity and highlight both that which we strive towards but also that which we seek to preserve and realise in our striving. The ‘cyclical’ process of identity work serves the (re)constitution of one’s subjectivity in such a way that the necessity to preserve our organising idea(s) is reinstated at its foundation.

¹⁰³ The way they monitored others became the way they monitored themselves.

Self-preserving identity work



Corrosive identity work ↔ **Self-referencing/reinforcing identity work** ↔ *Corrosive identity work*



Self-Idea

This means that the cycle of self-affirmation and self-questioning finally ‘returns one to oneself’ by way of being provided with an opportunity to make a choice that is in line with the subjects’ most significant aspects of being. As such, being fronted with obstacles and limitations to our self-knowledge, we are provided with an opportunity to choose that which is most relevant in our life as identity seeking individuals. This is significant when considering that the ontological nature of that which is most significant remains inconspicuous when we successfully attend to the particularities of social interaction. On that note, the relevance of a single thing becomes ‘disclosed to us’ through its negation. This, more importantly, uncovers our *prior* knowledge and understanding of the *totality* (of relevance) of things to which they belong (Heidegger 1953). As such, fluctuation from stability to instability (in our knowledge and self-knowledge) presents us with an opportunity to maintain our visions (for instance, of a more ‘complete’ reality and a ‘better’ constituted subject) and therefore ‘return’ to that with which we began our everyday heedful circumspection.

The 'Intentionality' and 'Distinctiveness' of the Self-Idea

The findings chapter indicates that agency that reflects a particular identity (the 'hard worker' identity, for example) is only *meaningful* when contextualised, that is, when 'assigned' to *specific* goals in the context of a *particular* circumstance (of work). As asserted previously, this highlights an ontological entanglement between the subject's sense of self and the context of interpersonal interaction. However, when aiming to ascertain the ontological foundation of action in the context of other (random) actions, it is important to consider that the *particularity* of circumstance (of work) pertains to each subject in specific ways. For example, for Nick, the immediate circumstance is coloured with examples of 'hard work' and its negation; for Margaret, the immediate circumstance is coloured with 'good communication' and its negation; while for Mark, the immediate circumstance is coloured with 'exceeding performance' and its negation. The *distinctive* immediate circumstances therefore engenders their subjective 'contexts'. As noted by Peterson (1999):

... new procedures and modes of interpretation literally produce new phenomena. The *word* (emphasis in the original) enables differentiated thought and dramatically heightens the capacity for exploratory manoeuvring. The world of human experience is constantly transformed and renewed as a consequence of such exploration. In this manner, the *word* (emphasis here) constantly engenders new creation. (p. 66)

This suggests that the 'particular circumstance of work' has been *carved out from the world* by the subjects so that their self-descriptions, goals and desires (to which they relate) *can be in a meaningful relationship*¹⁰⁴ (Leary 1977) (within the context of interaction thus constructed). As noted by Heidegger

¹⁰⁴ Presumably, this larger subjective context contains not only the 'hard worker' self-definition, but a multitude of other self-definitions and correspondingly, a multitude of short and long term goals and desires, interpretations, objectives and

(1988) “the self and world belong together in a single entity, [Dasein]” (p. 297). The findings highlight that the meaning of things is pre-existent to ‘circumstantial particularity’ as it provides a circumscribed boundary within which only *a particular thought or an action can take place*. On that note, the motivational significance of situated action cannot be said to emerge from the “*particular* circumstance (of work)” but rather from *an idea* of the particular circumstance of work. As affirmed by (Nietzsche 2018),

let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has elevated your soul, what has mastered it and at the same time delighted it? Place these venerated objects before you in a row, and perhaps they will yield for you, through their nature and their sequence, a law, the fundamental law of your true self. (p. 72)

As further recognised by Nietzsche (2018):

To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion of what one is ... The whole surface of consciousness - for consciousness -is- a surface - must be kept clear of all great imperatives. Beware even of every great word, every great pose! So many dangers that the instinct comes too soon to "understand itself" ...The organizing idea that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down - it begins to command, slowly it leads us back from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares single qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as a means toward a whole - one by one, it trains all subservient capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, goal, aim or meaning ... At the bottom of us, really “deep down,” there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual fatum [personal fate or destiny], of predetermined decision and answer to

motivations to which the self-definitions relate (although the time and space limitations of this study do not permit for an inquiry into their magnitude and complexity).

predetermined selected questions. Whenever a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable “this is I.” (p. 120)

Subsequently, the fact that *referential* attribution of truth within a *particular* circumstance is *preceded* by its subjective possibility matters not as much as does the realisation that the ‘(self-)constructed surroundings’ are necessary for abstracted aspects of the self to appropriate their *ontological nature*. For example, it is by virtue of her ‘inadequate performances’ that Margaret ‘objectifies’ the significance of her good project management and communication skills, because if nothing, she “will just go back and work with [her] father and build [her] own projects”. As aptly recognised by Jung (1933), if we don't know who we are, the world [within which you choose to dwell] will tell us” (p. 126). On that note, both ‘hostile’ or ‘familiar’ circumstances are therefore equally approving of one’s most significant realisations since their particularity is a ‘supporting mechanism’ for the subject’s subjective particularity. As noted by Peterson (1999):

Our hopes, desires and wishes—which are always conditional—define the context which the things and situations we encounter take on determinate significance; define even the context within which we understand ‘thing’ or ‘situation’. (p. 34)

This is also supported by Jung (1933) who states that:

The self ... is an archetype that invariably expresses a situation within which the ego is contained. Therefore, like every archetype the self ... acts like a circumambient atmosphere to which no definite limits can be set, either in space or in time. (pp. 167-8)

On that note, even though the ‘self and the world belong together in a single entity’ (Heidegger 1953), meaning that our self-definitions, goals and desires emerge from *the idea* of the immediate

circumstance, the integrity of our sense of self is *dependent on the plausibility* of the sections of the world we *choose* to carve out from its vastness and vice versa. For example, since the validity of my 'academic' identity emerges from referential attribution of truth, 'the *particular* immediate circumstance within which *the subject chooses to dwell*' must be rendered as *objective reality* for the 'academic' identity to sustain itself. The immediate circumstance, as such, is not a geographical locality only but also and more importantly a conceptual phenomenon, which subsumes both 'the reason behind my degree of choice' and 'the topic of interest I choose to explore' (to *become* an academic), as well as the 'aptly delineated contribution to knowledge' (I 'bring forth'), plausibility of which permits the particular *me*. This is affirmed by Schutz (1967) who states:

In everyday world in which both the I and the Thou turn up, not as transcendental but as psychophysical subjects, there corresponds to each stream of lived experience of the I a stream of subjective experience of the Thou. This, to be sure, refers back to my own stream of lived experience, just as the body of the other person to my body. During this process, the peculiar reference of my own ego to the other's ego holds, in the same sense that my stream of lived experience is for you that of the other person, just as my body is another's body for you. (p. 102)

As such, it is by virtue of the epistemological dimension of our self-ideas, that is, its pragmatic correlates, that our insights appropriate ontological properties. The process of self-realisation therefore reflects the material dimension of our 'tradition of knowing' (Jung 1933): the insight generated about limitations of the immediate circumstance becomes an idea when 'contextualised' by virtue of praxis without which the 'particular' insight is non-existent. The ontological and epistemological dimension of situated experiences are thus dependent on the *integrity* of the relationship between two sides of the same

entity (Heidegger 1953): the self and the self's perceived and constituted world. So, it is not only 'where' we are, but also and more importantly, what we think about where we are and whether what we think is 'true' that matters *in-order* for us to *be*. Therefore, what sits behind the phenomenon of 'intentional action' is the self-idea that 'finds itself' in *the objectifying* act of thinking, speaking and doing. As noted by Peterson (1999):

What is novel is of course dependent on what is known—is necessary defined in opposition to what is known. Furthermore, what is known is always known conditionally, since human knowledge is necessarily limited. Our conditional knowledge, insofar as that knowledge is relevant for the regulation of emotion, consists of our models of the emotional significance of the present, defined in opposition to an idealised, hypothetical or fantasised future state. We evaluate the “unbearable present” in relationship to the “ideal future”. We act to transform “who we are” into “where we would like to be”. (p. 19)

On that note, the temporality of the self-idea is therefore founded on the plausibility of the present. As demonstrated, however, the plausibility of the present is also 'self-promoted'. It is for this reason that the subjects rearrange their self-definitions and subjectively conceived pragmatic ends--by virtue of their importance--since a compromise in the integrity of the hierarchy-of-significance would be indicative of a collapse in the sense of self and the perceived reality that abounds (Higgins 1987). The 'concrete sensibility' (Sartre 2018) of the subject's ideas therefore serves to materialise the past experiences and future ways of being:

In a system that is arranged hierarchically, we may choose to refer to the inferences at the lower level as perceptions and the inferences at the higher level ... as beliefs, but we suggest that it is important to consider that similar processing obtains at all levels of the hierarchy ... Although it is

possible--and sensible--at one level of analysis to distinguish beliefs from perceptions ... at another level of analysis--the one that we think is more useful--no distinction is called for. (Corlett and Fletcher 2016, p. 96-7)

The hierarchical arrangements of our subjective contexts indicates that the content highlighted in thought and speech is only a partial reflection of the self-idea (given perceived circumstances at hand). The formation of a hierarchical arrangement within one's subjective context is therefore indicative of accumulative value appropriation which an insight is buttressed with additional conclusions that emerge from what we perceive and affirm as objective representations of reality in our ongoing being-in-the-world (of work). On that note, one cannot promote a foreordained relationship between a *particular* event in the past and the subjects' present decisions simply because a hierarchy of meaning is constantly subjected to reformulation on account of the plethora of circumstances we encounter since birth. For example, all three subjects choose to retain their most cherished aspects of the self and do so by disposing of those which do not serve the 'new' contexts they *choose or desire* to encounter next. For Mark, this new context is the new organisation, while for Margaret and Nick it is the context of self-employment. More importantly, choosing to encounter new context to preserve their sense of self, the subjects also 'embellish' their most cherished aspects and do so by way of new conclusions reached within the existing context of interaction (in question). For example, Margaret is still a good communicator and project manager but only when 'not burdened' by unnecessary bureaucracy (such as job titles for example). The same can be said about Nick who is a hard worker only when his 'soft skills' are not 'considered' in defining hard work. On the same token, Mark remains a miracle worker but only not in the eyes of his current (unreasonable) immediate supervisors. Furthermore, more importantly, the new circumstances of work encountered by the subjects will yield new (referential)

truth attributions which will further shape both their network and hierarchy of significance. On that note, the 'intentionality' of the self-idea to 'sustain itself' advances the argument for an accumulative formation of insight(s) upon which the self-idea is based. As recognised by Peterson (1999):

It is particularly difficult to specify the value of an occurrence when it has one meaning from one frame of reference (with regards to one particular goal), and a different or an even opposite meaning, from another equally or more important and relevant frame. Stimuli that exist in this manner constitute *unresolved problems of adaptation* (emphasis in the original). They present us with mystery which is what to do in their presence... Such circumstances provide evidence that our systems of valuation are not yet sophisticated enough to foster complete adaptation—demonstrate to us incontrovertibly that our processes of evaluation are still incomplete. (p. 40)

Peterson (1999) goes on further to suggest:

This means that consciousness plays a centrally important role in the generation of the predictable and comprehended world from the domain of the unexpected.... The orienting reflex is at the core of the process that generates (conditional) knowledge of sensory phenomena and motivational relevance and valance. (p. 52)

On that note, thrown into the world of others, the subjects inadvertently draw distinctions by way of comparison between things in their surroundings. More importantly, by drawing distinction between the two things compared (for example, between Margaret and her father), the subjects generate *novel* ideas about the self and the surrounding world (Bateson 2002; Heidegger 1953; Peterson 1999; Sartre

2018)¹⁰⁵. These novel ideas then ‘recede into the habitual textures of their mind’ (Lonergan 1992) and they do so by way of being ‘objectified’ (in daily comportment) through the *necessary* ‘plausibility’ of one’s thoughts (see arguments on previous pages): for the subject to be their thoughts must be true, and vice versa (Sartre 2018). The insights drawn from ‘inquiry’ constitute the particular subject and the particular object. The distinctiveness of the self-idea, therefore, is to be approached from the side of one’s idiosyncratic *conclusions*: the subjects *do not* advance the same content in situ, even though their self-expression emerges from analogous modalities of speech (self-referencing/reinforcing/preserving – see chapter six)¹⁰⁶. Subsequently, it can be said that the substantive variance in what the subjects find meaningful is embodied in the distinctive descriptions of a ‘single’ professional context. As aptly asserted by Heidegger (1953):

Existentially expressed, being-with-one-another has the character of *distantiality* (emphasis in the original) ... But this distantiality which belongs to being-with is such that, as everyday being-with-one-another, Dasein stands in *subservience* to others. It itself *is not*; the others have taken its being away from it.... This being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of being of “the others” in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more..... The world of Dasein frees the beings encountered for a totality of relevance which is familiar to the they in the limits which are established with the averageness of they. *Initially* (emphasis in the original) factual Dasein is in the with-world, discovered in an average way. *Initially* (emphasis here) “I” “am” not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the

¹⁰⁵ With respect to the question of identity, the two things that in their imminent relationship produce knowledge of their difference are the (perceived) self and the (perceived) other.

¹⁰⁶ If one contends that the content advanced in situ is dependent on the position they assume in the organisation, it would be akin to saying that all project managers would have the same values, beliefs and motivators. This, however, is implausible.

they (emphasis here). *In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially “given” to “myself (emphasis here).* (pp. 122-125)

Therefore, even though the subjects construct the context of interpersonal interaction, so that their self-definitions, goals and desires can be in a meaningful relationship (within), it can be argued that the formation of the self-idea is not to be considered irrespective of the context of interaction within which the subject ‘finds’ herself. Margaret, for example, was confronted by the world of her father’s ‘actions’, the interpretations of which formed the foundation for the construction of her own identity. This call against determinism¹⁰⁷ is precisely why one can argue for the idiosyncratic nature of (one’s) subjective structure: the notion of distinctiveness, as such, cannot be achieved by ‘uprooting’ the subject from the context of interpersonal interaction but rather by way of delineating the emergence of interpretation of/in the context of interpersonal interaction. This is also confirmed and described by Bateson (2002) who states:

There is a profound and an unanswerable question about the nature of those “at least two” things that between them generate the difference which becomes information by making a difference. Clearly each alone is—for the mind and perception—a non-entity, a non-being. An unknowable ... a sound of one hand clapping. (p. 64)

¹⁰⁷ This suggests that one cannot emphasize a deterministic relationship between a particular insight or a facet of the self-idea and a particular conclusion drawn in situ. On that note, one cannot say for certain that formulations of Mark’s, Nick’s and Margaret’s are dependent on an isolated interaction they had with their fathers, for example. The findings want to emphasize, however, that current conclusions drawn are founded on a web of meaning which emerges respectively to insight generated from perceived limitations in the subject’s immediate circumstances. The more complete and adequate view of reality and the vision of a relational subject serve as antecedents or inputs into the formation of preferences, significances, value and meaning. In the same way, the voiced (or otherwise) preferences, significance, value and meaning are reflective of the subject’s vision of a more complete and adequate reality and its relational subject.

On that note, the varying degrees of content advanced in situ are indicative of the definitive subjective possibility which informs what is seen as valuable and significant *from* the comparison of two things. This suggests that conclusions drawn from the 'quest for self-realisation' are therefore preceded by an inquiry that "pivots from the concrete to the abstract" (Lonergan 1992, p. 30). In doing so, the ability to draw conclusions is presupposed on the distinctive nature of our inner condition on account of which one can discern difference between the self and the other "which becomes information by making a difference" (Bateson 2002, p. 64). This suggests that the new information generated from comparing the self to others (for instance, an insight or a conclusion) already presupposes a perceived distinction between the two things compared because "each alone is—for the mind and perception—a non-entity." (Bateson 2002, p. 64). Subsequently, the distinctive nature of self-ideas is not only embodied in the definitively described surrounding world, that is, distinctive content advanced in situ, but also and more importantly, in the distinctive subjective possibility without which *no thing would be perceptible to begin with*. As such, it is not only by virtue of our self-knowledge that we comprehend and perceive the surrounding world but rather by virtue of our *distinctive self-knowledge* that the acts of comprehension can (even) take place. As noted by Heidegger (1953):

Every idea of a 'subject'—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum ontologically* (emphasis in the original) along with it, no matter how energetic are one's ontic protestations against the "substantial soul" or the "reifications of consciousness". (p. 46)

The notion of distinctiveness in the self-idea therefore emerges from the *particularity* of situated conclusions: through perceiving her immediate circumstance, Margaret has constructed what she believes is a more complete and adequate conception of reality which presupposed her idea about

herself. As such, the idiosyncrasy of situated conclusions is 'carried' across different strata of self-identity: from insight as a release to the inquiry into the question of identity (for instance, 'who am I and how should I act?'), to the subsequent materialisation of insight by virtue of sensible and relevant agency in the context of interpersonal interaction thus perceived. On that note, it can be said that Margaret does not *possess* her self-idea since it "springs from a source that is not contained within one man's personal life" (Jung 1933, p. 115). However, the distinctively constituted inner condition, and the possibility it provides for advancing idiosyncratic content in situ, instantiates a clear delineation between Nick's, Mark's and Margaret's identities: the participants are three different individuals with different life histories; different beliefs and differently constituted view on what can be recognised as their successes and failures on account of which they act and subsequently *are*. As aptly acknowledged by Sartre (2018):

The only kind of knowledge is *intuitive* (emphasis here). Deduction and discourse, which are incorrectly labelled as 'knowledge', are only instruments leading to *intuition* (emphasis here). When we reach the intuition, the means that were used to reach it are set aside; in cases where we cannot reach it, reasoning and discourse are left in the position of signposts that point towards an intuition that is out of reach. *Finally, if an intuition has been reached but is not a present mode of my consciousness, the maxims that I employ persist, as the results of operations that I carried out earlier, like Descartes's 'memories of ideas'* (emphasis here). (p. 246)

Herein lies the transcendental nature of our self-ideas. Its formation is the outcome of our desire to know ourselves and others in order to construct a more complete *version* of ourselves and the surrounding environment we have been "thrown into" since birth (Sartre 2018). The ideas emerge as an *extension* to what one perceives in the immediate surrounding world and in doing so are relational

to the concrete and situated. However, they are also 'independent' from the concrete because *situated* experiences are first 'subjectively contextualised' before they are 'geographically confined'. This means that all situated experiences contain an imprint of previously generated conclusions about our selves and the surrounding world. On that note, the circumstances are always 'catching up'¹⁰⁸ with an idea brought forth to colour circumstances in a particular way. As such, the self-idea transcends contextual particularity in that our situated identity claims are reflective of those insights or conclusions that have structured our subjectivity at the times of their (re)formulation and (re)affirmation (Lonergan 1992; Sartre 2018; Wilson 2016). Our conclusions about ourselves and the surrounding world of others are thus reflective of our individual-specific ontologies¹⁰⁹ because they shape everything we *can* see and experience¹¹⁰.

