THE GLOBAL INTEGRATION CHALLENGE: GLOBAL MANAGEMENT TEAMS, TEMPORAL DIFFERENCES, AND CONSTRUCTING THE IDENTITY OF THE GLOBAL 'OTHER'

by

Laurel Edwards Grassin-Drake

M.S., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016

M.A., Columbia University, 1992

M.B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 1983

B.A., Swarthmore College, 1981

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Signature of Author: Signature redacted
MIT Sloan School of Management

Certified by: Signature redacted
Donald Lessard
Epoch Foundation Professor of International Management, Emeritus
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: Signature redacted
Catherine Tucker
Sloan Distinguished Professor of Management Science
Professor of Marketing
Chair MIT Sloan PhD Program

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I investigate the challenges of 21st century global integration by examining it in-depth at a Fortune 200 global supplier (CC) that faces strong pressures of both global integration and local responsiveness. While global integration is typically discussed at a macro level, here I use qualitative methods to study senior managers at a micro level. In this way, I establish critical internal struggles with integration, and reveal external dynamics of integration in a close interfirm relationship as a strategic supplier.

Results highlight the role of Global Management Teams as an essential linking tool. At the same time, I find that conflicting temporalities across locations, accompanied by a globally-shared logic of appropriateness, place restraints on this mechanism of integration: limiting the hours available, and consistently advantaging and disadvantaging specific geographies.

I also draw on a unique data set to examine global integration in the context of a close, dependent relationship, with multiple boundary-crossing links. This consists of thirteen months of observations of the weekly virtual meeting of the global account team responsible for CC's largest customer (Alpha). Tracing the collective process by which the team constructs the organizational identity (OI) of the "other" from their individual distributed interactions, I find that in constructing Alpha's global OI the team is also co-creating their own global OI. Further, the process by which the team constructs Alpha's OI to answer the question "who are they?" parallels well-documented internal processes used by organizational members to answer "who are we?" Importantly, through this co-creation, identity acts both as an alignment mechanism within CC, and across firm boundaries in the relationship.

Finally, CC's identity work on Alpha extends beyond construction to shaping and enforcing Alpha's OI as partner through active voice, engaging the customer's hierarchy from outside to discipline and shape the customer's behavior from within.

Thesis Supervisor: Donald Lessard

Title: Epoch Foundation Professor of International Management, Emeritus

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Overview

"MIT's Clever Trick to Make Web Pages Load 34 Percent Faster"
(http://www.wired.com/2016/03/mit-polaris-faster-web-pages/)

The personification of organizations is taken for granted today. We don't think twice about headlines declaring that MIT knows a "clever trick" or that "Apple goes to war," "Metabiota bungled", or "GE denies." Since the early 19th century American law has treated formal legal entities as corporate persons, extending individual rights granted by the constitution to corporations (Mark, 1987). Within economic theory, companies are routinely seen as rational actors who interact on the economic stage as competitors, suppliers, customers, and so on; a view which provided the foundations for the field of business strategy (Rumelt, 1997). Yet, carefully considered, the embodiment of the corporation as an organizational actor requires the cooperation of thousands of people.

Accomplishing this is particularly difficult for MNEs. Scholars in international business (IM) have long recognized the need for global strategic behavior, while at the same time noting significant barriers to implementation (Ghemawat, 2017; Hout, Porter, & Rudden, 1982). Not only does sheer distance make coordination challenging, but national fault lines characterized by differences in formal and informal institutions are obstacles to establishing unified action. Furthermore, in an era of growing interfirm ties extending across the globe (Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000), any internal failure in harmonization becomes highly visible, as both linked organizations see the other through numerous individual cross-firm relationships in many geographies.

This challenge shapes the questions at the heart of my research:

How do the diverse actions and interactions of employees across hierarchical levels, functions and, in particular, countries come together to create the singular actor that is the multinational enterprise (MNE)?

- *Internally, in the effort to coordinate across regions, how does the tension between differentiation and integration play out?*
- *Externally, how is this accomplished in the context of strategic relationships?*

These are fundamentally questions of global integration, a central focus in international management studies, but they are also questions of identity. And while global integration has largely been a top-down concept, my questions drive a bottom-up perspective, as is found in work on organizational identity (OI). Answering these questions entail looking at microprocesses and interactions in order to tease out the actual mechanisms of integration where they play out within and between organizations, i.e. in the communication and interactions of globally-distributed managers.

This was my starting point as I began my in-depth qualitative study of a global components manufacturer (CC) through examining its integration through virtual meetings of global management teams, the limitations that temporalities place on the use of these meetings, and the identity dynamics between it and its largest global customer, as reflected in the weekly meeting of the global account team who interacted with the customer at multiple points across the globe.

Integration in Strategy and International Management

Since Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) first demonstrated the importance of both differentiation and integration for organizational performance, strategists (and managers) have struggled to identify mechanisms that allow for companies to maintain the precarious balance between the two. The balancing act is particularly challenging for international companies, whose operations must adapt to varied national institutions, and for whom coordination is further complicated by wide expanses of space and time. Recognizing the geographic tensions inherent in MNEs, and tailoring Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) insights accordingly, Doz, Bartlett and Prahalad (1981) developed the global integration/national responsiveness framework which remains a key tool in international strategy and management through the present day.

In general, it is relatively simple to operate with high levels of either global integration or local responsiveness and low levels of the other, thus avoiding the balancing act, and this is what early internationalizers did. Multidomestic structures composed of local country subsidiaries, largely independent of center, allowed for strong local responsiveness with minimal integration, and were common in consumer product companies. At the other end of the spectrum was a global structure, found in global markets such as chemicals or electronics, which exploited global cost efficiencies through integrating all control and decision-making at headquarters with little or no local adaptation (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989). Both minimize the need to balance integration and differentiation, as well as having the advantage of a simple hub-and-spoke design.

The real difficulty comes when a company operates in an environment which demands both high integration and high responsiveness, i.e. the upper right quadrant. More specifically, responding to both requires sophisticated forms of integration which can hold up in the face of local responsiveness without suppressing geographic voice and power. The result has been a move towards increasingly complex organizational designs for MNEs (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Birkinshaw, Toulan, & Arnold, 2001; Doz, Santos, & Williamson, 2001; Hedlund, 1986; Strikwerda & Stoelhorst, 2009). These models attempt to achieve integration by creating multi-layered, interdependent networks of people which cut across business units and geographies. In other words, "grouping" of organizational structure is no longer enough, or as Prahalad and Doz (1987:173) emphasized, "Reorganization is not the answer." Rather, what becomes critical for binding the firm together is cross-unit "linking" mechanisms, and underlying "aligning" systems (Nadler & Tushman, 1997; Westney & Zaheer, 2009) to create lateral (rather than merely vertical) integration, and a shared managerial "world view," "common understanding," or "mindset" (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Prahalad & Doz, 1987).

The need for linking and aligning tools has only grown in today's interconnected knowledge economy. Dynamic capabilities and competencies, as well as the strategic importance of knowledge and innovation (e.g. Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Teece, 2014) have put issues of the organization at the core of both strategy and IM. Now integration is not only addressing pressures for efficiency in operations, or strategic coordination in the face of global customers or competition (Prahalad & Doz, 1987), but is required for knowledge and capability development and transfer. To truly take advantage of its worldwide capabilities, the MNE must access locally-embedded, distributed knowledge and transfer it across borders for wider use. Thus the forces for complex integration are not only external, but also internal (Westney & Zaheer, 2009).

Further complicating the picture is the growth of new organizational forms requiring integration across the boundary of the firm (Davis, 2017). While multi-authority networked models such as the metanational (Doz et al., 2001) are designed to be effective at mobilizing knowledge and capability flows inside the firm, they create challenges for external audiences who need to "read" the organization. This is critical for the firm, as shown by decades of research demonstrating that organizations must provide "accountability and reliability" (Hannan & Freeman, 1984) through being coherent, i.e. performing as a single actor, with an identity and a voice (Zuckerman, 2010) in order to succeed. Yet, by definition a multi-authority organization is to some degree disjointed. Moreover, MNEs now often operate within larger strategic networks of interfirm ties (Gulati et al., 2000), increasing the probability that any incoherence can be seen from the outside. Connected firms no longer view each other as actors across an organizational field, but rather have a relationship that encompasses a diversity of individual linkages across functions, hierarchical levels and geographies, and a well-integrated company on one side will see the inconsistencies on the other.

Despite the widespread recognition that the requisite global integration is not easy to accomplish, the actual processes of integration remain largely a list of tools for strategists taking a top-down view. Linking and aligning mechanisms can be separated into two broad categories: systems, (e.g. information, performance measurement, resource allocation, budgeting, reward and punishment, etc), and tools connecting people laterally across the organization (integrators, business teams, coordination committees, task forces, socialization) (Prahalad & Doz, 1987; Nadler & Tushman, 1997). The first group of mechanisms are largely baked-in processes, what I term "hard integration," requiring little need for management's ongoing support, while the latter, "soft integration" mechanisms all demand high levels of management attention (Prahalad & Doz, 1987). It is these that are the focus of my research.

In particular, this study concentrates on what I term "global management teams" or GMTs (see Chapter 5), i.e. permanent managerial teams operating across borders, in order to address my first research question, "Internally, in the effort to coordinate across regions, how does the tension between differentiation and integration play out?" Business teams have been recognized as "the most effective tool" to "integrate dispersed operations." (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001:63). GMTs are frequently acknowledged as a key global integration mechanism, and "coordination committees" (Prahalad & Doz, 1987), "functional analogs" or functional teams across divisions (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), "global account management teams" (Birkinshaw et al., 2001), and "magnets" (Doz et al., 2001) are just a few of the examples. Yet there has been little in-depth empirical work on how these function and what the challenges are in employing teams to bridge the local/global divide.

In addition, while these linking mechanisms of managerial and professional communication crisscrossing geographies are meant to keep the organization connected, ultimately the mechanisms operate through, and themselves shape, a generalized "common understanding" (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), "common culture" (Prahalad & Doz, 1999) or "organizational identity" (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1991), which forms the basis for unified global action. Such broad brush characterizations, though, are likely insufficient in the context of a close interfirm relationship, where there is the need for a consistent global organizational identity (OI) in the face of visible, regional differences (as mentioned above). Thus OI dynamics in a specific context are at the heart of my second research question, "Externally, how do the diverse actions and interactions of employees across hierarchical levels, functions and, in particular, countries come together to create the singular actor that is the multinational enterprise in the context of strategic relationships?"

Organizational identity is fundamental to establishing the organization as a social actor. As King, Felin and Whetten (2010) note, "Organizations possess unique identities that make them recognizable, legitimate their existence, and distinguish them from similar others (Albert &

Whetten, 1985; Deephouse, 1999; Whetten & Mackey, 2002)." Internally, OI provides meaning (Selznick, 1957), and becomes the source for collective action (King, 2015). Shaped by routines and systems (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002), top-down sensegiving (Balogun, 2003; Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and reflection on external feedback loops (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010; Glynn, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), it drives member behaviors. Further, member identification with the firm is a source of commitment, helping to align individual behaviors with organizational norms. To a degree, it can be argued that this is the "common understanding" noted by IM scholars.

Given the obvious global/local tension in MNEs, IM research has focused on the tension between the dual identities of national subsidiary and global company, but often at an individual level. In particular, the importance of subsidiary managers identifying both with the local identity and the broader MNE identity is well-documented (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2009; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Reade, 2001; Smale et al., 2015; Vora & Kostova, 2007; Vora, Kostova & Roth, 2007). At a higher level of analysis, national identities of subsidiaries can be used as a tool to establish separation from HQ (Ailon-Souday & Kunda, 2003), thus inhibiting integration (Edman, 2016). In addition, in the context of cross-border mergers, the construction of the local subsidiary's new identity by HQ and local managers shapes its "strategic and structural location" within the MNE (Clark & Geppert, 2011), and establishing a new combined cross-border identity is facilitated by the image of a "common future" (Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2003). Further, a subsidiary that successfully draws on both global and local identities to create a "dynamic balance" can increase its strategic flexibility (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017).

Thus, IM theory has demonstrated and emphasized the value and impact of OI in the internal functioning of the firm; however the external face of OI is also critical, and has received much less attention from IB researchers. Organizational studies and strategy have increasingly recognized the importance of a company's presenting a clear organizational identity to external actors (Hsu, 2006; Negro, Hannan, & Rao, 2010; Ruef & Patterson, 2009). OI confers legitimacy and access to resources, because it allows other actors to predict and respond to the organization in a consistent way (King et al., 2010). This becomes critical in a close interfirm relationship. From a distance, OI projection by the top management team may be sufficient, but theory and empirics have not yet addressed the global/local tensions of OI in GMTs interacting with another organization at the boundary of a firm through multiple local points of contact. Using in-depth observations of a global account management team, interacting with a single global customer in a strategic supplier relationship, this study also advances our understanding of the role of OI in global integration within the firm, as well as between firms.

The Study

The chosen company setting proved to be ideal for addressing the research questions, because it experiences strong pressures for both regional differentiation and global integration, and operates within close interfirm relationships. The study took place across three regions of the largest division of a global components manufacturer (CC), as well as in the virtual space of global meetings. Their primary customers are MNEs who similarly operate across a large global footprint. Decades-old, their largest supplier/customer relationships are cemented through dozens, or even hundreds of individual connections across hierarchical levels, functions and geography, making the two organizations each part of the other's strategic network.

Through wide-ranging interviews of managers in CC, and over a year of observations of virtual global meetings in the same firm, I establish the critical role of virtual GMT meetings in integration, while finding that conflicting temporalities across locations, accompanied by a globally-shared logic of appropriateness, place constraints on this mechanism of integration: limiting the hours available, and consistently advantaging and disadvantaging specific geographies. Going more deeply within the interactions of a single GMT, I examine the processes by which the global account team responsible for their largest global customer "reads" the customer. Not only do I find that they co-create the customer's global OI alongside their own global OI, but that they employ voice, using the customer's hierarchy from outside to shape and discipline the customer's behavior from within.

The thesis proceeds as follows. After an overview of the setting and a description of obtaining access to the site and the processes of collecting data in Chapter 2, I present the in-depth study of the global account management team, using observations of their weekly meeting across thirteen months, in Chapter 3. Within the linking mechanism of the GMT, I find OI acting as an aligning mechanism, not just within the team, but more significantly, between CC and the customer (Alpha). In this close, dependent relationship, characterized by multiple boundary-crossing links across space and time, the team actively co-creates the customer's global OI alongside the team's own global OI. I demonstrate that in answering "who are they?" the team's processes parallel the well-documented internal processes by which members answer "who are we?" Moreover, with exit as an unrealistic option for enforcing the customer's OI, I show CC's effective use of voice through activating the customer's hierarchy to discipline and shape the customer's OI as "partner" from within. Finally, when faced with a breakdown in hierarchy, the team is forced to default to loyalty and adaptation. However, given that their "structural fit" (Toulan, Birkinshaw, & Arnold, 2006) with Alpha is rooted in their own OI, adaptation proves problematic. The results contribute to OI theory, by revealing external OI processes answering 'who are they?' as well as an audience working to shape and discipline the OI of the "other" through voice. Both findings suggest that the clean boundaries drawn between members inside the organization and stakeholders outside the organization in much of the OI literature may not hold. From the perspective of IM theory, the work reveals the microprocesses of constructing global integration, and in doing so, illuminates the role of OI not just as an integration tool within the MNE, but across MNEs in relationship, and as an effective, but possibly inflexible, anchor for structural fit.

In Chapter 4, I go beyond the experience of this single team to examine the broader role of global management teams and virtual meetings for cross-regional control, coordination and collaboration at the firm. Specifically, I follow respondents' lead in concentrating on the consequences of time zones on GMT meetings. Employing abductive "systematic combining" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), I first find that the challenge posed by differential time zones for coordination and control has been subsumed by geographical distance in international business theorizing and research. Deepening the analysis, I show that time zones should instead be treated as a social variable, embedded in local standards and norms, i.e. "temporalities" (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002), rather than modeled as a distance measure. This distinction is important because whereas technology ameliorates the effects of distance, it amplifies the effects of time differences; thus the impact of the two factors on international management is diverging. Using this new theoretical perspective, I demonstrate that, despite the absence of formal rules for scheduling meetings, a collective logic of appropriateness has evolved across all regions, which precludes scheduling meetings during attendees' "sleep time." Ultimately, this norm significantly limits the firm's ability to integrate globally and systematically places specific regions at a disadvantage.

After a brief summary of the key findings across both studies in Chapter 5, I set GMTs and GMT meetings, in the larger context of global integration. Distinguishing the GMT from the well-studied GVTs, I explain why temporalities pose a greater challenge for GMT meetings. With this research suggesting that temporalities are an administrative restraint (Penrose, 1959) to global integration through synchronous communication, questions are raised about the widespread use of meetings for coordination, collaboration and control, as well as the emphasis on networked information flows in contemporary organizational design. Finally, I close with some broad implications for future research in the areas of global information sharing, OI as a integration mechanism across firm boundaries and its possible field-level effects, possible contingencies affecting the benefits of relocating headquarters, and the need for a new look at MNE organizational design and global integration in light of China's economic rise.

CHAPTER 2:
DATA AND METHODS

Setting and Access

Given how little we know about the daily work of integration in MNEs, I chose to pursue this research with the magnifying glass of qualitative methods, using interviews, observations and corporate documents. Qualitative research plays an important role in the field of organizational studies, because these methods are "particularly well-suited for examining complex social structures, processes and interactions" (Lamont & White, 2008: 10). Moreover, qualitative research truly comes into its own when we are trying to come to grips with emergent knowledge. Unlike quantitative work, qualitative studies are able to observe real-world phenomena at close range, reveal mechanisms, identify processes and discover relevant variables for theory generation and hypothesis formation for future testing. (Lamont & White, 2008; Small, 2009)

Obtaining requisite micro observations of global integration in a complex multinational required in-depth access to what was likely to be a large MNE. In addition, I determined that the firm needed to be juggling a balance of global and local demands, i.e. that it be neither heavily centralized nor completely decentralized. To further ensure a move from strict hierarchy towards a more diffuse power structure and a somewhat diluted national OI, I also searched out companies that had more than one visible geographical power base in the organization under study. Finally, since the focus of integration work has long been top-down, I concluded that observations below the top management team level would likely yield more insights.

The chosen site proved to be ideal, meeting all the criteria. The study site is the largest product division of CC, a global Fortune 200 components manufacturer. Operating with a truly global footprint, the division is one of those rare businesses that has operations (sales, assets, employees) spread equally across the Americas, Europe, and Asia (Rugman & Verbeke, 2004). Moreover, the company is headquartered in the US, but the division is based in China, and the division is organized regionally in an increasingly global business. Using the classification laid out by Prahalad and Doz (1987:23-25), CC is in a multi-focal business. Reflecting only a low to medium need for global operational integration and a medium to high need for local responsiveness, there are strong regional silos within the division, as business unit profit centers are contained within region for key products. Yet at same time there is pressure to connect globally. Its customers are large global manufacturers, and the top ten customers account for 75% of revenues and are increasingly utilizing global platforms. Thus, in addition to weak dotted lines connecting functional managers to functional directors in the executive team, global account teams have been established to connect regional customer representatives to each other via designated global customer executives, while project teams centered on platform/product development complete the network of structured global relationships. In another vein, enthusiastic support from management also opened doors and provided flexibility of access. Ultimately, their willingness to supply the technology and permissions to sit in on global virtual meetings, presented me with a unique window into global integration at a micro-level.

As is frequently the case, the access process took some time and required several layers of approval. My first contact was with two senior engineering managers based in North America, introduced through a mutual acquaintance. These managers became keen backers of the research. They also continued to be my primary contacts and sources for basic information on the company throughout the study. They, then, presented my research proposal to the director of North American region, who proved to be the primary gatekeeper. Having decided it was worth a closer look, he requested a meeting with me, and I travelled to discuss the project with him in person. Finally, the director took the concept to Division President in China who gave the ultimate approval. At the time, I was also pursuing another company, where the next step would be to meet the CEO. Deciding that this study site had more potential, I moved forward with CC. This required that I sign a non-disclosure agreement, but there were no visible lawyers involved. Neither did I interact with any managers or executives outside the division, including the corporate C-Suite. With the division president's seal of approval, my contacts began to introduce me to senior managers in the region, and interviews were set up at the regional HQ and tech center. The entire process took nine months from the introductory meeting to my first interviews.

It is worth noting that the company also funded some of the travel and expenses tied to the research (this was further supplemented by an MIT-China Program grant from MIT

International Science and Technology Initiatives). In return, management asked that I share what I had learned with the company, but the nature of the information was not rigidly defined. In fact, management was extraordinarily open-minded about what the content might be, accepting that the research would be fluid. As the study evolved, I was constantly encouraged to do what I needed for research purposes, and they readily facilitated additional access.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over the course of two years, comprising interviews of 95 managers globally and observations of 99 virtual and in-person meetings (See Tables 1 and 2). Respondents included the executive committee of the division, senior regional managers, and a range of engineers. Interviews were conducted in five rounds of visits to offices in the US, China and Europe, and by phone with managers from other countries/regions. Lasting 1-2½ hours, interviews were semi-structured, allowing the respondents to speak in their own voice. The majority of interviews and some meetings were recorded and transcribed. Detailed notes were taken of the remainder. English is the formal language of communication for senior managers (every manager above a specified level must be proficient in English), and all interviews and meetings were conducted in English.

The process began at the Americas regional headquarters in the US, followed by a US tech center. Early interviews included a cross-section of regional managers and engineers. In addition, I sat in on a variety of meetings, all of which included some (or all) participants attending virtually. The sole exception was the day-long quarterly presentation of regional results to the divisional executive committee, which was entirely in-person (to control access, they do not allow electronic connections). As I learned how the complex divisional structure worked and the importance of electronic communication in linking and coordinating across regions, I requested access to the electronic meeting system, Microsoft Lync (now renamed Skype for Business). I was provided with a company laptop which not only afforded full access to electronic meetings (including chat), but also included an address book of managers (with names, titles, and reporting lines), as well as some generally available sections of the firm's intranet.

Table 1: Respondent and Interview Characteristics

Characteristic	Number Respondents	Percent Respondents
Location		
US	38	40%
Europe	26	27%
China	25	26%
India	3	3%
Mexico	1	1%
Brazil	1	1%
Korea	1	1%
Levels (current or past)		
Exec Committee	10	11%
Direct report to EC	28	29%
Senior manager	47	49%
Professional manager	10	11%
Function		
Engineering	32	34%
General management	12	13%
Account management	21	22%
Other (incl Fin, HR, Ops, IT, Purchasing & Mktg)	30	32%
Gender		
Male	83	87%
Female	12	13%
Interview medium		
In person	86	91%
Phone	9	9%

Table 2: Characteristics of Regular Global Meetings Observed

Characteristic	Primary customer account team	Engineering staff	Secondary customer account team
Length of time	13 months	5 months	5 months
Number observations	46 (of 50 held)	10 (of 13 held)	5 (of 7 held)
Frequency	weekly/rarely cancelled	weekly/periodically cancelled	twice month/often cancelled
Run out of	US	China	Germany
Meeting Time	Thursday 8:00-9:30	Wednesday 21:00-22:20	Tuesday 13:00-14:00 am EST
Length Median (range)	67 minutes (36-97)	61 minutes (34-85)	29 (12-64)
Attendance Mode (range)	13 (7-22)	10 (7-13)	11 (4-11)
Participants by country Mode (range)	8:00 US: 8 (4-10) 14:00 Germany: 1 (1-3) 18:30 India: 1 (0-3) 21:00 China: 1 (0-2) 11:00 Brazil: 1 (0-2) 22:00 Korea: 1 (0-2) 20:00 Indonesia: 0 (0-1)	21:00 China: 4 (3-5) 8:00 US: 4 (1-5) 14:00 Germany: 3 (2-6) 7:00 Mexico: 1 (0-2) 11:00 Brazil: 0 (0-1)	13:00 Germany: 3 (1-6) 20:00 China: 1 (0-2) 6:00 Mexico: 1 (0-1) 10:00 Brazil: 1 (0-1) 17.30 India: 0 (0-1)
Typical content	Coordinating pricing Coordinating client communication Interpreting customer Sensemaking competitive landscape	Staff reporting Top-down messages Performance measures	Staff reporting Business Planning Internal presentations to execs

Interviews continued with a trip to China. Here I met with individual members of the divisional executive committee, as well as regional heads and senior managers who regularly participate in cross-regional communication. I also attended a selection of regional and cross-regional meetings.

On my return, I began the process of deciding which meetings to attend and getting permissions to do so. First, I chose to focus on regularly scheduled meetings, rather than trying to catch impromptu communications. Given the importance of meetings as a formal mechanism for integration, this made sense. Moreover, their recurrence provided me with the opportunity to observe specific team interactions over time. As interviews in both North America and China revealed that the real challenge lies in global rather than simple cross-regional communication, I chose meetings connecting all three major regions (Americas, Asia and Europe). Norms of scheduling across temporalities mean that global meetings are only scheduled M-Thurs between 7-10am EST (see Chapter 4), thus I could only commit to sitting in on one meeting each day, for a total of four meetings max. In practice, I had difficulty locating meetings that are regularly scheduled on Monday. Since functional staff and GAM team meetings account for most regular communication across regions, I initially chose one of each for ongoing observation (i.e. engineering staff led out of Asia, and the team responsible for the largest customer led out of North America). Later I added a second customer account team, hoping to have a contrast led out of the final region (Europe); however, as Table 2 shows the team rarely met, and the result was that though it provided some signals about what doesn't work, I didn't have enough observations to draw any effective conclusions.