Research Questions

The postmodernist view that highlights identity as a discursive invention, as such, is incorrect in as much as our experiences of the world are shaped by our idea(s) of ourselves and others. In that light, the essentialist view is also inadequate as it does not acknowledge subjective constructs, such as self-ideas, as fundamental to perception and interpretation of immediate circumstances. These ideas (about our selves and others) do not have to be rendered consensually *legitimate, plausible and objective* to serve as a springboard for perception and interpretation and to provide an impetus for everyday agency. They

¹⁰⁸ By providing novel attributions of truth which we choose to deploy and participate within the outcome of which is the revision of our network and hierarchy of importance.

¹⁰⁹ A simple representation of this claim is the fact that every single participant in this study made sense, at length, of their professional identity in terms of their past, specifically, in terms of their family upbringing and their life as children (without being prompted by the researcher and the interview questions). This is not simply a retrospective reconstruction of past events into a meaningful whole since their negative situated experiences were also a reflection of this 'abstract' narrative or their existing body of knowledge and self-knowledge.

¹¹⁰ This is an ontological assertion and different to the argument of what we *want* to see and experience.

are ontological in that they presuppose our ability to talk of 'legitimacy', 'plausibility' and 'objectives'.

As acknowledged by Jung (1933):

Can experience with the objective world save us from subjective prejudgements? Is not every experience, even in the best of circumstances, to a large extent subjective interpretation? On the other hand, the subject also is an objective fact, a piece of the world. What issues from it comes, after all, from the universal soil, just as the rarest and strongest organism is nonetheless supported and nourished by the earth which we all share in common. It is precisely the most subjective ideas which, being closest to nature and to the living being, deserve to be called the truest. *But what is truth?* (emphasis here). (pp. 115-6)

Assuming a contrary position; one that downplays the importance of subjective self-constructs in shaping (personal) reality, one would not be able to conclude how we make sense of specific circumstances as there would be nothing against which we can render them meaningful or otherwise. As such, it is precisely because both essentialist and postmodernist theories of identity evade subjective constructs as credible foundations of (individual-specific) reality that their arguments ultimately end up 'alienating' the individual about whom they theorise (see Chapter Two and Three). As confirmed by Bateson (2002):

Experience of the exterior is always mediated by particular sense organs and neural pathways. To that extent, objects are my creation, and my experience of them is subjective, not objective. It is, however, not a trivial assertion to note that very few persons, at least in the occidental culture, doubt the objectivity of such sense data as pain or their visual images of the external world. Our civilisation is deeply based on such illusion. (pp. 28-9)

Considering the above, where the postmodernist view does *not* fall short (while the essentialist does) is when we attempt to consider whether our view of the world and ourselves can be characterised as a true and objective representation (better yet, a direct representation) of reality, *in general*. Grappling with the concept of universality we inadvertently come to a point of realising that our representation of the world and our self-conceptions are in the first instance subjective abstractions that (also) draw on a common stock of knowledge intersubjectively shared in specific communities of practice. In being subjective, however, one cannot assume their illusory (as recognised by Diver 2012) nature as such a position would suggest that only things that can be ‘measured’ objectively are worth analysing. Why, then, would there be a need to invent the concept of the microscope? And that is exactly what studies of self-identity have needed—a microscopic or nuanced view of everyday being-in-the-world of work the outcome of which is the realisation that our way of seeing the world is *largely* conditioned by who we ‘are’ (Jung 1933).

The preceding arguments thus assist with answering the study’s research questions:

1. How does one’s self-identity shape one’s situated professional experiences?

Answer: one’s self-identity shapes one’s situated experience by way of providing resources for interpretation of the situated circumstance which precedes the experience of a circumstance.

The findings highlight that there is a relationship between how one perceives a circumstance and how one experiences the same. As highlighted in the study’s findings, the subjective experience of circumstantial particularity is expressed as an articulation of a distinctive self-idea/identity. For example, when describing negative experiences, the delineated attributes embedded within the surrounding world were reflective of the perceived and/or anticipated ‘loss’ in their sense of self (for

instance, encapsulated in the perceived inability to realise their desires and goals) and not of 'objective' properties of the context of interaction encountered. On that note, even though the perceived or anticipated loss relates to 'objects in the world', such as a particular professional position, promotion and/or a desired way of life (for example, spending more time with the family), all descriptions emerge from a particular self-image (or lack thereof) which subsumes who one perceives to be and wants to become. This demonstrates that **3**) existing self-notions permit [only] for *certain* experiences and forms of agency (**aim 3**). As such, one's self-idea permits forms of interpretation of circumstantial particularity which shape how the interpreted circumstance is thus experienced (for example, as an enablement or a constraint to self-realisation). The relationship between self-idea/identity and situated experience, as such, is expressed as follows:

Self-idea ↔ Interpretation ↔ Perceived Circumstances ↔ Situated Experience

However, the relationship between the self-idea, interpretation and situated experience is not unidirectional in that the perceived circumstance and corresponding situated experience also affects how we self-express. As such, in the same way that our self-ideas provide resources for (interpretation of) situated experiences; the situated experience also affects *how* one's self-identity (or the self-idea) is thus (re)articulated to self and others. These arguments relate to the study's second research question:

2. How do one's professional experiences (re)shape the process of (re)articulating (professional) self-identity?

Answer: the (distinctive) self-idea/identity is rearticulated as a hierarchical arrangement of self-definitions when the subject renders the encountered circumstances as impediments to self-realisation.

The self-idea subsumes a network of self-definitions, goals and desires that are referential to one another. In case of Nick, for example, his identity of being 'adaptable' and 'flexible' (for instance, the ability to 'wear many hats') is related to his other self-definitions of 'being a hard worker' and 'emotionally astute' (for instance, the identity that is related to Nick's 'soft skills'). The sense of self is thus constituted by way of an in-order-to ontology (Heidegger 1953; Sartre 2018) between self-definitions and subjectively conceived pragmatic ends to which they relate. Their relationality (for instance, the relationality between one's goals and desires and one's self-definitions) suggests that the non-realisation of pragmatic ends inadvertently corrodes the plausibility of self-definitions that support them. For example, Nick's 'ultimate goal' of spending more time with the family (and the identity associated with this reality) would be risked in case of indubitability and corrosion of the 'hard worker' identity (and vice versa). On that note, to prevent the 'loss-of-self', the subjects rearrange their self-definitions in the order of preference so that some self-definitions are assigned more significance than others (in the life of *the identity seeking individual*), given *perceived* circumstances at hand. This insight highlights how **1)** how one's subjective constitution is shaped within the context of specific interpersonal arrangements (**aim 1**). For example, Nick will not sacrifice his 'hard worker' (nor will Mark) identity, in the same way that Margaret will not sacrifice her 'good communicator, personable and sociable' identity simply because these self-definitions provide the foundation for the participants' envisioned future self. On that note, by preserving the 'hard worker' identity--while downplaying the significance of the 'people's person' identity--Nick perpetuates the potentiality of realising his desire to 'spend more time with the family'. Furthermore, this highlights a relational ontology **2)** between one's subjective 'constitution' and everyday agency (**aim 2**). The situated experience, which emerges from the perceived circumstance, thus affects the process of (re)articulating one's self-identity in such a way

that the subject assigning weighting to pre-existing aspects of self so that the most significant self-attributes are reinstated at the ontological foundation of everyday agency. Therefore, given that the in-order-to ontology defines the relationship between facets of their self-idea(s), when fronted with (perceived) uncertainty and constraints, the subjects engage in a gradation of their 'subjective circumstance' (or subjective context) to preserve the most valued aspects of the self and to act on account of that new insight.

Conclusion

The chapter discussed the study's findings by reflecting on the theory used to analyse them. The philosophical implications of the study's findings and the effect they had on answering the research questions were highlighted. One of the philosophical implications of the study's findings is reflected in the nuanced argument for the process of forming and reforming one's self-idea. More specifically, the chapter has recognised the journey of one's self-idea as a process that begins with the subject's inability to shape the ideas that affect comportment and ends with the opportunity to make a choice that is in line with one's most significant aspects of being. On that note, recognising the ontological nature of one's self-idea, the chapter also demonstrates that the intentionality of one's self-idea is embedded in the necessity to maintain the legitimacy of the perceived surrounding world which plausibility is required for the self-idea to sustain itself (and vice versa). Finally, the chapter highlights that the distinctiveness of one's self-identity is not only embedded within the idiosyncratic conclusions drawn in situ but also, more importantly, it is an outcome of the distinctively constituted inner condition without which the subject would not be able to perceive and comprehend.

The Self as the Centre of the Universe

Introduction

The chapter will discuss the contributions to the existing body of self-identity literature. Drawing on the arguments foregrounded in the identity formation and identity work literature (outlined in chapter two and three), this chapter will seek to address the shortcomings that emanate from the literature's inability to conceive of a self-conscious distinctive self without imprisoning it in spheres of prescribed action and expectation. The chapter will first begin by extending the literature that overemphasizes the fragmented and predicate oriented characterisation of self-identity. The chapter will then move onto providing arguments for the distinctive and ontological nature of self-identity in the context of arguments that position self-identity as a discursive illusion. After establishing self-identity as a subject of sociality, the chapter will move onto explicating the philosophical arguments behind the dialogical relationship between the self and society. More importantly, this section of the chapter will demonstrate how both the self and society can be conceptualised as distinctive entities (of different order) which relationship is not defined by determinism. Finally, the chapter will provide philosophical arguments for the intentional nature of agency and in doing so highlight the continuous, multi-order and multidimensional nature of identity work.

Contributions

The existing gaps in the extant literature highlight dominant thematic disagreements (see Chapter Two and Three) between essentialist and poststructuralist positions. At the core of their argument is the disputed existence of a distinctive self and intentional agency. More specifically, the literature is unable to provide an inclusive rendition between **a)** the notion of the self that develops and the self that is experienced as coherent and continuous (by the self); **b)** between the sovereign self and the socialising power of structured role relationships and **c)**, between the distinctive or central self and the normalised ('social') self. These pervasive tensions in the extant literature are thus reducible to a single argument: one which cannot seem to obviate an explanation of a self-conscious distinctive self without imprisoning it in "spheres of prescribed action and expectation" (Cerulo 1997, p. 388). Considering the study's findings, these tensions will be addressed in the following pages that will (re)highlight the gap in the extant literature while also illuminating the study's contributions to the existing body of knowledge. The argument will be presented in the form of answers to contentious identity-related questions that are at the core of thematic disagreements that pervade the self-identity literature.

Is Identity a predicate of sociality or a purely situated and fragmented phenomena?

"Gap 1: Identity and the identity formation processes are conceived, in the extant literature, in light of a Cartesian split. This way of theorising begs for a more balanced ontological position and one that highlights a dialogical relationship between the subject and the object; the self and the other; the self and the pervading normative order. Focusing on the dialogical relationship between the self and other-as-representing-the-context permits for self-identity to be explored both as a *subject* as well as a predicate of interpersonal arrangements. This permits for a more

nuanced **1**) understanding of how one's subjective constitution¹¹¹ is shaped within the context of particular interpersonal arrangements (aim 1 of the study)." (p. 24)

The findings recognise that we do not experience the world *directly* (Peterson 2018). To perceive the world directly would mean to see all the world there is to see; all at once. "However, there is just too much of the world to see, just as there is too much past to remember" (Peterson 2018, p. 120). In general parlance, thus, "we restrict our limited vision and understanding to that which is of vital importance" (Peterson 2018, p. 120). This highlights that our 'image' of the world cannot be conceived irrespective of our 'image' of ourselves as what is vital and important to us implicitly presupposes our idea about our *self-worth* (Gill 2015).

The implications of these arguments are that they position the individual at the *centre* of their *own* (situated) professional 'experiences'. By 'centre' is meant two things: **1**) *first*, the subject is complicit in constructing the (professional) 'surrounding world' within which only particular experiences can be had. This becomes evident when one realises that for something (a thing, event or a person) to be described as an enablement or a constraint to self-realisation, it must stand in a relationship with our subjectively conceived pragmatic ends to be perceived as that which 'obstructs' or 'enables' (Archer 2010). The world we dwell within, therefore, engenders a particular creation and does so on the grounds of our *preconceived* ideas we hold about ourselves (which do not preclude what we want, what we do not want, what we desire and strive towards). On that note, *changes* in the 'external world', that is, *pressures from the external environment*, are not an independent phenomenon because "it is our own definitions of what constitutes our self-worth that determines which normative evaluations matter"

¹¹¹ The term 'subjective constitution', 'personal identity' and 'self-identity' will be used interchangeably since all are indicative of the contents of one's mind with respect to the perception of the self and the surrounding world (of others).

(Archer 2000, p. 219). More specifically, therefore, pressures from the 'surrounding world' and the effect they have on our sense of self, are in the first instance, self-mediated predicaments before they come to be addressed or analysed as indications of a 'clash' between 'objective' and 'diverging' properties of the self and society (or the society's normative order). On that note, the findings highlight that the image of a goal is ontologically prior to the particularity of the world since we first envision a particular version of ourselves (which includes our goals and desires) before the world 'populates itself' with obstacles and impediments.

Second, 2) the experiences of the surrounding world thus constructed are limited in that they are circumscribed by the boundaries of our self-images (or self-ideas). For example, the 'laziness' of others is only meaningful in terms of Nick's definition of 'hard work' which is founded on the content of his 'hard worker' identity. On that note, any claim, measurement or classification of one's environment, which inadvertently subsumes the general and specific other—as well as the context specific normative evaluations (Archer 2000)—emerges from the contents of one's *distinctive self-idea* since judgements can only be passed against things that are relevant and significant to the identity seeking subject. Subsequently, everyday heedful circumspection, that is, identity work, as such, is *limited* by this self-idea in that we can see in the world *exclusively* that which pertains to the boundaries of our self-knowledge. The findings therefore recognise that we develop an idea of ourselves which provides an ontological framework for the make-up of the surrounding world as well as for what we can see and experience in the surrounding world thus constructed.

The ontological primacy of our subjective constitutions therefore positions self-identity as a subjectum (Heidegger 1953) of contextual particularity. In addition to the epistemological sensibility of these

claims, the claims are also ontologically plausible since any discussion of a *predicate* must *phenomenally* presuppose a relational *subject* (Heidegger 1953; Sartre 2018). The implications of this are twofold: **1)** *first*, it adds to the predicate-oriented conceptualization of identity that dominates the postmodern identity literature (see Ahuja et al. 2018; Ahuja et al. 2019; Alvesson & Robertson 2015; Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Alvesson et al. 2008; Beech et al. 2016; Brown 2015; Brown 2017; Brown & Toyoki 2013; Driver 2012; Karreman & Alvesson 2001; Knights & Clarke 2017; Snow & Anderson 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003; Watson 2008). *Second*, **2)** positioning the self-idea idea as a subjectum of society (or an organization) recognises “identity as an issue central to understanding processes of social communication, negotiation, entrepreneurial behaviour, leading and following, decision-making, and strategizing” (Brown 2018, p. 11). In doing so, the findings answer calls made by Brown (2018) that urge ‘exploring rich possibilities of identity’ as a counter weight to approaches that are more content to treat identity as an exclusive by-product of interpersonal interaction. On that note, I contribute to the extant predicate-ordinated identity literature by highlighting that everyday acts of self-expression (that is, forms of actions and/or descriptions) *begin* with one’s self-idea, which subsumes all the that subject perceives herself to be and would like to become (**contribution one**).

On that note, since everyday heedful circumspection (also) *begins* with one’s self-idea, the findings highlight an *inherent* relationality between *different* identity positions separated by time and space. More specifically, positioning the self-idea as a subjectum of sociality suggests that there is an inherent relationality between different identity positions within the **1)** same context of interaction as well as **2)** between identity positions across different contexts of interaction. *First*, since the sensibility and meaning of ‘action’ in a particular context cannot obviate the ‘narrative structures of the self’, situated claims cannot be said to be random acts of self-expression. More specifically, given that our self-ideas

provide a circumscribed boundary within which only certain actions and experiences can take place, the totality of situated identity positions is more appropriately captured as a possibility of an individual-specific ontology (for instance, their self-ideas) than a *random* collection of acts and assertions. On that note, the relationality between different identity positions within the same context is founded on the realisation that nothing can be seen, perceived, comprehended or described unless done so from the springboard of self-knowledge that carves out a particular world from the vastness of indistinguishable reality.