A visit to Europe for interviews, as well as second round visits to China and North American headquarters, were conducted towards the end of the meeting observations. This was to ensure that interviews with team members would not affect meeting dynamics. In addition, the interviews of European regional managers acted as a validity check on already developing conclusions based on information from North America and China.

In addition to interview and meeting transcripts and/or notes, I also took field notes on the day, specific to the interview or meeting (such as setting, personal impressions, etc.), as well as notes describing the day as a whole when on site. Once transcriptions were done, field notes were supplemented by analytic notes which included summarizing key points made by the respondent, unique information provided, emotional content, any surprising information, my own interpretation of any implicit content, and so on.

At the same time, I started writing analytic memos addressing emerging themes and questions across interviews or meetings. Part way into this process, I began coding transcripts using NVivo. The memos both informed early coding, and were informed by coding. Time zones and the challenges of temporality arose early in this process, and the work on this proceeded abductively as laid out in detail in Chapter 4.

As observations of meetings proceeded I found that the functional team meetings primarily consisted of hub-and-spoke communication centered on reporting information into and out from the team leader, while the global account team contained a mix of interactions, including strategic sensemaking exercises that involved a true integration of diffuse information, and identity work with regards to their customer, Alpha. These global account team meeting observations thus form the core for Chapter 3. The complexity of interactions led to my decision to chunk data by episodes which tied to an event or series of related events. Again, the methods are laid out in more detail within Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3:
WHO ARE THEY? CONSTRUCTING AND ENFORCING OI FROM OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

Chapter 3 Introduction

Much of strategy is a comparative process, in which strengths and weaknesses are evaluated relative to competitors with regards to customer needs (Grant, 1999), through asking: Who are our customers? Who are our competitors? What is our strategic positioning vis-à-vis others and what are our key relationships? These questions, which are at the heart of determining competitive positioning and strategic action, implicitly involve the construction of the other, as well as the self. Thus they boil down to two questions of organizational identity (OI): Who are they? And who are we in relation to them?

The importance of organizational identity as a concept has been recognized within strategy for some time, although the terms used often vary. Andrews (1971) emphasizes that the firm's vision and mission are the starting point for strategy. In international business, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) highlight the importance of the "matrix of the mind," (a loose concept that could also be construed as identity) in making complex organizational structures work. More recently Spender (1996), in the context of the knowledge theory of the firm, demonstrates that a strong organizational "social identity" is critical to organizational learning and knowledge sharing (especially tacit knowledge), and Teece (2007) states that "identity of market segments to be targeted" (1329) and "identity of the enterprise itself" (1326) are determinants in how firms should structure their dynamic capabilities.

Nevertheless, within strategy, identity processes are largely taken-for-granted, partly because in trying to determine how companies can gain a competitive advantage and outperform, strategy theorizing has generally taken top-down and macro perspective, with firms (or sometimes business units) considered as a unit. Identity is relatively uncomplicated at this level of analysis. Whether as a hierarchy with clear boundaries separating it from a market (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1981), a member of a population (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), a bundle of capabilities and/or knowledge (Barney, 1991; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Levitt & March, 1988), a node in a network (Gulati, 1998; Nohria, 1994; White, 2001), or a player in a cooperative game (Gans & Ryall, 2017), firms are portrayed as functioning as distinct and singular social actors.

Today's large firms, though, operate across multiple divisions, functions and geographies, as shown in Chapter 1. Thus developing or constructing a singular identity for the firm, as is implicitly assumed in the strategy literature, is a complex organizational process, especially in a geographically distributed firm. However, with a small number of exceptions, strategy itself has paid little attention to how this identity is formed or enforced. Even in the case of research into cognitive groups (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989; Reger & Huff, 1993) (in-depth research which has explicitly considered questions of identity in management's determination of their relevant competition), the process is limited to a small number of strategic decision-makers or the CEO himself. The results, while valuable to our understanding of managerial perceptions of the strategic field, still do not capture or explain how this might work in a large multinational.

Within organizational theory, there is a growing stream of literature which has specifically formalized the concept of organizational identity, and even demonstrated its importance in strategic processes (see for example: Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Divided into two main strands, the bulk of the work is founded on Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition of OI, as that which is central, enduring and distinctive about the organization, answering the question "who we are." This research takes an internal perspective which is providing an in-depth understanding of the OI processes of organizational members. However, while it has shown that interaction with external stakeholders is an essential part of the process, the research has not (by definition) really addressed the process by which external stakeholders answer the question "who are they?" The second strand theorizes OI as the collection of relevant categories in which an organization is believed to belong by all audiences (not just members), both internal and external. Generally the focus is from the outside-in, thus potentially answering the equally important identity strategic question "who are they?" but research and theory show that if audiences struggle to answer the question, then they simply withdraw their resources and exit the interaction.

The intent of this study is to take a first close look at the identity dynamics in a global firm operating in a strategic supplier relationship with a similarly global customer. Based on 13 months of observations of the weekly meeting of a global account team within the largest division of a Fortune 200 company (CC), I find that presenting a coordinated front to the customer is an important component of what these managers do (as predicted by OI and IM theory). Unexpectedly, though, they also spend a significant amount of time constructing the customer's (Alpha's) global OI, despite the fact that neither stream of OI theory really anticipates an external organization engaging in identity work about the "other."

Specifically, I establish that the ongoing micro-level process by which the CC team constructs Alpha's OI echoes that found for internal OI construction, despite their operating from outside Alpha's organization. More surprisingly, I show that the CC managers, operating as an external audience with no realistic exit option, go beyond loyalty to actively use voice (Hirschman, 1970). In fact, by working Alpha's hierarchy and communicating with people in different parts of Alpha, they don't just exercise voice <u>on</u> the company as a single point of contact from outside, rather, they activate voice from <u>within</u> Alpha, e.g. employing micro connections to affect macro organizational behavior. Through escalation, socialization, and the extreme of what I term "symbolic exit," they work to shape and discipline Alpha's coherence as a social actor, because their ability to take effective strategic action depends on Alpha's predictability. Moreover, given the close relationship and their dependence on Alpha, their identity work vis-à-vis Alpha's OI is critical because it interacts with and co-creates their own OI.

However, the effectiveness of CC's voice is ultimately dependent on Alpha's entitativity (i.e. being an entity) enforced by Alpha's hierarchy, and facilitated by their interorganizational fit (Toulan et al., 2006). Thus, when faced with the emerging power of a key joint venture partner within Alpha that Alpha HQ couldn't control, and the resultant fundamental fragmentation of the other, the only option left to CC is loyalty and adaptation. But with purpose, structure and processes rooted in a team OI created in relationship with a global Alpha, they struggle to respond appropriately.

After laying out in more detail the theoretical strands in OI and positioning the current work in the space, I will introduce the data and the context for the observations, followed by a section on methods. I then illustrate the sensemaking narrative process by which they construct Alpha's OI by analyzing a specific episode "The Rabbit" in-depth, documenting the similarities with internal OI identity work. The ensuing sections go beyond the Rabbit to show how their own OI is co-created with Alpha's OI and the role of organization structure in providing flexibility to Alpha's coherence. Drawing on Hirschman (1970) I then demonstrate the CC team's active use of voice to shape and discipline Alpha's OI by employing: escalation, socialization, and what I term, "symbolic exit." I show that a key mechanism for effectively employing these techniques is to use Alpha's hierarchy. I then trace the breakdown of Alpha HQ's control over China, the team's retreat to loyalty, and their struggle to adapt to the new environment.

Theory

Organizational Identity

It has long been a basic presumption in the literature that a central challenge in organizational life is the struggle to answer the question of "who are we, as an organization?" Whether as organizational character (Selznick, 1957), or organizational identity (OI) (Albert & Whetten, 1985), the definition of the organization by members and/or other management has been shown to be critical to organizational success for a number of reasons. Some scholars note its important role in members' own projects of self-fulfillment, providing a vehicle for collective bonding (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). Other work has demonstrated the importance of a shared organizational identity for purposes of coordination (Dukerich et al., 2002; King, 2015), in particular, when "who we are?" tells us "how people do things around here" (Steele & King, 2011:78). Still others stress the need for a recognizable OI which aligns with audience category expectations in order to achieve organizational success and even survival (Gioia et al., 2010; Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Zuckerman, 1999). Thus OI facilitates the cohesion necessary for both members and stakeholders if the organization is to be read and accepted as a social actor.

Organizational identity (OI) emerged as a named field of study with the publication of Albert and Whetten's (1985) seminal work defining OI as that which is "central, enduring and distinctive" in the organization. One of the reasons OI is such a powerful paradigm is that it acts as both a first-order and second-order concept (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2002). Readily grasped by the general public, managers, and respondents, OI also provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how organizations achieve the continuity, accountability and predictability required of social actors. Similar to Selznick's (1957) much earlier notion of character (King, 2015), OI provides institutional meaning through a "sense of unity and distinctiveness with regards to a set of activities" (Kenny, Whittle, & Willmott, 2016: 142). It accomplishes this by drawing on the rich theoretical traditions of individual identity, including: symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), identity theory (Stryker, 1968; Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991), and social identity theory (Tafjel & Turner, 1979; Tafjel & Turner, 1986). The result has been a steady increase in peer-reviewed papers, dissertations and theses as documented by Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth and Ravasi (2016), from one in 1985 to more than thirty in 2014.

Empirical studies have borne out the significance of OI. It is a core factor in employee identification (Cheney, 1983; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994) as well as stakeholder evaluation and action towards the organization (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Zuckerman, 1999). Further, OI has been shown to be central to the success or failure of strategic change (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Humphries & Brown, 2002; Sonenshein, 2010), including mergers, acquisitions and corporate spin-offs (Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, & Thomas, 2010; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Tienari & Vaara, 2016). OI also underpins strategic direction (Porac et al., 1989; Schultz & Hernes, 2013), and powers the coordinated action needed for directing innovation (Anthony & Tripsas, 2016). While a positive OI may lead to financial and reputational rewards (Millward & Postmes, 2010), a fragmented OI is a source of conflict (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Glynn, 2000) and a cost to the organization (Zuckerman, 1999; Foreman & Whetten, 2002).

Like many meta-concepts, though, the umbrella of OI encompasses scholars from multiple disciplines and fields (e.g. psychology, sociology, strategy, marketing, and communications). Numerous papers have noted the resultant fragmentation in the field in terms of: epistemology, ontology, theory, perspective on OI (internal vs. external) and methodology (e.g. Cornelissen, Haslam, & Werner, 2016; Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Ravasi & Canato, 2013). Moreover, despite variation in the dimensions used to categorize papers in each of these reviews, there is a notable similarity in the resultant groups, suggesting the existence of strong silos. A recent review of empirical OI research by Foreman and Whetten (2016) confirms this through formal cluster analysis. Five distinct groups emerge, characterized by the underlying theoretical understanding of OI, the methodology, and whether the empirical focus is on an insider or outsider perspective. There is little boundary-crossing, and for most authors, their research stays within a single cluster (see Table 3 for a condensed version of the Foreman and Whetten cluster tables).

Organizational identity: Insider, outsider or both?

In taking identity theory up a level of analysis to encompass organizations, a second social process is introduced. The "self" is no longer an individual, but a group of individuals. Thus OI becomes the product of internal, as well as external, interactions, raising the question: Does OI refer to the internal process, the external interaction, or both? The duality has been the source of much debate and confusion, as various scholars use and define OI from different perspectives (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Over time, though, the definition first formulated by Albert and Whetten (1985) has come to dominate: that OI consists of the constellation of attributes seen as central, enduring and distinctive, which together answer the question "Who we are as an organization?" In other words, OI exclusively refers to internal process. (Work based on the Albert and Whetten definition of OI is shaded in white in Table 3.) Perhaps as a consequence, research is heavily concentrated on the insider view. Notably, in a review of 82 peer-reviewed empirical papers on OI, 58 used solely insider data, 17 studied perspectives from both insiders and outsiders, while a mere seven focused on outsiders alone (Foreman & Whetten, 2016)

Nonetheless, an increasing number of studies emanating from Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition of OI recognize that continuous exchanges with external audiences are also critical in shaping OI, because, "Who we believe ourselves to be as an organization is partly based on how others see us" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000:68). Reserving the OI label for members-only processes, the terms "construed image," (what members believe others think of the organization)

Table 3: OI Research Clusters

(Research Group 1 in white background, Research Group 2 shaded grey)

Conceptualization of OI (number of articles)	**Theory Lens**	**Perspective**	**Analysis**	**Data**
Stories, themes, discourse (17)	narrative/ discourse	mostly insider	narrative/ discourse	predominantly interviews
Socially constructed claims & understandings (22)	social construction	insider only	grounded theory; ethnographic	interviews, internal docs, some observations
Multiple: social claims, attributes, characteristics (10)	mixed	insider or both	case study; ethnographic	external & internal documents, interviews, many observations
Attributes; theoretical typology (18)	social actor	mostly insider	regression, ANOVA EFA/CFA	mostly survey
Social categories (15)	social categories/ institutional	outsider or both	regression	secondary data

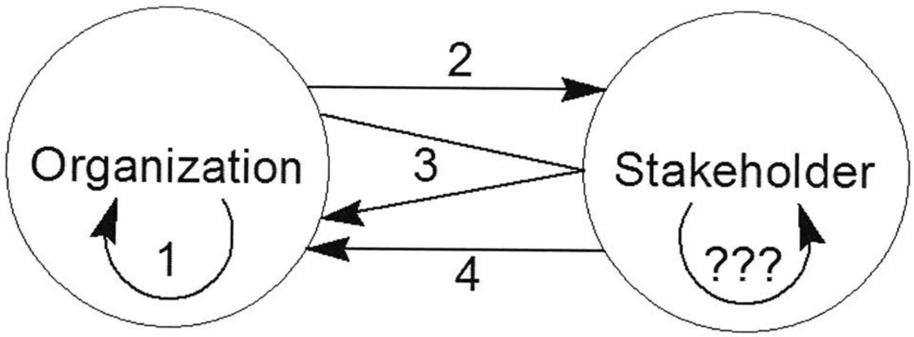
"projected image" and "reputation" are used to capture interactions with external stakeholder views of the organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

Research has shown the impact of external forces on internal identity dynamics and action through "construed image," or what organization members believe others think of the organization (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dukerich et al., 2002; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Glynn, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Other studies have found that collective evaluative beliefs about the organization in the form of "reputation" can drive internal change (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011), to redefine OI (Gioia et al., 2000), and to work to change evaluative dimensions (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Organizations also make calculated efforts to manipulate how others perceive them through "projected image" (Bartel, Baldi, & Dukerich, 2016; Dutton et al., 1994; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia et al., 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000).

Finally, all four components (OI, construed image, projected image and reputation) have been found to interact in important ways, resembling the loops of announcement and placement shaping individual identity and action in identity theory (e.g. Stryker, 1980 ; see also "claiming and granting" in OI theory [Pratt, 2012]). For instance, iterative member sensemaking through construing external images, and sensegiving through projecting their desired image, is fundamental to the process of organizational change (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Similarly, "negotiating identity claims" and "assimilating legitimizing feedback" are key steps in the organizational formation process (Gioia et al., 2010).

Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetten (2006: 100) provide a research map of the theoretical concepts, shown in Figure 1, connecting external stakeholders to the focal organization.

Figure 1: A Map of OI Concepts Related to Self and Other



1 Organizational identity: "Who are we as an organization?"
2 Projected identity: "What does the organization want others to think about the organization?"
3 Construed identity: "What does the organization believe others think of the organization?"
4 Reputation: "What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?"

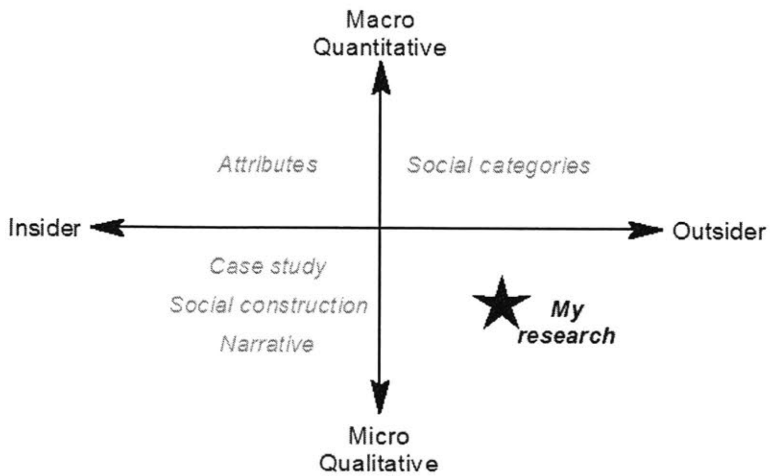
But there is one piece which is conspicuous in its absence: the "stakeholder" circle holds only empty space. While "reputation" is meant to represent what "stakeholders actually think of the organization," there is no consideration of how stakeholders come to their opinion. In other words, there is nothing within the stakeholder circle that mirrors the internal "who are we?" of the focal organization, to address the construction of "Who are they as an organization?" Part of the gap may be definitional, since Albert and Whetten defines OI as an internal process, but I would suggest that it is more than this. The very use of the term reputation implies an evaluative process taking place at a collective level, which excludes the possibility of a micro stakeholder process comparable to that found within the focal organization.

There is a second line of work which fundamentally differs in its understanding of OI, and therefore is not included in Brown et al.'s (2006) schema (See again Table 3, noting the "Strategic categories" row, shaded in grey). Drawing on other theoretical traditions in sociology, this research breaks down the distinction between self and other in OI, arguing that, "identity inheres in the expectations, assumptions, and beliefs held by internal and external to an organization" and instead "refer to homogenous sets of agents as audiences" (Hsu & Hannan, 2005:476). OI is no longer a members-only question, but instead all audiences, including many outside the formal boundaries of the firm, try to define and make sense of the organization based on existing institutional categories. An organization which can't be categorized, or which does not sufficiently align its behavior with its categorical OI, is illegitimate, and the result is that audiences are likely to withhold resources (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Tripsas, 2009; Zuckerman, 1999). However, while these empirical studies encompass the external categorical placement of organizations, they fail to address the process by which outsiders might answer the "who are they?" question.

Theory, methods, and data across these two dominant sets of OI literature may all contribute to the gap. Theoretically, the Albert and Whetten strand starts with the position that OI is solely a member construction, and therefore doesn't even consider the question of external process. Within the social categories strand, though, the responsibility for making sense of the organization doesn't rest with audiences, but with the organization. If the organization doesn't succeed, the assumed disciplining mechanism is audience exit. This assumption, though, is based on an important boundary condition which also determines the audiences chosen for study: that the audience has resources the organization needs (e.g. customers, investors, regulators, etc.), and that therefore the organization is dependent on the audience. In such a context, the audience stance is effectively, "If you're confusing me, I'm just going to walk away." So there is no need for researchers to look closely at audience construction of the other.

The respective focus of each group further drives methods and data. Researchers using qualitative methods to study micro processes (including narratives) of identity work have only considered member processes, because OI as a member construct is the starting point (even the concept of "construed image" is the member construction of external input). Turning to social categories, one might have expected theory to say something about external audience construction, given their lens on both internal and external audiences; however, their theoretical stance leads to large-N quantitative studies. By definition, such data will not reveal microprocesses of construction. Mapping the OI research clusters on the dimensions of Macro/Micro and Insider/Outsider, similarly reveals a research hole, in the blank lower right quadrant of Figure 2, where this research takes place.

Figure 2: OI Research Clusters on Relevant Dimensions



Finally, both traditions have tended to use or assume external collective audiences operating at arm's length. The result is that the answer to "who are they?" becomes a unidimensional foil, revealing itself through media characterizations (Kjærgaard, Morsing, & Ravasi, 2011) institutional categories (Czarniawska, 1997; Zuckerman, 1999), ratings (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Kovács & Hannan, 2010), surveys (Bartel, 2001; Hsu & Hannan, 2005), or most crudely "they are what we are not" (e.g. the "via negativa" in Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; and Gioia et al., 2010; or "contrast" in Negro et al., 2010).

Firms today, though, don't just interact at a distance across an organizational field. Instead there been a proliferation of organizational arrangements such as outsourcing, joint ventures, alliances, etc., which are so close as to blur the boundary of the organization itself (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Davis, 2017). These intimate organizational relationships have very different characteristics than the arm's-length connections assumed in OI theory. With multiple, long-term individual relationships reaching deep into both firms, the implication is a perspective on OI which is neither fully internal nor is it external (Scott & Lane, 2000). The resultant softening of the clear lines delineating the "organization" and its "stakeholders" raises questions for scholars in the tradition of Albert and Whetten (1985), and there have been calls for reconsidering OI in the face of these relationships (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 1996; Pratt et al.,

2016) Moreover, the multifold close relationships challenge the assumption of collective audiences operating at a distance found in both strands of OI theory and research, as well as the cognitive groups' literature. Now, the audience is a single organization which must "read" the "other" as a social actor through multiple individual visions, suggesting the need for micro processes constructing "who are they?" Finally, for many of these audiences, exit is not a realistic option. In contrast to OI theory based on resource dependency, power does not necessarily rest with the audience. Rather, these organizational relationships are frequently interdependent, or may carry a reverse dependency, making it difficult for the stakeholder to extricate itself.

Similarly, these relational characteristics are found in many supplier/customer arrangements in the business-to-business world, especially in global industries where a few suppliers face a similarly small number of customers. Servicing a few large, complex customers frequently requires interorganizational links across levels, functions and locations (Bakos & Brynjolfsson, 1993). The blurring of organizational boundaries is often further amplified by a growing demand for connected systems for efficient supply chain management (Holland, 1995). In this context the supplier must hold a very specific OI of the customer in order to understand and predict customer behavior (including wants and needs) and respond accordingly. A diffuse OI for the customer is insufficient. The implication is that such organizations would require and use internal processes to determine "who are they?"

This research extends our understanding of organizational identity work into the global business-to-business setting, revealing the external processes of constructing the organizational identity of the other through an in-depth qualitative study. Using some of the methods and data similar to that found in OI research in the Albert and Whetten tradition, the research begins to map out processes addressing "who are they?" in the context of a global supplier closely connected to its primary customer across geographies, functions, and hierarchical levels. The primary data consists of one year's observations of the weekly meeting of a global account management team within the largest division of a Fortune 200 components manufacturer (CC). These managers are responsible for the company's principal customer (Alpha), connecting to managers within Alpha across regions and even functions. In these meetings, individual perceptions of the customer based on local, personal interactions are integrated to form the single customer OI needed to take action at the global level. Thus much of the team's identity work is directed at the "other," i.e. Alpha.

Data, Context and Methods

The analysis and findings in this chapter are primarily drawn from 13 months of observations of the weekly meetings of the global account management team responsible for CC's largest customer. This was a unique setting to study organizational identity dynamics vis-à-vis the customer in a global context, as the meetings serve as the principal forum for team communication. Moreover, these observations not only provide a window into the external construction of organizational identity, but also afford the chance to go beyond event-based research delving into the OI formation, challenge and change. Instead, the setting reveals ongoing identity work in day-to-day interaction, thus meeting Ravasi and Canato's challenge (2013): "If we take seriously Goffman's idea of identity as an ongoing performance (Goffman, 1959), then any self-referential claim, categorization or narrative…should be analyzed within their social interaction context" (18).

In addition, interviews were conducted with nine core members, including four interviews with the prior coordinator of the team (before, during and after the observation period), two with the director (before and after), and single interviews with the seven others towards the end of or following observations.

Although there is regular interaction of team members in smaller groups outside the meeting structure (including emails, 1:1 phone calls, and break-out meetings of sub-groups for specific tasks), the weekly meeting brings the whole group together. These were all virtual through Lync (or by phone for some members without good internet access). The core group had last met in-person about two years earlier, and peripheral or more recent members had never been face-to-face with their cross-regional colleagues.

I participated, as all others did, via Lync (now Skype for Business). This afforded an exceptional opportunity, because, like the proverbial fly on the wall, I was nearly invisible.

Rather than being a body in the room taking notes, I appeared as a single name in the middle of a list of names at the side of screen, and though I had been introduced in the beginning, it quickly became apparent that people forgot about me. In fact, when access was first agreed, the coordinator noted that, *"It's taken a lot of time to get to the point where people feel comfortable speaking up openly*." So if anyone didn't want me there, or it became apparent that my presence was stifling discussion in any way, he told me he would ask me to stop attending. After the first couple of meetings, he reported back to me that there had been no objections and he didn't perceive any change in participation, so there was no problem with my continuing to observe. Finally, when scheduling interviews towards the end, I discovered that one core member, having missed the initial meeting, had no idea who I was.

Meeting Format

Meetings are scheduled weekly from 8:00-9:30 am US Eastern time, depending on the season. The median across the thirteen months was 67 minutes, while the range was from 36 minutes (where the gathering was truncated by a divisional virtual presentation for senior managers) to the rare overtime meeting of 97 minutes. Because this team is led out of North America, North American holidays were observed. As a result, the team met fifty weeks out of 58, of which I attended 44. In addition, there were two break-out sessions scheduled on specific topics which I also observed. Thus the total number of observations for the study is 46 (See again Table 2 above).