Second, since every position is interdependent with the ‘ontological foundation’ of the self—that subsumes all the person ‘is’ and would like to ‘become’—there also exists an inherent relationality between ‘geographically dispersed’ identity claims. For example, the participants’ existing professional self-definitions are founded on the self-idea that emerged from without the particular context in question: for Nick, the notion of ‘hard work’ was appropriated from his father’s way of life; Mark’s desire to stand out and be really good at something emerged from being raised in family with seven siblings; while Margaret’s desire to run her own projects and exercise her creativity and project management skills are related to her dad’s success in property development industry. More importantly, given the ontological primacy of self-referential/reinforcing nature of perception, the self-definitions ‘derived from without’ were further deployed in classifying the comportment of the subjects’ co-workers. For example, even though integrated within the self-idea in the past, the ‘hard worker’ self-notion served Nick as an interpretive mechanism deployed in classifying his and the comportment of other organizational members *in the present* (organization). The same can be said of

other participants' whose self-ideas continued to serve as a measuring stick for enveloping reality¹¹². Therefore, the findings highlight that situated agency, irrespective of its geographical locality, emerges from the subjective content that subsumes the subject's experienced past and envisioned future. On that note, given that contextual particularity is *contingent upon facets of the self-idea that traverse the particularity of space and time*, situated self-attributions cannot be interpreted as isolated events or deeds.

The *transcendental nature of the self-idea*, however, does not promote a reified view of the self (for instance, one's fixed personality) and the surrounding world as suggested by proponents of essentialism (see Chapter Two and Three for arguments). This is because, as highlighted in the study's findings, the constructed narrative of the self is an accumulative phenomenon emerging from the plethora of insights generated through comparison between different things, events and people one encounters throughout life. On that note, situated identity positions are contingent upon the self-idea that cannot be said to reflect a single context exclusively since its 'amorphous mass' remains subject to revision and change (by way of new insights) respective to the 'in situ' demands of the *perceived* normative order (Archer 2000; Archer 2003). For example, prior to immersing herself in the partner organisation, the plausibility of Margaret's 'good' communication skills and her overall 'project management' identity was not contingent upon bureaucratic requirements such as job titles. On that note, one realizes that self-identity cannot be perceived as either a subject or a predicate of sociality exclusively given that the

¹¹² For instance, Margaret's perception of what constitutes good project management skills and people skills and her judgement of her colleague's performance emerged in relation to her appropriation of such knowledge from her father, before starting work at the partner organisation. Mark's need to 'go over and above' in fulfilling his professional responsibilities emerged in relation to his desire to distinguish himself both professionally and socially considering his past and his life of living in a large family with seven siblings. Subsequently, the perception he had of his performance affected how he defined the performance of others in that no employee 'was doing what he does'.

self-idea is an amalgam of both—one brings to (perceived) circumstantial particularity an idea about oneself which get altered through interaction, albeit *not completely*. Such a realization, however, is *only* attained when theorizing of self-identity *begins* with the subjective possibility of circumstantial particularity. On that note, in the same way that one cannot speak of intersubjectivity without considering it as an ‘offspring’ of subjectivity; the findings highlight that a discussion of a predicate-oriented, fragmented and precarious nature of situated identity positions is only sensible when recognised as being a reflection of a distinctive and enduring *subject*.

The findings therefore extend arguments founded on the contributions of role identity theory (Snow & Anderson 1987) and do so by suggesting that one’s self-identity is indeed shaped, although *not bound*, by ‘structured role relationships’ within which the individual participates. In doing so, the study bridges the ‘chasm’ which formed in response to the literatures’ inability to conceive of a self-conscious distinctive self without imprisoning it in “spheres of prescribed action and expectation” (Cerulo 1997, p. 388). More importantly, given that ‘contextual particularity’ of identity is nothing other than a synchronic reflection of a diachronic self-idea¹¹³, the study provides a more enduring rendition of pre-existing self-notions which ‘persistence’ has been undermined by proponents who recognise identity as a ‘precarious accomplishment’ (Ahuja et al. 2018; also see Becker et al. 1961; Diver 2012 Knights & Clarke 2017; Pratt et al. 2006; Snow & Anderson 1987). More specifically, highlighting how pre-existing self-notions serve as resources into situated identity positions, the study challenges the literature that recognises discursive resources as exclusive antecedents of situated identity claims (in particular, see Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016; Brown 2017; Knights & Clarke 2017). On that note, by arguing that

¹¹³ Otherwise, claiming that identity positions are exclusively disparate and situated phenomena (devoid of a foundation that connects them) would be akin to claiming that the situation has borne the criteria for understanding and speech ‘by itself’ and separate to the minds of interlocutors.

'context-specific-identity' is only a situated facet of the subject's self-idea *that traverses the particularity of space and time*, the study contributes to literature that recognises identity merely as a temporary fix, rarely consistent and generally fluid (Karreman & Alvesson 2001), only "concocted by individuals to impose a degree of coherence in the face of assorted vulnerabilities" (Brown 2018, p. 10). Therefore, highlighting the enduring and personal aspect (that is, intentionally appropriated) of self-identity, the study represents a counter weight to the literature that emphasises the impersonal (discourse-focused), fragmented (or uprooted) and precarious rendition of self-identity (**contribution 2**) (see Ahuja et al. 2018; Beech et al. 2016; Cerulo 1997; Driver 2012; Knights & Clarke 2017).

Is (distinctive) self-identity a discursive illusion?

Gap 2: The identity politics and identity formation literature cannot seem to explain, ontologically, the possibility for a distinctive self and the distinctive other in the context of liquid modernity. (p. 29)

The sheer unpredictability of interpersonal interactions highlights that our subjectively conceived 'maps' of the world are not objective representations of reality. The subjectivity of it all, that is, the limitations of our 'interpretive map' (that is, our self-idea) are evident when we come across 'novelty' (Heidegger 1953; Peterson 1999). In this case, being 'a hard worker' or 'good at one's job' also entails working hard at one's inadequacies of 'people management', for example, which suddenly emerge as an inseparable (although previously insignificant) attribute of the self (In the case of Nick), *given perceived circumstances at hand*. This suggests that our developed self-idea presupposes, rather ontologically, its own limitations respective to the boundaries of the *incomplete* nature of knowledge and self-knowledge upon which it is based. As affirmed by Heidegger (1953), "taking care of things

always already occurs on the basis of familiarity with the world” (p. 75). On that note, as highlighted in the study’s findings, the specificity of novelty is, therefore, highly personal since subjects’ *grasping* of novelty emerges from the soil of (incomplete and limiting) individual-specific concerns, desires, needs, objectives and goals. As noted by Peterson (1999):

Our hopes, desires and wishes—which are always *conditional* (and conditioned – emphasis here)—define the context which the things and situations we encounter take on determinate significance; define even the context within which we understand ‘thing’ or ‘situation’. (p. 34)

The grasping of novelty, therefore, occurs from within the limits of all of that which is known by the subject. This suggests that novelty is defined in opposition to that which is known because otherwise, ‘novel things’ would not mean anything to the subject and meaningless things would inadvertently exist outside of our perceptual boundaries. On that note, in the same way that our self-ideas ontologically presuppose their own limits, every situated *known* identity claim also entails its *unknown* negative. The *first 1)* implication of this realisation is that it is in the relationship between a position and its negative (known and the unknown) that one can delineate the boundaries of one’s knowledge and self-knowledge. Better yet, the relationship between the known and the unknown aspects of reality represent the boundaries of all of that which can be perceived by the individual. More importantly, however, the *second 2)* implication of this is that it is because of ‘the nature of two different things’ (Bateson 2002) (known and unknown [by the subject], for example) that one can even talk about the act of perceiving and comprehending. As noted by Bateson (2002), “*relationship is always a product of double description* (emphasis in the original)”. Subsequently, since two indistinguishable things are not two things, and one thing alone might not even be (Bateson 2002; Peterson 1999), it is precisely because

our self-ideas bring forth limitations that one can be said to have an ability to see and think about different things 'in the external world'. On that note, it can be said that *things (and people) are perceptible through their imminent distinction*, in the same way that self and others can be distinguished from the limits of their respective knowledge and self-knowledge. As noted by Schutz (1967):

In the everyday world in which both the I and the Thou turn up, not as transcendental but as psychophysical subjects, there corresponds to each stream of lived experience of the I a stream of subjective experience of the Thou. This, to be sure, refers back to my own stream of lived experience, just as the body of the other person to my body. During this process, the peculiar reference of my own ego to the other's ego holds, in the same sense that my stream of lived experience is for you that of the other person, just as my body is another's body for you. (p. 102)

The significance of these arguments is twofold: first, **1)** it is by virtue of our incomplete knowledge and self-knowledge *that we can self-define* (and define others) since drawing distinction between all the things that matter in the life of the subject is an ontological aspect of being-in-the-world of work. More specifically, as highlighted in the findings, it is by virtue of our incomplete knowledge and self-knowledge that we attribute degrees of valance to our self-definitions, goals and desires. For example, Nick's most cherished aspect of hard work was used as a measuring stick for classifying his own and the comportment of his co-workers. More importantly, by exalting the 'hard work' self-definition to the apex of his hierarchy-of-significance, Nick (re)defined himself and others by virtue of the insignificance of 'everything else' (for instance, peoples' skills) other than hard work. Therefore, the hierarchy-of-significance within the subject's self-idea(s) foregrounds one's ability for distinctive descriptions. More

specifically, the incomplete nature of our self-ideas permits for articulating preference without which one could not speak of his *own* self-identity and the 'identity' of others. As affirmed by Peterson (1999):

This means that *categorization* (emphasis in the original), with regards to value—determination (or even perception) of what constitutes a single thing, or a class of things—is the act of *grouping together according to implications for behavior* (emphasis in the original). (p. 9)

On that note, **2)** the distinction or difference drawn between things perceived (and compared) also produces a 'segmented' world, therefore; one that is populated by things that carry *graded* significance to the identity seeking individual. Subsequently, it can be said that the graded (or tiered) attribution of significance to existing self-notions also transpires to things described in the external world: the subjects delineate properties of the 'external' world with (degrees of) higher and lower significance for their self-realisation. The limiting and incomplete nature of our ideas (of self and others) thus brings to surface the *distinctive* 'hierarchy-of-significance' (in meaning) the purpose of which is to foreground the pre-requisites for everyday action: subjects act within the particular context of interpersonal interaction by virtue of that which matters the most to the identity seeking individual(s). As noted in the study's findings, the perceived (in)completeness in the subjects' self-idea(s) act as precursor to agency that seeks to protect the most cherished self-beliefs (*at the expense of others*). For example, all the subjects considered resigning from the partner organisation to preserve their most valued concerns, goals and desires. On that note, it can be said that the incomplete nature of our self-ideas permits for meaningful *action* because it enables one to navigate between more or less significant things in the 'external world'. As noted by Peterson (1999), "thinking also and more fundamentally is *specification of value* (emphasis in the original), specification of implications for behaviour" (p. 9). On that note, since inaction proceeds

from a lack of meaning (of things), the findings therefore highlight that the limiting nature of our self-ideas frees action from the burden of insignificance. As noted by Archer (2010):

Increasingly, agents navigate by the compass of their own personal concerns. This growing reliance on their personal powers—whether deployed individually or collectively—has as its counterparts the demise of the generalized other and the diminution of socialization as a quasi-unilateral process. (p. 284)

On that note, it is precisely the limitations in our ‘interpretive maps’ that demonstrate the *ontological nature* of the self-ideas since a ‘fragmented’ and an *uprooted* self would not impose a ‘weighting of importance’ upon the self and the surrounding world on the basis of which it can act in particular ways (such as, for example, choosing to abstain from particular contexts or interactions¹¹⁴). As noted previously, this was evident in participants’ speech since they all expressed willingness to undertake measures (such as finding a new job) aimed at preserving their most valued concerns: Mark would find another job where he would be more valued; Margaret would start her own business to take advantage of her most valued asset of people skills and creativity, while Nick would ‘just go back and work for himself’ to preserve his ‘hard-worker’ identity. Therefore, since there is no ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel 1989) “there is *only* (emphasis in the original) a perspective seeing, *only* (emphasis in the original) a perspective ‘knowing’” (Gadamer 1975, p. 364), the study highlights that the *distinctive* self-idea is *an enabling factor of any agential enterprise* in so much as its limitations are a prerequisite for our ability to think, speak and act (**contribution 3**). Subsequently, albeit contended as illusory, as Driver (2013) and

¹¹⁴ It is important to note at this juncture that all three participants have resigned since the researcher has exited the partner organisation. This affirms that one’s self-identity (self-definitions, goals and desires) cannot be considered as illusory since it is by virtue of its content that subjects make decisions which shape materiality—all subjects have shaped the context of interaction in the partner organisation by choosing to not participate within it any longer.

many others would suggest (see Knights & Clarke 2017), the study highlights that our self-idea represents a map which is superimposed over the world in such a way that it permits not only activity but more importantly, activity that reflects a *distinctive subject*. These arguments therefore add to the literature which recognises identity studies as doomed attempts “to turn the individual into a definable object that knows who it is and what it wants” (Brown 2018, p. 10). More importantly, by highlighting *the ontological nature of our self-ideas*, this study contributes to literature which promotes an inherent ‘lack in human subjectivity’ (see Braidotti 2011; Lacan 2006) on account of which it recognises that “individualistic preoccupation with, and attachment to, identity as futile and often self-defeating means of rendering the self stable and secure” (Knights & Clarke 2017, p. 340). More specifically, by demonstrating that the ontological nature of limits in our understandings of the self and the surrounding world is a prerequisite of *preferential agency*, the study adds to arguments which contend that identities are nothing other than ways of “anthropocentric deceit (and conceit) that we control our lives” (Backer 2011, p 55). Therefore, because our self-ideas provide *rues for perception*, this contribution extends arguments that suggest our preoccupations with identity are merely a strategy deployed to deal with anxiety and insecurity (Knights & Clarke 2017) (also see Lacan, Fink et al. 2006, Braidotti 2011)

On that note, rather paradoxically, it is because of the incomplete view we have of the self and the surrounding world (of others) that one can have the capacity to shape oneself and materiality. As Archer (2010) suggests, “these very different forms of social orientation are, indeed, *interior to subjects* (emphasis in the original) and predispose them toward equally different social trajectories” (p. 300). Hence, the illusory nature of self-identity persists, albeit in abstraction and only if one attempts to level down one’s self-definitions to being an attribute of discourse as opposed to being intentionally

appropriated on the grounds of rules of our limiting self-ideas. On that note, by nuancing how identity is (re)formed (for example, by way of ongoing insights emerging from the soil of limiting knowledge and self-knowledge), the study addresses what Knights and Clarke (2017) refer to as the 'paradox of identity' and does so by providing a bridge between positivism and interpretivism (and constructivism) whose respective theorists have not been able to conceive of an enduring self that *simultaneously* changes and develops. The significance of this realisation is that one cannot discuss a 'fragile self, vulnerable to implosion' (Watts 1951, Becker 2010, Becker 2011) without first acknowledging that the self is a stratified phenomenon subsuming attributes of graded significances. More specifically, because our self-identities are organised in the form of a hierarchy-of-significance, by virtue of which we embody preferences in our words and actions, the study highlights the possibility for both permanent and impermanent facets of our self-identities. Furthermore, by highlighting that disposal of less significant self-notions inadvertently serves the preservation of that which matters the most in the life of the subject, the study extends the literature which cannot seem to conceive of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) without sacrificing the possibility of a distinctive and discernible subject (see Braidotti 2011; Driver 2013; Knights & Clarke 2017; Lacan 2006). On that note, by highlighting the stratified nature of our self-ideas, the study therefore permits conceiving of self-identity as both a stable and ephemeral phenomenon which bridges the chasm between literature that support either its enduring (Archer 2000) *or* self-defeating attributes (see Driver 2012; Knights & Clarke 2017).

Is the self in a dichotomous relationship with ‘society’?

Gap 3a in the extant self-identity literature would, as such, be embedded in the failure to delineate.... the dialogical relationship between the conscious agent ... and the *perceived* world of subjects and objects. (p. 35)

The ontological nature of the existing self-idea is, however, not analogous with Rene Descartes’ adage—*Cogito, ergo sum*: I think therefore I am—since there exist many factors which impinge *objectively* upon a person (Archer 2000). As noted by Archer (2000), “the environment at any time was either dangerous or it was not, and this was a matter of objectivity for it was gauged by whether it damaged our bodies or was benign towards them – something which could be ascertained medically, that is without resort to human subjectivity” (pp. 215-6). Subsequently, it is important to point out that the matter of self-identity *within* a specific contextual arrangement—that this study seeks to investigate—is not one of *first-order reference* (Archer 2000; Peterson 1999), that is, one that aims to delineate ‘objective’ attributes of the structure/agency confluence. On that note, in the context of this study, the relationship between self-identity and sociality is *not* akin to ascertaining whether a blow to the head with a sharp object is likely to produce pain but rather, and more importantly, whether and in what way such an event *matters to us as subjects*. As affirmed by Bateson (2002)

The mind contains no things, no pigs, no people, no midwife toads, or what have you, only ideas (i.e., new of difference), information about “things” in quotes, always in quotes. Similarly, the mind contains no time and space, only ideas of “time” and “space”. It follows that the boundaries of the individual, if real at all, will be not spatial boundaries, but something more like the sacks that represent *sets* (emphasis in the original) in set theoretical diagrams or the bubbles that come out of the mouths of the characters in comic strips. (p. 123)

The implication of focusing on the meaning ascribed to things, events and people is threefold: **1) first**, the study contends that there is no single discernible and universal normative order within a particular context of interaction with which the individual 'interacts'. For example, participants' self-definitions of being 'a hard-worker' (Nick), 'good-communicator' (Margaret) and a 'miracle-worker' (Mark) encapsulated a particular specificity of meaning in that the contents of these self-definitions could not be regarded as reflecting 'universal' normative evaluations¹¹⁵. More specifically, all participants define the notion of 'people person' in reference to their idiosyncratic concerns: Nick as one's ability to make people laugh; Margaret, as indicative of one's non-confrontational communication skills while Mark saw it in one's ability to anticipate needs and desires of co-workers and clients.

A blow to the head with a sharp object will (objectively) produce pain; however, the experience of such an event will depend on the *value assigned to it by the subject*: for some it will bring forth feelings of shame respective to their "sense of dignity, of worth, of how we are seen by others" (Archer 2000, p. 216) while for others, not in the slightest. By the same token, therefore, a passing comment from the boss (for instance, 'how are you going with the project?') will evoke *different thoughts* for different individuals; the specificity of which will pertain to the concerns the subjects seek to preserve; for example: for some, it will highlight all the ways they have *not* done the right thing while for others, all the ways they have gone over and above. Some, on the other hand, might see the question as an example of exorbitant control and micromanagement which is taken as 'proof' that time is ripe for a career change. Therefore, the mere existence of 'error', 'misunderstanding' and 'disagreements'

¹¹⁵ One cannot even contend that there is a 'universal' definition of particular discourses within a specific contextual arrangement as that is suggestible of a closed system of organising that cannot be said to signify a modern organisation (Burr 2002).

suggests that ‘what we see depends on where we sit’ (Clegg 1975) thus instantiating a ‘multiverse’ of normative orders within a single domain of interpersonal interaction. As noted by Burr (2002):

.... each person perceives the world differently and *actively creates their own meanings from events* (emphasis here). *The ‘real’ world is therefore a different place for each of us* (emphasis here).

On that note, **2)** the study contends that a society, a structure or an institution and the self cannot ‘interact’ unless they do so through the *perceived meaning* of the institutions’ normative orders. Therefore, if one is to talk about a relationship between self and sociality, it would be more appropriate to do so in terms of the ‘self with a head full of self-referential interpretations of the normative order’ and the ‘other with a head full of self-referential interpretations of the normative order’ since sociality or norms ‘representing’ sociality do not have the capacity to ‘interact’ unless we anthropomorphise entities or concepts. For example, the justice system and the institution of courts produce legislative measures that restrict certain kinds of behaviour; however, these legal institutions do not ‘interact’ with individuals per se in as much as they only *restrict agency that individuals care about*. As asserted by Archer (2002) elsewhere, “there are evaluative standards, but their effect is dependent upon our feeling bad if we fall short of them and good if we live up to them” (p. 218). Therefore, the study highlights that, irrespective of the fact that the normative order of the partner organization (for example, what is considered as ‘good people skills’, ‘good communication skills’ and ‘good performance’) ‘predates’ the study’s participants, it is the subject that brings norms into effect *by grasping their particularity in terms of their self-idea* and acting in light of that insight and understanding. Subsequently, acting upon one’s perception of the normative order materialises the ‘interaction’ between self and society that has *first* occurred in abstraction, that is, within the subject’s (reflexive) interpretation of a circumstance. As noted by Schutz (1945): “reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life. The origin of *all*

reality is subjective (emphasis here), whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real” (p. 1). Therefore, the study purports that although “structure predates the actions that transform it” (Archer 2010, p. 275), their confluence *begins with one’s subjectively constituted view of the self and surrounding world of others* because ‘the causal power of social form is *mediated* (emphasis here) through social agency’ (Bhaskar 1989).

Third, since the study ‘relocates’ the confluence between self and society from discourse to one’s subjective constitution, the ‘appropriation’ of normative tenets cannot be said to be **3) direct** because it remains subject to the individual-specific hierarchy-of-significance which instantiates preference and choice as an everyday aspect of subjects’ being-in-the-world of work (see previous section). This suggests that the normative order gets to be *filtered through* subjectivity before becoming a part of our pre-existing ideas (about the self and the surrounding world of others¹¹⁶). More specifically, this means that the classification (and adoption) of the ‘encountered’ norms is done by virtue of ‘orders of significance(s)’ they pose to the identity seeking individual. Subsequently, these realisations have numerous implications on how one perceives the self and society (and their relationship): **a) first**, it positions the individual as distinctive from society and does so on the grounds of intentionality and personal discretion that subjects exercise when ‘weeding through’ different orders of significance they assign to things, events and people. As asserted by Muller, Sankaran et al. (2015), “it cannot be assumed that agents will completely behave in accordance with all conditioning influences” (p. 87). This was highlighted in the study’s findings when all subjects sought to preserve the most cherished aspects of

¹¹⁶ As it was highlighted in the study’s findings, the participants defined themselves *in relation to* the contexts they inhabited, professional or otherwise (for instance, the family context). The self-definitions that were appropriated were further ‘embellished’ within the partner organization with additional, that is, previously unconsidered reference point for their identities.

self-worth by disposing of those they previously adopted, from within the context of the partner organisation, as significant for self-realisation. *Second, b)* it colours the self and society as two different entities, albeit *not separate*, that through their imminent distinction can be said to ‘interact’. It does so by demonstrating that the particularity of one’s self-identity cannot preclude the import of social normativity; however, this import is distinctive (and personal) since its ‘appropriation’ emerges from the soil of one’s (stratified)¹¹⁷ ideas which bestow ‘graded significance’ upon the perceived surrounding world. As recognised by Margaret, “her superior project management skills have nothing to do with her inability to complete ‘mundane’ administrative tasks”. Thus, by suggesting that norms can be adopted, *but not completely*, and that the self is a representation of society, *but not entirely*, the argument maintains distinction in the respective domains (the self and society) the necessity of which precedes one’s ability to speak of their *dialogical*, as opposed to unilateral and deterministic, relationship **(contribution 4)**.

In light of the above, it is important to recognise that the preceding arguments do not aim to instantiate a deity-like disposition of the self-idea, while downplaying or avoiding addressing the effect particular contextual arrangements have on the (re)formulation of participants’ self-idea(s). However, in order to understand how contextual arrangements can affect the (re)formation of one’s identity, the literature has had to be more specific as to ‘where’ this relationship occurs. *First, 1)* by demonstrating that norms have to be first recognised as norms before they can be said to have an effect on the subject, the study demonstrates the significance of individual-specific views (of the self and the surrounding world of others) *for sustaining objectives of institutions*. By highlighting the mutually reinforcing or symbiotic

¹¹⁷ Stratified by virtue of significance the encapsulated self-definitions carry in the life of the identity seeking individual.

relationship between self and society, the study suggests that subjects evoke 'oppressive' working arrangements, for example, by experiencing them as such. On that note, although there *persists* a social order 'external' to the individual, "there cannot be a sense of remorse without the personal acceptance that I have done something wrong" (Archer 2000, p. 217). This contribution extends studies of managerial identities (Trethewey 1999, Thomas and Davies 2005), specifically Foucauldian feminist theorists (Weedon 1987, Butler 2011), that contend that subjects are at the (exclusive) mercy of "gendered discourses that constrain women's professional identities" (Trethewey 1999, p. 423). More generally, the study extends the literature which, in leveraging subject/object binary thinking when conceiving of the relationship between the self and society, cannot avoid reducing identities to "effects of relations of power which operate variously to seduce, insinuate, insist, restrict or even coerce both people's identity options and their choices" (Brown 2018, p. 14; also see Koveshnikov et al. 2016).

Second, 2) by demonstrating that norms are recognised as norms because they stand in a relationship with the particularity of the subject's self-idea, the study delineates a *distinction between the subject's intentions and institutional objectives*. As affirmed by Bhaskar (quoted in Archer 2010, p. 275), "people and society.... do not constitute two moments of the same process; rather they refer to radically different things". That said, the relationship between self and society would not be possible without the normative order but in so much as it needs to be first experienced (grasped or perceived) before one can talk of discernible properties in both domains (self and society). Simply stated, the study contends that self and society would remain indistinguishable if social norms were 'alluded by personal significance'. On that note, the study demonstrates that the question is not whether the external environment can exert pressure to modify and control behaviour—by way of conditioning action "from accessibility of resources to the prevalence of beliefs" (Archer 2010, p. 277)—but rather *how* such

'control measures' are perceived and subsequently acted-upon by the subjects. Therefore, by highlighting that the relationship between the persisting normative order and the subject occurs on the grounds of (self-)preference, which seeks to preserve the most valued self-notions, the study conserves the subject's capacity for discretion and choice without doing away with *the effect of* 'political processes and power constellations' (Koveshnikov et al. 2016). More specifically, by suggesting that 'interactions' between individuals and 'societies' must be understood in light of the subjects' *selective adoption* of normative orders, the study provides a 'roadmap' out of 'central conflation'¹¹⁸(Archer 2015, Archer et al. 2015) which either renders the self and society as inseparable (by virtue of amalgamated action), or celebrates their deterministic, as opposed to dialogical, relationship. On that note, the study provides a bridge between arguments which contend "individuals are produced by discourses and organisational processes" and arguments that assume "that individuals have considerable agency in matters of identity" (Brown 2018, p. 14). In doing so, the study answers calls made by Brown (2018) which have sought for a more balanced inquiry into self-identity aimed at producing "synergies between different design and theoretical perspectives" (p. 15)

Is identity-work a discontinuous and a single-dimensional predicament?

Gap 3b in the extant self-identity literature would, as such, be embedded in the failure to delineate agency as intentional and proactive, emerging from ... a 'head full of *pre-existing ideas*' ... (p. 35)

¹¹⁸ Central conflation is a term used (Archer, 2010) for describing the pragmatists' conceptualisation of the relation between structure and agency that seeks to emphasise their non-distinction, rendering them inseparable by virtue of amalgamated action that precludes the examination of their interplay. In other words, the society is an amalgam of each individual action (Giddens 2013) while on the other hand, the individual can also be reduced to sociality.

The findings highlight that identity work is an ongoing, continuous, multilocal and a multidimensional¹¹⁹ predicament (**contribution 5 and 6**). However, before making claims that highlight the ‘proactive’ nature of identity work, it is important to explicitly elucidate how the study’s findings have permitted such conclusions.

The fact that the relationship between contexts and action begins with the *meaning ascribed* (by the subject) to pervading normative order (see previous section) inadvertently attends to whether the ‘influences of the social order upon agency should be located *fully within agents or entirely outside them* (emphasis in the original)’ (Archer 2010, p. 273). It does so by suggesting that the first phenomenon of interpersonal interaction is one of self-reference since for something to be perceived, it must stand in a *relationship* with our existing self-knowledge. As affirmed by Schutz (1945, p. 1), “to call a thing real means that this thing stands in a certain relation to ourselves”. As highlighted in the study’s findings, although participants’ utterances foregrounded epistemic variety, that is, although their descriptions highlighted a difference in the way participants defined themselves, ontologically, their perception followed a phenomenal uniformity¹²⁰ that at its core has the *distinctive self-idea* as a *subject of everyday being-in-the-world of work*. This means a thing or an event or a person rises out of inconspicuousness by being *rendered* meaningful by the subject before ‘becoming’ a matter of indifference to that person. As affirmed by Sartre (2018), “we choose the world – not in its in-itself constructions, but in its meaning – by choosing ourselves” (p. 606). On that note, by beginning our everyday heedful circumspection with the existing self-idea, or better yet, comprehending and perceiving through our self-idea, one comes to understand that the structure of ‘reality’, or the social

¹¹⁹ Meaning it can encapsulate a self-affirmation and a self-negation, simultaneously.

¹²⁰ Self-referencing/reinforcing/preserving forms of perception.

order, is founded on the particularity of views we have about ourselves and the surrounding world of others. As noted by Burr (2002):

.... Each of us develops a system of dimensions and meaning, which he calls 'constructs'. We perceive the world in terms of these constructs and our actions, although never predictable, can be understood in light of our construal of the world. Everyone construes the world differently, so in this sense we each inhabit different worlds, although it is possible for us to gain some appreciation of others' constructions... (p. 19)

However, since the origin of all reality is subjective (Schutz 1945, 1), its *integrity*, therefore, is not permanent. As affirmed by Burr (2002), "we have the capacity to change our own constructions of the world and thereby to create new possibilities" (p. 19). This has numerous implications for what one defines as being the 'primordial purpose' of being-in-the-world. *First, 1*) because we perceive with our self-idea, it can be said that the 'familiarity' of the external world is dependent on the integrity, that is, on the truth and plausibility of the subject's self-definitions, goals and desires. For example, as highlighted in the findings, when our goals are brought into question, that is, when the context of interaction is rendered as constraining self-realisation, the self-definitions that support them are also rendered indubitable. As affirmed by Archer (2003), "[commentaries] are thus relational to something, which is what gives them their emergent character, and that something is our own concerns which make a situation a matter of non-indifference to a person" (p. 195). Herein lies the motivational significance of being-in-the-world, because for something to be rendered as true and plausible representations of reality, we first have to ensure the integrity of our 'interpretive schema' (Peterson 1999) (or the network-of-significance of self-definitions, goals and desires) upon which our classification

is based. On that note, given that our ability to perceive and comprehend is founded on the integrity of our self-definitions, goals and desires, **2)** there exists a pre-reflexive modality of heedful circumspection that 'affirm[s] immediately the reality of all that is conceived' (Schutz 1945, p. 1) to foreground one's capacity for perception. Subsequently, it can be said 'active exploration' emerges from the *pre-ontological desire* to maintain the integrity of the network-of-significance without which the self and the surrounding world would not exist as two discernible entities. As aptly depicted by Wilson (2016):

As Dr. Leonard Orr has noted, the human mind behaves as if it were divided into two parts, the Thinker and the Prover. The Thinker can think about virtually anything.... As psychiatrists and psychologists have often observed (much to the chagrin of their medical colleagues), Thinker can think itself sick, and can even think itself well again. The Prover is a much simpler mechanism. It operates on one law only: Whatever the Thinker thinks the prover Proves... If the thinker thinks the sun moves around the earth, the Prover will obligingly organize all perceptions to fit that thought; if the thinker changes its mind and decides the earth moves around the sun, the Prover will reorganize the evidence... Of course, it is fairly easy to see that other people's minds operate this way; it is comparatively much harder to become aware that one's own mind is working that way. (pp. 2-3)

Therefore, the findings highlight that situated self-expression and ongoing descriptions of the 'surrounding world' are contingent upon the ontological necessity to *preserve* our self-knowledge. The stratified ontology of heedful circumspection therefore suggests that the domain of discursive concordance (and symbolic interactionism) (Brown 2015) is not the only domain of identity work. More specifically, the significance of the relationship between the *integrity* of our self-ideas and the *integrity* of the social order suggests that that the first domain of identity work is not interpersonal but rather intrapersonal in that the subject first needs to see in the external world that which affirms one's sense

of self before it can have the capacity to negotiate the self *in* discourse. This contribution adds to the narrow and taken for granted assumptions which recognise that identities are exclusively “formed through soliloquy and in relation to others through dialogical processes” (Brown 2018., p. 10) (also see Kuhn 2006, Boussebaa and Brown 2017). On that note, since ongoing perception and interpretation is presupposed by the integrity of the *stratified* nature of significance inherent in our self-ideas, the findings highlight the *multilocal nature of identity work* (**contribution 5**) and suggests that the process of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and and/or revising one’s self-notions is not exclusively circumscribed by dialogue (with others) since it first emerges from the subliminal preservation of pre-existing (self-)tendencies. On account of this realisation, the study adds to the literature that ‘seeks to account more fully for the *external* (emphasis here) aspect of identity work’ (Brown 2015, p. 24). In doing so, the study addresses the ‘focal area of contention’ (Brown 2015, p. 24) which disputes the possibility of identity work in ‘run-of-the-mill events’ (Brown 2015, p. 24). More importantly, by moving the origin of identity work from the domain of discursive concordance to the ‘intra-psychic domain’ (Brown 2018), the study celebrates the (pre-reflexive and) ongoing nature of identity work and in doing so contributes to scholars who “have preferred to attend to identity work that occurs in particularly demanding situations or at times of significant transition” (Brown 2015, p. 25) (also see Ibarra 1999, Beyer and Hannah 2002, Collinson 2003, Kaufman and Johnson 2004). As affirmed by Sartre (2018):

Thus, the *first phenomenon* (emphasis here) of being-in-the-world is the original relation between the totality of the in-itself or world and my detotalized totality: I choose myself in my entirety in the world in its entirety. And just as I come *from* (emphasis in the original) the world *to* (emphasis in the original) a particular *this* (emphasis in the original), I come from myself as a detotalized totality to

the sketch of one of my particular possibilities, since I can only grasp a particular this against the ground of the world in the circumstance of a particular project of myself. (p. 603)

The pre-reflexive and ongoing nature of identity work does not presuppose permanent boundaries of our interpretive schema, however. The significance of this realisation is twofold: **1) first**, it positions identity work as an ontological precursor to the emergence of the 'unknown'. Said in a different way, one first has to compare two things known before one realises unknown aspects of the (known) things compared. As acknowledged by Peterson (1999), "what is novel is of course dependent on what is known—is necessarily defined in opposition to what is known" (p. 19). Therefore, given that every position entails its negative (Sharp 1991), the findings highlight that identity work precedes the emergence of novelty, in the same way that it serves the induction of familiarity and coherence. This adds to the literature that invokes a separation between identity work and 'external' tensions and pressures. More specifically, it contributes to the literature that positions structural changes as ontologically prior to actions that sustain the particularity of the normative order. On that note, by highlighting that identity work, which essentially mean thinking about the self and others, is complicit in evoking the complexity in the surrounding world (by, for example, perceiving things previously unconsidered), the study extends the largely anti-humanist literature that dichotomises agency from society and in doing so anthropomorphises structures and discourses as autonomous entities ('capable of exerting' pressures).