The meetings follow a standard format. Speaking in English (English is the corporate language and is required of all managers above a certain grade), the meeting organizer begins with the topic agenda, distributed the day before. This is then followed by a round-table where each participant brings in any issues, problems, questions or information that they believe will be relevant to the team. The meetings take place virtually on Microsoft Lync, and it long ago became the norm for the meeting organizer to take notes "live" using screen share, switching over to slides (also using screen share) for the occasional formal presentation given by a member or an invited guest. They have found that real-time notes help ensure that communications between English and non-native English speakers are correctly understood. It is worth noting that none of the other global teams I observed at the company followed this practice. Unfortunately, this still leaves some of the participants in Asia (especially China) at a disadvantage. The time difference means that Asia calls in during their evening from home, and technical challenges at home often lead to phone-in participation, rather than full Lync (see Chapter 4).

Attendees appear as a list of names to the left of the screen if they connect through Lync. If, however, a manager uses a phone connection, he or she is represented by an anonymous phone icon. As mentioned above, some participants, such as the Chinese members of the team, almost always connect by phone. Others might connect by phone if travelling. On occasion a phone attendee failed to actually speak during the meeting, and so I have no record of attendance. Therefore I will consistently refer to participants (those who speak) rather than attendees at meetings. With few exceptions the two categories are identical.

Participants

The median number of attendees is 13, with a range of seven to 22. Hierarchically, managers extended from the director of the Alpha business, who reports directly to the divisional president, to members who were four levels down (with most being three to four). I have divided the participants into three categories: 18 core members, 11 occasional members, and twelve invited guests (see Table 4). Core membership consists of those who participated in more than half the discussions, or who joined as a recognized "new member" in the middle of the study. This included 11 from North America, two from Europe, two from South America, and one each from China, South Korea and India (including three women: NA, Brazil and Korea). In addition to this central group, occasional members often participated actively. These managers might attend meetings covering specific topics of interest or as a fill-in representative when a core-member colleague couldn't attend. This list encompasses four participants from North America, two from India, and one each from Europe, South Korea, Brazil, China and Indonesia (no women). Finally invited guests comprise twelve individuals from outside the group who each came to present once or twice to the group on a specific issue (e.g. a presentation on a competitor from corporate marketing), eight of them being from North America and one each from China, South Korea and Japan (one woman: NA).

Table 4: CC Global Customer Account Team Meeting Participants

	Core Members	Occasional Attendees	One-time Guests
Nationality			
US	11	4	8
Europe	2	1	0
South America	2	1	0
China	1	1	1
South Korea	1	1	1
India	1	2	0
Indonesia	0	1	0
Japan	0	0	1
Total	18	11	12
Gender			
Male	15	11	11
Female	3	0	1

Core members are part of the team as a representative of either a specific geographical subsidiary, geographical region, or a smaller product line which is sold globally (rather than regionally). In addition there are three senior managers who guide and direct the meetings (referred to as Leads in this paper). Because the customer is headquartered in the United States, the team is led out of North America. Moreover, the global product line managers are also based in North America, thus the North American group makes up more than half the core team. Membership in the GAM at CC remained very stable during the period of observation, and in fact most managers have been part of the team for many years. This continuity echoes senior management continuity at CC. It is not unusual to speak to senior managers or engineers in long-established markets (like NA or Europe) who have worked at the company for more than twenty years.

Ironically, the director and coordinator were the newest core members when the study began. The director had been in the role for a little over a year, and meeting coordination was in the process of being handed over. These individuals – director, past coordinator, and present coordinator are the only members with a specifically global remit for the division's dominant product – and together they lead the meeting. Not only are they the most prolific speakers, but they are essential in shaping how the group works. Between the three of them, they have established norms, manage the flow and order of topics and speakers, shape the conversations, and create the collective summaries which drive action. Given their importance, the following paragraphs briefly characterize each of these senior managers.

The director, John (names are anonymized), is the epitome of "walk softly, but carry a big stick," though it is a stick he rarely uses. Having worked at the firm for more than thirty years, he is a highly respected and trusted senior manager within the division. He previously ran other divisional business units and departments (including a long period of interaction with Japanese customers, as well as time spent living and working in Japan). In the current position, John is directly accountable for Alpha business in NA, but also has responsibility for Alpha business globally at the divisional level, as well as at the corporate level. In the latter two roles he has no formal control, and only a few NA members of the GAM team report to him. However, his multilevel responsibilities mean that he has direct communication lines to both the division president and the CEO of the corporation. Despite his status and influence, though, he literally speaks softly, and works to create a collaborative environment on the team. In direct contrast to a team leader on another GAM I observed (which doesn't function effectively), the director never refers to "my" team (the single instance where he started to slip into this, he quickly corrected himself) or attempts to issue instructions. Rather, he often emphasizes the joint nature of the work, by using "we" (this collective characterization of their work and discussions is also an important component in controlling and shaping the group narrative, as shown below in "Constructing the Other Through Sensemaking"). Similarly, much of the time he works to characterize CC's relationship with Alpha as a partnership, even in the face of aggressive actions. Whether by personality, training, or as an effect of his Japanese experience, John has perfected the managerial skill of crafting words and sentences which blunt negative events or actions.

The coordinator, calls the meeting, sets the agenda and directs the discussion. His importance also comes from the fact that he is a senior manager, works directly with John, and talks regularly to senior global purchasing managers at Alpha headquarters. This role was in transition when observations began, and Thomas, the coordinator for much of the observation period, was new not only to the post, but to the division and the customer. Within the corporation, divisional boundaries are robust, thus he was coping not only with new responsibilities, but also new people in a new structure with different systems and a distinctive divisional culture, as well as an unfamiliar customer. While he initially was hesitant in his direction, over time he gradually became more assertive.

Bill, the prior coordinator, is the heart of the team. As coordinator when the team began to form, about a decade earlier, he helped set the team norms which were visible in the handover. Many of these norms reflect a sensitivity for people located outside NA. For instance, before starting the meeting there is an informal discussion of local weather, or events such as the World Cup, thus connecting the group as a team while at the same time bringing conscious awareness that each is physically in a different locale. Other norms include: the simultaneous note-taking, ensuring that participants from Asia go first on round-table (recognizing that it is night time for them), and making a point of stating his name first before speaking (for those on the phone who can't see the Lync screen). Despite the fact that everyone readily recognizes each other's voices now (and certainly knows his distinctive voice), he continues to model this behavior; though unfortunately guests often don't follow suit. Having been so long at the center of the global interactions between CC and Alpha, Bill often provides institutional memory to the team's discussions, making connections between past Alpha actions current events, thus helping maintain a sense of continuity for both CC and Alpha. Finally, he understands the regional vs global capabilities, limitations and tensions with regards to not only people, but also operating and data gathering systems between CC and Alpha. As a result, team members still often turn to him for help in getting things done on a global level.

Alpha and the Relationship

Alpha is a large global OEM with its headquarters in North America. Though Alpha is clearly the more powerful entity in the relationship, there are balancing factors which create some degree of interdependency, both economic and social. Not only is Alpha CC's largest customer, but CC is Alpha's most important supplier, and Alpha relies on CC's technical and operational expertise to create and share a stream of cost-savings on a large portfolio of existing programs, through "gain-sharing." Ties are further reinforced by personal connections. CC has a long and close association with Alpha extending for decades. Over the years managers have also moved between the two. Individual relationships also go deep within both organizations, from the CEO level down to platform engineers within the region/product lines.

Both firms have strong regional silos, though at CC the primary organizational dimension is first product and then region, while at Alpha, region dominates. That said, the purchasing function at Alpha, is similarly separated by product groups which align with CC's organizational lines. The result is a parallel structure in which people in specific roles communicate regularly across the firm boundaries. For example, the CC account manager for product A in China is expected to connect with the Alpha purchasing manager for product A in China. Communication will be in person as well as electronically (CC managers are consistently located physically close to their Alpha counterpart), and takes place weekly, even daily at times. The bulk of the cross-firm communication occurs at middle management levels. Lower than this and contacts tend to be project/problem related, so interaction may be intense but temporary. Conversely, communication at the highest levels is continuous, but infrequent, as executives rely on the mid-level managers to conduct the day-to-day business between the two entities.

As Alpha has moved towards global platforms, it is trying to centralize control. The difficulty is that Alpha China is a joint venture controlled by the Chinese partner: a partner who is increasingly gaining power and acting independently. In fact, Alpha China has just gained a mandate for global platform. The tension between Alpha China and Alpha ROW, was both an implicit and explicit theme throughout the year of observations, as the team tried to grapple with the new landscape and to avoid being caught in the middle.

Communication Topics in the Alpha Global Account Management Team

The explicit subject matter of the discussions readily falls under seven categories: requests for quote on new business, systems alignment with Alpha, performance measurement by Alpha, negotiations for annual gain-sharing on existing platforms (i.e. how expected operating/engineering cost savings will be allocated between CC and Alpha), quality problems, local problems needing escalation, and reporting out to the regions interactions with Alpha headquarters' executives. (See Table 5 below)

Table 5: CC Global Account Team Meeting Topics and Characteristics

Topics	Patterns of Time	Dominant Communication Patterns
Request for quote	Continuous	Interactive
Systems Alignment	Continuous	Various
Performance Measurement	Cyclical	Hub-and-spoke
Annual gain-sharing	Cyclical	Hub-and-spoke
Quality problems	Intermittent	One-way
Local issues for escalation	Intermittent	Dyadic
Reporting HQ information	Frequent	One-way

The dominant topic is expected or currently in-process requests for quote on new business, and the accompanying competitive analysis, accounting for well over half the time. Though prices are quoted regionally, most platforms are at least cross-regional, if not global, in scope, and require a coordinated approach. In fact, it is the move towards global platforms by customers which originally drove the creation of global account teams for the supplier. Generally, the group hears about upcoming new platforms long in advance of the request for quote. These conversations extend across many months, even years. For example, one major platform which appeared as a weekly item on the agenda and dominated several meetings throughout the study, existed prior to the start of this research, and was still in fact-finding mode when observations ended.

Another major thread extended beyond the observation period, as they struggled to achieve systems alignment with Alpha. The combination of the customers' desire for supplier transparency and the need for comparability across suppliers underpin moves to require standardized detailed costing reporting for all products and suppliers. In order to comply, though, CC must have systems that provide data in the necessary format. Problems have been multiple and varied, as Alpha and CC work together to make it fit. In particular, fundamental differences in production processes for this division's products versus other components Alpha buys has created a major stumbling block. Regional differences at Alpha in engineering/production processes also make it difficult to produce globally uniform break-downs (a difficulty which doesn't come to the fore until the new forms are rolled out from North America).

Other topics are cyclical, rather than continuous. Alpha's monthly performance assessment of CC is a prime example of this. Despite close and ongoing relationships between the two firms, across geographies, functions and hierarchies, executive management at Alpha relies heavily on a "dashboard" of specific numerical measurements to evaluate CC alongside other suppliers. This quantification of performance is calculated first by geography and product, rolling up to summary numbers at a divisional and then corporate level. These final figures can have very real consequences. High numbers are required for recognition as a top supplier (a stated team goal), while low numbers cut off a supplier from being considered for new business. Thus each month's results are presented to and reviewed by the team, as everyone looks for opportunities to improve the scores. Moreover, part way through the observation period, the customer significantly changed parts of the calculation, drastically reducing CC's grade. The result, as discussed later, was a flurry of activity at both CC and Alpha.

Similarly, discussions about gain-sharing are recurring. Each year the target savings for following year is negotiated and agreed with Alpha. These are promised on a product/region basis, but the team works to harmonize what is agreed. Several dynamics force coordination. First, platforms are typically cross-regional, therefore platform savings would expect to occur across geographies. Secondly, the amounts are large enough that they must be approved by the divisional executive committee. And perhaps most importantly, the customer not only rolls-up the totals to divisional and even corporate levels, but also carries on multilevel negotiations which include the president of the division. During this period of negotiation (which extended across a few months) the topic is a consistent item on the agenda. The actual realization of these savings in the current year appears quarterly as it feeds into ongoing performance measurement.

Problems with quality or timing appear intermittently, as do requests from the subsidiaries for the center to escalate issues with Alpha that have not been solved regionally. Quality or timing concerns are included if it's possible a similar issue might be experienced in other geographies, or if it is large enough that there's a concern it might affect how Alpha is interacting with other regions. Escalation is often regarding monies that CC believes it is due because of changes to Alpha plans (such as Alpha pulling production out of a country) or major environmental factors (e.g. substantial drops in local currency relative to the dollar). Some of these escalations became a recurring topic over several months, as the situation evolved.

Throughout, the three Leads who interact with Alpha headquarters in NA also regularly report to the rest of the team any communications they've had with the global executives. This can range from phone calls, to in-person meetings, to formal presentations in a group setting (including all-day events). Likewise, the director passes along any information he considers relevant from CC executives, such as the division president.

In general, the meeting is meant for higher level *"information sharing only"* (Bill) although it often goes beyond this, as the analysis to follow will show. However, where more in-depth discussion and action is required, it is not uncommon that a separate sub-team is formed (e.g. for specific platform quotes) or an additional set of one-topic meetings is scheduled (e.g. two meetings across two weeks for imparting information about a specific system change) with only the managers from relevant geographies included.

Communication Patterns in the Alpha Global Account Management Team

Three primary modes of communication take place within the team: one-way, hub and spoke, and interactive network. As would be expected, the nature of the topic determined the pattern within the team meeting. In one-way communication, one person speaks to the group as a whole, with sporadic questions or some discussion at the end. It occasionally includes formal presentations with PowerPoint slides, though much of the time there are no accompanying documents. Often (though not always) one of the three NA leads are in control, especially for reporting out. In addition to reporting out, quality or timing issues take a one-way form, led by the affected region. Hub-and-spoke communications are a series of two-way exchanges on a single topic, always involving a lead and at least one other member of the team. The series might consist of interactions limited to two people, as in escalation issues, which are initiated by someone in the region towards a lead. But the hub-and-spoke pattern is most visible in discussions of performance measurement and gain-sharing, when many members may contribute, but their comments and feedback is always directed back to the lead controlling the subject (i.e. the hub). At various points, issues with systems alignment could take the form of a one-way reporting out from Bill or a hub-and-spoke discussion, with him at the center. Finally, in interactive network communication, a true multi-directional conversation takes place, with members directly addressing each other (rather than going through a lead). The extensive discussions on requests-for-quote are dominated by network discussions. In the early period, prior to receipt of a formal request for a quote, things are often still in flux at the customer, and many important parameters may still be undetermined. During this emergent period, the team is in a constant sensemaking mode with regards to the platform, the customer needs across varied regions, and the relevant competitive map, as they try to anticipate the future and take appropriate action.

Methods

Finding the appropriate method for analyzing this data was not straightforward. From the beginning, I took notes during, and memos following, each meeting, as well as recording and transcribing the content of the meetings. Thus I ensured that I had the necessary data for most forms of qualitative analysis, but understanding what would work didn't unfold until I actually began grappling with the data.

The material that forms the basis for this study encompasses over one-thousand pages of meeting transcripts, alongside company documents, and management interviews, as well as my own meeting notes and analytical memos. Beyond the sheer volume of data, the meeting observations presented a complex challenge for analysis. Rather than the contained dyadic back-and-forth of an interview, the meetings represented many people involved in complex patterns of interaction. In one sense, the data is ethnographic. I have close observations of managers at work, as in ethnography, though I don't experience the full environment in which they operate. I 'see' only the meetings. However, to the extent that my observations are decontextualized, one could argue that this disembodiment from their local situation is part and parcel of their own lived experience of the virtual meeting they are attending. At the same time, though, the data goes beyond observation to actual transcripts of the interactions, thus providing the potential for the coding work of grounded theory or discourse analysis. However, it was clear the temporal element (i.e. sequencing, pacing, etc.) would be critical in answering the questions I was asking. The process of how a conversation unfolds - who speaks when, action and reaction, stops and later restarts, etc. – needed to be an important part of the analysis. And while discourse analysis accomplishes this, it does so on a micro-scale, not being designed to handle conversations extending over a year. On the other hand, coding for grounded theory doesn't readily accommodate the sequential element of the discussions. Finally, often key information was implicit in the context of what was being said, rather than explicit (i.e. it required having a large section of the conversation, or even connecting pieces which occurred at different times, to see the intended meaning), thus making it difficult to code using standard practices.

During the second meeting of the global account team, a specific episode stood out, and this became the anchor for my methodological approach. The Rabbit, which will be presented and analyzed in detail below, is very clearly an instance of the group constructing a narrative, using a sensemaking process to interpret the customer's (Alpha's) behavior and take strategic action based on their understanding. This suggested using a narrative lens to chunk the data into episodes, interpreting each narrative independently through multiple close readings and analytic memos, alongside initiating selective coding for items relating to identity and process (Glaser, 1998).

Narrative analysis has several advantages for the study of identity in conversation. By its nature, like conversation, narrative is chronological and contextual (Czarniawska, 1998). More importantly, narrative analysis is an interpretive process linking meaning and action (Ricoeur, 1981), just as identity is fundamentally a self-understanding which drives action. In fact, many scholars argue that identity *is* narrative (Czarniawska, 1997; Bruner, 1990; Humphries & Brown, 2002; Clegg et al., 2007; Sonenshein, 2010).

Defining the scope of a narrative, though, was not straightforward. From one perspective each meeting could be considered a unique conversation, separated by time from the other conversations. But this would do a disservice to the data (note that the Rabbit extends over several meetings). However, the Rabbit was unusual in its completeness, with a clear beginning, middle and end to the process of narrative construction and action. Instead most of the observations can be characterized as "antenarrative," consisting of stories representing emergent narrative that is still messy and unfinished (Boje, 2001). Arriving out of the "flow of lived experience," the CC discussions are plurivocal and appear in fragmented forms in which one antenarrative weaves over and under other antenarratives. In fact, one could go so far as to say that the entire observation set of meetings creates a single conversation which started years ago and will continue for some time into the future. Even in a full-blown narrative, with seemingly clear boundaries, like the Rabbit, it draws on prior stories and understandings, and overlaps with other antenarratives of competition, relationship and self. However, such an all-encompassing view wouldn't serve the purpose at hand. Ultimately, I chose to delineate stories by theme.

The first step was to use the participants own explicit topics as themes. Initially, these reflected agenda topics, as in the Rabbit. However, as the meetings unfolded, cross-topic story-lines became visible. So for instance, the "strategic supplier" status was never a primary topic, but rather wove through many other discussions, and became an antenarrative thread of its own. Similarly, the story of "competition" appeared throughout the observation period. And all three overlapped in the Rabbit. Other antenarratives that proved significant to the study findings included "changing people" referring to changes at Alpha, and "the divide of Alpha China and Alpha HQ." It is also worth noting, that three episodes stood out: the Rabbit, for its unexpected sensemaking of the customer, the CC team's action to aggressively pull-out of important talks with Alpha when its strategic supplier status was threatened (an action which I later term "symbolic exit,"), and the CC team's failure/inability to adjust appropriately their sensemaking and decision-processes in the bidding process for a new program for which the center of control was not the corporate HQ, as had been the accepted pattern, but Alpha China. All three went against theoretic and/or common sense expectations, and served to deepen the analysis and theory-building as I searched for the underlying explanation. Each of these episodes plays a key part in the Findings section below.

At the same time, I also began coding the process and interaction within the meeting itself. Having broken the meeting into explicit topic segments, I then coded for each segment items such as the core explicit purpose, the broad pattern of interaction, who controlled the discussion, key contributing comments, who was ignored, any disagreement within the discussion, etc.

In addition, coding on dimensions of identity was initiated. Having quickly recognized that Alpha's OI was central in many of their discussions, I ensured that this perspective was represented in my codes. These included explicit statements about characteristics of self, the team, CC, or Alpha, as well as implicit images of the team, CC or Alpha (coded as implicit). I also coded statements which represented CC or Alpha as a fragmented social actor or as a single entity (e.g. focusing on the regional versus the global persona). Breaks in continuity were also identified. Actions related to identity were similarly coded as efforts to project a coherent identity or to read coherence into the other. I further isolated actions taken in response to a lack of coherence (fragmentation or continuity), including acceptance. Transforming these initial open codes to axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) led to the findings on exit, voice and loyalty. Finally, conflict and alignment between Alpha and CC were both coded, as were any references to, or audible evidence of, emotion.

Throughout, I continued to write analytic memos on what was emerging from the codes, as well as from the stories. As sensemaking became one important theoretical parameter for interpreting the data, I added appropriate theoretic codes for sensemaking, in order to identify when and where this appeared, and cross-tabulate it with identity codes. Moving further into analysis and theory building, I began to map underlying themes within stories to each other and with the coded material. From this process I established two key aspects of the findings: the role of hierarchy in identity work, and the identity of self and other in relationship.

Findings

Ultimately, the work in the team meetings is conversation. Information is shared, collective knowledge is built, and action is coordinated through the informal back-and-forth that happens within the broad structure of agenda topics and round-table contributions. Moreover, conversations extend across time. As events unfold and new information is gathered, the ongoing discussion and its conclusions evolve from week to week, sometimes over months or even years. Such data is valuable for the study of ongoing identity work (as opposed event-based OI work), but challenging to capture effectively.

At times of identity formation, change or threat, direct statements addressing OI may be found in interviews, texts, and archival sources (Ravasi & Canato, 2013). However, in this setting, identity work by the team comes piecemeal over time, emerging in interactions and decisions whose stated purpose is tied to concerns other than identity. Moreover, OI becomes implicit, rather than explicit, thus requiring the researcher to detect and interpret not only identity statements, but also identity processes and assumptions, within an ongoing stream of communication and action.

Simple quotes are insufficient for representing this unit of analysis. At the same time, high level summaries capture neither the interactions, nor the rich and subtle details, on which this analysis is based. So to overcome the challenge of properly representing the empirical data, I begin the results with a paradigmatic discussion, "The Rabbit," followed by an examination of the role of OI in the conversation and decision-making which occurs. This is meant to both provide an exemplar of the methodology applied to the larger study, as well as a foundation for the broader conclusions to come.

Once the Rabbit has been presented, the results will proceed methodologically, moving from the single episode to the larger context, as well as moving deeper into the analysis and shifting from interpretive work to coded concepts:

1. A first-level interpretive analysis of the text of the Rabbit itself, establishing the fundamental link to Alpha's OI in the episode.
2. An examination of the CC team's process for constructing Alpha's OI, mapping it to sensemaking theory, and verifying parallels with known processes of internal OI construction. Still drawing heavily from the Rabbit, it begins to connect the episode to broader observations.
3. A deeper-level analysis revealing the co-creation of self and other by contextualizing the Rabbit discussion within the larger study.
4. A conceptual analysis, based on coding CC responses to incoherence in Alpha's behavior across all the data. Drawing on Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice and loyalty, it demonstrates CC as an external audience, acting from outside Alpha to shape and enforce Alpha's OI through multiple voice mechanisms within Alpha. Moreover, it shows the limits of these mechanisms and the ultimate CC response of loyalty and adaptation.

Constructing the Other through Sensemaking and Narrative: The Rabbit

"Who are they?" is a question constantly visible just under the surface in these meetings. Understanding Alpha's OI allows CC team members to predict Alpha's behavior and decide what actions to take in response. Most team members have closely worked with Alpha over many years, and believe they know Alpha's OI. At the same time, an ongoing stream of actions and words from Alpha is regularly providing further feedback, leading them to reaffirm (*"We know that Alpha…."*) or to slightly adjust their map of Alpha's OI. These "snippets of talk" generate "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 1997) representing the team's identity work directed at sensemaking the customer in small increments. From this perspective, the meetings as a whole could be considered an entire story line (Boje, 1991) that began years ago and extends with no visible end.

Periodically, though, members of the CC team are faced with behavior that challenges their expectations, causing them to more explicitly consider in a concentrated fashion what is happening in light of their map, and the possibility that a larger shift is taking place. The resultant discussions typically continue across time, and stand out in their intensity and the participation of many team members. Moreover, these episodes bring to the surface underlying processes and assumptions which operate throughout, driving action.

The following episode, which I title "The Rabbit," is paradigmatic of this basic process. First, I will provide a detailed description of the discussion itself. Following this, I examine in-depth the role of OI in the conversation and how this influences the team's decision-making. Next, I lay out the nature of the OI process, connecting it to theory. The section will then close with a deeper analysis, contextualizing the Rabbit in the larger setting to establish that in relationship with Alpha, constructing Alpha's OI is simultaneously constructing the CC team's own OI, and vice versa. The two are co-constitutive.

The Discussion

The Rabbit stretches across eight meetings over nine weeks. It is ideal as an example, because it is an intensive exercise in identity construction embodying repeated patterns I found appearing in more fragmentary fashion across other topics and meetings. Taking place early in the observation period, it is presumably part of a longer topic discussion which began before I arrived. The division has been asked to quote on a new global platform, headquartered in Europe, but including production from China. The request to quote is a bit surprising because the platform is understood to "belong" to a key competitor, Hirai. Hirai and CC are the sole designated strategic suppliers; thus Hirai is seen as CC's most central competitor. However, the relationship between Hirai and the customer, Alpha, is deteriorating, and, though not included in the formal agendas, the topic thread runs through many discussions across the year, as they sensemake why it is happening, how it is playing out, and what the implications are for CC. The primary participants were John, the director, and the facilitator, Bill, from North America, as well as Paul from Europe, and Simon from China. At various points, though, other managers chime in, including: North American-based managers globally responsible for another product, managers from South Korea and South America, as well as two other European discussants, and an additional Chinese representative.