On that note, *second*, the findings nuance identity work **2)** on the basis of degrees of choice that can be exercised by the subject. For example, by being complicit in the emergence of novelty, identity work serves to 'expand the domain of relevance' with which the subjects render meaningful (or familiar) the self and the surrounding world of others. As was highlighted in the study's findings, when classifying

the comportment of others in reference to themselves, the subjects evoked new (that is, previously inconspicuous) points of reference pertinent for self-realisation. In this instance, however, the purpose of identity work shifts away from affirming all of that which is known by the subject to *narrowing* the breadth and depth of the subject's interpretive schema to a single point of reference. As highlighted in the findings, when 'fronted' with novelty, all subjects rearranged their network-of-significance into a hierarchy at which apex sit that which they are not willing to sacrifice. The implication of this is that one's capacity for discretion and autonomy increases when one assigns unequal value to different aspects of their knowledge and self-knowledge. This suggests that coherence in the sense of self, and the ability to navigate the apprehensive quality of the unknown, is more pronounced when emerging from identity work that assigns weighting, as opposed to equal value, to all that is perceived in the self and others. On that note, the study recognises that 'affirm[ing] immediately the reality of all that is conceived' (Schutz 1945, p. 1) is a different form of identity work to one that assigns *shades of significance* to things, events and people since the latter reflects a more (self-)conscious subject (this will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter).

On that note, the findings highlight the multi-dimensional (**contribution 6**) nature of situated identity positions and do so by demonstrating that an act of speech can simultaneously affirm and preserve some aspects of the self while also negating others. Said in a different way, the study highlights that situated position can reflect self-affirmation and self-negation, simultaneously. In the case of Nick, for example, his act of self-negation (embodied in his acts of recognising his diminished capacity to manage staff in terms of 'soft skills') is also an act of self-affirmation that seeks to entrench the 'hard worker' identity as the 'only thing that matters' (to a specific identity-seeking-individual) given (perceived)

circumstances at hand¹²¹. As noted by Peterson (1999), “to act is literally to manifest *preference* (emphasis here) about one set of possibilities, contrasted with an infinite set of alternatives” (p. 10). Therefore, the findings recognise that a selection between more or less significant things (in the external world) can be said to occur in a single instance of speech since the *choice* to favour something is undertaken on the basis of simultaneously highlighting not favouring attributes of something else. To paraphrase Peterson (1999), what is significant is of course dependent on what is insignificant—is necessarily defined in opposition to what is insignificant. On that note, the study recognises that one should cease to conflate everyday utterances with identity work exclusively since such a position would classify the *strategic* ‘choice to remain silent’ as a non-event, having no theoretical significance in matters of self-identity. The element of ‘strategy’ in identity work therefore permits for a conceptualisation of agency as a reflection of an *autonomous subject* which extends the literature that ‘looks to’ discourse for ascribing meaning to things events and people.

Synopsis

The preceding arguments have provided a way forward for conceptualising self-identity as a subject of social and organisational life. By delineating the distinctive aspect of self-identity, the study highlights the journey of the self-idea, that is, the cyclical nature of the identity formation process that begins with self-identity as a subject of sociality and ends with self-identity as a predicate of social participation. On the other hand, by delineating the intentional aspect of agency, the study focuses on

¹²¹ He shows this by never judging others’ performance based on their soft skills but rather their ability and willingness to ‘work hard’. The supremacy of the ‘hard worker’ identity is also supported in his acts of self-preservation that seek to protect it from being corroded by the expanded domain of relevance which introduced the ‘soft skills’ identity as a pertinent attribute of performance.

the personal causal efficacy in decision making thus highlighting that the predicate-oriented phenomenon of self-identity cannot obviate the distinctive individual as the central aspect of the identity (re)formation process. This establishes a dialogical relationship between self-identity and social normativity—between structure and agency—by virtue of one’s self-referential perception of the surrounding world. The effect this has on various thematic disagreements that pervade in the extant literature on self-identity is one where subsequent theorisation are freed from mutually exclusive descriptions of self-identity phenomena: positioning the individual as centre stage in the study of self-identity permits for conceptualisation of the phenomena as being both a subject and predicate of organisational life and as having both context dependent but also context interdependent aspects and qualities. Finally, the study demonstrates that self-identity is a multidimensional phenomenon that reflects both shifting and persistent (or distinctive and fluid) attributes which are necessary for the notion of identity work to assume its intentional properties--a process that seeks to form, repair, maintain and/or change self-notions that are effective of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. As such, respective to the study’s findings, the aim of the next chapter is to further explore the process of identity work in terms of its success in regulating one’s sense of coherence and distinctiveness.

The Self-fulfilling Prophecy of Existential Dilemmas

Introduction

The following paragraphs will address the self-fulfilling aspect of our self-ideas and the problematic aspect of the adopted self-notions. The previous chapters have highlighted that subject's perceive and experience with their existing body of knowledge and self-knowledge. With this foundation in mind, the following chapter will address the implications existing self-notions have in situated negative experiences. On that note, the chapter will recognise that not all identity work acts can be recognised as successful since some forms of perception and comprehension induce a sense of incoherence. The chapter will suggest that this realisation is particularly pertinent in the context of project management in which onerous demands of the context in question have largely been explained from the vantage point of institutional isomorphism. On that note, the chapter will provide a more personal rendition of dealing with existential dilemmas that project managers face in fulfilling their day-to-day responsibilities. The chapter will then move onto suggestions for future research respective to the findings and arguments made.

What is (Un)successful Identity Work?

Gap 4 in the extant project management and identity literature can thus be summarized within the inadequacy to conceive of individual-specific orientation of managing 'onerous demands of the project management practice'.... In the context of these arguments, identity work ceases to be an agential medium between structural demands and personal interests but rather a process that can be scrutinised in light of its success, or lack thereof, to minimise the emotionality of 'constant self-

questioning and self-doubt'. Such a more 'responsible' rendition of situated agency would assist endeavours seeking to address institutional isomorphism, in the context of project management, and would do so on a more personally relevant level. (p. 61-2)

In the context of arguments about identity work, a successful endeavour would be one which assists with the process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence" (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165). However, since situated experience is shaped by our self-ideas, arguments for (in)coherence in the sense of self must not preclude discussions of one's subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others. Therefore, the study argues that not all acts of forming, repairing, maintaining and strengthening self-representations can be considered as *successful* identity work since they remain 'blind' to the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of our self-ideas and the limiting nature of self-referential/reinforcing perception. As noted by Estate and Waley (2013):

Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions;
watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character;
watch your character, it becomes your destiny. (p. 87)

On that note, as was highlighted in the study's findings, we perceive and experience the world from the springboard of our knowledge and self-knowledge (see Archer 2000; Archer 2003; Heidegger 1953; Jung 1933; Peterson 1999). Therefore, the *problematic* aspect of such self-referencing/reinforcing nature of perception is that our 'successes' and 'failures' are not objective properties of our 'competencies'; because they, in the first instance, emanate from subjective constructions of the self and the surrounding world of others. On that note, experiences of stress and anxiety and sense of (in)coherence

do not emerge from constraints to self-realisation embedded in the 'external world', but rather and more importantly, are the product of a particular way of seeing (Clegg 1975). Therefore, it is important to recognise that for the identity work definition¹²² to be plausible, it needs to imply the existence of two phenomena: *first*, attending to the coherence in the sense of self mandates that **1)** the subject is *conscious of oneself*, that is, conscious of one's appropriated self-concepts (to which it attends). The *second* requirement is that the **2)** subject exercises intentional agency that seeks to protect and preserve aspects of the self that are deemed valuable (by the self).

These arguments deal with what Brown (2015) recognises as 'the lack of construct clarity' that dominates the extant identity and identity work literature. For example, as highlighted in the study's findings, becoming conscious of that which is most important in the life of the subject emerges in response to the subject's perceived self-inadequacy. This is because when on familiar ground, the subject is unaware of the totality of significance that constitutes their self-idea. The perceived self-inadequacy therefore emerges when the subject renders the immediate circumstance as unfamiliar; the unfamiliarity of which becomes a constraint to self-realisation since the subject cannot any longer exercise agency on account of that which is known. Therefore, the 'constraining' circumstances are situated indications of the dubitability of one's self-idea¹²³ in that they highlight the implausible nature of our capacity for self-fulfilment. Subsequently, the 'enabling' or 'constraining' circumstances are phenomenally different respective to how 'they' affect the subject's ability to form, strengthen, repair and/or revise existing self-notions (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165): while enabling

¹²² Identity work is the process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence" (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165).

¹²³ One's perception of a more complete and plausible reality which subsume one's self-definitions and subjectively conceived pragmatic ends to which they relate.

circumstances reaffirm what the subject already holds to be true and plausible, constraining circumstances, given the newfound 'implausibility' of self-ideas to which they relate, 'provoke' situated reflections over that which is important in 'the life of the identity seeking individual' and instigate action on account of the emerging *insight*.

On that note, given that 'in' enabling circumstances the subject is not afforded the opportunity to impose a weighting on that which is perceived in the self and others, the study contends that *unsuccessful identity work* is embodied in self-affirmation since such acts do not permit for the emergence of the subject's hierarchy-of-significance (with which the inadvertently make sense of the world) to the forefront of conscious activity. Said in a different way, the 'desensitized' (or in the words of Heidegger, *unthematic*) being-in-the-world (of work) does not permit an opportunity to highlight the relational arrangement between one's existing self-definitions, goals and desires in view of the *significance* they carry in the life of the identity seeking individual. In this instance, the subject acts on account of that which conforms to their existing body of knowledge and self-knowledge and in doing so foregrounds one's indifference to all of that which is perceived. As noted by Schutz (1967) "as long as my whole consciousness remains temporally uni-directional and irreversible, I am unaware either of my own growing older or of any difference between past and present" (p. 47). Therefore, the study recognises that when perception continues to reaffirm established repositories of knowledge and self-knowledge, one's agency cannot be said to be *working* on one's identity (Archer 2003; Archer 2010; Jung 1933; Peterson 1999).

On that note, the study argues that *successful identity work* is the outcome of a process that does not obviate self-questioning. As highlighted in the study's findings, self-questioning begins with monitoring others by way of magnifying sameness and differences to one's sense of self. However, this

inadvertently leads to a predicament in which the subject invokes limitations upon one's own knowledge and self-knowledge. The emerging self-doubt, however, leads to the process of 'rearranging' one's subjective constitution *by virtue of that which matters the most in the life of the identity seeking individual*. For example, once the subject subjects one's goals and desires to doubt—by introducing previously unconsidered 'truth claims' (such as for example, Nick's inadequate people skills)—the network of significance assumes a hierarchical in such a way that some self-definitions are assigned greater importance by the subject than others. The subjects' 'worry', as such, highlights that which they are worried about—which has been previously taken for granted, that is, which remained invisible when (successfully) fulfilling day to day responsibilities—thus subsequently permitting for forms of agency that changes, modifies and/or revises existing aspects of self-identity by virtue of their significance. As Rolfe et al. (2017) note, "an inauthentic response is one in which the need for certainty and security overcomes an opportunity for the curiosity of questioning. The greatest threat to experiential and in-situation learning is neither cognitive nor technical competence: it is the willingness to embrace the anxiety experienced in being paralyzed." (p. 740). Therefore, the newly perceived limitations in our sense of self are not a negative phenomenon (in terms of self-development) in that they permit reorganisation of one's self-definitions, goals and desires in such a way that subsequent agency is reflective of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. More precisely, the process of subjectively rearranging one's self-definitions effects subsequent agency by providing subjects with an opportunity to act in a way that serves that which they care about the most (for instance, choosing to resign to keep one's dreams alive)¹²⁴ which inadvertently gives them a sense of purpose, coherence and

¹²⁴ It is important to point out that since the researcher has exited the organisations all three participants have resigned (there have been more than three resignations in the partner organisation so stating this still protects the identity of the subjects)

distinctiveness. Therefore, the notion of *success* in identity work is not *solely* indicative of agency that affirms one's self-definitions and subjectively defined agential enterprises. More specifically, the study highlights that an act of self-affirmation reflects identity work of a *less self-conscious individual*.

However, although the 'retrospective gaze' (Schutz 1967) over their existing network of self-definitions permits its (re)arrangement (in the form of a hierarchy), the study highlights that subjects typically are unaware of the *ontological* nature of the self-referential/reinforcing forms of perception when acting-in-progress (Schutz 1967). This suggests that participants cannot see that they see in the world that which pertains to their existence as particular individuals. For example, all participants have confirmed that the exorbitant stress and anxiety they experienced in the fulfilment of their day-to-day responsibilities was the result of their co-worker's behaviour or unreasonable requirements of their superiors and clients. On that note, all subjects have rendered their external environment as containing attributes that cause anxiety without considering that constraints to self-realisation must stand in a relationship to their goals and desires (Archer 2010)¹²⁵. Since the study's aim is not to verify the validity and truthfulness of participants' claims but rather to inquire into the problematic nature of adopted self-notions (**aim 3**), what this 'ontological blindness' highlights is that in the **1)** act of affirming our knowledge and self-knowledge, we remain indifferent to the relational and constitutive character of 'sameness' and 'difference' between us and others. The same persisted in participants' **2)** acts of self-negation, however: although highlighting a more elaborate and previously unacknowledged aspects of

¹²⁵ As indicated previously, the ontological nature of self-referential/reinforcing forms of perception suggests that one's classification of other's 'laziness' is only sensible in terms of one's perception of what constitutes hard work: for Nick, others were lazy because 'they complained about every little detail of their work' while he never does; for Mark, others were lazy because 'they did not go over and above to address clients needs' which he did; for Margaret, on the other hand, laziness and incompetence was referential to her quality of being a people's person where any behaviour of her co-workers that did not highlight the characteristics of what she believed this competency entailed attracted a classification of inadequacy.

the self which preceded the sense of coherence and distinctiveness, the subjects continued to perceive the external world as ‘holding’ attributes that cause anxiety’ which highlights their unawareness *that a different world would prevail altogether if we only had different goals and desires.*

(Successful) identity work, therefore, can be nuanced as a *multi-order phenomenon* (**contribution 7**). The **a) first order** of the process requires the subject to perceive their self-notions in terms of the significance they attract in the life of the subject, and the necessity they acquire for the realisation of the desired pragmatic ends to which they relate. Deploying a ‘retrospective gaze’ over the existing network of self-definitions permits one to rearrange them in a form of a hierarchy at which peak sits that which matters the most to the identity seeking individual (given perceived circumstances at hand). Subsequently, what makes such reflexive processes ‘successful’ identity work is the ability to embody agency that attends to the preservation of one’s subjective constitution¹²⁶. However, although ‘success’ in identity work can be found through forms of agency that preserves the chain of ‘something in order to for something else’ (Heidegger 1953), such agency can nonetheless still *restrict the experience of circumstantial particularity* to a predetermined (and narrow) number of possibilities. Although participants’ acts of self-negation permit a newfound sense of coherence and distinctiveness, by rendering the external environment as ‘containing’ anxiety provoking qualities the subjects downplay or do not acknowledge the *complicit* nature of their self-knowledge on the experience of circumstantial particularity. Furthermore, although the subject's agency can be classified as embodying personal discretion—in that it seeks to preserve the pre-existing sense of self—such acts of ‘freedom’ remain limited and/or inhibited by self-imposed dichotomy between subjects and objects. The *problematic*

¹²⁶ Speaking in line with one’s beliefs is what psychoanalysts call ‘authentic speech’ (Peterson, 1999).

aspect of this predicament, however, is that it serves in the perpetuation of particular situated experiences—some of which are negative—because the subject choice remains constrained within his abstracted world that inadvertently presupposes its own limitations.

In light of the above, given that different orders of successful identity work suggest that the ability to ‘choose’ subsumes various degrees of freedom, the success of the identity work process, therefore, must also be considered in terms of one’s ability to have a conscious effect on one’s situated experiences. For this to be possible, perception must be preceded by an aptitude that sees the **1)** *perceived* self-inadequacy as an emergent predicament that is in a relationship with the self-construed gravity of one’s pragmatic ends (as opposed to being a *permanent attribute of the self’s competence*) and **2)** the *perceived* circumstance as not being a completely objective characteristic of the external world since it must stand in a relationship with the particularity of our concerns to attain the (un)apprehensive of (un)familiar attribute¹²⁷. This furnishes one with the understanding that the particularity of one’s experience, whether it be positive or negative, is partially self-inflicted since an experience cannot obviate self-referential/reinforcing perception that ‘demands’ expectations of situated interactions (or in the words of Peterson [1999], that invokes a happenstance). Therefore, while the subject can act in such a way that her actions serve to protect and preserve that which the subject cares about the most (the first order of successful identity work), remaining ‘blind’ to the self-fulfilling prophecy of one’s self-idea keeps the subject ‘imprisoned’ within the limits of one’s self-

¹²⁷ For example, choosing to resign from a position on the grounds of ‘unreasonable working conditions’ must be considered in terms of what the subject perceives to be ‘reasonable’ in the life of the identity seeking subject (otherwise a change in context might not bear desired results). This becomes particularly important in the context of this study since all three individuals interviewed have resigned since the beginning of the study.

conceptualisations (which become particularly pertinent in the context of negative emotional states¹²⁸). *The b) second order of successful identity work* would thus not require a ‘retrospective gaze’ in so much as it would a *lateral* one that permits seeing that our knowledge and self-knowledge determines the import of the surrounding world. As aptly asserted by Ralph Waldo Emerson, “wherever there is life, the world bursts into appearance around it” (Lanza 2009).

The particularity of one’s situated self-expression are referential to that which matters the most in the life of the identity seeking individual; hence, the first order of successful identity work provides insights to organisational theorists concerned with antecedents of decision-making, entrepreneurial behaviour and general patterns of communication (Brown 2018). On the other hand, by placing the subject as the *object* of analysis, the second order of successful identity work permits analysis of everyday experiences in view of the complicit nature our self-ideas have in producing particular forms of reality. This has particular implications in the context of project management and existential therapy, which will be addressed in greater detail in the following pages.

(Un)successful Identity Work, the Crises of Project Management and Existential Therapy

The study therefore highlights that existential therapy, in the context of project management, begins with the particularity of the subjectively constituted view of the self and the surrounding world of others. It does so in particular by suggesting that our ‘lived experiences’ are in a *relationship* with the

¹²⁸ This is not to say that one’s knowledge and self-knowledge can be obviated; it is to say that particular experiences can be explained as subjective constructs thus providing more opportunity for the identity seeking individual to discern the ‘gravity’ of events and ideas which he serves.

network of our pre-existing self-definitions, goals and desires. For example, perceiving circumstances as threatening and constraining to self-realisation risks the indubitability of the subject's sense of self. This means that how we define a particular event, thing or a person cannot be conceived irrespective of the *ontological* nature of the 'project of the self' since a happenstance would be meaningless if not 'grasped' as significant to the identity seeking individual. Therefore, given that insignificant things exist outside of our perceptual boundaries, dealing with the emotionality of 'onerous', 'constraining' or 'unfair' circumstances must avoid the philosophy that sees the relationship between subjects and objects as being founded on the ontology of the Cartesian split. Regrettably, however, subject/object binary thinking has dominated the extant project management literature (Rolfe et al. 2017). As noted by van der Hoorn and Whitty (2019):

By shifting the focus from the so-called 'project management' equipment to what project managers are *directed towards* (emphasis in the original), we can reveal the common ground that links those who manage projects... A focus on *compartment* (emphasis in the original) can break us free from the terminology of the practice guides and their instrumentation focus as called for by the critical project management and 'lived experience' agendas... Such a structure would assist in mobilising a context sensitive perspective of project work in the project management classroom with the focus on what the project managers are trying to achieve... (pp. 374-5)

Therefore, the two orders of successful identity work¹²⁹ (see previous section for details) "could provide a way of project managers' practical coping with otherwise potentially inhibiting existential disruptions"

1) ¹²⁹acting in light of one's hierarchy-of-significance; 2) acting in light of the complicit nature existing hierarchy (or network) of significance has in situated experiences.

(Rolfe et al. 2017, p. 739) given that they foreground an insight into the phenomenology of a *more* self-conscious subject. For example, beginning with the act of self-negation, the first order of successful identity work is exercised on account of the previously inconspicuous hierarchy-of-significance that colours one's everyday being-in-the-world of work. The significance of this realization is that attending to 'inhibiting existential disruptions' must be preceded with an awareness of that which is being inhibited which, in this instance, does not obviate the emergence (and exposure) of the most significant aspects of self-realisation. The practical implications of this argument, therefore, is that perceived 'existential disruptions' emerge as a necessary predecessor of intentional activity that seeks to preserve the most significant self-notions the (in)dubitability of which (inadvertently) foregrounds the sense of (in)coherence. On that note, any discussion of existential therapy that begins with 'institutional theory' (Baker & French 2018) sidesteps the significance of that which is personally meaningful in dealing with the (negative) effects of 'incoherence'. On that note, the first order of successful identity work, therefore, highlights that the 'price' of self-consciousness is the emotionality of the encountered 'inhibiting existential disruption', since it is by virtue of self-negation that the subject becomes (more) *awake (or aware)*. Therefore, existential disruptions are not a negative phenomenon in the context of 'the identity question' (for instance, 'who am I' and 'how should I act?'), since they serve to pull out of inconspicuousness (of habit) the 'dormant' purpose of one's everyday being-in-the-world. As aptly acknowledged by Wilson (2016):

The transition to a higher order of functioning—or hooking onto a higher neural circuit—is often accomplished by considerable anxiety or a turbulence in personal life which seems as if the organism were falling apart or breaking up. This phenomenon of instability is really the way that every living organism—societies, human primates, chemical solutions, etc.—shakes itself, as it were, by

myoclonisms or similar convulsions into new combinations and permutations for higher and new levels of development. (p. 1)

However, the first order of successful identity work still leaves room for 'emotional bondage' (which is a sign of incomplete *awareness*) because the gravity and significance of that which matters the most to the subject will continue to breathe complexity in the self and the surrounding world (of others). For example, attending to the affirmation of one's self-definitions, goals and desires, the subjects invoke a more elaborate totality of relevance (of things) which becomes assigned (by the self) with significance for self-realisation. This is the same as saying that our most cherished aspects of the self 'force' us to foresee the slightest hurdles that might infringe on their plausibility (Peterson 1999). On that note, a sense of coherence attained by narrowing the significance of the self and the surrounding world of others (first order of successful identity work) is only a temporary phenomenon which 'solidity' is not dependant on the context(s) within which we (choose) to participate *but on the significance of that which we seek to preserve*. Therefore, choosing to resign on account of that which matters to us the most, for example, does not rid us of the subjective 'content' that *foregrounds* specific emotional experiences. This inability to think *away* 'from oneself' does not leave room "for a reflexive questioning of taken for granted assumptions about managing projects" (Rolfe et al. 2017, p. 740).

On account of these arguments, any act that seeks to preserve the significance of things without first realising that encountered constraints are not objective constructs of the world is an act unaware of the constitutive relationship between the self and the world. As Heidegger (1953) notes, "what no longer takes the form of pure letting be seen, but rather in its indicating always has recourse to something else and so always lets something be seen *as* (emphasis in the original) something, acquires

with this structure of synthesis the possibility of covering up” (p. 32). The significance of this argument is that such acts cannot deal, completely that is, with the root of the ‘inhibiting existential disruption’ since they remain indifferent to the fact that the origin of all reality is subjective (Schutz 1967). Said in a different way, because subjects perceive anxiety as being embedded within the ‘encountered externalities’, they also perpetuate the problematic of limiting world views. Therefore, the second order of successful identity work suggests that existential anxiety, in the context of project management, must be preceded by dissipating ‘ontological blindness’, foregrounded with the realization that a ‘different world would prevail if we had different goals and desires’. Said in a different way, ontological blindness dissipates when the subject realises that the ‘thinker’ needs his thoughts ‘proved’ in-order-to-be. Therefore, while the first order of successful identity work highlights that a sense of coherence can be maintaining by acting with regard to that which is the most significant in the life of the subject, the second order of identity work highlights that it is because of our need to preserve the most cherished aspects of self-worth that we produce a complex surrounding world that we find difficult to navigate.

By assigning an *object* to existential anxiety (that is, one’s self-idea), the study extends what the extant project management literature considers as an “experience which is both objectless and nameless” (Rolfe et al. 2017, p. 740. Also see Baker & French 2018; Buckle & Thomas 2003; Chasserio & Legault 2009; Chasserio & Legault 2010; Clegg et al. 2020; Clegg & Courpasson 2004; French et al. 2013; Gale & Cartwright 1995; Lindgren & Packendorff 2006) (**contribution 8**). More importantly, by assigning an object as a source of existential anxiety, the study also assigns a particular way of thinking about the process of its management. For example, the study recognises that a female brings institutional isomorphism into effect by rendering significant the project managements’ disposition to gender. In doing so, rather paradoxically, the person populates the external world with gender-related constraints

to self-realisation. Therefore, if a female does not assign degrees of significance to normative orders, or said in a different way, if she *chooses* to discern her position in a society on the grounds of principles that do not celebrate her individuality, she will integrate *the consensual assumptions on gender* into her idea about the self and the surrounding world of others which will inadvertently become both her biggest motivator and deterrent; the source of both pleasure and pain (Peterson 1999). Hippocrates is attributed as the source of a common expression: “before you heal someone, ask him if he’s willing to give up the things that make him sick”. On the same token, Müller, Jedličková et al. (2022) recognise that “managers achieve self-development through the redescription of their lived experiences” (p. 25). On that note, the study recognises that dissipating existential anxiety should come in the form of thinking away from oneself. However, thinking away from oneself is not thinking irrespective of oneself because thinking, in general, is predisposed by self-knowledge. More specifically, therefore, thinking away from oneself is akin to an insight that endows the subject with an understanding of the ontological nature of our self-ideas (Cohn 2002), or better yet, is akin to an insight that endows the subject with the understanding that *we are the bond servants of our ideas* (Jung 1933).

In light of the preceding arguments, it can be said that postmodernists are correct in that they recognise that our identities emerge from the soil that is ‘divorced’ from the shifting circumstances we encounter throughout life. However, because of this ‘separation’ they cannot be discarded as insignificant because they are complicit in our situated experiences. On that note, the postmodernist are incorrect because they seem to miss the significance of *Dasein* – “a being that *can* (emphasis in the original) “choose” itself in its being, it can win itself, it can lose itself, and it can never and only “apparently” win itself” (Heidegger 1953, p. 42). By the same token, project management ‘existentialists’ (see Rolfe et al. 2017; van der Hoorn and Whitty 2019) are also short-sighted because they see anxiety as “not related to

[one's] unselfconsciousness or conflicts between different parts of [one's] inner self" (Rolfe et al. 2017, p. 740). In doing so, they outsource one's ability to deal with existential dilemmas to 'appropriately' constructed models such as that provided by Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology (also known as EHP). Contrary to both positions, however, this study highlights that our self-ideas are objects of existential dilemmas. In doing so, it recognises that the significance of one's ability to deal with an existential dilemma is founded on the stratified nature of reality which invokes a being that is separate to one's own thoughts and in being such, can *watch* which thoughts will become words and which will become actions. On that note, the study provides a more "individual-specific orientation of managing 'onerous demands of the project management practice'" (p. 62) and in doing so extends research 'favouring' institutional isomorphism (Baker & French 2018) as the origin of project management 'toxicity' (Baker & French 2018; Buckle & Thomas 2003; Chasserio & Legault 2009; Chasserio & Legault 2010; Clegg et al. 2020; Clegg & Courpasson 2004; French et al. 2013; Gale & Cartwright 1995; Lindgren & Packendorff 2006).

Limitation of the research and findings

The study, like any research project, has limitations that foreground the need for future research. The theory laden approach to generating contributions to the existing body of knowledge suggests that what is advanced as new knowledge is also dependent on the study's ontological and epistemological positions. Although the study provides a detailed exploration of the philosophy of subjective phenomenology, leveraging contributions from theorists such as Heidegger (1953), Peterson (1999) and Archer (2000; 2003), this means that the core of the study's arguments is based on the ontological, and therefore non-negotiable, nature of the self. The first limitation of the study's findings is thus 'the leap

of faith' performed by the researcher with respect to contributions of various theorists (namely, Heidegger, Peterson and Archer) whose arguments have formed the foundation of the study's contributions. As such, the study acknowledges that arguments for the distinctive nature of the self, for example, do not seek to suggest that the self *is* distinctive but rather that the ontological and epistemological models adopted provide for the possibility of conceiving a distinctive self (May & Perry 2017).

The second limitation of the study arises from the limitation of the research project's framework design of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Deep phenomenological inquiry into the participants' subjectively constituted self is inescapably imbued with the depth of the researcher's subjective constitution. The meaningfulness of that which was seen in the participants' speech cannot escape that which the researcher also saw within himself. Analysing how others experience the world and how others make sense of their experience thus cannot obviate the researcher's analysis and understanding of their own experiences. Understanding that we draw conclusions based on what we know and think of ourselves is, however, exactly what the study seeks to highlight—one cannot obviate the self in the process of making sense of the world. More specifically, only when one realises that one sees in the world all that corresponds to his subjective constitution can such processes of interpretation be labelled as 'phenomenal', implicating the researcher's bias. These conclusions eradicate any need to address everyday claims in light of their truthfulness and plausibility and shifts the analysis towards understanding that subjective 'aptitudes' enable but also restrict self-expression. The highly subjective nature of any phenomenological study exposes the research project to objections to its non-generalisability, thus presuming the subsequent 'insignificance' of its proposed theoretical contributions if that is the warranty sought. To do this, of course, is to play an entirely different language

game, one with which the thesis has no truck. The aim of the research project to generate in-depth knowledge of antecedents of experience means that the number of participants recruited for the study was limited to permit an idiographic approach to data analysis. The number of cases diminishes the study's capacity to develop what can be considered as 'generalizable knowledge' (Miles & Huberman 2014). However, the power of a good example should not be underestimated as a source of scientific development. As noted by Flyvbjerg and Sampson (2001), "that knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society" (p. 76).

Future research agendas

For Project Management Practice

Positioning self-identity as a subject of organisational 'life', the study provides an ontological framework for existential therapy in business settings. On that note, future research can benefit from extending the notion of successful identity work by conducting an empirical inquiry into one's (subjective) capacity to wilfully affect and shape their situated professional experiences. More specifically, the research can inquire into the potentiality of 'thinking away from oneself' and the effects such 'shifts in mindset' have on one's ability to *deal* with 'taxing' professional environments¹³⁰. The research that positions the subject as the object of analysis can have great applicability in the context of project management in

¹³⁰ Noting that Heideggerian existential therapy has been a long-standing tradition in psychoanalysis (Cohn 2002). Its aim is to assist the individual with unearthing the frameworks that permit for the construction of situated experiences. However, little can be said about the effects of its application in business settings, particularly in the context of situated self-management of negative experiences.

particular, given that such professional arrangements have been rendered as inordinately stressful, as Love and Edwards (2005) note:

Aspects of occupational demands and their deleterious consequences on the psychological well-being of construction project managers have received limited attention in literature. Yet it has been widely reported that construction project managers have been experiencing increasing levels of occupational stress; the generic definition of work-related stress is “the inability to cope with the pressure in a job. (p.88)

As Love and Edwards (2005) go on to say, the situation is invariably unacknowledged in practice:

Previous research has revealed that the most significant stress factors identified by construction project managers are work overload, long working hours, role ambiguity and conflict, the diverse range of personalities encountered in the project environment, poor communication, limited resources, insufficient time spent in the family/home environment and financial pressures (work-related and personal). However, it would appear that many construction contractors are unaware of the level of occupational stress being experienced by their construction project managers because of the limited theoretical and empirical research applied to occupational stress within the industry. (p. 88)

In this regard, the present research is a pioneering departure in research into project management because it deals directly with the sources of occupational stress by illuminating their situatedness in the self and its conceptions of identity. Therefore, in the same way that Muller, Sankaran et al. (2015) and Drouin, Müller et al. (2021) recognise that the “cornerstone of being accepted as a leader is an autonomous self-management” (Muller, Sankaran et al. 2015., p. 3), this study can form the foundation

of future arguments that recognise and highlight that the cornerstone of positive professional experiences is (simply) *self*-management.

For Archer's Meta-Reflexivity

Archer's (2000) notion of meta-reflexivity suggests that subjects have the capacity to discriminate their reflexive process to ascertain *why* they perceive the situation in particular terms. However, as was pointed out in the previous sections, understanding what is most significant in the life of the subject, given circumstances at hand, (first order of successful identity work – see previous section) is different to understanding the working of non-dual expression, that is, understanding that *what we see in the world reflects who we are as particular individuals* (second order of successful identity work). For example, understanding that a particular person 'rubs us the wrong way' because 'we are both in line for the same promotion' is different altogether to understanding that our perception of the same individual would (potentially) shift and alter should our self-realisation not be tied to the attainment of a particular position. Therefore, what the second order of successful identity work suggests—and what was not evident in participants' speech—is that being aware of one's act of reflexivity is different from understanding that one's reflexive contents permits the emergence of particular phenomena in the 'external' world: understanding why we perceive a circumstance in particular terms is different to the understanding the *complicit nature of perception in producing a circumstance*.

These arguments nuance Archer's (2003) notion of meta-reflexivity by suggesting that being reflexive about one's own reflexivity does not only entail a realisation about why a proposition was uttered but more importantly, it also entails a realisation of self-perpetuating limits 'in' the external world. Meta-reflexivity is not exclusively about knowing why a proposition was uttered (for example, 'he always rubs

me the wrong way because he is socially inept) but why we have arrived at a particular ‘why’ *in relation to an innumerable number of other possibilities*. Future research can benefit not only from exploring one’s ability to be involved within the construction of their own lived experience but also can explore a more nuanced conceptualisation of Archer’s (2000) meta-reflexivity that accounts for the subjects’ ability to potentially ‘step outside’ the inner dialogue to exercise greater discretion and sovereignty in one’s everyday being-in-the-world of work¹³¹. Such research would be well received by studies that attend to stress-related issues of demanding professional environments (such as consulting and project management) (Clegg & Courpasson 2004; Gill 2013).