Paul from Europe opens the discussion by reporting on the target price which has just been released, which he sees as unreasonably low, "*Nobody will reach this target. We had some discussions internally, my opinion is that the reason why the open sourcing here is because they gave this as a strategic supplier target to Hirai. I have no clue where this low price is coming from. Hirai clearly told them 'No we never can reach this price,' so automatically they went back to the market. I'm pretty sure nobody, definitely nobody, will come close to this target. For me it's unrealistic.*" At this point, Bill reflects on the similarity to a past, differently named platform, led out of Korea which disappeared. *"The pricing on that platform was EXTREMELY aggressive competitively. We were getting pushed very very very hard in Korea in particular on the pricing. The platform targets were based on the pricing that was going on in Korea. That sounds like the pricing numbers I hear you getting right now, Paul. It was the lowest prices I have ever seen on a major platform.... Hirai won the business."* Now addressing himself to the team director he says, "*And that's all I can think, John, is that, as Paul said, what has played out here is that Hirai probably had a platform target that was set based upon the sourcing originally maybe done by Korea, and now are not meeting the targets. It got thrown to global sourcing and they have a platform target that they cannot change until they have completed global sourcing. Someone then has to say that this is the best we can do based on global sourcing. It will be a problem on Alpha."* The Korean team member now provides the actual target price from the earlier platform, and a back-and-forth ensues as the active four participants compare the price to the current target, concluding that it is essentially the same. Moreover, the Korean rep affirms that the center for the program moved to Europe and Hirai was given the contract (Remember that the two programs have different names and there has been a space of time. In other words, the group doesn't *know* it is the same platform. They are making a leap of logic.). Bill then summarizes the narrative thus far, and this becomes a "fact" upon which they will subsequently build.

Taking this information, John now proposes an alternative perspective, *"So it makes you think that it's what the platform perhaps can afford. It may not be a game you know just to try to beat*

Hirai down or see who's the rabbit. It may just be that that's all the platform can afford which means, what can be done with the assumption to change the true cost of the platform?" He goes on to provide a sample list of possible shifts in platform parameters they could propose to save Alpha money. When told this discussion has already taken place and *"They declined,"* John concludes *"They're looking for the rabbit."* At this, the conversation moves towards an analysis of the competitive field as they try to determine which competitor will be the "rabbit" and chase the price down the hole. The focus quickly shifts to Weber, one of their three primary global competitors. Paul briefly analyzes the similarity of cost structures between Weber and CC, *"Weber can't make it for this price. Definitely not."*

Bill then asks for input from Simon in China. Simon provides the Chinese target price, and another European participant notes it is within the same pricing structure. China has quoted to Alpha, but notes that, *"Because when we calculate cost, the gap is more than 60%.....We are feeling a little bit lost by the target."* Moreover, he reports that, *"There's much discussion price* [in Alpha China] *because they are waiting for feedback from Alpha Europe."* To this Paul adds, *"On other side, Karl spoke with Alpha Europe engineering, and they said, 'We never talk to China. There is not request from China.' It seems there is bad communication between Alpha Europe and China. They're not talking with each other."*

Bill starts to create an action plan, and others join in as they build the "next steps." John emphasizes that he will talk to a senior purchasing executive at Alpha headquarters because, *"I want to be able to let her know what we're talking about as far as targets and how unrealistic it is....I want to be able to explain the target and have some kind of a rational discussion with them on what why are they doing it."*

Following some further discussion, John shifts the direction of the conversation to the future, *"So just to wrap this up. What do you think Alpha is going to do if Weber doesn't jerk it down into that ultra-low price? We already know that Alpha is mad at Hirai and if we don't go that low what do we think they're gonna do? Are they gonna be able to save face and source it as a higher than target price? Or will they cancel the platform do something different start over?"* Bill responds by drawing on similar past experience with Alpha, noting that in this product category they wouldn't cancel, but would likely raise targets. He makes a point that it is difficult for Alpha engineering and purchasing to do, *"but it can and has been done."*

The following week, John reports back to the group about his "face-to-face" with the senior purchasing executive at Alpha headquarters. John concludes that there are indeed inherited platform targets and that, *"He said we should be aggressive to try and help Alpha hit the targets, and this and that."* The group continues to test the calculations as people from China, Europe and North America contribute numbers. Finally Bill turns to John, saying *"Well, it only allows 10% for everything else: manufacturing, engineering, burdens. It's just not feasible. It's not sustainable, let's put it that way. You can keep telling them, 'This is not a price that is sustainable by any supplier, based on the design we see....So we don't understand what's happening here.'"*

As the weeks pass, there are short updates, until finally in week 7, Hans reports from Europe that there are, *"rumors at Alpha Europe, a couple of sources engineering saying business might be given this week to Weber, at least for Europe."* Simon is not on the call, but Bill adds, *"Last time Simon reported it was very, very likely that the sourcing would go to Weber in China."* This now drives a major concern about strategic supplier status. If Hirai is out, does this mean that Weber is now in? *"Will they be considered a strategic supplier in future activities? Maybe Hirai will not anymore and they could take Hirai's place. I don't know. Very interesting."* This is sufficiently vital, that John takes two immediate actions: he asks corporate marketing to present a formal competitive analysis of Weber at the following week's meeting, and after Alpha officially announces the award to Weber he has a follow-up conversation with his executive contact at Alpha headquarters. The outcome of the first is that, *"I don't feel like Weber is gonna be the next strategic supplier for Alpha or they're gonna take 30% of our business."* Which aligns with the personal feedback, *"He thought that Weber will have enough of Alpha's business to keep them busy for a long time. He did not say that Weber has become a strategic supplier. What he's saying is that right now because of Hirai, whatever the shortcomings there have been, they just needed somebody that was qualified to win the this particular platform. So strategic suppliers remain CC and Hirai as far as I can tell from talking to him."* Weber was effectively dismissed, and lived in the background for the remaining eight months of observations. The strategic supplier status of Hirai, though, continued to be a major concern.

First-level analysis: Creating an identity narrative of the other for strategic action

With the Rabbit episode documented, I will now analyze the Rabbit, demonstrating the centrality of Alpha's OI in the discussion. Having built competing narratives for Alpha's actions, with divergent implications for Alpha's OI, it becomes clear that the team's own action will depend on which narrative they believe to be "true." Thus the Rabbit establishes the importance of answering "who are they?" in determining CC's strategic action.

In the context of strategic decision-making, as they try to decide how to price an upcoming bid for new business, The Rabbit begins with confusion and a question of motive "Why has Alpha set such a low target price?" Both the European manager's bewilderment and the following explanation constructed by the team members are built on a critical assumption: that Alpha is a valid social actor in its own right. Despite the fact that they each experience Alpha through personal relationships with specific individuals, these relationships ultimately roll up to the collective "Alpha." Not only is Alpha seen to act, but it is expected to act with intent (King et al., 2010); there must be a reason "why" Alpha would do this.

At the same time, Paul has clearly identified the pricing request as an anomaly, "*I have no clue where this low price is coming from.....For me it's unrealistic.*" The difficulty is that it doesn't fit his expectations based on past interactions with Alpha. Paul requires consistency from Alpha in the form of stable patterns of behavior over time, emanating from what might be termed its character or organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1995; Tollefson, 2002; Selznick, 1957). Implicit in this statement is that Alpha's pricing has been in the past "realistic," that one of the relevant competitors should be able to "make it," and as Bill later suggests, pricing should be "sustainable" i.e. build in enough margin above material costs. Because the price doesn't align with past experience, it makes no sense. In other words, Alpha should be predictable and coherent, and it is neither.

Presented with this anomaly, the team shifts into a joint process of narrative creation aimed at finding continuity and predictability in Alpha's behavior. Taking advantage of the team's broader perspective on Alpha as a whole, they build on past experience and their collective knowledge of Alpha to build the narrative framework. Whereas Paul interacts solely with Alpha Europe, Bill, as past coordinator and the leading global team member since its founding, has many years of experience with Alpha globally. He quickly finds an analogy to a past platform which was directed out of Korea and then disappeared, supporting it with parallels in the levels of pricing and Hirai's having secured the contract. Important to this emerging narrative, is that the earlier pricing "made sense" because the Korean center set global targets based on local pricing. Thus there is an acceptance that Alpha's international subsidiaries vary and are sufficiently independent to act based on local (vs global) conditions. The link is still tenuous, but gradually they build support for the narrative, with the Korean manager verifying price levels, corroborating that Hirai won the contract, and then adding that the center moved to Europe. The puzzle, though, is still not fully explained. Why should a European center maintain Korean pricing? Again, past behavior explains current action. Through prior experience they know that once program pricing and targets have been set at Alpha, it becomes hard to change them. In other words, global corporate systems and routines now override local agency.

Having summarized the group narrative as it stands, Bill hands it over to the team director, John, who now places valences on the possible motivations, personifying Alpha in the process, *"So it makes you think that it's what the platform perhaps can afford. It may not be a game, you know, just to try to beat Hirai down or see who's the rabbit. It may just be that that's all the platform can afford: which means that what can be done with the assumption to change the true cost of the platform?"* Thus, John suggests that prior to the sensemaking exercise, the only option was that Alpha was just trying "to beat Hirai down" or see who's the rabbit. The context and words suggest an illegitimate use of buyer power. Hirai along with CC are the two designated strategic suppliers, and this platform "belonged" to Hirai. But the known systems at Alpha again limit action, because as Paul reports, if Hirai's price doesn't meet target, then it *"automatically"* goes to open bidding, as has happened. However, the team has already concluded that the price that triggers the behavior is unreasonable, thus Alpha is not justified in taking it away. In this scenario Alpha is an arbitrary puppeteer, "playing a game," acting as a bully "beating Hirai down" or a predator sending out a price rabbit as bait to see which competitor might chase it down the hole. Now, though, the team has fashioned a third, more palatable scenario. Perhaps Alpha is not deliberately being unreasonable; instead, neutral, predetermined routines may be at fault. In this case, the team projects their own experience as managers trapped by corporate systems, and believe that Alpha is still acting within the frame of "partner" which they expect (and desire).

The characterization matters, because it will determine action. In particular, once Alpha is viewed as a partner contained by systems, the response is one of empathy for "the platform." Looking to help them, John begins to explore with the team how they might be able to help the platform meet its target price within the confines of CC's own demands for financial accountability. By contrast, once the feedback leads John to conclude that Alpha is playing the rabbit game, he shifts the group's focus away from trying to work with Alpha and towards an evaluation of the competitive playing field. They no longer seem to be interested in doing more than the minimum required for Alpha.

That said, testing of the narrative continues outside the team meetings. It is clear that this is not how the team expects Alpha to behave, since John decides to meet with his contact at Alpha to double check their story and to voice their concerns. The escalation to a senior executive at Alpha headquarters (whom John identifies by name rather than role title in team meetings) might appear to be a move away from dealing with "Alpha" as an organizational actor and back towards the individual relationships. In reality, though, it is a move to further reinforce Alpha as a unified entity. Whereas the CC team members' interactions with the program team are local and diffuse, the headquarters executive is understood to have the power and accompanying voice to speak for the organization as a whole. The Alpha executive thus represents entitativity for Alpha. His response reorients their action, as the Alpha exec confirms their plausible story and asks CC to *"be aggressive"* and *"try to help* [the platform team] *hit the targets."* The goal, then is back to "helping" a partner versus doing the minimum for an adversary, but a residual of doubt is left by John's use of the throwaway phrase *"and this and that,"* suggesting customary, ritualized exhortations. A long discussion follows led by Bill, in which team members analyze the target numbers against costs and margins in Europe and Asia.

Without being able to change platform parameters, though, he brings the story back to the original conundrum, as he reports to John, *"You can keep telling them* [Alpha], *'This is not a price that is sustainable by any supplier, based on the design we see....So we don't understand what's happening here.'"* Ultimately the regions submit bids far above the target, knowing that it won't go anywhere.

Alpha's decision to give the platform to Weber begins another sensemaking process, now with regards to Weber and its position in the competitive field. The shift in supplier from Hirai to Weber causes real concern, as it presents a potential breakdown (or at least redrawing) of the competitive field. As will be discussed later, this represents a major identity threat for the CC team. As they look to evaluate whether Weber is a danger beyond the single platform, it is notable that their sources of information change. Lacking the direct contacts to individual managers that exist with Alpha, the director turns to formal strategy tools produced by CC corporate marketing. The PowerPoint slide presentation shifts the view to a top-down external perspective, drawing on annual reports and public statements to analyze Weber's industries, products, geographical footprint, mergers and acquisition activity, customers, and research and development. The overall representation is summarized by a standard strategy tool, a SWOT analysis. Ultimately, though, what the group truly cares about is Weber's relationship with Alpha. Having already concluded based on the report that Weber is unlikely to become a new strategic supplier for Alpha, John still reaches out to his Alpha headquarters' contact, who confirms that this is a one-off for Weber. Trusting the executive's commitments and his ability to control future sourcing decisions, the team from this point forward no longer considers Weber a focal concern during the course of observations.

Bringing in theory: Sensemaking as the process for answering "who are they?"

Moving from the first-level interpretation of the Rabbit, which has established that Alpha's OI is at the heart of the episode, I will now delineate the process by which the CC team constructs and maintains their perception of Alpha's OI. In addition to being an identity process, it is clear that the CC process begins with ambiguity, proceeds in dialogue, and ends with an accepted narrative that forms the basis for action. Thus sensemaking becomes a useful paradigm for structuring the examination. After a brief overview of sensemaking theory and its empirical value, I break down the six elements of sensemaking within the Rabbit, but also contextualizing these findings within my broader observations. Finally, I demonstrate the close parallels between the process CC uses in answering "who are they?" and the well-recognized processes of OI construction used to answer "who are we?"

In their review of the sensemaking literature, Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 67) find that sensemaking is "a process, prompted by violated expectations, that involves attending to and bracketing cues in the environment, creating intersubjective meaning through cycles of interpretation and action, and thereby enacting a more ordered environment from which further cues can be drawn." Sensemaking as a cognitive process, was originally observed at an individual level, and early work at an organizational level focused on its organizational role in creating and responding to crisis (Gephart, 1993; Weick, 1990, 1993). In 1995, Weick introduced a broader theoretical framework for understanding sensemaking in organizations.

Rooted in identity (Weick, 1995), sensemaking and its narratives are intricately linked to OI processes affecting strategic action and organizational outcomes. As the mechanism by which members answer the core question "who are we?" it is not only essential in organizational formation (Gioia et al., 2010; Navis & Glynn, 2010), but also in planned strategic change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Clark et al., 2010; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Sensemaking also helps shape actions in the face of both OI ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Tripsas, 2009) and external challenges which threaten identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996).

Six elements are recognized in classic sensemaking, and as demonstrated below, all are visible in the Rabbit. These include: noticing anomalies, or bracketing information; extracting clues; retrospection; enactment in dialogue; creating a plausible narrative explaining the anomaly; and ongoing feedback, to adjust and fine-tune the narrative (Weick, 1995).

Bracketing information

As in the Rabbit, the CC team begins their sensemaking processes, by noticing and labelling an anomaly, thus bracketing information as needing discussion before action. Much of the time, the team's decision-making flows smoothly as Alpha acts according to script. Current bids follow past patterns, performance measurement is consistent, Alpha's reactions to quality problems are predictable, etc. It is only when the team perceives an event or action which does not "fit," that they stop and reflect. In the Alpha-world in which they are embedded, these anomalies almost uniformly relate to their perception of Alpha's OI. More specifically, the team is sensitive to any lack of continuity in Alpha.

Thus Alpha's understood characteristics come to the fore when Alpha's action, or its results, don't fit CC's underlying OI map of Alpha. So for instance, within the rabbit, several agreed attributes of Alpha emerge. In particular, Alpha is rational, with realistic expectations (and this characterization creates the dissonance of the "unrealistic" target). At the same time, they also accept Alpha as somewhat Janus-faced in the role it takes in relationship with its suppliers, sometimes acting as a partner, while at other times acting as an adversary. In other words, Alpha is not entirely reliable – it cannot be trusted.

These attributes may be positive "realistic" or negative "not trustworthy," but either way the group expects continuity. As an example, across many discussions and meetings, it is clear that they consider Alpha to be "undisciplined". It is part of Alpha's perceived OI. Though a negative evaluation, they have learned to work around this "fact," and use it to decide action (by building it into their pricing), and they do not welcome signs of change. This is in contrast to the concept of reputation which is commonly used to capture external representations of OI (Brown et al., 2006; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach, 2003; Gioia et al., 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000). Whereas there is an evaluative element in the team's perceived Alpha OI, it is first-order (based on their own experience) rather than a second-order "generalized belief" (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). In addition, CC's response as an external stakeholder is not exit. CC is not trying to improve or modify Alpha's undisciplined nature, or walking away from Alpha as a result of the negative attribute, but rather CC as a trading partner desires stability, even in Alpha's weak adherence to standards.

Bracketing information also goes beyond actual anomalies to anticipating moments of potential discontinuity. The team has learned over time that certain types of changes inside Alpha can shift Alpha's behavior within the relationship. In particular, new people and new systems are cause for close surveillance, as well as a time for heightened sensemaking.

For these CC managers Alpha's OI is embedded in individuals, who bring their own identity, perspective and past experience to their organizational role at Alpha. Thus a change in the person filling the role is always a risk to Alpha's OI as the team perceives it. They are acutely aware of the potential breach in Alpha as a social actor, and each time a primary contact leaves or a new one arrives, whether at Alpha HQ or in the regions, it is announced to the group as a whole. Over the course of the study it became obvious that the team views the movement of Alpha managers in and out of key roles as a potential threat to their experience of Alpha's continuity and commitments, to the degree that they take proactive steps to both insulate themselves from such changes, as well as actively socialize the new Alpha manager into the existing relationship between the two organizations (see "Shaping and Enforcing…" below).

Similarly, a change in systems or processes can shift Alpha's priorities and actions, thereby adding uncertainty to the relationship. This concern was as much about how CC projected its own OI to Alpha through the lens of systems (especially performance systems), as it was about "reading" any changes in Alpha's desires and attributes reflected in the new procedures. As noted at the front of the chapter, system changes are so vital, that they are a major topic thread, in and of themselves.

Retrospection

The CC team is clearly operating from an existing shared cognitive schema (Daft & Weick, 1984) of Alpha's OI, based on past interactions. This is the implicit comparison point against which the current behavior is bracketed as an anomaly, so by definition, the two are in conflict. Yet, surprisingly, they return to the map as the primary source of clues for interpreting that very inconsistency. As in the Rabbit, analogy to past behavior and their knowledge of Alpha's procedures were two of the primary sources of information for reconstructing continuity. In other words, the team's assumption of continuity in Alpha's OI is their starting point. If the current behavior doesn't seem to follow known patterns, then it must be that the team isn't focusing on the correct corners of the map, thus they need to return to the map, looking more deeply and broadly.

Enacting dialogue

As individual stories converge into a single global summary, ratified by the team hierarchy, the team's dialogue processes literally enact both Alpha's OI as a global entity and the team's own identity as a global team. Each member of the team brings a unique perspective to the sensemaking exercise. Embedded in discrete national/regional subsidiaries and representing different products, they not only have a claim to speak for those internal CC sub-groups, but also for the parallel Alpha sub-groups with whom they interact. As seen in the Rabbit, there is a layering of input from various team members as their dialogue builds to a coherent narrative. Thus explanatory clues come not just from retrospection, but from the distributed direct feedback from individual Alpha managers, as interpreted for the group by the relevant CC manager. Within these discussions, the individual and sub-group relationships appear and disappear as conversations move between individual Alpha managers, Alpha sub-groups (e.g. Alpha Europe), and Alpha as a whole. The shift back-and-forth across levels is seamless, sometimes even occurring within the same sentence, but the general direction of the arc is towards determining Alpha's OI as a singular actor. Thus, the very process of converging on a shared representation of Alpha's global OI across space and time, is also a process of moving from individual team voices to a global team voice.

Plausible narrative

Using information and interpretation provided in dialogue, the CC team begins to build "scenarios" that provide plausible narratives explaining the anomaly (the low price is Alpha looking for the price rabbit vs. Alpha systems incorrectly forcing a low Korean price). From their perspective they are looking to find the "truth" of what is happening inside Alpha, but in actual fact, as outsiders they will never have the full picture. Rather, they are finding the story which provides a reasonable fit based on what they collectively know from their personal and regional interactions with Alpha managers, past Alpha behavior (including Alpha's ways of proceeding driven by systems, routines and structures), and their existing map of Alpha's OI.

Senior leadership is critical to the evolving narrative, acting both as sensemakers alongside the team as well as sensegivers (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) to the team. Guiding the sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005), Bill and John are responsible for filtering the input, driving lines investigation, deciding which lines will be pursued or dropped, summarizing and solidifying the final narrative, and most importantly, imparting meaning and motive to Alpha from the narrative. Though Paul identifies the anomaly, Bill quickly controls the "fact finding." He begins a second scenario using past analogy upon which others build. Having structured an alternative narrative that is agreed by the group (reflected by no one objecting), he then hands it to John. It is John who finally interprets both stories. He sensegives for the team by using the Rabbit metaphor to characterize the first version and then opposing it with the new version, *"maybe it's what they can afford."* Now John further tests the waters through questioning the group and then later the Alpha HQ buyer himself. Though there is room for disagreement or new information, there comes a point where John's summary narrative becomes final, becoming the basis for action.

The narrative, though, has two functions. Not only is it the foundation for action at the team level, but it also enters into the strategic narrative that John supplies to CC executives. This upward narrative thus becomes an important component in the executive level strategic sensemaking and understanding of Alpha. In addition, through the narrative, John substantiates his advocacy for the CC executive group to approve specific resources and/or actions (as I observed in an executive committee meeting). Thus John acts as sensegiver in two directions: downwards, in the development of the narrative within the team, and upwards in the use of the narrative to influence broader strategy.

Research on OI construction and change has demonstrated the importance not only of sensemaking on the part of organization members, but also sensegiving by managers to subordinates (Balogun, 2003; Bartunek et al., 1999; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) as in the Rabbit. However, this research shows the existence of key "linchpin" managers in the middle who influence both directions simultaneously.

Within CC, the overall process ultimately gives priority to the voice of the team leaders, and through them, the voice of their Alpha HQ counterparts. In a global context, the indirect result is a single regional viewpoint (NA) is privileged over other regional perspectives. This slows their recognition of shifting power within Alpha, as shown in the section below "When voice is limited: Loyalty and the struggle to adapt."

Ongoing feedback

Having become part of the ongoing map of Alpha's OI (i.e. "it is"), these past narratives then inform the next sensemaking process for the group in a recursive loop. As new interactions with Alpha take place and new events arise, the additional feedback generally reinforces their understanding. However, occasionally their expectations are challenged, forcing them to revise their map.

What is striking about the CC team's external construction processes of Alpha's OI is the degree to which they mirror what have been characterized as internal means of OI formation and development, with narrative sensemaking at its core. Though many of the studies connecting sensemaking and OI construction/adaptation consider the interweaving of internal and external contributions to the process (e.g. Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al., 2010;

Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), the perspective remains a member perspective, and none look closely inside the stakeholders themselves. However, within the team, the fundamental process (exemplified by the Rabbit) of constructing Alpha's OI and answering "who are they?" is also one of sensemaking.

Similarly, narratives are recognized as a central component in OI work (Czarniawska, 1997; Bruner, 1990; Humphries & Brown, 2002; Clegg et al., 2007; Sonenshein, 2010). Establishing the "us" vs "them" so critical to a distinctive identity (Mead, 1934), stories create characters, presume intentionality, assign roles with expected behavior, and construct continuity. In this way, "narratives are part of identity work as people locate themselves <u>and others</u> [emphasis added] in various roles through the stories they tell" (Fenton & Langley, 2011:1180).

In the focus on OI as a member construction, though, locating "others" is largely absent from the process research. Instead, "narrative as a mediator between sensemaking and plausibility judgements" has been seen to answer "the basic questions of 'who we are,' 'what we do,' and 'why are we doing it'" (Navis & Glynn, 2010:489). This is not to say that external inputs are ignored, but generally the external "other" acts as a unidimensional foil (e.g. the "via negativa" of "who we are not" (Clegg et al., 2007; Elsbach &Bhattacharya, 2001; Gioia et al., 2010; Ybema et al., 2009), because this is how it is perceived or treated by members looking out.

CC, however, is not facing a collective or a category representative, rather the team is confronted with an external audience which must be "read" as a single actor, but which is known through specific, diverse and diffuse relationships with individuals. And it is critically dependent on this audience. In this sense, the relationship with the customer more closely resembles members' experience of their own organization than it does the typical study of external audience effects. The multitude of boundary-crossing connections makes Alpha more transparent, and the CC team comes to know Alpha just as members generally come to know their group OI: through up-close, daily, personal interaction. It is not that the team's own OI is absent from the process, but rather the team must also construct an answer to the questions "who <u>they</u> are," "what <u>they</u> do," and "why are <u>they</u> doing it" with respect to Alpha, so as to fulfill their strategic purpose.