For Phenomenology of Unselfconsciousness

Highlighting two orders of successful identity work nuances the notion of everyday ‘unselfconsciousness’ (Smith et al. 2009). The findings suggest that there are *degrees of consciousness* respective to one’s everyday being-in-the-world of work. For example, although the subject engages in reflexively mediated agency when affirming one’s sense of self (as highlighted by the study’s ontological and epistemological positions – see chapter four), it can be said that the consciousness of such acts, related to the question of identity, are of a ‘lower magnitude’ to those that contain self-questioning/negation properties. Furthermore, it can be said that there are also degrees of consciousness within agency that seek to preserve one’s most cherished aspects of the self since subjects can remain blind to the ‘complicit’ nature of perception in producing particular experiences

¹³¹ There are some phenomenological implications which pertain to this argument (such as, for example, our ability to be a subject and object simultaneously while immersed in the stream of pure duration of consciousness - also referred to as acting-in-progress, see Schultz 1967) however the space does not permit a further and more nuanced exploration of subject’s (potential) aptitudes to consciously be involved in the construction of their own situated experiences. This can be the central topic of future research.

when *working* on one's identity. Unselfconsciousness is not exclusively related to a state of not being aware of one's subjectively constituted meaning structure (which is the case when affirming one's knowledge and self-knowledge), but also entails a predicament of not being aware that the gravity of our goals and desires determines what we perceive as 'objective' properties of the external world. Noting that the subject can still be unaware of the self-reinforcing relationship between situated experience and the particularity of one's self-idea, future research can explore the notion of unselfconsciousness by recognising the relationship between *degrees of consciousness* and the particularity of one's lived (professional) experience.

Conclusion

Overall, it seems 'demanding' workplaces and environments push us to ask more of ourselves. Even though the study contends that circumstances are in the first instance perceived, it can be 'objectively' recognised that some organisational contexts are more onerous than others (evidence of which can be the high suicide rate in the construction project management industry in Australia – see Baker & French 2018). The 'positives' of pressing circumstances permit the emergence of a distinctive and clearly articulated and more resilient subject. On that note, further research on other industries and social contexts could determine the extent to which the self-fulfilling prophecy of a subjectively constituted hierarchy-of-significance also holds true in 'less' psychologically demanding professional environments.

Finally, future research can also benefit from expanding the scope of this study. For example, the recruitment of additional participants, longer immersion in the research field and a more grounded approach to theory building could yield a more generalised contribution in the domain of arguments for 'distinctive' self-identity. Conversely, a bolder design phenomenological study, focusing on a single

case, or an autoethnography, could provide a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenal processes that constitute one's self-identity and shape situated interaction. By diving deeper into the phenomenal world of a single individual, research could gain a complete and a more nuanced insight into the formation of subjective structures that affect how we perceive and experience the world of organisations.

Synopsis

The preceding pages highlight the distributed model of distinctive self-identity from which self-expression springs. Providing the foundation of our everyday being-in-the-world, this insight is subsequently used to discern the process of identity work with respect to its success (or lack thereof) to form, change and repair notions that are reflective of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. These pages highlight a counterintuitive aspect of identity work built on the premise that suggests subjects are provided with an ability to work on their identity at times when they realise the limitations of their views and perceptions. As highlighted in the findings, subjects engage in a process of rearranging their self-definitions, goals and desires at times when aspects of their self are perceived to be under scrutiny. Unsuccessful identity work reflexively renders one's self in these immediate circumstances as conforming to pre-existing notions and doubts. Unsuccessful identity work is akin to habituation to these while successful identity work engages in the process of their self-negation.

The self-fulfilling prophecy of ideas highlights the problematic aspect of self-identity in that what we see and experience in the world cannot obviate our preconceived ideas about the world. Successful identity work can be further nuanced into a two-part process. The first part of the process requires the subject to rearrange one's subjective constitution by virtue of that which matters in the life of the

identity seeking individual (which remains dormant when everything goes to plan). The second part of the successful identity work process requires a lateral view of our subjective constitution permitting insight into the surrounding world with respect to our models of the self in context. This realisation becomes valuable not only with respect to understanding the situated nature of experience but also with respect to forming, changing, repairing and rearranging aspects of our self-ideas (that is, models) that are in a relationship with the perceived and experienced incoherence of the self.

Conclusion

The study began with an interest that sought to explore how one's (professional) self-identity can affect and shape everyday agency and the experience of the context of project management. Placing one's self-identity at the centre of everyday patterns of communication, decision-making and entrepreneurial behaviour has also been recognised as an under-researched phenomenon in the extant self-identity literature (Brown 2018). The study's analysis of the extant literature was driven by the desire to ascertain whether it recognises the significance the pre-existing subjective constructions have on everyday perception and subsequent agency. By probing into extant identity formation and identity work literature, the study has unearthed the core tension that has incapacitated academics' attempts to position self-identity as a subject of organisational life, namely "one which cannot seem to obviate an explanation of a self-conscious distinctive self without imprisoning it in "spheres of prescribed action and expectation" (Cerulo 1997, p. 388).

Therefore, extant identity work and the identity formation literature could not provide an ontological explanation for the possibility of a distinctive self in the context of liquid modernity due to the ontological impasse dominating both sides of opposing arguments. For example, due to the dominance of the (ontology of) the Cartesian split in conceiving of social phenomena, the self-identity literature largely defined the relationship between self and others or self and society in terms of causality that cannot avoid discussions of dominance and power. The implications of this are many but in the context of arguments put forward here, the implication is that social phenomena be reduced to that which existentially 'precedes' them. For example, if society ontologically precedes the self, the self becomes merely an outcome of society. One of the theoretical implications of this position is that self-identity

becomes a predicate of social interaction which explains away the subject's predisposition for intentional agency and purposeful being-in-the-world. More specifically, such a position disregards the implications of subjective antecedents on situated action, which reflects the literatures' inability to conceive of individual-specific strategies for managing 'onerous demands of the project management practice'.

The thesis has foregrounded the significance of the relationship between empirical and sub-empirical elements of self-expression and their effects on shaping situated experiences. More specifically, the thesis highlights that self-identity is a 'stratified' phenomenon, 'existing' simultaneously in acts of self-expression and inner dialogue but also as the foundation of our 'operating systems' (Peterson 1999) in the form of a distinctive self-idea. Leveraging the contributions of Heidegger (1953), Peterson (1999) and Archer (2000; 2003), the study therefore introduced a philosophical framework that highlighted the significance of the stratified nature of reality, the implications of which are that "*our way of looking at things is conditioned by what we are*" (Jung 1933, p. 117). In being implicit in all acts of perception, the stratified phenomenon of self-identity thus provides interpretive models for our everyday being-in-the-world. These models are the foundation of what we render as enablement and constraints to our self-realisation and as such, are implicit in negative situated experiences. The thesis recognised that not all acts of forming, repairing and strengthening our sense of self can be considered as successful identity work where they remain blind to the complicit nature of our self-ideas in the recreation of situated experiences.

The thesis highlighted how, at the core of any social phenomenon, is an individual with a head full of ideas and beliefs about the self and the surrounding world of others. These ideas and beliefs shape how one perceives the surrounding world and inadvertently affect and modulate subjects' situated

experiences. This suggests that the question of identity is implicit in all acts of reasoning since a description of the external world cannot obviate the self-referencing modality of perception and comprehension. Therefore, by placing individual subjective constitution at the centre of the identity debate, the thesis provides an alternative position to the non-humanist arguments that have dominated the self-identity literature. More importantly, alleviating the polarizations of the reductionist theorising, the thesis provides a more nuanced rendition of self-identity and its relationship to situated decision making, entrepreneurial self-behaviour and general patterns of communication (Brown 2018).

In general, by bringing together the distinctive nature of our self-ideas and the intentional nature of agency, the thesis has thus extended postmodern self-identity literature subscribing to the view that self-identity is nothing but a discursive illusion. On the other hand, celebrating the relationship between *self-identity* ↔ *everyday agency* ↔ *situated experience*, the study has managed to introduce the possibility of a distinctive self without sidestepping the fluid nature of social modernity explained away by essentialism. Utilising tenets of critical realism, phenomenological philosophy as well as insights from psychoanalysis, the study has developed a sound foundation for any subsequent identity related research that seeks to begin with self-identity in analysis of social phenomena. More specifically, positioning the individual centre stage in the study of self-identity provided the means necessary for the study to delineate the following contributions:

- A.** First, the study addresses the shortcomings of the extant literature which positions identity as a predicate of sociality. It does so by positioning self-identity as a subjectum of contextual particularity. By highlighting a distinctive self-identity as a foundation of everyday being-in-the-world of work, the study thus extends the nihilistic conceptualisations of self-identity that foreground its illusory and self-defeating attributes (**contribution one**).

- B.** Second, the study argues that context-specific notion of identity is only a situated reflection of the subject's self-idea which traverses contextual particularity. In doing so, the study extends the fragmentary conceptualisation of self-identity that has dominated the postmodern literature **(contribution two)**.
- C.** Third, by highlighting the complicit nature of self-identity in the particularity of everyday experiences, the study is provided with an opportunity to conceive of intentional agency by virtue of a distinctive subjective content (a distinctive self-identity) as an antecedent of heedful circumspection. In doing so, the study demonstrates the problematic, in addition to precarious, nature the adopted self-notions have on the particularity of our daily experiences **(contribution three)**.
- D.** Fourth, by highlighting a dialogical relationship between the self and the perceived normative order (representing society) by virtue of one's reflexive being-in-the-world of work, the study extends literature that, by reducing the society to the self (and vice versa), had not been able to conceive of both as two separate and distinctive entities unless by virtue of power relations **(contribution four)**.
- E.** Fifth, the study highlights the multilocal nature of identity work. It does so by suggesting that that the process of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and/or revising one's self-notions is not exclusively determined by that which is negotiated in discourse; but is also dependent on identity work within the subjective domain that attempts to crystallize through tendencies on account of one's pre-existing priorities. In doing so, the study extends the discontinuous rendition of identity work **(contribution five)**.

- F.** Sixth, the study highlights that identity work, in addition to being a multilocal predicament, is also a multidimensional phenomenon. It does so by demonstrating that situated identity positions can reflect an act of self-affirmation and self-negation simultaneously. More specifically, considering hierarchically constituted subjectivity, the subject can (re)affirm the significance of some aspects of the self by negating or downgrading others that are less significant. In doing so, the study extends the single-dimensional rendition of identity work that has dominated studies that rely on rationalities in discourse for meaning-making (**contribution six**).
- G.** Seventh, the study adds nuance to identity work by recognising degrees of success embedded in attempts to achieve a sense of coherence and distinctiveness. More importantly, in addition to highlighting the unsuccessful rendition of identity work, the study also recognises that successful identity work is a multi-order phenomenon: the first order of successful identity work requires the subject to deploy a 'retrospective gaze' over the existing network of self-definitions, goals and desires in order to have the ability to embody agency that attends to the preservation of the most significant aspects of one's subjective constitution. The second order of successful identity work requires not a retrospective gaze, but a lateral one so to speak and one that permits seeing that our knowledge and self-knowledge determines the import of the surrounding world (**contribution seven**).
- H.** Eighth, the study assigns an object to existential dilemmas. It does so by recognising that the origin of negative emotional experiences is embedded in our struggles to preserve the ideas that reflect one's distinctive self-identity. On that note, the study provides a way of thinking about existential dilemmas that obviates impersonal strategies of managing negative emotional

experiences. More specifically, by recognising that we are the bond servants of our ideas, or better yet, that our self-ideas are complicit in our situated experiences, the study provides an individual-specific orientation for managing onerous demands of the project management practice **(contribution eight)**.

In conclusion, one's self-knowledge shapes situated experiences by way of providing 'resources' for reflection which determine the import of the surrounding world (in reference to oneself). Subsequently, one's professional experiences shape the process of (re)articulating (professional) self-identity by way of rearranging one's subjectively constituted view of oneself and the surrounding world by virtue of that which matters the most in the life of the identity seeking individual. On that note, the study provides a counter weight to the anti-humanist arguments dominating the postmodern and positivistic literature on self-identity.

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Appendices

Literature Review Matrix

Study's Aims	Literature's Gaps	Ontological Relationship of Interest	Ontological Arguments
<p>1. Explore how one's subjective constitution is shaped within the context of particular interpersonal arrangements;</p>	<p>1. Self-identity as a subject of interpersonal arrangements is insufficiently explored--the literature does not consider what is brought to bear in situated interaction prior to it being shaped and changed as a result of the interaction;</p>	<p>Two-directional or dialogical, not mutually exclusive: exploring how our subjective constitution is shaped in the context of interaction presupposes a subject being shaped into a predicate of interaction;</p>	<p>Identity and identity formation processes are not to be perceived in light of subject/object binary thinking. Doing so, one cannot escape deterministic and reductionist conclusions that position the self as <i>either</i> a subject <i>or</i> a predicate;</p>
<p>2. Develop an understanding of the relationship between one's subjective constitution and everyday agency;</p>	<p>2. <i>In extension of gap 1, the literature does not provide an explanation of a discernible and autonomous subject without explaining away the possibility for liquid modernity;</i></p> <p>The foundation if this is the single dimensional or monological nature of identity work</p>	<p>A two-directional relationship that begins with the subject's subjectively constituted world of self and others. The subjective world first encountered becomes the subject's-specific ontology;</p>	<p>Living in a social world does not permit for a reified ontology of subjectivity. The two-directional relationship between the subject and the subject's perceived world of other subjects and objects permits for malleability in the domain of the self and the social order without explaining away the possibility for a distinctive subject with whose personal ontology one must begin to understand situated interaction;</p>
<p>3. Examine how our subjective constitution permits for <i>particular</i> experiences and <i>forms</i> of agency.</p>	<p>3. The literature fails to delineate agency as proactive and emergent from the dialogical relationship between the agent's subjectivity and the</p>	<p>As above.</p>	<p>One cannot see outside of one's subjectively constituted reality. Only things that are meaningful to the subjects are the things that exist in the subject's world.</p>

	<p><i>perceived</i> world of subjects and objects. The literature fails to address the ontological aspect of adopted self-notions and its effect agency and experience;</p> <p>4. The literature fails to consider the process of identity work, and its success or lack thereof in providing a sense of coherence, in respect to adopted self-notions.</p>		
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Data Corpus

Overall, the study's data corpus subsumed the following:

1. Interviews: Two interviews per participant (three participants recruited). One formal and one informal. The interviews lasted on average one hour. The transcripts generated from interviews were in excess of thirty single spaced pages for each participant. The formal interview was transcribed while the informal interview was documented by way of notes.
2. Shadowing and observation: Numerous days to day discussions with participants conducted during the four months the researcher was within the organisation. The discussions were ongoing and were conducted face to face, through a phone call, text messages and/or emails. The discussions also continued well after the researcher exited the partner organisation—the participant and the researcher engaged in discussions about the subjects' daily events and previously discussed contentious issues (over phone calls and text messages) in excess of eight months after existing the partner organisation. Notes generated from general discussions produced a data corpus of approximately sixty pages of handwritten notes.
3. In line with the double hermeneutic approach to data analysis (see previous pages), the researcher also took note of his own presuppositions for interpreting data, both theoretical and experiential. For this reason and to eliminate bias in perception of circumstantial particularity, the researcher engaged in a practice of journaling which primary purpose was to engage in processes of meta reflexivity (being reflexive of one's reflexivity). A total fifty of analytic and self-reflexive journal pages were accumulated and used in aiding data analysis process.