Thus, the Rabbit illustrates the essential nature the identity work taking place during these meetings: that the first-order, active OI lens is primarily directed at Alpha, rather than at themselves, and that this is fundamental to the choices they make. In fact, the core of the Rabbit is the ongoing construction and maintenance of Alpha's (and then Weber's) perceived identity. Decision-making leading to strategic action at a global level requires predicting Alpha's behavior as a singular social actor. Needing to assign continuity and intentionality, they ascribe a character, or in other words, identity to Alpha (King, 2015). However, this does not happen explicitly, rather the team holds an implicit cognitive map (Daft & Weick, 1984) of Alpha's identity. The entire map is never visible, rather pieces of this map only become evident through their reactions to Alpha's current behavior and in the underlying assumptions they make about Alpha based on past experience. These assumptions become particularly noticeable when something doesn't fit and they turn to a sensemaking process to create alignment. This may come through drawing on a more in-depth understanding of Alpha, as in the Rabbit, but the exercise may also slightly shift the map itself. Generally, adjustments to Alpha's perceived OI, though, were rare and required a long string of evidence contrary to the existing map.

In fact, the process is not dissimilar to the process by which collective identities form across levels of analysis as theorized by Ashforth, Rogers and Corley (2011). Drawing on Weick's (1995) use of Wiley's (1988) "intrasubjective," "intersubjective" and "generic subjective," Ashforth et al. suggest that OI identity is constructed at each extra-individual analysis, by moving from the intrasubjective "I think", to the intersubjective "we think" to the generic subjective "it is." But "as the generic subjective crystallizes…it in turn affects the enactment and ongoing elaboration and reconstruction of the intersubjective and intrasubjective, completing a recursive loop." (1147) Given that these sub-groups and groups within the organization are nested within each other through the hierarchy of the organization, the power structure ensures that "identities at higher levels of analysis simultaneously constrain and enable the form and enactment of identities at lower levels." (1145)

Once again, in the context of Alpha discussions, the process is turned on its head, as the team explicitly focuses on constructing the identity of the external other, often leaving its own identity process implicit. Moreover, having caught the process in mid-flow (rather than at founding, see Ashforth, 2016), this is no longer about the original OI formation nor does it operate purely from the top. Instead, it now represents an ongoing construction of Alpha's OI through the theorized recursive loop. As shown in the Rabbit, working from the "it is" of past agreed constructions (i.e. their cognitive map of Alpha's OI), each team member contributes "I think," based on his or her own experience and understanding from personal relationships at Alpha, to the emerging and converging "we think." Ultimately, as senior management reflects back in summary narrative the team's negotiated sense of Alpha in this specific situation, the final "it is" is established and solidified.

The co-creation of self and other: Alpha as partner

Thus far, the analysis has considered the visible process of identity work in their discussion, through sensemaking "who they are." However, placing the Rabbit into the larger team context it becomes clear that interacting with this explicit identity work is a second, implicit process by which they construct and reinforce "who we are." Their identity work is not limited to Alpha and CC's competitors, because ultimately the focus of their attention is not Alpha per se, but rather CC's relationship with Alpha. Thus their own identity – as individuals, a team, and an organization – is also in play. As they together decipher Alpha's motives, determine their response, and analyze the competitive field, they construct themselves and work from assumptions about who they are as a team and firm, and at times, even project their own OI onto others. Moreover, the relational nature of their interactions with Alpha and their strategic decision-making provides a unique window into a co-creation process which is to be expected, but is not always visible.

Titled as the "Alpha Global Account Team" the group's core identity literally rests in CC's relationship with Alpha. Furthermore, their collective preoccupation with Alpha extends to the individual members, most of whom are solely engaged in working with Alpha locally around the globe, and have been for many years. Thus Alpha, and CC's relationship with Alpha, is at the heart of every discussion. Even when the conversation broadens into an analysis of the competitive field, it is specifically looking at the competitive picture with regards to Alpha. In fact, it could be said that they believe their primary purpose, individually and collectively, is to *"make Alpha happy."* This trope appears repeatedly throughout the meetings in phrases such as *"give Alpha what they want," "satisfy Alpha,"* In this way, Alpha is personified, and the corporate relationship between CC and Alpha, and the collective "us" vs "them," becomes a mirror of the individual relationships experienced across regions and functions. This collective purpose shapes how they work together to develop an overarching competitive strategy for a bid (as in the Rabbit) or to determine savings, as well as their concern about performance indicators, quality problems, and the perceived importance of hearing what NA has learned in direct conversations with Alpha HQ executives. Thus they need Alpha to perform as an organizational actor not just for reliability and accountability as a market partner, but also because in constructing Alpha, they construct themselves. If Alpha is not whole, then there is no need for a global Alpha team.

The significance of the bond with Alpha is further reinforced at divisional and corporate levels by CC's long-established, close relationship as Alpha's largest supplier, and in parallel, Alpha being CC's largest customer. As a result, the team and its individual members have a higher status than other equivalent employees within the firm by virtue of their association with Alpha (and their responsibility for the relationship). Thus their own work identity, both as individuals and a group, is deeply tied to Alpha.

This is why Alpha as partner is the single most important dimension of Alpha's OI in team discussions, and the most likely to generate sensemaking and drive CC action when Alpha appears to stray, as it does in the Rabbit. In being defined by the relationship with Alpha, Alpha's constructed role becomes critical to the team because it implicitly places them in a counter-role, to which they must react based on their self OI. Alpha as partner implies CC as partner. This aligns with their own core OI, so if Alpha is behaving as a "partner," they respond in kind. However, if Alpha is acting as a "predator," they will refuse to *"play the game."* They are not foolish prey taking the bait of *"unrealistic"* pricing. Checking and re-checking the numbers, proves their role as careful fiduciaries for their shareholders, and establishes them as a rational, efficient organization that earns a *"reasonable"* profit, as a well-regarded public company should. Moreover, John directly reaches out to Alpha to refute being positioned as prey, through having a *"rational discussion"* to *"explain"* their position. The conversation both establishes their own OI counter-claim and is an attempt to enforce the reasonable partner role onto Alpha through persuasion.

While Alpha's perceived OI reflects on CC's OI, the team also uses their own OI to construct and interpret Alpha's OI, forming a recursive loop. For instance, within the Rabbit their own experience of systems at CC shapes their reading of the role of systems in Alpha's actions. Management systems are a critical component of procedural legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) in modern corporations, signaling sound decision-making. The CC managers are daily operating within the constraints of their own business systems and routines, and though the managers are aggravated by them, they accept the systems as right and necessary (in interviews managers want to make changes, but no one speaks about removing them altogether). Thus, when the team explains Alpha's behavior as "following systems," their construction of Alpha's role suddenly shifts. Acting according to systems is not only without malice, but is also what managers in a legitimate corporation do. Furthermore, John takes the team beyond acceptance, to projecting their own personal and group frustration with system limits and imperfections onto Alpha's platform managers. For a brief moment, the sub-unit or personal identities separate from the overarching corporate OI, as John expresses empathy for their counterparts at Alpha. In fact, they also expect such understanding in reverse as well. For instance, when team leaders want to delay individual regional action on an item until all are agreed, Bill suggests telling an inpatient European buyer, *"that it's hard to go see our CEO every month for approvals."*

Just as their own bond with Alpha defines who they are, so too do they measure the competition based on rivals respective relationship with Alpha. The result is a competitive field composed of nested circles with Alpha at the center. Highly conscious of the long-standing relationship as Alpha's "top" supplier, the team clearly considers CC to be "the best" in this competitive field. Within the Rabbit, this OI underlies their belief that CC is the most efficient among these global competitors. At various points in time there are statements implying that if CC can't do it, then neither can any of the other competitors. In other words, the possibility of lower cost structures is not contemplated. Categorically, though, Hirai is formally a part of the innermost circle alongside CC, through its shared strategic supplier status. Beyond this circle are the other competitors designated as "global." This is exemplified when within the marketing presentation, the group defines "us" as one of five global players, and since one of these firms does no business with Alpha in the team's product ranges, their perceived competitive field is limited to three other companies (Hirai, Weber and Daniels). Finally, the outer circle is composed of everyone else, i.e. the many largely unnamed firms perceived to work on only a local or regional basis.

Consequently, being recognized as a "strategic supplier" is central to how they define themselves. It represents both Alpha's commitment to act as partner, as well as Alpha's formal recognition that CC is a partner. And though the program is relatively new, it has become a visible symbol of their OI vis-à-vis Alpha. But almost from the start of the program, the status was at risk. Despite the fact that it was specifically designed for large global programs, Alpha China announced in the past year, *"'Oh we're not gonna agree to honor strategic supplier expectations. We like competitive folks.'"* (Bill in interview). The result has been constant sensemaking with regards to Alpha's actions and their own status throughout the observation period.

This is why from the beginning of the Rabbit there is concern about Hirai's position as strategic supplier. It first appears in discussions of the target price and the sense of unfairness that a platform belonging to Hirai was sent to market based on an unreasonable price. But it is most noticeable in John's decision to use the majority of a meeting for a corporate marketing presentation dedicated to Weber. The concern isn't that Weber has won a large platform, rather he is worried about whether the entire strategic map is being redrawn by Alpha, i.e. that strategic supplier status has been stripped from Hirai and given to Weber, that Weber has become a third strategic supplier, thus enlarging the inner circle. But their greatest fear, as spelled out by John, is the loss of strategic supplier status, *"What we've gotta figure out now, with Hirai failing and with Alpha China not wanting to participate in the strategic supplier arrangements the way it was meant to be, what does that leave us with?"*

Fundamentally, any changes to Hirai's status represents a significant identity threat for the group; if Alpha is seen to arbitrarily take the designation away from Hirai, they can do the same to CC, because it represents a shift away from Alpha acting as partner. As the single firm sharing CC's SSP status, disquiet about Hirai's apparent fall from grace extended well beyond the Rabbit. On seven separate instances in various geographies, managers noted that CC was being asked to bid on pieces of Hirai designated programs or that Hirai was not included in a bid on new Alpha platforms. Despite the fact that these became opportunities for CC to increase its share of Alpha business, their response was not celebratory, but somewhat unnerved. Each time, there was surprise, and questions as the team looked for justification for Alpha's actions. Knowing ***why*** Alpha was moving away from Hirai is critical to them, because they need to know that there is a good reason if Alpha is no longer acting as partner to a fellow strategic supplier. They want to confirm that it is Hirai's fault, not Alpha's fickleness, and that therefore Alpha remains reliable. Gradually, across the months, specifics were added from various regional perspectives, whether it be that Hirai, *"didn't have the engineering support,"* or *"there were quality problems,"* or *"they didn't meet target price," "has warranty issues,"* or most generically *"[Alpha] just doesn't like them as well as us,"* but the catalogue starts to look like a laundry list. In addition, when summing up action that CC would take as a result of these changes, after mentioning Hirai, John repeatedly inserts a phrase such as he does in the Rabbit, *"So we know that there's been disappointment with Hirai, at least from what they're telling us here in North America. Alpha has told us that they're not happy with Hirai."* The information at this point of the discussion is superfluous (and often presented in nonspecific terms), and it would give the impression of a minor aside if it didn't occur so often. Instead, John seems to be reassuring himself and the team that Alpha's behavior is legitimate, that Hirai is to blame through its own actions, and by implication, Alpha's fundamental OI is still partner and CC is secure as a strategic supplier.

Watching this play out at a distance, there is nothing for them to do to actually change the Alpha/Hirai interaction, but these events sensitize the team to any Alpha actions that could signal the same may be happening to them. The result is that they are quick to strongly react when a piece of one of their own programs is threatened as seen below.

Shaping and Enforcing the OI of the "Other": Exit, Voice and Loyalty

The CC team's identity work, though, is not limited to their cognitive map of Alpha's OI. In this section I will examine CC's efforts to shape and discipline Alpha's OI. To do this, I move away from interpretive narrative analysis tied to, and extending from, the Rabbit, to conceptual coding across the full-range of data.

Selectively coding on instances of the CC team problematizing Alpha's OI, the coding process began with categorizing the actions taken in response to the perceived lack of coherence (across both dimensions of continuity and entitativity. Collapsing actions into categories, I found that Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice and loyalty not only aligned with the data, but also provides a useful conceptual starting point for connecting these findings to existing OI theory of audience exit, as well as internal theories of member responses to dissatisfaction with the employing organization. These three axial codes provide the basis for the analysis below which considers the conditions which shape CC's choice of action.

Absent Exit: Disciplining through voice and the use of "symbolic exit"

Our understanding of the role that external audiences play in OI formation is summed up by Gioia, Schultz and Corley(2000:73) "agents and institutions in the environment work to maintain some semblance of recognition and stability in their own perceptions and, consequently, communicate a desire for nonradical shifts in identity and image." The logical follow-on question is "How do they communicate this?" Members are understood to respond to organizational actions through exit, voice or loyalty (Hirschman, 1970), and research on internal OI has consistently stressed the mechanism of voice, by which members work to shape and define OI through their sayings and actions. But as laid out at the start of this chapter, work on the external enforcement of OI is largely focused on exit. And while public channels of voice, such as ratings (Zuckerman, 1999) or media commentary are recognized as having a major influence, their ultimate threat is through projecting or creating a poor reputation, leading other resource holders to exit. In fact, it would seem that this is a key distinction between members and external audiences in influencing OI. While disciplining from outside is limited to a rather crude on/off switch, members have the capability of applying a nuanced and targeted voice.

But what are the options for a stakeholder when exit is impossible? Although CC and Alpha are interdependent, the balance of power clearly lies with Alpha as a customer who has other supplier options. Exit for CC is virtually impossible; the Alpha account is just too vital. Given this inequality, and CC's external placement, the reasonable assumption would be that loyalty is the only option left to them.

However, what I observed is a regular pattern of CC employing active voice in an effort to shape and discipline Alpha's OI when their sensemaking led to the conclusion that Alpha was not acting coherently or in accordance with the key "partner" dimension. This occurred in diverse formats, and to varying degrees of forcefulness: from escalation using the Alpha hierarchy to enforce coherence, to consciously socializing new managers in Alpha into the "partner" role, to the unexpected extreme of what I term "symbolic exit."

Direct resort to hierarchy: Escalation

The appeal to a higher level of Alpha management for resolution of a difficulty encountered at lower levels of Alpha is a regular strategy used by CC to induce coherence in Alpha. Its use is sufficiently frequent that the CC team has their own abbreviated term for it, "escalation," and it appeared in almost every meeting. Though there was evidence that it is also employed within regions, in the context of the team meeting, escalation generally takes the form of asking Alpha HQ to enforce entitativity and continuity at the regional level.

At times CC needed to behave as unified social actor, but could not overcome cross-regional or regional/HQ conflicts on its own. In one example, Alpha Region 1, working on behalf of themselves and Alpha Region 2, didn't properly line up internal approvals before making a sourcing commitment to CC. Unable to get the purchase orders issued, Alpha Region 1 agreed to pay half and told CC they could get the other half themselves from the Alpha Region 2. Now caught in the middle, and unable to get their money, the CC product manager told John, *"So I'm about to escalate this here today to the commodity manager. But if we can't get resolution on this, we may need to collect this money by not giving on some of our [gain-sharing]."* Alpha's standardization also creates friction for CC. When staff in Alpha's regions are unhappy with new bidding documentation from center, the CC team discusses how to handle this. Paul concludes that, *"our strategy will be, 'Hey, this is a global template. You sent out a global template and we will follow the global template.'"* Bill replies, *"If they ask the question, 'Who has given you the direction?'* [Alpha manager X] *is a global lead for rolling out this document. I told him, 'I would not think Alpha would want to just piecemeal changes. You would want to do that at some particular breakpoint so that it does not slow down the teams from submitting quotations on time.' And he agreed."* In other words, having anticipated the challenge, Bill has pre-escalated the issue to Alpha HQ, and persuaded the purchasing manager that this is what Alpha wants. Now, Paul only has to invoke the authority of the HQ person in charge (note that this is by name) to back up his action. Along the same lines, when it comes to pass-through discussions, CC asks that decisions are communicated from Alpha center to the regions, *"We will continue to push* [purchasing HQ executive] *and* [purchasing HQ senior manager] *to speak for Alpha globally, like they expect us to be able to do."* (Bill)

Continuity is also sometimes a challenge. Promises made at a local level, aren't always kept, especially in smaller countries where resources are tight. So when sales fell short of contractual volumes in one emerging market, appeals went up multiple levels in the HQ hierarchy. Ultimately, some (though not all) of the amount that CC believed they are due was paid. Similarly, when Alpha shut down business in another emerging market, and CC had to write-off capital equipment, there was no local representative to apply to for compensation, and the regional head had changed. Thus, John reached out to Alpha HQ.

Despite their regular use of escalation as an enforcement mechanism, though, on several occasions John communicated that it is not the best method, and conveyed that it carries some risk, *"So we have time if we need to escalate an issue, but I'd prefer not to escalate things. I just want to make sure I get you the right help."*

Socialization

For these CC managers Alpha's OI is embedded in individuals, who bring their own identity, perspective and past experience to their organizational role at Alpha. Thus a change in the person filling the role is always a risk to Alpha's OI as the team perceives it. They are acutely aware of the potential breach in Alpha as a social actor, and each time a primary contact leaves or a new one arrives, whether at Alpha HQ or in the regions, it is announced to the group as a whole, sometimes repeatedly. Over the course of the study it became obvious that the team views the movement of Alpha managers in and out of key roles as a potential threat to their experience of Alpha's coherence, including adherence to commitments, as well as the mutual understanding of the partner relationship. The result is that team members actively work to *"educate"* and *"train"* new Alpha managers, socializing them into the existing relationship between the two organizations, and the standard practices in boundary-crossing routines. As Bill succinctly reported in interview, *"We've trained them. There's been a lot, continues to be a lot of people changes at Alpha, so many people that we trained a year or two years ago are all in new jobs. And so we're constantly educating them."*

Socialization at its most basic is education, as CC members *"explain our business"* to new Alpha managers. CC managers in the division regularly noted the uniqueness of the production processes for their main product vs other products generally supplied to Alpha. Moreover, they are proud of their plants and the efficiency of their operations. Thus whenever possible, a trip to a production plant was organized for new buyers, *"the purchasing director was interested to see first time a production plant. He never say a Product X plant before. He was very impressed. So he knew it was a good plant, looks great. And so he was very impressed. And there were two new buyers they took the opportunity to see a production plant as well."* (Paul)

"Lack of understanding" on the part of new managers is also seen to extend to inappropriate expectations in interactive business routines. This was most visible with the turnover at HQ, as John reported out in a CC team meeting, *"we're dealing with a new group of purchasing buyers and management. And we're finding that we have to reestablish ourselves with agreements that we've made, expectations from Alpha on transparency and those sorts of things. ... it's requiring us to reestablish, do some work that we've done before with the prior organization. So we're dealing with all new folks and we're finding we've gotta reset some things."* For instance, the allocation of design change cost became an issue, because (as reported by Bill), *"The challenge we have this year is with X being new, Y is new. We have some people in our purchasing who do seem really to be surprised we are taking that position. All I can reconcile is that maybe they came from other* [product categories] *where there are not* *normally large design changes."* The HQ team's response was to persevere and continue to repeat this is how it's "*always*" been done, as well as why it's been done that way.

Socialization could also be indirectly accomplished by drafting existing Alpha managers to help in the process. This might be through using *"back channels"* to support their claims of Alpha processes, but it could go as far as literally having a current Alpha executive enact the partner relationship with CC for the new Alpha manager. When the newly arrived senior Alpha HQ buyer was visiting China with the purchasing executive to whom he reported, John acted to have the new buyer get to know CC more deeply and broadly, *"I invited him to visit our China plants…I want him to see your* [Simon's] *team in China, see the technical facility, and get into him one of our plants."* Further, John also grabbed the opportunity to demonstrate the close relationship between the two firms, *"Then I made arrangements for the two of them to have dinner with X [CC* president of the division]. *The purchasing exec and our president know each other very well."* The intent is clearly for the new buyer to both observe and be part of a friendly, social interaction between these executives of Alpha and CC. Thus rather than just telling or trying to persuade the new buyer that the two firms have a special relationship, John has essentially enlisted the buyer's supervisor to perform the relationship with and for the buyer. At the extreme CC employs Alpha's hierarchy to help in maintaining Alpha's continuity and reinforcing OI as partner with a new employee through "symbolic exit" (see below).

Finally, socialization is also actively pursued within the existing Alpha organization, when the opportunity presents itself. When an HQ buyer had not yet been replaced, the purchasing executive two levels up, whom John saw occasionally, was suddenly, *"more involved than he has been in the last couple years that I've worked with him."* This was at the time of some key negotiations, and John used the chance *"to spend time and explain to him how much we are offering…. And I think that he realizes that we're the biggest supplier for a reason because we're negotiating in good faith. So he wants to try and make something work. And that's what we're gonna have a meeting this morning with his people."* Examples can also be found deeper into the organizations. For instance, CC helped Alpha as it developed a cost model for the product category, *"We went through and we were almost teaching Alpha the elements of how we cost things. And they absorbed as much as they could…."* (Bill in interview) Thus CC works to align new Alpha routines with their own. At a more fundamental level, CC engineers are actually permanently embedded within Alpha engineering in some geographies, physically crossing the boundary line between firms. CC members thus become quasi-members of Alpha, interact as colleagues, and increase Alpha reliance on CC resources and skills, further strengthening the interdependence which sustains the partner role.

Symbolic Exit

On rare occasions, team managers take more dramatic action to redirect Alpha's behavior when it goes off script. While it is unthinkable that CC could or would exit the relationship altogether, at the extreme CC can refuse to cooperate in areas important to Alpha, performing what I term, "symbolic exit." As a measure of the radical nature of the action, it happened only once during the course of the observation period, and team members in interviews reported that CC only did something similar *"a couple of times"* over the years.

The difficulty began when a new senior buyer arrived at Alpha HQ. Having moved across from another firm, he was more transactional in his approach, and had no experience of the long and deep relationship between Alpha and CC. Given the buyer's seniority and HQ role, the team had paid close attention to any variations in the relationship, signaled by tone or action. Very quickly, Bill observed that, *"certainly a very strong, traditional approach being taken, with threats of impacting sourcing opportunities and demanding...."* The buyer was also identified across meetings as *"very aggressive"* and using an *"unacceptable tone"* in negotiations. The role being enacted was clearly not partner, but hostile adversary, *"He doesn't give a hoot what anybody else... he's looking for a club to beat you with."* Increasingly concerned, the CC team leaders (who directly communicated with the Alpha buyer) avoided responding in kind, trying to redirect the respective roles back to "partner" through projecting a positive and helpful stance.

The situation came to a head, though, when it became clear that a European add-on to an existing platform which "belonged" to CC as a strategic supplier would be put out to a market bid. The decision originated in Alpha Europe, but the HQ buyer did not step in to protect CC's designation. The team was incensed, believing that this not only reneged on an important past commitment, but further undercut the already at-risk strategic supplier status. The team leaders in NA, particularly John, decided to take drastic action (requiring approval from the Divisional President and Executive Committee). The annual discussions of next year's gain-sharing were in process, and CC pulled out. As Bill reported, *"We told [*the buyer*] that until we resolve the European sourcing challenge that they're coming at us with, we really won't be able to have an effective discussion about gain-sharing for next year... because that's got too much of an impact on our business relationship to address it right now."* This was explained within the team meeting, and the regions were also instructed not to discuss gain-sharing locally, *"I think each region can continue to tell Alpha local in their region that the discussions are gonna be global, and be handled with* [global buyer]*."*

The savings discussions are a high priority for Alpha purchasing, up to the highest levels. So pulling out of the negotiations served several purposes. It signaled to Alpha (and particularly the new buyer) how essential CC considers the SSP to be, and it notified the very top echelons of the Alpha buying organization of the problem in a way which would push them to act, leading to pressure being exerted from executive Alpha management on the buyer and his organization to sort it out. *"So that is a bit of an escalation issue, that will I'm sure accelerate some discussions."* And it worked. Within a couple of weeks the global buyer was in Europe in meetings with his HQ superior on the phone, and the head of European purchasing and CC representatives in the room, trying to sort things out. From Bill's perspective, *"the pressure from [the global buyer] is totally on the European program. He doesn't want to talk about gain-sharing compared to that."* When Paul was finally able to report to the team that the contract had been signed, John observed, *"I can't tell you what a burden this was on [global buyer] and [his superior]! This European program that had not been closed out yet."* In essence, CC successfully refocused Alpha management attention as well as enlisting Alpha executives in educating the new buyer about the special nature of Alpha's relationship with CC.

Further, at the local level, Alpha managers reoriented their interaction with CC. Having initiated the confrontation in this instance, when another related product was ready for sourcing several months later, Paul reported, *"Of course* [senior engineer] *knows we have issues with delay of the prototypes, but this is the normal business and we can handle it. But this was a* *very open and frank meeting and he's open for ideas to support us here. It's not, 'Can you do it Paul? If no, then we'll look for somebody else.' No, no, he's very open. I think it makes no sense to split this and give this to somebody else here. So he's looking to get CC on the boat."*

CC's action was clearly unexpected and dramatic. The fact that it needed to be approved internally at the divisional level, communicates both its singularity as well as the seriousness (and possible risk) of the strategy. At the same time, its rarity, alongside CC's willingness to confront Alpha in such a robust manner, got Alpha's attention and generated a positive response. Alpha could easily have pushed back, but it would seem that Alpha management agreed that as an organization, it "should" keep prior global commitments and act as a continuous, consistent entity. Thus Alpha ultimately acknowledged the prior commitment and acted accordingly. CC had successfully disciplined Alpha into maintaining continuity, despite the unequal power dynamics in the relationship.

Though this may appear to be a straightforward story of protecting financial commitments, evidence indicates that this was not just about financial returns, but rather their decision was also contingent on the level of identity threat. As discussed earlier, they were already apprehensive about the inroads that had been made into the original SSP agreement through Alpha China pulling out. In that environment, they were disturbed by Hirai's seeming disappearance as a fellow strategic supplier, and spent time reassuring themselves that they were still a strategic supplier, at least for Alpha ex-China. Not only had this become an important marker of their special organizational identity with relation to Alpha, but it was also critical to the internal perception of John and the team, since John had persuaded division executives that accommodating Alpha's demand for transparency was worth the status and the business that would come with it.

Both the observed choice of words and tone the CC team used for this topic signaled that strategic supplier discussions went beyond simple business calculations. These exchanges carried an emotional charge absent in other conversations, and nowhere was this more visible than in the team's reaction to idea that the European add-on might go out to market bids. There were other discussions about issues which could cost them as much or more in dollar terms, but these issues did not generate the same depth of reaction. Angry and outraged, the team, led by John and Bill, took a notable stand against Alpha behavior which not only threatened a financial arrangement, but, critically, their very identity in relationship to Alpha. Bill best summed it up when he said to the group, *"I don't see any benefit of us talking about next year [with Alpha] when we have such a significant emotional and financial issue being threatened in our partnership relationships, right now with the European program"* [underline added].

Summary

In conclusion, despite being a dependent external organization with no option of exit, CC can be seen to employ multiple mechanisms at varying levels of intervention to discipline and shape Alpha's OI. Its deep knowledge of Alpha, and the strong relationship forged over the decades in complex individual ties throughout both organizations, allow it to work not only from the outside, but to also operate as if it were inside the organization.

However, many of their internal mechanisms operate via Alpha's hierarchy. They require that Alpha is held together as a single global actor by its hierarchy, and that Alpha HQ has the power to decide, command and allocate resources. Socialization can happen at all levels, but the most robust interventions require activating hierarchy. In addition to control, it may be that hierarchy is more likely to be in accord with CC's efforts. In particular, top-level Alpha managers are most concerned about the final returns from CC's gain-sharing. Moreover, relationally, most of the very top Alpha purchasing executives had long experience with CC, and would have been conscious of the importance of CC as a supplier. Further, OI research would project an increasing commitment to a coherent, singular OI as one moves towards the top of the organization. Taken altogether, it might be said that hierarchy acts as a multiplier effect, increasing the power of what CC can accomplish on its own.

When voice is limited: Loyalty and adaptation

The critical role of hierarchy in CC's enforcement mechanism became obvious over the course of the year, as Alpha China increasingly asserted its independence from Alpha HQ. The shift in power within Alpha became apparent in a series of events that challenged Alpha's global OI in the CC team's eyes, and compromised their ability to work inside the Alpha organization through HQ. In the face of this separation of control within Alpha, CC had no choice left but loyalty. However, loyalty required redrawing their cognitive map of Alpha's OI, with implications for the CC team's own OI, including both taken-for-granted routines and structural patterns of power and voice.

In the first section below, I provide a basic narrative of events related to the developing power split within Alpha, including CC's struggle to adapt to the new situation. This will be followed by a broader discussion of organizational structure as an element of OI, particularly in defining the form of "globality" in an MNE. Employing theory and evidence from this study, I assert the importance of global "fit" in a strategic relationship. Being tied to identity global fit helps create a powerful bond, yet is inflexible in the face of change (as in the experience of the CC team).

Alpha China's challenge to Alpha's global entitativity

Based on interviews with team members, the disconnect between Alpha China and Alpha HQ always existed to some degree, but only became a flash point with Alpha's new claims to globality, beginning with the strategic supplier program. Traditionally the geographic gaps have suited CC because, as mentioned above, CC is regionally structured. Moreover, CC China has very strong long-term relationships with Alpha's Chinese joint venture partner. However, having been offered global strategic supplier status by Alpha HQ in return for greater transparency, they had expected to move forward on this basis. This is not what has happened. Instead, according to Bill, in the last year Alpha China decided, *"'Oh we're not gonna agree to honor SSP expectations. We like competitive folks.'"* The Chinese CC manager had some idea that this might happen, and spoke up against the SSP agreement, but he was overruled as the North American team members. Effectively when the claim to global action was made by Alpha HQ, the senior CC management accepted Alpha's global OI believing it to be anchored by HQ power. So as Bill reports, *"we,"* i.e. the team, didn't expect Alpha China to pull out, adding, *"I would say Alpha wasn't expecting it either."* This renunciation of the strategic supplier program by Alpha China was the initial shock leading to their heightened sense of SSP status vulnerability; Alpha HQ could not deliver on their commitment of global strategic supplier programs which included China.

The split became more complex with the first major global program to be centered out of China, as the team's inner power dynamics and communication patterns no longer aligned with what was happening at Alpha. Alpha China is now in charge, and over time it emerges that not only are they not following important Alpha routines but they aren't communicating well with Alpha HQ either. The result is that sensemaking the customer using the multi-vocal approach guided by the North American leads begins to fail.

Logically, they need to give precedence to the Chinese voice on the team, but this is not what happens. At the beginning, the team is trying to determine the shape and geographic footprint, as well as the timing of the new program. The primary sources of information are in China and South America, and they conflict. In fact, the team manager from South America reports that the there is a wall between Alpha program buyers, as buyers in three geographies, "*are connected with the Alpha Global Pursuit,*" but the buyer who is responsible for Alpha China, "*is not allowed to have a conversation on phone.*" Surprisingly, despite the Chinese control and broken communication channels within Alpha, the South American manager's feedback from her local connections is given at least equal weight, and sometimes greater. In general, this manager is assertive in meetings, speaking intensely and often, in fast English. By comparison, the Chinese manager enters conversations less frequently and, though speaking good English, is softer and slower in his delivery. Moreover, because he is calling into the meeting from home (it is late evening), and not being on the full Lync connection, he is more invisible. There is often a pause between questions and his replies: a pause that I hear filled by the NA coordinator (Thomas) more than once, as Thomas answers the question instead. In addition, the South American has interacted face-to-face with the Thomas, while the Chinese representative has not, and during the year of observations the South American manager moves to the US.

As they progress towards establishing a separate program team from the three locations (the usual CC routine as a new platform comes closer to bidding), it becomes clear that Thomas (based in North America) intends to head up the effort, assuming that NA should be in charge as it is within the global account management team. John and Bill both realize that it needs to be led by China, and step in to ensure this will happen. However, the role continues to be contested. Just as Alpha China is not following standard Alpha procedure, so too the CC Chinese manager doesn't adhere to the accepted NA practice within the program team. Seeing that Alpha China is still changing the parameters and has pushed out dates, Simon doesn't see a need for regular meetings at this point. As Simon observes in interview, *"Different working style. I feel it's 'Oh I don't wanna have to waste my time.' They will say 'Ah, it's not a waste of time. To know more is better.'... We should let difference exist right? We cannot always say 'This way is correct that way is wrong.' We cannot say this. We say 'This is my working style this is your working style. Let's find the better way maybe.''"* The SA manager, though, gets specific parameters and much earlier dates from her contact at Alpha SA, so she is concerned about moving forward more quickly, as is the NA coordinator. Unhappy with the direction of things, she advocates for leading the team herself. Over multiple occasions it becomes clear that the information from SA is wrong and the Chinese manager's information reflects the correct the trajectory, and even the SA admits in frustration, *"They change their mind all the time. And China is saying something different than SA is saying. Sometimes the information meets each other. Sometimes it's opposite. It's confusing what Alpha wants, the global wants."* yet the internal power and voice dynamics within the CC team, as well as North American discomfort with the Chinese manager's delay in face of conflicting information raise doubts.

At the same time, their normal channels at Alpha HQ for resolving conflicting regional information are collapsing. Alpha HQ is no longer in control, and itself does not know what is happening. In fact, Alpha HQ shares some of the concerns of the CC leadership, and during this process the boundary of us vs them sometimes shift from Alpha vs CC to Alpha and CC NA vs. Alpha and CC China, as Alpha HQ voices its frustrations with Alpha China to CC team leaders. For instance, both Alpha HQ and CC are disturbed that Alpha China is talking about sourcing with local suppliers who are not necessarily Alpha-approved. As John reported to the team, "*So I'm meeting with* [executive Alpha buyer] *and we're going to talk about* [the new platform]. *He had mentioned that perhaps Alpha China would want to bring a Chinese supplier in. He wasn't sure. They admit that they don't really know what Alpha China is doing."* Yet Alpha still insists that this is a global program, i.e. that sourcing will not be split.

Now, disciplining Alpha's entitativity is not possible. The normal mechanism using Alpha hierarchy is broken, voice is no longer effective, exit is not possible, and loyalty and adaptation is the only option left. Thus CC must just accept the duality, and try to adjust. This was evident when Alpha China refused to adhere to the Alpha HQ global commitment with the SSP. CC took no action because it would be fruitless. By contrast, when Alpha Europe threatened to go to market with a CC-designated program, CC could take forceful steps to successfully pull Alpha back in line, because Alpha Europe is subject to Alpha HQ. Thus, faced with a divided Alpha on the current bid, and the tensions about the program team, the NA CC lead managers try to reorient their response through bifurcating the leadership of the program team, with the Chinese manager focusing on Asia, and the SA manager coordinating the SA and NA activities.

However, even though they acknowledged the split in the SSP context, they struggled to apply this new world more broadly. When the new program center is set in China, they continue to operate as a global team, sensemaking Alpha as a singular entity comprised of multiple regional voices led by NA HQ. When they do finally begin to recognize the disconnect in the new platform management, rather than logically moving towards Chinese leadership of the global program team (which would better reflect a "global" platform based in China), they shift towards a regional model, which maintains the status quo: Chinese and South American voices both contribute, and the NA leads keep their role as an important conduit to Alpha HQ because Alpha South America reports to Alpha HQ.

Concurrently, "Alpha" as an organizational actor becomes more uncertain. As discussions evolved, they would lose the thread of who "Alpha" is. Sometimes "Alpha" would refer to Alpha globally, but now, in the context of the new platform, "Alpha" might refer to the portion of Alpha controlled by Alpha HQ only, i.e. everything except Alpha China. Realizing that it was becoming increasingly confusing, the speaker might take a step back to clarify, but on several occasions the intention was not clear. The CC SA buyer captures it this way: *"They change their mind all the time. And China is saying something different than SA is saying. Sometimes the information meets each other. Sometimes it's opposite. It's confusing what Alpha wants, the global wants."* Alpha has lost all coherence.

The irony is that when Alpha truly loses entitativity, CC's levers for shaping and disciplining Alpha's coherence become ineffective. Eventually recognizing that Alpha HQ doesn't have the power to correct the new state of affairs, the team dispassionately reverts to loyalty. Despite the fact that this is a far greater threat to OI and future business than the European episode which led to CC's symbolic exit, the strong emotional valence of symbolic exit is missing here. The team voices frustration, but nothing more, as they accept the new state of affairs.

However, loyalty in this situation requires adaptation, but as shown above, the CC team has difficulty adjusting. Why? In many other situations they readily modify their behavior in response to Alpha's changing needs and requirements, so why is it so difficult this time? In the following section, I reveal that the required adaptation has implications for the OI of the CC team, thus accounting for their confusion.

The Struggle to Adapt: Organizational Structure, OI and Structural Fit

Throughout the observations, the hierarchy of Alpha's organizational structure, or more specifically the allocation of decision-making between global HQ and geographic subsidiaries, determines CC's interpretation of Alpha as well as its use of voice. On the other side, CC's own structure shapes the team's internal processes, key strategic narratives, and resultant actions. In other words, organizational structure becomes a key feature of OI on both sides. Moreover, the structural fit (Toulan et al., 2006), or alignment of the two structures, facilitates and enhances the relationship.

I will first present evidence and analysis supporting the above claims, and then theoretically argue that organizational structure should more generally be considered a fundamental dimension of OI, especially for MNEs. Finally, I close the circle by establishing that the advantage of structural fit in a global account team relationship is based on shared identity. Identity is powerful, but doesn't change readily, thus explaining CC's struggle to adapt, as well as suggesting that structural fit itself is inflexible in a changing environment.

Historically, within the product group CC and Alpha's global structure of decision-making has closely paralleled. The result is that the perceived legitimacy of Alpha's OI regional fragmentation into sub-unit OI's is reinforced by CC's own similar organizational structure and the resultant web of relationships between corresponding managers across organizational boundaries. Thus, as seen in the Rabbit, the semi-independence of the regions is taken for granted. Alpha is understood to be a fundamentally a regionally structured firm, beginning with the original Korean pricing. Later, when Simon mentions that Alpha China is also lost with regards to the target price, and feedback to Simon in China and Paul in Europe indicates that the two sides aren't communicating, the group evidences no surprise and continues with the sensemaking already in process. In fact, despite the apparent identity fragmentation, the team continues to speak of "Alpha" as a singular entity. I would argue that they are able to do this because Alpha's regional organization is accepted as a key feature of its established organizational identity, and its legitimacy is reinforced by CC's own parallel structure.

In fact, the dominance of regional silos is the primary reason that CC's service of Alpha is first and foremost handled within the regions. Just as CC themselves have their profit centers in the regions, requiring reports and evaluations from Alpha on a geographic (not just global) basis, so too can Alpha can shift from a global to a regional perspective. Within Alpha, regional diversity means that not only are there local versions of global programs, but often times, processes and systems can vary across borders. The team not only accepts this, but sometimes even uses it to their advantage. Occasionally, when the regional system is working in CC's favor, and the team want it left alone, the NA leaders feign ignorance. As Bill would say *"I tell them* [Alpha HQ] *I don't speak Chinese. I don't know what they're doing over there either. Let's let them work it out."* Thus creating a bond between Alpha HQ and the CC NA team leadership by reorienting the boundary of us/them from CC/Alpha to NA/China.

At the same time, though, in recent years, Alpha has made a claim to global integration, introducing global platforms supported by cross-regional systems and routines. CC accepts this, and has set up the global team in response. Underlying their acceptance is the expectation that central hierarchy, represented by the voice of headquarters executives, will accomplish and enforce the claim of global "unity, recognizability and entitativity" (Albert & Whetten, 1985: 87), just as it does within CC. This is visible in the Rabbit in their assumption that Alpha HQ in NA can speak for the regions (as it can at CC); thus John's contact there has the final say. In fact, within CC, the structure and process of the team has created a reinforcing loop between the authority of the NA leaders on the team and the perceived power of Alpha's HQ voice, as the two are co-created. John and Bill's power within the team is predicated on their hierarchical roles and status gained through their internal reputation, but it also stems from their direct connection to executives at Alpha HQ. At the same time, John and Bill's influence within the team imparts added weight to the messages they relay from their HQ contacts. One could argue that at the very deepest level, the existence and purpose of the team depends on this enactment of global hierarchy on both sides; if there is no unified voice for the regions, then there is no need for a *global* account team.

Thus CC's effectiveness in shaping and enforcing Alpha's OI is facilitated by the structural fit between the two actors, but such fit means that the CC group interactions with Alpha are also rooted in "how we do things around here" at CC, i.e. CC's internal OI. To align with the new state of affairs, the CC team must modify taken-for-granted routines, as well as patterns of power and voice, that are fundamental to who the team is. This is why adaptation becomes so difficult for them when Alpha China asserts its independence from Alpha HQ. The bifurcation of power in Alpha initiates a major shift in the team's cognitive map of Alpha's OI, but in relationship, this entails a reordering of their own OI if they are to maintain the structural fit. And shifting OI is far more difficult than changing specific behaviors.

Supported by the results of this study, I propose that organizational structure itself should also be considered a key dimension of OI, especially for large multinationals. Research has already demonstrated that institutional categories play a critical role in identity formation (Tripsas, 2009) and maintenance (Phillips, Tracey, & Kraatz, 2016), and that adherence to category norms can determine organizational success and failure (Zuckerman, 1999). Basically, the organization needs to be familiar to audiences, both internally and externally, to be considered legitimate. Discussions of category characteristics are dominated by industry or sub-industry classifications (see for example work on cognitive groups, e.g. Porac et al., 1989; Reger & Huff, 1993). However, other "relevant dimensions" such nationality (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999), organizational governance (McEvily & Ingram, 2004), and even size as a dimension of organizational form (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000), have also been noted for specific settings.

Similarly, organizational structure is an essential descriptor of any large firm. In systematizing the organization's activities, it determines channels of formal power and communication, as well as providing the framework for systems and routines, priorities and voice. By establishing a trajectory for "what we do" (Navis & Glynn, 2010), it can be argued that the structure becomes a defining aspect of the organization's identity, and may even be at the core of much that is central, enduring and distinctive (Albert & Whetten, 1985) in the organization.

The paradox, though, is that organizational structure serves to both unify and divide the organizational actor. Structure generates the infamous "silos" which creates the boundaries delineating internal sub-groups, or "tribes" (Ashforth & Rogers, 2012), each of which holds its own specific group identity, just as the global team at CC does. Ashforth, Rogers and Corley (2011) have further theorized that these sub-identities are nested in a hierarchy originating at the top of the organization, thus facilitating the control and maintenance of the overarching singular OI of the entity. The overall configuration echoes the hierarchical system mapped out by the organization structure.

Thus organizational structure as an institutional feature imparts legitimate plasticity to organizational identity. Like CC, we not only understand, but accept, that divisions, departments, etc. within the same entity may behave differently and autonomously. But at the same time we see the organization as a single actor operating from the top-down. Our expectations of the shape and degree of both the separations and the unification are set by the claimed organizational structure.

Within an MNE, organizational structure gains further prominence, defining not only whether the MNE is global, but "how global" it is. It's long been recognized that geographic rifts are markedly salient in an MNE. Not only are people in the international subsidiaries far from HQ, but they are further separated by national identity, by culture and institutions, and often by language. Thus how the company resolves the tension between global integration and local responsiveness is a key feature for an MNE. So it is not surprising that when two global companies interact with each other, the shape that "global" takes in each firm can be a source of alignment or of conflict, as seen in the case of CC and Alpha.

IM scholars have recognized and demonstrated the importance of structural fit in global account management for exactly this reason (Toulan et al., 2006), but this study reveals how it works, and the limitations. Structural fit not only helps pattern communication between two global organizations through parallel nested identities, but it is also the basis of a shared understanding of the world, as seen through the similar classification systems and power distribution shaped by organizational structure. Thus, structural fit isn't just about aligning surface behaviors, but is embedded in a common identity. This is why structural fit is so effective, yet also inflexible in the face of fundamental changes at the customer, as I have shown.

Summary

Through close examination of the identity work in the context of a dependent strategic organizational relationship, section lays out the external options of voice and loyalty in shaping and enforcing a strategic partner's OI, as well as contingencies that affect the choice of action. Interestingly, these voice options resemble member options, in that they take advantage of multiple connections inside the "other," as well as close knowledge of the firm to socialize new members of the "other," as well as mobilizing the "other's" hierarchy to shape and discipline the OI from within. The experience of CC also indicates that the strength of the intervention is contingent not only on the material resources involved, but also the level of OI threat the stakeholder faces.

However, the most effective voice mechanisms operate via the hierarchy of the "other." Thus when the hierarchy breaks down, irrespective of the level of OI threat, the only remaining option is loyalty with adaptation. In this situation, though, adaptation is hindered by the fact that the structuring, power and routines of the stakeholder itself need to be undone, thereby threatening its own OI.

Discussion

Up until now, organizational theory and research has assumed that identity work is performed by members to shape and maintain the OI of their own organization; however, this study reveals non-members in an external organization similarly working to shape and maintain the identity of the "other." They do this because they need to. Not only does global strategic action require reading Alpha as a social actor with motive, but in addition, key dimensions of Alpha's OI are intricately linked with CC's own OI, as well as the team's sub-group OI. Placement and claims of each firm become mutually constitutive in the context of their close organizational relationship. Further, the distributed yet connected nature of the relationship affords an environment in which CC regularly encounters the imperfections in Alpha's integration, thus necessitating a complex process of identity work.

Strategically, making sense of Alpha is critical for CC. Strategy requires viewing competitors, suppliers, customers as collectives or organizational actors with continuity, predictability and distinctiveness. To accomplish this, these stakeholders must have a coherent OI as seen by the other actors in their strategic field. This is exactly why work in categories and institutional theory has shown that audiences or stakeholders withhold resources when an organization can't be easily "read."

However, this study shows the existence of alternative identity dynamics in a dependent strategic relationship. Reading Alpha is a challenge for CC, in essence because it knows Alpha too well. At the same time, though, its dependent relationship with Alpha makes exit almost impossible. Instead, CC's identity work with Alpha extends beyond constructing Alpha's OI within team narratives, to shaping and enforcing Alpha's OI employing mechanisms within Alpha of: escalation, socialization and symbolic exit.

The limits of reputation and rethinking the scope of OI

Theoretically, OI is recognized to be, "at its heart a relational construct" (Pratt et al., 2016: 3), and as research into the interaction between external influences and internal OI work grows and develops, results have provided connections across the research cluster silos. For instance, work on identity formation, associating the social actor view with identity claims (i.e. projected image) and the social constructionist view of identity with identity understandings (i.e. internal OI), shows that they are "mutually constitutive processes recursively generating" (Gioia et al., 2010: 35; see also Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). However, there has been little showing the true co-creation of the external OI with the internal OI.

In explicitly examining how people answer "who are we?" the implicit reverse process answering "who are they?" has become invisible. Specifically, the perception of the external other has been limited to reputation, a second-order "generalized belief" (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) or simple categorization, but both are insufficient to capture the external dynamics observed in this study. In the context of a deeply embedded relationship between two organizations (i.e. multifold specific and continuous ties), the perception of the external other is based on primary rather than second-order interactions, and specific rather than generalized beliefs. Thus the process of coming to an agreed audience understanding of an organization's OI changes. Rather than an open collective process of assigning categories or sharing beliefs in a social group, what is documented here is a structured, distributed process in an organization. Moreover, it is a process which in many ways echoes those described in the internal OI literature. The result is a truly mutually constitutive process which answers both "who are they?" and "who are we?" because the answer to one question co-creates the other, especially with regards to attributes tied to the relationship.

This raises a larger question for the study of OI. In the context of today's networked corporations, where does one draw the line between members and non-members? And should there be any separation at all? It is generally understood that identity is socially constructed at the intersection of self and society. Yet most scholars of OI have relied on the Albert and Whetten (1985) definition of OI, limiting it to members. Often this is possible because other organizations operate at a distance. In this study, though, CC has an intimate perspective on Alpha which approaches an insider view of the company. The result is that the dual, interactive construction of us and them becomes discernable. In this context, it is not clear why the "internal" construction should be privileged over the "external construction" in defining OI – rather OI is jointly constituted.

Thus this study joins a growing body of research which problematizes the member/non-member divide. As noted in the theory section at the start of this chapter, there is already one group of scholars who argue that members are just one among many audiences who construct an organization's identity through their collective "expectations, assumptions and beliefs" about the organization (Hsu & Hannan, 2005:476), but the processes are largely hidden (Social categories in Figure 2). In addition, Scott and Lane (2000: 44) have proposed a bridging of the two perspectives with an organizational identity construction model which "shift[s] the focus from an internal-external (i.e. identity-image) view to a manager-stakeholder view." Like the second group who take an all-encompassing view of identity, Scott and Lane assert that, organizational identity is "the set of beliefs shared between top managers and stakeholders [including members]." In other words OI inheres in society (stakeholders or audiences), not just within the organization. But in line with the first group of OI scholars, they draw on Albert and Whetten's definition in limiting identity specifically to beliefs "about the central, enduring and distinctive characteristics of an organization." Similarly, Coupland & Brown (2004: 1341), analyzing social media interactions, contend that "theories that locate organizational identities within the putatively strict confines of an organization's 'official' boundaries are inadequate." Certainly, in the context of interorganizational relationship, member and non-member OIs become hard to disentangle.

CHAPTER 4:
THE COST OF TIME ZONES:
SOCIAL NORMS OF TEMPORALITIES AND THE EFFECT ON CROSS-BORDER COORDINATION

Min Park is a Korean-American working in China for a Fortune-200 US components manufacturer. Trained in engineering, he joined the company straight out of college. Now, after three decades and several foreign postings, he is global director of advanced engineering for the largest division. Min is among the top 7% of managers in the company, reporting directly to a member of the Executive Committee for the division, which recently moved its HQ from the US to China. In his role as global director, Min spends his evenings attending virtual meetings with managers and engineers embedded in the regions of Asia Pacific, Americas, and EMEA. In a typical day, he wakes at 6am, is driven to work while he goes through his emails, and is at the office from about 7:30am until 5 or 6pm. Back at home, he has a quick dinner and then begins his global meetings which last until 11 or 12 at night. In his words, "It basically means there's no life other than the weekend. You wake up and until you go to sleep you're just working and meetings. So I think that's the biggest challenge [to operating in China]. There's no way really around it." The puzzle is 'why?' Min is actually leading most of these meetings. He is in charge. Why then take the night-time slot? And certainly, why do it day-in and day-out? Moreover, his experience is not unique. Whether acting as chair or participant, managers in China are consistently calling into global meetings at night from home. The pattern appears to be institutionalized, but there are no formal rules guiding it. What's happening?