Code Groupings

The Subjective Context	The World as They Know it	Overlap (insight)
<p>Codes: Self-description and Goals/Aspirations (SD and G/AS):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I get enjoyment of helping others but I get more satisfaction about actually physically building it. And driving past and taking my kid past that place or my family past the house that I built 15 years ago, and say dad built that with his f*cking hands, and look it's still standing. And as a family I enjoy that every single day. That makes me happy." (Nick) 2. "I am a creative person. And I am always interested in architecture and design. I wanted to lead the client and be the creative person, not so much a builder. Anyway, I wanted to get involved in more interesting and creative projects" (Margaret) 3. "I like synthesizing information and Estimating provide a better opportunity for that. There's a lot of data to get across and ultimately you are taking all that information and putting it into a story. That appealed to me. I like taking people on a journey and selling story. So, it is very relationship based" (Mark) 	<p>Codes: Description of professional responsibilities and Description of organisation (PR and DO):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "What I've found lately in the past 2 years, is that my role has become very diverse. It's not focused on one particular point on the construction site.... It's a lot more than what I knew and what I'm passionate about, and what I enjoy doing in construction. It has just morphed into another whole sector dominated by people management and it has been 10 times harder for me to manage." (Nick) 2. "Construction—I never really considered it as construction, I considered it as project management. I wanted to learn tangible things so I came from property development, and I was disillusioned by the whole industry because it was this money making, non-creative, egotistical sphere of the world." (Margaret) 3. "The role itself is like, we win projects by tendering. So if we don't win projects, if we don't tender we don't win projects than we don't have a company. The role is paramount to the whole operation. If I am not quite good enough, pretty soon they don't have a viable business model" (Mark) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "My anxiety is coming from looking at Mark. Mark has the great skill set that he can diffuse a situation, he can tell a person what they want to hear. He has got a way to his communication skills which are above anyone else that I've seen in business. And I'm in the total opposite side. I'm trying to get his skill set on board onto myself to make me a full package. But it's not easy so it's just challenging." (Nick) 2. "I chose construction because I was disillusioned with property development. Initially it all stems back to my dad so I always wanted to please my father, and I'd do anything for his love, because my parents fell out when I was 13" (Margaret) 3. "From what I have observed, most people very rarely are quick to take responsibility. There's always a reason, there's always the other guy. Even though they honestly share 90% of the responsibility, their focus is on 10% and its always scrambling, finding fault with everyone else in some way" (Mark)
<p>Code: Self-description (SD):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I have worked so hard to have this company where it is at... When we grew up 10-15 years ago, it was like here you go sweetheart, sink or swim. I wish I had the support employees have these days. I wish I had someone that I felt comfortable to go and ask for assistance. We walk on a very fine line at the moment with the new staff and their actual skills." (Nick) 2. I love hospitality because it is a source of human connection. So, I love restaurants and food, creative spaces, architecture and design encapsulates always all of that. I always thought that I should have stayed in design but I 	<p>Code: Colleagues approach to work and Description of others (CAW and DO):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "But if they can't fix their problem, and they're voicing it to me, where else is there to go after that? How many times do you think they come up to me and say, I haven't got the right team, or the project is not staffed correctly. And that's what's occurred the last 12 months, with the new people that come in—yes, you're under the pump but, time to shine, time to step up." (Nick) 2. Michael is new and young. Say if you go to a big project management company, they'll have a project manager who has been therefore 20 years and teaches you what to do. Matt's only been a project manager for a year" (Margaret) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "For me to leave and go home and try enjoy that time with my family, my anxiety goes through the roof. I am thinking about what the f*ck am I missing, and what sh*t am I going to come into tomorrow morning. And that's a culture thing that we've built, that I've personally probably put into this company, which I've got to try to break from." (Nick) 2. "They say you are not hustling enough. And I am like—mmmm I am. It is not in my nature to be 'you have to come down, you are not making me money'. Its juts not who I am. So the feelings I've had that I am not good enough or not smart enough is not the case—no one thought me anything" (Margaret)

<p>was too insecure when I was young and thought I was not creative enough” (Margaret)</p> <p>3. “There is this real sense of isolation as an estimator. There is an otherness, an outsider. The projects team sits in meetings every week and they chat about the project, and there is always a scapegoat. The scapegoat is the estimator” (Mark)</p>	<p>3. “I think it’s a very defensive industry. It’s filled with scared little boys, trying to prove how awesome they are, while still trying to cover up their inner stuff ups. And they typically do that by blaming somebody else, not actually staying in their lane and accepting responsibility.” (Mark)</p>	<p>3. “I have no anxiety about being able to do my job well. My anxiety relates to not being able to do the project well. And I always think about ‘oh I could do that job or solve that thing’. The anxiety I think comes down to living up to the expectations I set up for myself, and I feel in turn those that are imposed on me” (Mark)</p>
<p>Code: Self-description and Concerns (SD and C):</p> <p>1. “I would feel I would not let go. Yes, I’d manage a site, but I know I would be pulled in or I would want to help with everyone else issues. Then I would immerse myself into it and then I would want to know. I would use my time to research it further to make sure what I have advised is correct.” (Nick)</p> <p>2. “I am still a CA. CA is like admin and creating variations, and documenting, and being detailed focused which is not something I am naturally good at. I can write, read and talk to people, these are my strengths. I am not a Caroline or a Sam. I am not going to site there and estimate and put spreadsheets together. This is not something I am good at” (Margaret)</p> <p>3. “The skill set that I’ve had to navigate, I’m not saying I’m an amazing person, but I’m better than I was. So, to grow through, or because adversary and challenge, I think I’m a better person today than I was five years ago. But I don’t know if I like myself better.” (Mark)</p>	<p>Code: Colleagues approach to work (CAW):</p> <p>1. “There is no accountability from employees. They know when push comes to shove or there is a f*cking problem, they just need to make a phone call or walk up to my desk.” (Nick)</p> <p>2. “I would come home from work having worked myself for 11-12 hours straight and I would get home and get an email from Matt saying I don’t have time to be checking your admin, you have made all these mistakes. Admin mistakes like spelling mistakes, or things filled wrong. I am like Matt, f*ck you, I have no respect for you. I am willing to absolutely address any admin mistakes I’ve made but only when it comes with a degree of ‘hey thanks for doing that.” (Margaret)</p> <p>3. “There is a rewarding aspect of knowledge, of knowing something, and whenever I use words that I think should be used in general connotation, and people say I have no idea what you just said, I don’t really care. Well, I don’t read at the second-grade level like you do, so I don’t try and talk like a second-grade level like you do. Eg yes, no, single syllable word” (Mark)</p>	<p>1. “It is all in my head and I have been trying to get help for the last six months in regards to being able to let go and allow people to make mistakes and learn from them. Ask my wife, I am stressed to go home. I think it is an excuse, and it is using the excuse of anxiety or being frustrated to constantly want to intervene. I am known to say that if I am not part of the meeting, something is going to go wrong. This is sick.” (Nick)</p> <p>2. “A good manager is someone that listens and criticises in a positive way. And say this is what you’ve done wrong, but I’ll teach you how to do it better next time. And also communicates in person, not sending me an email in the middle of the night saying you’ve done this and this wrong” (Margaret)</p> <p>3. “I think I’ve lost a part of who I actually am. I think I’ve lost parts of my best self, or they’ve been buried by other competing realities. I am not an angry person, this is the story I tell myself, whether it is true or not. I’m not an angry person per say, but sometimes I’ve really had to escalate to meet people where they are. To be heard” (Mark)</p>

<p>Code: Self-description and Desires (SD and D):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I think I have been a great asset to the company, and I try and help everyone succeed. I don't do it for my own benefit, I fundamentally and in my heart want everyone to succeed." (Nick) 2. "At the moment I've been put onto a special project where I'm like doing project management for clients. I am managing all sorts of things. I am doing development management, which is what I used to do, which is quite fun for me because I am very strategic and holistic. I like hospitality and design so I can see how this will play out and how this will be the product that my client wants" (Margaret) 3. "It comes down to validation. To go from knowing I was adequate at something but not really valued, versus going to a context where everyone is like wow, that's amazing. So, then I figured I'm good at this, I could do this, but it was at the expense of myself." (Mark) 	<p>Code: Description of others (DO):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Mark always says to me—why are you still here? Why are you on site on a handover day, until 11 o'clock at night? Because these guys look up to us. If I am in my bed, with my head on my pillow, these guys know that. They know that you are at home and they are here busting their ass trying to get this job over the line for the company. Mark thinks he is untouchable." (Nick) 2. "The client has champagne taste on a beer budget, whereas I come from a world where money does not matter, so I'm like great, let's do this and that, and he is like oh you know, but dude this is what you wanted. I just find it a bit embarrassing, and I can feel him being awkward" (Margaret) 3. "There is no accountability with specific individuals, yes. At the beginning of that project lifecycle, we sat down and said 'here's the game plan, you are going to do this and you are going to do this'. By this time and this date, it was blatantly ignored." (Mark) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I am supposed to be the shining knight, I am supposed to be a rock, I am supposed to be a saviour. You are trying to be that father figure; you are trying to be a stabiliser. But internally, I got mayor anxiety and I am stressed out." (Nick) 2. "I feel quite confident but my title belittles me to my clients. I cannot be like I am the project manager and Mark is supervising. If I am at the meeting and Mark is not there, then they'll say why isn't Mark here. If I was the client, I'll say why is this chick managing my project, and she's still got this CA title. They don't know what that means, it sounds like I am this minion" (Margaret) 3. "We feed into narratives. And whenever I looked at the narrative, my dad was always working, at one point, he was working 18-hour day, three different jobs. So, against this backdrop, 11 o'clock at Friday night and he is still working on his porch. He is in his 70's and works at 11 o'clock on a Friday night. I had to help him to bed." (Mark)
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Table 01

Thematic Hierarchy		
Modes of Production	Means of Production	Truth Claims
<p>Self-referencing Identity Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects <i>perceives</i> the surrounding world in terms of his/hers existing body of knowledge and self-knowledge; 	<p>Matching/aligning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects' claim for objectivity by way of highlighting in the external environment qualities that are reflective of their sense of self; 	<p>Mark: "clients need a service that captures their needs while also providing them with best value for money. It is not all about being contractual"</p> <p>Margaret: "good project managers are good with people. They can communicate their expectations and manage those of others"</p> <p>Nick: "If you are a hard worker, you do what you have to and you just get on with it. There is no sense to complain about every little detail"</p>
<p>Self-reinforcing Identity work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects <i>acts</i> in the world in terms of his/hers existing body of knowledge and self-knowledge; 	<p>Magnifying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects' claim for objectivity by way of focusing on the sameness and/or difference <i>between</i> self/other; 	<p>Mark: "For example, look at John. He does not care whether someone is waiting for him nor does he want to provide an explanation for why he is late"</p> <p>Margaret: "Matt just sends an email when he wants to assert his authority instead of just coming and speaking to the person"</p> <p>Nick: "Look at Tony. He comes in at 7am and leaves at 5pm. He never goes the extra mile to do the best he can"</p>
<p>Undifferentiated Identity Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject <i>monitors</i> the self by the same rules applied in monitoring others; 	<p>Negating/questioning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjects deploy previously highlighted claims for objectivity in the acts of self-negation; 	<p>Mark: "I do understand it is my fault that I don't raise my hand to say I am too busy. Instead, I take on a new project and don't give it the attention it needs"</p> <p>Margaret: "I am expected to know what needs to be done when I get a task. But I am new here. I understand it is simple for others but I need guidance in how to do things. How can they not see it?"</p> <p>Nick: "Today being a good manager requires attentiveness of the emotional states of others. I never complained, I just used to get on with things but today that does not matter much"</p>

<p>Corrosive Identity Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject <i>perceives limits</i> in one's knowledge and self-knowledge in reference to others; • Subject <i>perceives</i> a more complex and elaborate circumstance respective to perceived limits in self-knowledge; 	<p>Contrasting and prioritising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjects' claims to objectivity expand to include previously unacknowledged qualities about the self and others • Subjects' claims to objectivity extends to <i>prioritise</i> perceived sameness and difference between self/other 	<p>Mark: "I never know whether I have done a good or a bad job. Every time it is something else. Most of the time I have not considered something that others think is obvious"</p> <p>Margaret: "Look at Caroline. She puts her head down and works like a racehorse. She does not talk all day and just gets things done. I think I could never do my work the way she does"</p> <p>Nick: "Being a senior manager, I now need to dress in a certain way, speak in a certain way, manage the emotional needs of others all of which is a big learning curve for me. Being good at your job does not mean building quality project anymore"</p>
<p>Self-preserving Identity Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject <i>acts</i> in terms of the new perception and more complex and elaborate circumstances. 	<p>Rearranging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjects' construct a new definition of the self and the external world in terms of that which matters the most in the life of the subject 	<p>Mark: "You come to a point where you don't care anymore. If they don't appreciate my effort and what I do, I can find a new job in a week and work for someone else who values what I do"</p> <p>Margaret: "I thought construction will let me exercise my creative aptitudes. I now realise this is really not for me. I always wanted to work on projects where I can add value in a different way and not just be a cog in a wheel"</p> <p>Nick: "I know who I am and I know that who I am is not a bad thing. I know that if I leave this place, I will do just fine"</p>

Table 02

Interview schedule

1. Could you please tell me what you do in your job?
2. Can you tell me about how you came to get this job?
3. Can you tell me how you see your job fits into the work the organisation performs?
4. Can you please describe the steps involved in fulfilling your responsibilities?
5. What are the main differences between a good and a bad day at work?
6. What do you think your boss thinks about how you do your job?
7. Can you tell me what place work related anxiety has in your professional career?
8. Can you tell me about a recent time when you felt anxious at work?
9. Can you describe how work-related anxiety affects your relationships at work?
10. How has work affected how you see yourself?
11. How do you think other people at work see you?
12. How do you see yourself in future?
13. How do you think your life would be if you were doing something else?

Formal Documents

Project Manager's Identity: A Phenomenological Perspective

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Matija Djolic and I am a student at UTS. (My supervisor is Prof Stewart Clegg)

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research seeks to understand the experience of work-related anxiety in project-based work arrangements from an employee's point of view and explore how this experience shapes how participants view and define themselves.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

This research will be phenomenological and observational. That means that I will engage in detailed fieldwork observing the normal course of work unfolding with data collected by:

- i. Semi-structured interviews. There will be two interviews conducted per participant. Each will be about 1 hour in duration
- ii. Diary studies

And observing daily routines of architects through

- i. Observing meetings with consultants and stakeholders over a 6-8 week period (approximately 2-4) hrs per week.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

There are very few if any risks because the research has been carefully designed. However, it is possible that you might feel uncomfortable being observed or interviewed. I will aim to minimize the chance of this; the aim of the research is to elicit accounts of particular experiences in your own words and not to criticize or pass judgement. You will be in control of the overall interview process. It is also possible that the research may reveal inefficiencies in the organizational structure or information flows in a project process. This may cause discomfort and fears of repercussions for team members. However, everything that is said and discussed in the interview will remain strictly confidential.

In any case, should the interview process cause you discomfort, please refer to the below counseling service which can assist with managing negative emotional experiences.

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety>

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You don't have to say yes. Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you think I or my supervisor can help you with, please feel free to contact me (us) on Matija.Djolic@student.uts.edu.au or my supervisor on Stewart.Clegg@uts.edu.au

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number: 2015000333.

CONFIDENTIALITY

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using personal information about you for the research project. All this information will be treated confidentially. All data will be de-identified prior to publication and no direct reference will be ever made to participants personal characteristic. Data will be de-identified using pseudonyms. Data will only be accessed by the researcher Matija Djolic, his supervisor Stewart Clegg and other member of the supervisory panel (Natalia Nikolova, Helena Hezimann). All recordings and notes will be stored securely on two password protected archives stored in UBS memory keys that will be kept in a closed cabinet in UTS DAB, along with hard copies of the documentation and notes.

We would like to store your information for future use in research projects that are an extension of this research project. In all instances your information will be treated confidentially. Data will not kept any longer than necessary, and destroyed after 5 years.

I plan to discuss the results with my PhD supervisor Stewart Clegg and other member of the supervisory panel (Natalia Nikolova, Helena Hezimann). In any publication, as mentioned, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

CONSENT FORM

Projects Manager's Identity: A Phenomenological Perspective

I _____ [participant's name] agree to participate in the research project (*Phenomenology of Unsuccessful Identity Work: The Problematic of Self-expression in Project-based Environments*) being conducted by Matija Djolic

(Matija.Djolic@student.uts.edu.au). I understand that funding for this research has been provided by UTS to Matija in the form of a scholarship.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researchers or the University of Technology Sydney.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I agree to be:

- Audio recorded

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that:

- Does not identify me in any way
- May be used for future research purposes

I am aware that I can contact Matija Djolic and his supervisor Stewart Clegg (contact provided in the information sheet) if I have any concerns about the research.

___/___/___

Name and Signature [participant]

Date

___/___/___

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

Date

Consent Form and Information Sheet - Matt Djolic and Jeremy Interview (PhD research project)

Matija Djolic <Matija.Djolic@student.uts.edu.au>

Wed 8/28/2019 2:28 PM

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

2 attachments (35 KB)

19.08.28 - Information Sheet and Consent Form.docx; Sample Interview Questions.docx;

Hi Jeremy!

Further to our discussion, the attached is the information sheet which provides information on the project and some regularly asked questions. It also provides all participants with information in regards to how the data will be treated and how any concerns will be addressed. I have also attached some sample interview questions to give you a guide of our discussion. These will vary but not substantially.

Please let me know what time is good for you to sit down. To be on the same side, please allow 2 hours. It will be a conversation format interview and although there are questions to guide us, we will not follow it blindly as the aim is to have an open discussion about work and where it takes us is up to us.

As part of my ethic application process, I need to make sure that senior management of the organisation is not across who i am interviewing. As a result I would prefer to conduct the interviews of site (outside the office and outside working hours) so as to keep the matter as confidential as possible. It is however up to you as to how you want it done so please let me know when you would like to do it and where.

And yes, please sign the consent form after reading all of the attached and send it back to me. Please feel free to ask me more questions if you have any concerns prior to signing.

Thank you and I am looking forward to our discussion.

Regards,

Matija Djolic

4/27/2021

Mail - Matija Djolic - Outlook

Consent Form and Information Sheet - Matt Djolic and Sophia Interview (PhD research project)

Matija Djolic <Matija.Djolic@student.uts.edu.au>

Wed 8/28/2019 10:21 AM

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

2 attachments (35 KB)

19.08.28 - Information Sheet and Consent Form.docx; Sample Interview Questions.docx;

Hi Sophia!

Further to our discussion, the attached is the information sheet which provides information on the project and some regularly asked questions. It also provides all participants with information in regards to how the data will be treated and how any concerns will be addressed. I have also attached some sample interview questions to give you a guide of our discussion. These will vary but not substantially.

Please let me know what time is good for you to sit down. To be on the same side, please allow 2 hours. It will be a conversation format interview and although there are questions to guide us, we will not follow it blindly as the aim is to have an open discussion about work and where it takes us is up to us.

As part of my ethic application process, I need to make sure that senior management of the organisation is not across who i am interviewing. As a result I would prefer to conduct the interviews of site (outside the office) so as to keep the matter as confidential as possible. It is however up to you as to how you want it done so please let me know when you would like to do it and where.

And yes, please sign the consent form after reading all of the attached and send it back to me. Please feel free to ask me more questions if you have any concerns prior to signing.

Thank you and I am looking forward to our discussion.

Regards,

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