Chapter 4 Introduction

Differential time zones are an obvious distinguishing feature of international business. Domestic firms, except those in Russia, face no more than a 3-hour difference, and the vast majority of countries are covered by a single zone. International firms, though, frequently find their operations spanning the globe with day-for-night time differences. The positive advantages of time zones for providing customer coverage and speed have been widely noted, (Lewin & Peeters, 2006). In contrast, the challenge of time zones for senior management coordination, collaboration, and control, though acknowledged, remains largely unexplored in IM. Instead, time zones are regarded as a distance measure and subsumed under geographical distance, despite the fact that the mechanisms underlying the two variables are likely very different.

In fact, increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies (ICT), taking advantage of the spread of the internet, have significantly ameliorated the challenge of distance for management, while bringing the problem of time zones to the fore. Managers can now readily communicate, send documents, even share screens across distance, but the communication must be scheduled across time zones. And in response to ICT, many MNEs have significantly curtailed travel budgets in favor of electronic communication in a drive to increase efficiency. The result is that more managers than ever communicate electronically, while fewer managers physically experience the geographic spread of operations.

Another contextual factor driving time zone awareness is the growth of China. Until the 1990s, the majority of MNEs were focused in the Americas and Europe (Ghemawat, 2017), simplifying time zone differences.[1] Later, the first major forays into Asia by Western MNEs were in search of cheaper labor markets and suppliers. In this situation, power dynamics dictate that Asia, as a supplier or a small subsidiary serving dominant units, would defer to headquarters with regards to timing. The time-structuring of these relations was further reinforced by national status dynamics, echoing past colonial roles. For instance, when IT services moved to India, Indian companies established all-night operations so as to communicate smoothly with their Western clients (Carmel & Espinosa, 2011). But now, China is taking a prominent role on the global stage, and the profile of Chinese subsidiaries within MNEs is rapidly rising. China must now be taken into account, and as this research will demonstrate, the real problem in virtual communication comes when Asia, Americas and Europe are all on the call.

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[1] Japan is an exception in both directions. Though a major market, western companies find it difficult, and Japanese subsidiaries often operate independently. Conversely, Japanese multinationals have long faced global time zones, but Japanese generally keep late office hours. With cross-border coordination dominated by Japanese expats, late workday norms operate both in HQ and subsidiaries. So temporal differences are a lesser issue than time zones would suggest.

In this chapter, I explore the critical role of time zones through an in-depth study of synchronous communication in a large multinational. Time zones were not the starting point for this research. Rather, they arose unexpectedly in the context of a study of integration and organizational identity. Reflecting the emergent nature of the research, the paper will move from theory to data and back to theory again before returning to the findings. I begin with an overview of time zones in IM and Global Virtual Team (GVT) research, establishing that the effects of time zones have been largely assumed to be equivalent to geographic distance. This is followed by a section describing the data and the iterative methods used to arrive at the results. Based on early-stage analysis, I determine that the theoretical construct of time zones as distance does not fit the empirical data, and I introduce the social structuration of time as an alternative. Applying this new theoretical lens, I find that in the absence of formal rules, meeting schedules are set locally; however, these local decisions have crystallized into a tacit consensus, institutionalizing three major temporal divisions: work-time, wake-time and sleep-time. Further, the almost universal understanding that meetings should not be scheduled during sleep-time, creates a schedule which limits the bandwidth for global meetings, as well as consistently burdening China.

Theoretical Context

Time as distance: Time zones in international business and global virtual teams

IM research has long recognized and explored the challenge of distance (Hymer, 1960), and overcoming the barriers created by distance has been at the core of much theorizing in international business studies (see Ghemawat, 2017). A multi-modal concept, its most fundamental form is geographic (e.g. Delios & Beamish, 2001; Tsang & Yip, 2007), but the concept has also extended into a large body of research exploring institutional distance (e.g. Caves, 1989; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999; Xu & Shenkar, 2002), as well as work on cultural distance (e.g. Birkinshaw, Brannen, & Tung, 2011; Brannen, 2004; Hofstede, 2001).

Time zones, though, are seldom addressed. Discussions of time in IM often focus on the longer intervals of internationalization sequences at both the firm and product levels, including entry and exit (Eden, 2009). But the daily challenge of managing across large time differences is largely neglected, and the underlying assumption in most studies is that time is equivalent to geographic distance. It is rare to see a temporal independent variable beside the customary distance variable, while discussions of the difficulties of managing across geographies often conflate problems of time with those of distance (e.g. Buckley & Casson, 1976; where time is not distinguished from geography in the communication costs of internalization.). This is not entirely surprising. Unlike culture or institutions, time zones are linked to geographic distance, being constructed along longitudinal lines. When internationalization was limited to the northern hemisphere, there may have indeed been a high correlation between the two variables, but with southern expansion, the assumption no longer holds. Moreover, seemingly similar effects operate through different mechanisms. While geographic distance is a cost for moving goods and people, the real impact of time zones is felt in moving information and knowledge, particularly through synchronous communication. We know that time zones, independent of geographic distance, are significant in psychic distance (Dow & Karunaratna, 2006), and that time zone differentials add more to the cost of doing business than geographic distance (Stein & Daude, 2007). However, we have few direct insights into how these costs are incurred.

Similarly, studies of GVTs frequently subsume time under geographic distance. A cross-disciplinary literature review by O'Leary and Cummings (2007) of virtual team research concluded, "The overwhelming majority have focused on the spatial dimension of geographic dispersion" (435). Another review covering 2000-2013 (Gibson, Huang, Kirkman, & Shapiro, 2014) found a single temporal paper. Time is occasionally explicitly associated with geography, as in two recent studies that create a measure of structural dispersion (Haas & Cummings, 2015; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005), but the distinction between the two is often blurred (e.g. Komi-Sirviö & Tihinen, 2005). A notable exception is O'Leary and Cummings (2007) who use separate continuous measures for geographic, temporal and configurational dispersion in global teams, and demonstrate differential effects, associating temporal dispersion with reduced real-time problem solving. The theoretical basis of the measure, though, is still one of distance, and it relies on summing dyadic time zone differences, rather than exploring the overall group temporal dynamics.

Studies of software development teams have examined effects of time separation on delay, accuracy, and vulnerability costs, again using dyads (e.g. Cummings, Espinosa, & Pickering, 2009; Espinosa & Carmel, 2003; Espinosa, Nan, & Carmel, 2007; Espinosa, Slaughter, Kraut,

& Herbsleb, 2007). Beginning to move away from "time as distance," several focus on "time separation" or work overlap (an amalgam of time zones, weekends, holidays, etc). Espinosa and Carmel further demonstrate that time separation effects are asymmetric and more complex than distance separation, while Espinosa et al. show that they are non-linear. However, the new construct is under-theorized, and findings remain limited to dyad effects.

Data and Methods

Data

Though the site was originally chosen for research on identity dynamics of integration, as attention shifted to time zones and global meeting scheduling, it remained an excellent empirical unit of observation for study. The global distribution of its operations, the interactions with global customers and the dynamic of dual HQ locations in the US and China ensure regular global communications fundamental to the study; while its regional nature limits the population of managers communicating cross-regionally, permitting deep sampling within the relevant population.

The analysis for this chapter is largely based on a sub-sample of interviews conducted with the 75 respondents who regularly interact cross-regionally, especially the 64 who participate in global communication at CC (defined as communication involving all three regions: Americas, Asia and EMEA). As noted in Chapter 2, interviews were conducted in five rounds of visits to offices in the US, China and Europe, and by phone with managers from other countries/regions. Meeting observations were used as a validity check against norms reported by respondents.

Methods: Empirics confronting theory

As indicated above, time emerged as an unexpected focus from interviews in the early stages of the study, weaving through personal stories about the challenges of managing globally. Following respondents' lead, I deepened my questions on time zones and turned to research in IM and GVT for theoretical understanding, beginning a process of constant iterations between existing theory and empirics. This process aligns with an abductive logic, and in particular mirrors systematic combining in which "the theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork and case analysis evolve simultaneously," with a view to developing rather than generating theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002: 554).

I have outlined the process in Figure 3, identifying five research phases of variable duration. I moved rapidly through theory matching (Phase One to Phase Three); while Phase Four represents an extended period of research and theoretical development. In each phase theory shapes the unit of theoretical analysis which defines questions, data sources and sampling boundaries. Ongoing empirical observations and data analysis then dictate modifications in the next phase. Changes from one phase to the next are in bold. In reality, research cycled through continuous comparison and adjustments, borders between phases are porous, and Phase Four contained multiple sub-loops, as concepts developed and were refined. Thus, the figure is an imperfect representation of an inherently messy iterative process.

Phases 1-3 represent the process of matching, in which the researcher searches for theoretical fit. In Phase 1 my initial focus on the interaction of national identity and organizational identity in the context of the HQ move determined a national level of analysis. Data included archives and interviews of those who interacted with HQ on either side of the move, i.e. US senior managers and engineers, and Chinese senior managers within the division. Travel dictated clusters of about twenty interviews (scheduled in advance of arrival). Transcriptions arrived 2-3 weeks later, so early data analysis utilized field notes and analytical memos (memos were significant in the analysis throughout). These results led to the shift in focus, and a turn to IM and GVT discussions of time zones (Phase 2). At this stage, the theoretical unit of analysis became the individual, with questions and analytic memos exploring how respondents talk about time. Archival data did not contribute to this new framing, and interviews were the sole data source. Given the larger effort involved, I narrowed the sampling boundaries to managers who communicate cross-regionally. Ongoing analysis (incorporating NVivo coding) revealed that respondents did not talk about time in terms of distance, but rather in terms of activities, prompting a search for a new theoretical lens: the social construction of time (Phase 3). In addition, I identified cross-regional meeting schedules as the flash-point for conflicts, and adjusted the unit of analysis to "meeting scheduling" with questions about the process of

Figure 3: Analytical Process

	Theoretical Framework	**Theoretical Unit of Analysis**	**Data Sources**	**Sampling Boundaries**	**Data Analysis**	**Empirical Results**
Phase 1	HQ Move Interaction of national & organizational identity	National groups affected by move Q's= Orientation to firm HQ move Patterns of interaction & changes over time Challenges of working cross-border	Interviews Archival	Division of CC Sr managers & engineers US/Asia	Field notes Complemented by analytic memos of developing themes	Time-zones are important
Phase 2	IB & GVT time zones Under researched Implicit = time as distance	Individuals Q's= Patterns of interaction & changes over time Challenges of working cross-border In-depth follow-up on time zones	Interviews	Division of CC Sr managers w/cross-regional interactions US/Asia	Analytic memos: How they talk about time In-vivo coding	Conflicting activities in synchronous communication Especially meetings

Changes from one phase to the other are indicated in Bold

Figure 3 (cont.)

	Theoretical Framework	Theoretical Unit of Analysis	Data Sources	Sampling Boundaries	Data Analysis	Empirical Results
Phase 3	Time=social construction	Meeting scheduling Q's = Challenges of working cross-border Meeting scheduling: How? By whom? Process? When good or bad? Effects?	Interviews Meeting observations	Division of CC Sr managers w/cross-regional interactions US/Asia	Analytic memos In-vivo coding Collapsed codes into 2nd order conceptual codes e.g. norms, preferences	Global meetings emerge as unique problem Preferences vs norms
Phase 4	Time=social construction	Meeting scheduling Individual (effects) Organizational (effects) Q's = Meeting scheduling: How? By whom? Process? When good or bad? Effects??	Interviews Meeting observations	Division of CC Sr managers in global communication Add Europe Add peripheral subs	Analytic memos Grouping & cross-coding Combine/Recombine theory to inform specific findings	3 primary norms Sleep norm & global patterning Effects on individual & organization
Phase 5	Develop theory in context of IB Connect to: Cultural difference vs cultural distance	Cross level	Survey & interviews	Other MNCs Managers in global meetings		

scheduling: Who? How? Preferences? Effects? At this point, I began regular observation of electronic global meetings as a reality check against what respondents reported, as well as a source of information about interactions which would not be gleaned from interviews. I continued to write analytic memos regarding my observations, and in-vivo codes were collapsed into larger conceptual codes. Comparing these observations with theory confirmed that time as social construction fit the data, and this continued as the core theoretical framework.

The principle change in Phase 4 was in sampling boundaries. Having determined that global meetings presented a special challenge, I narrowed the remaining interviews to managers who participated in global meetings. In addition, I expanded the geographies represented. Though the analysis followed a case study logic (Small, 2009), there was a gap between the primary unit of observation (the individual) and the core unit of analysis (scheduling at the meeting level). Since the impact and perspective on scheduling dynamics could be very different depending on the respondent's geography and role within the meeting (i.e. leader vs participant), I triangulated by range sampling across these dimensions to ensure saturation. European interviews confirmed rather than changed the fundamental results, but they provided added richness to the overall picture. In the end, the universe of respondents represents an overlapping skein of meeting attendance, ensuring internal validity and reliability.

In this phase, analysis progressed to the examination of relationships between themes, aiming to extend the theory of temporal social construction into the IM realm. I identified three primary temporalities with distinct normative valences (see Table 6 for examples), as well as the centrality of the sleep-time norm in patterning global meeting schedules. While the primary level of analysis remained meeting scheduling, reported effects belonged to the individual or organizational levels. So the final results move across levels. As results emerged and I deepened my analytical grasp of the setting, I widened the literature search to areas of complementary knowledge and theory. This direction and redirection (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) generated: the parallel of time zones and culture; insight into the differential effects for these management teams vs. GVTs; and a better understanding of the reported effects of late meetings (Phase 5).

Table 6: Conceptual Codes

Samples of Normative Valences Associated with Three Primary Meeting Temporalities

Work-time: Taken-for-Granted
"But for North America we do one I think our morning their evening and then another meeting is our evening their morning so just to distribute the pain a little bit better and not for everybody suffer."
(implicit: work-time schedule frees from pain and suffering)

"I've attended meetings from home 7 o'clock 8 o'clock at night. But most of the time it was either very early here or I could stay 'til 5-6 o'clock here and it was still okay."
(work-time is OK vs evening)

"With Europe they're only six hours' time difference you could talk to them at least I'd call in the morning it's their afternoon; you can always make phone calls....."
(implicit: there is no trouble with a work-time call)

"It's very difficult to find a time when everybody is really on a 'comfort zone', I call it, on a normal working time."
(work-time is normal and comfortable)

Wake-time: Acceptable (but not ideal)
"But for North America we do one I think our morning their evening and then another meeting is our evening their morning so just to distribute the pain a little bit better and not for everybody suffer."
(evening involves pain and suffering)

"I've attended meetings from home 7 o'clock 8 o'clock at night. But most of the time it was either very early here or I could stay 'til 5-6 o'clock here and it was still okay."
(accepts evening meetings, but not OK like work-time meetings)

"...8 or 9pm... We usually make those meetings quick but there's just things you have to talk about." (evening meetings must be "quick")

Sleep-time: Unacceptable
I said "Shit he's sleeping already. I can't wake him up." So I'd wait for the next early morning and then I tried to get him early morning."
("can't" disturb during sleep-time)

"I have made an agreement with my wife that I turn my cell phone off when we go to bed."
(believes it appropriate to turn off cell at sleep-time)

"I believe it's a normal behavior, if you tell me, 'I'm not coming to a meeting at 4 o'clock in the morning, because I will not do.'"
(sleep-time is abnormal)

In Search of a New Theoretical Lens

Initial results: Conflicting expectations

"*Time zones make it difficult…Many late-night meetings or early meetings. My wife jokes about the person I interface a lot with in Asia. When the work cell phone rings at eight at night, 'Your work husband's callin'. Pick up your phone.*'" This quote from a business product director (US), strikes at the heart of the difficulty. When respondents talked about the problem of time, they spoke of "time zones" and often referenced hours. But the joke tells another story. Instead of these work meetings occurring during the work day at the office, as they should, they arrive after work and at home. For his wife, this should be time and space dedicated to family, so anyone calling must be family, i.e. his "*work husband*." Essentially, for this manager and others, the underlying clash is the conflict between work meetings, scheduled on a globally-integrated basis, and locally-embedded norms that create an expectation for alternative (non-work) activities.

As respondents' stories of time-zone troubles accumulated, work-time remained the taken-for-granted appropriate time for a meeting. Time-zone tensions only materialized when the meeting took place during time normally allocated for something/someone else, and phrases such as *"early morning" "evening"* or *"night,"* conveyed that the time being addressed was outside of work-time. Though complaints included a variety of conflicts (e.g. "*driving in to work*" "*meeting up with friends*" and "*sleep*"); for most, meetings outside of work come at the expense of designated family-time. A senior engineering manager (US) was one of few (3) respondents who dislike early morning meetings for this reason, *"I'll get these recurring meetings with Europe at 7am. Which they don't think is a problem, but if you have a young child and you have to get her ready for school and get her to school, regularly scheduled 7am meetings are an issue."* But evening agendas create the greatest conflict with family expectations for most respondents, as this is time when "*I'm with the kids,*" "*I usually read to my daughter,*" "*I was at my son's baseball game,*" etc. As a senior engineering manager (China) said, *"Night, I need to think of my son."*

In other words the problem of time is social.

Theory: Social temporal structuring and temporalities

Sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists have long recognized the social construction of time (e.g. Adam, 1995; Durkheim, 1995; Nowotny, 1992; Sorokin & Merton, 1937). Rather than accepting western scientific assumptions of time, embedded in the Newtonian notion of time as an external, mathematical absolute (Adam, 1995), these scholars point to a subjective understanding of time based on customary norms and practices established through social interaction and individual perception.

Within management and organizational theory a growing body of work has built on social theories of time, particularly for elucidating process and change (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998; Crossan, Cunha, Vera, & Cunha, 2005; Huy, 2001), but in IM the dominant theoretical understanding of time remains that of "quantitative time—continuous, homogeneous, and therefore measurable because equal parts are equivalent" (Starkey, 1989, p. 42). Time is either a yardstick of intervals and duration, as in a timeline, or a measure of distance through time zones. There are exceptions. Most notably, cultural orientations to time have been identified and shown to affect communication and performance (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1981; Nonis, Teng, & Ford, 2005; Saunders, Van Slyke, & Vogel, 2004). However time zones themselves, continue to be comprehended as distance, and "temporal and geographic distances are absolute and indisputable" (Zaheer, Schomaker, & Nachum, 2012: 19).

The social structuring of time should be particularly salient in MNEs, though. Temporal frameworks, and their results (which I refer to as "temporalities") have historically been local in nature as they "emerge from and are embedded in the varied and ongoing social practices of people in different communities and historical periods." (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002: 686). Natural cycles and biological rhythms are based on the placement of the sun and moon in a given place. Local custom and culture adds further layers of structuring (e.g. weekends, meal times, holidays, etc). Thus time is not a universal, objective norm, instead it is locally-embedded as temporalities which define the nature of time, its proper activities, and suitable social interactions (Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001). However, with the advent of synchronous technologies, temporalities are no longer buffered by distance. Whether through telephones or internet, conversations and meetings happen at a single point in time, and when an electronic meeting is scheduled, a new globally-integrated temporality, “meeting time,” is imposed on the locally-embedded temporality. Thus, when understood socially, time is revealed to be another dimension in the permanent tug-of-war between global integration and local embeddedness in MNEs.

Faced with an additional, external temporality, how do managers adjust? Social theories of time would suggest that new norms should evolve. With this in mind, interviews were supplemented with meeting observations, and my questions began to go deeper into meeting scheduling, including the process and its effects.

Next-Level Findings

The three core temporalities: Work-time, wake-time and sleep-time

Meetings are part of work - formal interactions with business colleagues for business purposes. So it’s unsurprising that respondents’ universal ideal is that meetings should take place during work-time. In this division, the default norm for scheduling meetings is between about 8am and 6pm, local time. As shown in Figure 4, honoring the work-time norm is very feasible for bilateral communication involving Europe, since its worktime has several hours of overlap with commercial centers around the globe. The difficulty arises when managers in China and US need to communicate. With a time zone difference of 11-12 hours, depending on the season (China, like most of Asia, does not use daylight saving), it is impossible for them interact synchronously during work-time. This guarantees that participants in one of the two regions will be disadvantaged, and the question is who?

Traditional temporal norms, tied to a single locale, don’t incorporate the possibility of conflicting temporalities, nor does the company provide any formal policy for booking cross-regional meetings. In its absence, meeting schedules are decided by power dynamics within each group of participants. These discrete individual decisions/negotiations depend on the individual with control, leading to unpredictable outcomes. However, looking across the division, it becomes clear that a powerful tacit consensus has formed, effectively dividing the day into three primary normative temporalities: work-time (ideal for meetings), sleep-time (unacceptable for meetings), and wake-time (acceptable for meetings). I will first trace

Figure 4: Work-time Across Three Major Regions

US EST	*midnight*								*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*noon*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*						
Europe			*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*noon*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*							*midnight*					
China	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*							*midnight*								*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*noon*

Work time (8am-6pm) Personal time (6pm-8am) evidence of distributed decision-making which determines who calls in outside of work-time, and then go on to show how the precise hour is limited by sleep-time.

Effectively localized power within the meeting decides who gets the coveted work-time slot, and unsurprisingly, hierarchy often exerts its power to its advantage. Concerns about the divisional Executive Committee's (EC) move to China frequently revolved around the challenges of time zones for the EC at both ends. For American functional heads, regular communication with the relevant EC member translates into evening meetings, *"If it's just my functional head in China and me, then it'll be my evening: seven, eight or nine."* (global purchasing manager, US) At the same time, the EC in China is at the mercy of corporate headquarters in the US, "*That's the real reason I think [time] is ultimately a problem. All the corp guys put their meetings in our evenings."*(EC member, China)

However, senior managers often try to be *"fair."* If there is a large imbalance in geographic representation, the country with the largest participation will often take or be given the daytime position, because *"You try to inconvenience the lowest number of people."* (production manager, US) These claims were supported in meeting observations. Even EC members would defer to the larger group when meeting with a team of managers in the US. Similarly, if there are regular interactions between two equivalently-sized groups of people, often they take turns. Asked when meetings with Asia would be morning or evening for instance, an IT manager (China) responds, *"It changes. We rotate. So sometimes it is 7am China time; sometimes it is 7pm."*

Regularly scheduled meetings have an identifiable "leader" or "coordinator," and *"Typically [scheduling] depends on who's coordinating the meeting." (*product development manager, US), but control can also be a negotiated process. Below the level of the EC, clear reporting lines quickly become regionally-based. As a result, the senior manager in charge doesn't always have authority over participants from other regions. In these situations, others may have power to influence or dominate the decision.

For instance, managers in both the US and China reported that meetings are more frequently occurring American evening/Chinese morning since the EC's move to China (note that these meetings are not directly involving the EC). It seems that prior to the shift, China accepted being the *"little brother"* (a term used by both Americans and Chinese) and deferred to the US. But now with the association of divisional headquarters, Chinese managers assume a higher status and are emboldened to speak up and claim the daytime slot. As one customer executive (China) put it, "*Usually, ten years ago they scheduled [meetings] nighttime. But right now it changes. Right now, most of the situation is China time... the reason for this change is maybe global [EC] members moving [from] Americas. So we said, 'Can China?' Nobody said 'no' [to] China time.*"

At times the localized power struggle had negative consequences for the group (and the firm) as a whole. This became clear as I observed regular meetings for two global account teams. As laid out in Chapter 3, the Alpha global team was headed by a highly-respected senior manager who has been with the company for decades, and has a wide network of relationships and the ear of the division president (and access to the CEO), thus there was no challenge to his authority in the group. The result was that this meeting ran regularly and smoothly, with all participants making a significant effort to attend on a consistent basis, regardless of the local time zone, and global participation generated joint sensemaking which helped to better understand the customer's actions in shaping their competitive strategy. By contrast, the second was led by a senior manager who only just joined the firm, and with no connections he had little influence. Over the course of several months Chinese managers regularly failed to appear, objecting that it was scheduled after work. At the same time, the American representative, based in Mexico, was already participating at 6am (though intermittently). Ultimately, the account manager was forced to split the team into two separate meetings: Europe and Asia, and Europe and NA. Not only was this more time consuming for European participants, but the group lost the critical ability to build on each other's knowledge of the customer in their respective regions.

There were other factors mentioned by a few. For instance, doing a favor or providing help tends to give one power to choose as the supplicant accedes to the benefactor, *"if we build* *product in China, and if you had a US program that was counting on that, then you're probably gonna be on late night meetings." (*engineering manager, US). And in all things, the customer always comes first.

Summing up the diversity of responses: in the absence of set rules, local power dynamics determine who controls the timetable. But in deciding/negotiating who participates during their workday, multiple factors potentially come into play. While there were some general patterns, the outcome isn't entirely predictable.

Once the coveted work-time slot had become allocated, though, the hour must still be agreed. In theory, if one party schedules it during their workday of 8am to 6pm then the other party could end up online anytime between 8pm and 6am. This, however, rarely happened within the division. Instead, cross-code analysis revealed two clear temporalities have emerged from this distributed process, which I will refer to as sleep-time and wake-time. The edges of sleep time are less defined than work-time, but it is understood to begin around 10 or 11pm, extending until 6 or 7am. Wake-time then fills in the rest, being all hours of the day not encompassed by work or sleep.

Essentially, while work-time is the default for meetings, wake-time has become an acceptable (though undesirable) alternative when faced with the need to communicate synchronously across regions. Wake-time is messy. Unlike work-time, which is structured by the firm, wake-time's sub-temporalities vary by region and even individual. At the boundary with work-time is the commute, which might be short in the US or 1+ hours in China. Further, managers on both sides of the Pacific prefer later in the evening versus immediately after work, whether the finance manager (US) who reports, *"I don't mind 9 or 10pm meetings. Dinner is done. My son goes to bed at 9:15. Usually my wife and I are just watching TV at that time."* or the HR professional (China) who says, *"It's kind of time I'm on my way home and then I spend time with my son and I feed him I put him to bed and I would take the call after."* This accords with other research which showing that scheduling at the edges of the day is problematic (Tang, Zhao, Cao, & Inkpen, 2011).

There are limits, though, to booking meetings at night. Sleep-time, the third relevant meeting temporality, is universally seen as anathema. No matter the region or level within the division (corporate had its own rules as will be seen below), it was considered unacceptable. Many put it in the context of *"respect,"* as did this global product manager (US), *"I have a hard time bringing engineers from China in at 10 at night because I want to set the example that I respect your time outside of work. And I'm hoping that people will do the same for me and respect my time outside of work."* and finance manager (China), *"And so when you do meet with them you have to respect where they're at and pick a time that's beneficial to both and sometimes that's not easy if you need a quick meeting. And I know sometimes we've been in meetings where we'd have somebody on the other end; they're probably already home when they call in and they're almost falling asleep."* Moreover, the norm is sufficiently strong that managers further down the line feel justified in blocking out the possibility. Asked about middle-of-the-night calls, one engineer (US) replies, "*No. I mean I don't know. My phone goes off but I ignore it. I'll get texts and stuff in the middle of the night but I don't sleep with my phone."* Similarly, others reported turning off their cell phone when they went to bed.

There are exceptions to the norm. One important exception is in the case of an emergency, or an immediate and critical deadline, but the emergency has to be clear and valid, *"I don't know that there would have been an emergency enough in that situation to warrant a two in the morning phone call." (*senior systems engineer, US). Along the same lines, when I ask a customer business executive (China) if he receives middle-of-the-night calls, he replies, *"Very, very few. Normally they will not call you in the middle of the night. They will send an email."* External parties, particularly customers, can also demand a late-night call, but they rarely abuse this power. For instance, one global customer executive (US) had to stretch back to remember an example, *"Like a year or so ago, [customer] wanted to have a meeting. It was a 4am meeting that I took by phone from here."*

Though sleep-time norms are observed within the division, corporate headquarters in the US seems to regularly demand late night interactions with the division's executive directors in China. The best example of this is the story of an EC member who was expected to participate in a weekly staff meeting led by headquarters, which went well into his night: *"That poor guy,* *they put him on an agenda at one [in the morning] and I'm like, 'Dan, that's where you gotta say "I'm on the call, you need to move my agenda item to eight so that I can be awake..." ' I think that's insensitivity, even if somebody is up and they're always working."* (EC member, China) Perhaps most telling is that I heard versions of this same story from several EC members (without prompting) and each told it with a sense of outrage. Through their responses, the wake/sleep norm becomes clearest in its breach. Breaking the norm for regular business is seen as an illegitimate abuse of power by corporate headquarters.

Sleep-time norms and the geographical structuring of meeting times

In a global firm with operations in the Americas, Europe and Asia, though, the sleep-time norm has major consequences. In particular, the geographical patterning of time-zones interacts with the sleep-time norm, to create a fixed structure for global meetings (see Figure 5).

Now there are only three hours of mutual overlap, and global meetings MUST take place between 7-10am in the US, and 7-10pm in China; otherwise Europe would be forced to participate in the middle-of-the-night. Unsurprisingly the managers in China were most acutely aware of this inflexible arrangement, and there is a poignancy in their stories of the EC move, *"When EC was moving here we were very happy. Now we can make the US people working in their night time and we are going to have meetings in our daytime. Then finally found this impossible because of four regions. Europe... We can't be so selfish. When we are in daytime Europe is in night, so nighttime for China seems the right time for global meetings."* (purchasing manager, China) One could even hear in their voices the remembered first excitement, followed by disappointment and resignation with the dawning realization that global participation patterns are immovable in light of the unquestioned sleep-time norm. So now it is accepted that when a global meeting is required, "*Global need America and Europe. Only evening time fit for all of us."* (customer account manager, China) Consequently, *"our global staff meetings are all between six and nine o'clock at night, because you have Europe at the middle of the day, US early morning and us[China] at evening."* (finance manager, US) The results are two-fold: the combination of wake-time norms with weekend limitations restricts potential global meeting time to about 12 hours per week; and subsidiaries/regions are consistently advantaged or disadvantaged depending on geography.

Figure 5: Scheduling Global Meetings with the Interaction of Temporalities

US EST	midnight					6	7	8	9	10	11	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21		
Europe	6	7	8	9	10	11	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21								
China	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21			midnight						6	7	8	9	10	11	noon
Mexico		midnight						6	7	8	9	10	11	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
Brazil				6	7	8	9	10	11	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21			midnight		
Thai/Indonesia	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21			midnight						6	7	8	9	10	11
India	11	noon	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21				midnight					6	7	8	9	
Korea/Japan	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21			midnight						6	7	8	9	10	11	noon	13

Wake time (6am-10pm) Work time (8am-6pm) Sleep time (10pm-6am)

In this structuring, Europe holds a favorable middle-position, and managers in the US and China reported stronger and more frequent connections with Europe, reflected in this comment from an engineer manager (US), *"With China it's really tough because you're 12 hours. Europe, we have a lot better relationship because we can catch them when we come in in the morning, it's their afternoon."* The workday overlap between Europe and China also allowed for better informal channels through ad-hoc synchronous communication such as chat, whereas the US/China communication required planning. This finding aligns with research showing London as a "temporal 'lynch pin,'" in global teams (O'Leary & Cummings, 2007: 444), and corporate, recognizing this dynamic, has placed its global purchasing in Europe: *"We moved [global purchasing] to Europe for all kinds of reasons, but the biggest one is the clock. When you're in Europe, you can talk to every region at some reasonable hour of the day"* (purchasing manager, Europe). Several respondents even question why the EC didn't move to Europe rather than China for this reason: "*So that's why if you work over time zones my personal opinion is... the headquarters of such a company would be ideally located in Germany or Luxembourg. It's more central from a time perspective.*" (strategic planner, US)

China, on the other hand, is clearly disadvantaged. In this regionally-structured firm, the impact of global communication falls most heavily on senior managers who are responsible for holding together the regional pieces, because once they get to that level, they are juggling multiple meetings. Min Park is not alone in finding himself night after night running global meetings from shortly after he gets home until he falls into bed. In fact, it is rare that a respondent reported participating in only one global meeting a week; if a manager sits in on one, then he/she sits on several, and global meetings fills executives' weeks in China, as reflected in these quotes:

> "*I have a lot more evening meetings. I have at least two evening meetings, but for this week, I have four to five, except for Friday. All of them are global meetings, so each have to be in the evening.*" (HR Manager, China)

> *"Often I need to have North America, Europe, Asia, together. This is why 2-3 evenings at a minimum is occupied from the time I go home until 11 o'clock at night."* (Head of Product Development, China)

EC members have it worst as they must also communicate with US HQ. The Chinese evening hours of overlap with the US wake-time are limited to three hours, which are quickly filled, so meetings with HQ extend into the night for the EC, *"When you're a global company there is no more after-hours free time...So I have meetings from 8 until midnight again. All week long I got meetings, so I get home, I barely say, 'Hi!' to my daughter, and I'm on the phone. And I still gotta get all the rest of my work done."* (EC member, China)

The sole exception to this patterning is from a global engineering manager based in Europe who rotates his global staff meetings in order to equalize the effects on China, scheduling some in the middle of his night. The implication is that team leaders from elsewhere may not ask/require this of the Europeans; only a European in-charge can himself freely choose to participate during sleep-time.

It is worth noting that China at least has status and power in the company. It is the Asia-Pacific regional headquarters, the divisional executive committee resides there, and it has by far the largest operations and sales in Asia. Times are selected to optimize the three main regional temporalities: US EST, Europe and China. Smaller markets just "fit in" (refer again to Figure 5). The net result is that Koreans and Japanese may be in meetings until midnight, *"So the only time is 8 or 9 in the US so everybody's awake. Maybe there is suffering for Korean colleagues because one hour..."* (account manager, China), while Mexicans attend at 5am, *"But I can't get my Mexico folks on to make any reasonable time..."* (purchasing manager, US).

Reported Effects

While occasional late meetings might be annoying, they are unlikely to have any major effects, but repeated late meetings after a full day of work are costly for managers in China. Beyond the impact on personal life, there are indications of negative performance effects. Multiple respondents in China report being tired during specific meetings, as well as noting a more generalized fatigue across their week which they attribute to evening meetings (especially when the manager attends multiple global meetings). At the extreme, more than one EC member revealed the uncomfortable fact of falling asleep during meetings with corporate HQ, *"I'm sitting on my chair and I just fell asleep. Woke up and realized the call was over. Thank God I'm pretty sure I was on mute, but if they asked me a question I have no clue. Had my headpiece on, after a while I just dozed off."* Moreover the accumulation of individual effects is understood to be an organizational issue, as this planner (US) observed, *"Time zones are really difficult......Because many of our programs are global it does tend to wear out your organization too."* The finding is supported by work showing that global workers find the job "overwhelming" when evening meetings eliminate off-job recovery time (Nurmi & Hinds, 2016).

Tired managers are not operating at peak performance, but how does this become manifest? Extensive studies on sleep and performance show that sleep restriction (i.e. seven hours of sleep or under) is associated with lapses of attention, slowed working memory (used for processes of reasoning, decision-making and complex cognitive tasks), reduced cognitive throughput and diminished verbal fluency. Mood is also altered as people with shortened sleep are more depressed, confused, tense, and disassociated, while at the same time less optimistic and sociable. Affected managers, though, are unlikely to self-report, because sleep-restricted subjects are generally unaware of these effects, believing their performance is better than it is (Short & Banks, 2014). Neither will other meeting participants recognize the issue. Since in most instances they only know their Chinese colleague in the context of the call, performance short-falls are likely to be attributed to the person rather than meeting schedules.

However, the EC move provided a ready comparison point. Managers who interacted with the EC before and after the move reported negative mood shifts, "*So sometimes when people say, 'The EC is edgy.' Well these guys aren't sleeping...and they've got a lot of stress on their shoulders. So how long until you're gonna be really crabby if I don't let you sleep and I give you a whole bunch of stress?"* (HR manager, US) Broadly, they see the EC as having a shorter fuse, *"When they're working odd hours and everything, it gets tiring. It takes a toll. You can start seeing their frustration levels start going up. They're not as calm and relaxed as they* *should be."* (finance manager, US) And though many respondents empathize with the EC, managers strongly believe that the changes impair the EC's leadership role and decision-making, *"My feeling tells me that they're more and more worn out. The longer they stay in China, the faster the meetings need to happen, because they have less patience to understand a story. I do see that some of them are just tired...They are working extreme hours with the disadvantage that they are in a nightshift time zone. It also creates a lot of frustration within the lower-level team members. For instance, if we have a face-to-face meeting, it is just inacceptable that EC members are falling asleep in this meeting."* (engineering manager, Europe) While it is true that the EC keeps longer hours than anyone else in China, these comments hint at the ways in which the Chinese subsidiary may suffer from the established time-zone pattern for global meetings.

In addition to the impact on existing managers in the Chinese subsidiary, there is the occasional remark or event that signals problems in attracting and keeping talent. Despite the strategic importance of China, Chinese managers have yet to reach global executive levels in the company. In interviews with Chinese respondents, I questioned whether they anticipated that the EC move to China would lead to the promotion of Chinese beyond the region. Much to my surprise, the opposite emerged, as multiple managers believed that the EC presence is a damper because everyone sees the hours they put in, *"...the majority of the Chinese people, not many people will say 'Okay I want to be the global leader.'" Q: Why do you think that is? "Different time zone."* (purchasing manager, China) And just as an HR manager told me that foreign firms are no longer first choice for new university graduates, so too did this business unit director (China) indicate that it was difficult to get high-potential Chinese to accept global responsibilities, *"I've seen a lot of Chinese now, they don't want these global roles; they don't want to straddle three time zones. People have money. Money is no longer the criteria for everything. So that shift I see is happening. I've seen people refusing to take the global job."* Supporting this are anecdotes of key professionals who left the firm at least in part due to the hours for global interaction, whether it be a team of engineers who spent nights with American counterparts, or the EC member attending the middle-of-the-night meetings scheduled by HQ. As an EC member in Europe noted, *"The Chinese are involved in lot of things and they are* *getting more and more involved...I call it 'under the bus', from a time zone point of view. And I do understand that people quit, because you cannot work 24/7, right?"*

There are also global organizational effects. Returning to Figure 5, it becomes readily apparent that the sleep-time norm significantly narrows the bandwidth for global meetings. With only a few hours a day available to schedule meetings, it becomes increasingly difficult to accommodate global communication, *"I attend meetings that I have to be part of. But then I have a lot of conflict, too. Next Wednesday, I have five or six meetings at night. Many of them are sitting right next to each other, and I have to decide which one I'm going to actually tie into."* (Engineering director, China) This is despite the fact that global interaction is presumably minimized in this regional firm.

Discussion

Temporal difference vs geographic distance

With IT innovations such as virtual meetings and informal chat rooms, it is easy to forget the time dimension. Even respondents get caught in this trap. Several respondents began enthusiastically talking about advanced conferencing being installed in meeting rooms, but then acknowledged this still wouldn't help the fundamental temporal problem: *"The video set up we have is good, but it can't do any time shifting"* (engineering manager, US). Skype cameras remain unused because those calling from home don't want to, "*put on a dress shirt in pajamas"* (finance manager, US). And developments such as chat have worsened time zone fault lines, uniquely excluding interactions between NA and Asia from new informal communication channels. Fundamentally, technology has ameliorated the challenge of communicating across distance, but exacerbated the problem of time. This local qualitative finding is supported by economists Stein and Daude (2007) who find that not only is longitudinal distance more negatively associated with FDI than latitudinal distance, but the differential effect has been increasing over time. Time and space are diverging.

The easy alternative is to add time zones to the equation as a temporal distance measure, but as this research shows, the challenge of time is temporalities not time zones. This distinction may at first appear forced or even trivial, but the difference can have profound implications for models of IM outcomes. Temporalities do loosely connect to time zones; ultimately social norms about sleep and work are in some way bounded by biological rhythms which are driven by the same natural movements loosely measured through time zones. Thus, temporalities contain a geographic component. But temporalities are also fundamentally cultural.

Shenkar (2001) has powerfully argued against the concept of cultural distance in IM, identifying several illusions implicit within the distance that don't apply to culture. This study demonstrates that temporalities share many of the cultural characteristics noted by Shenkar:

- Non-equivalence: The hours associated with work-time, wake-time and sleep-time have a strong social determinant, and the results can override expected patterns. For instance, my US respondents reported fewer problems communicating with Japan, because it is customary to stay late in Japan, while Chinese colleagues expected to leave by 6pm.
- Asymmetry: Temporality is not symmetrical, and directionality matters: the six-hour time difference between Europe and China varies depending on which perspective you take.
- Non-aggregation: There is a strong global patterning when multiple time zones participate. Using distance measures which capture only the largest time difference across team members or sums the time differences of dyads misses this important aspect.
- Non-linearity: Temporality preferences do not follow a linear, sequential pattern, particularly at the edge of the workday. In addition, temporalities are discrete, rather than continuous variables.

The China effect

What is the implication then for China? Generalization of these results would suggest that Chinese subsidiaries are handicapped by the clock, raising questions of subsidiary performance and voice. Horizontal network models of collaboration imply or even require balance, and theories of voice imply an ideal of proportionality. Thus, as Chinese subsidiaries grow, one would expect their participation to reflect the change. But as this study shows, when trying to accommodate Europe, China and NA, the very reasonable sleep-time norm results in the managers in China, like Min Park, still being consistently disadvantaged by the global clock, despite seniority. There is an irony that even as China starts to come into its own, gaining both status and resources in modern multinationals, it still finds itself at a global disadvantage; now structured by the clock. Certainly, my respondents questioned the long-term viability of the Chinese HQ, *"That's the biggest challenge we have, the time architecture....if you're gonna headquarter coming out of Asia you're gonna be working nights, I mean it's just a fact. I don't know if it's sustainable over the long-term."* (Finance manager, Europe)

There is a fatalism when discussing time zones with managers. Time appears unalterable, and they see no way around the conundrum. Working early and late is part and parcel of what it means to be global, but the impact on China is swept under the carpet. By focusing on two-way communication with China, the fundamental imbalance is hidden from managers in the US. Emphasizing norms of fairness in conversations with China, they are not fully aware of how consistently unfair global communication is. Even Chinese global managers only realized the inflexibility of the temporal map with the move of HQ to China. Similarly some Chinese managers (not on global calls) insisted that managers could just *"work it out;"* until I literally mapped out the temporal structure on a piece of paper, and the light dawned. The trade-off being made is unacknowledged, and thereby leaves the door open to underperformance (Azoulay, Repenning, & Zuckerman, 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited to a division of a single US-based company, so generalizability becomes an important question. In particular, how common is the sleep-time norm? In evaluating generalization it is critical to keep in mind that this norm arose from a distributed process, in a multi-cultural environment. The only scheduling rule promulgated from above (by the Division President), forbid regularly scheduled meetings on China's Friday night. But while managers allowed meetings to encroach on their evenings, they universally drew a bright line at sleep-time, and none of the managers interviewed across countries and regions contested the moral rightness of the decision (even the Chinese). It appears that the sleep-time norm may be fundamental, and for good reason. Not only does working at night set individuals apart from the rest of society, resulting in social isolation and marginalization (Costa, 2010), but it fights our basic biological clock. As a result, "the coordination within a collectivity of the timing of sleep is one of the most important senses in which [time] is institutionalized" (Schwartz, 1970: 487). Indeed, the protected nature of sleep-time is reflected in the low status attached to night shiftwork (e.g. Brown, 1975). Though further research (and larger samples) is needed, it seems likely that the sleep norm is widespread.

How this plays out within an MNC depends on the geographic patterning of its business. For example, one external respondent works on the West Coast of the US for a French firm with operations in Australia. In this unusual case Australia became the linchpin and the US manager is always on at night, but the principle of avoiding sleep-time holds, as does the unequal distribution of pain.

The bigger question will be, 'As Chinese companies reach out and internationalize, how will they cope with temporal norms of global communication?' Will headquarters be willing to set aside its power to accommodate the sleep-norm in subsidiaries? Or will it expect the company to keep Beijing time? In Japan and Korea, centralized decision-making with a hub-and-spoke design have reduced the need for global meetings, while local temporal norms have promoted long workdays, allowing subsidiaries to communicate during their own workday. But Chinese workday norms appear to differ, and it isn't assured that the Chinese will follow suit.

A further limitation to this research is that it may be limited to a piece of a developing picture. My interviews indicate that global communication has been increasing, facilitated by technology. Have the new temporal norms stabilized or are they still evolving? Obviously wake-time was once off-limits for meetings but now is acceptable. Will sleep-time go the same way? In this study, there were hints that the corporate encroachment on sleep-time may be starting to move further down the hierarchy. In the single report of a meeting that went against the divisional norm, it was an EC member setting a meeting with US regional staff at 10pm their time. His reply when they objected was, *"I have to do this all the time, you can…."* Additional research might reveal whether this is a one-off, or whether it represents the beginnings of an erosion of sleep-time norms in senior management. Certainly the EC manager in Europe believed this was likely, *"It is very difficult for a global company, having* *headquarter in China, to keep that discipline, because they have no feeling anymore for it. It's so normal to be in a zone-less situation that they will expect everybody switch to zone-less mode."*

Conclusion

How firms deal with the effects of global synchronicity will likely have ramifications for their long-term success. The head of the division (China) summed it up beautifully:

> *"One of my guys out there was on the phone every night. It was total disregard. My surprise was the level of understanding [on the part of US corporate headquarters], what does it mean for the company to have capability in China? What role does China play in the future of the company? All the way down to the simplest of simplicities, the implications on time zones, what should we be doing to support that?"*

We indeed perceive time zones to be "the simplest of simplicities." By treating them as indistinguishable from geographic distance, or even as linear scales that may or may not correspond to distance, we underappreciate their power. This research aimed to advance our understanding of time zones in global organizations, and in doing so shows more precisely how time zones impinge on managers trying to connect and collaborate across regions.

In-depth interviews and meeting observations in a single company reveal the importance of social temporal structuring. Finding that the distance theory of time zones prevalent in IM doesn't fit the data, the study introduces a new theoretical perspective, the social construction of time, for modeling time zone differences; and goes on to show that the dynamics of time zones more closely resemble a cultural rather than a distance variable. Employing this new theoretical lens, the social norms of temporal structuring are highlighted, making it possible to identify three key temporalities of work, wake and sleep which govern meeting scheduling.

Moreover, the analysis establishes that the sleep-time norm becomes a critical driver in setting a fixed pattern of global meeting schedules. This both severely limits the time available for global communication and produces geographic imbalances that do not reflect the strategic weight of subsidiaries within the firm, particularly as China rises to prominence in global business.

When seen through a social-construction lens, temporal differences embodied in time zones are no longer simple. Instead, they reveal their full complexity, encompassing interactions between society, firm and individual.

CHAPTER 5:
FINAL THOUGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Over the last decade and a half, issues of organization have become much more central in strategy and international management, as scholars in these fields have increasingly highlighted organizational capabilities, competencies and knowledge. Moreover, the growing recognition of new organizational forms with permeable boundaries has become increasingly pervasive in both fields. All of these have put a spotlight on the long-standing issue of differentiation and integration.

This study uses a unique data set, to examine integration in-depth at a global supplier that experiences both strong pressures to geographically differentiate its operations and to globally integrate its customer strategy, service, and communication. Following managers' lead in interviews, I highlight global management team meetings as an essential linking tool, while at the same time finding that the misalignment of temporalities is a potential limiting factor in effectively employing this critical tool (see more on this in the section below). The results also point to the necessity of unbundling time and geographic distance effects in IB research and of treating time as a fundamentally social variable rather than a standard measure of distance.

Going deeper into a single team's experience, I examine a global account management team operating at the boundary of the firm, in close relationship with the largest customer, Alpha, across multiple countries. Having observed the team's weekly virtual meeting over time, I expand our understanding of organizational identity (and associated socialization) as a fundamental source of integration within the firm, through extending OI theory to encompass identity work directed at the 'other.' Using a micro, qualitative lens in the context of an organizational relationship characterized by multifold, disbursed linkages, I find that determining 'who are they?' requires a structured process, similar to already documented processes of member-only OI construction. This is necessary for determining motive and predicting behavior, before deciding strategic action. But it is also necessary because the two OIs of self and other are co-constituted, as the OI of one places the OI of the other within the relationship, and vice versa. As a result, the team's identity work also extends to activating voice within the partner organization to shape and discipline the OI of the 'other' in an effort to maintain the shared relational OI. Thus OI is not only also a key mechanism for internal integration for the MNE, but also for interfirm global integration in the context of strategic relationships, as well as the basis for relational and structural fit between two firms.

Global Management Teams Today: The Challenge of Enacting the Networked Organization

Although this research did not originally intend to study virtual meetings, it quickly became apparent at the beginning of the fieldwork that they are a significant vehicle for micro-level integration in today's multinational organizations. With managers located across the globe, the need for control, coordination, and collaboration requires managerial teams to meet virtually. Though facilitated by increasingly sophisticated technology, virtuality brings a unique set of challenges. Scholarly work on global virtual teams has highlighted many important issues, but has tended to focus on temporary project teams, particularly those engaged in R&D and innovation projects. This research does not fully capture some key dynamics of the teams I observed at CC, which I have termed "global management teams" (to distinguish them from "global virtual teams" in the literature). Here I lay out why such teams (and the fact they are meeting virtually) are necessary, how they are differentiated from the typically observed global virtual team, and the potential implications for both knowledge-based strategic theory as well as management practice.

We all aware of the dominance of meetings as one of the most important formal legitimized framework for groups of managers to communicate, coordinate, negotiate and make decisions. As a highly recognizable genre (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), they are a fundamental part of bureaucratic life, accounting for more than half of managers' time (Mintzberg, 1971). Meetings came of age in an era where everyone gathered in the conference room down the hall, but today senior managers are spread worldwide. Surprisingly, meetings have not disappeared. In fact, surveys across the decades show senior managers spending more of their time in meetings (Romano & Nunamaker, 2001). Increasingly sophisticated communications technologies have seemingly overcome distance, making it possible to hold virtual meetings with attendees "sitting in" from all continents. Studies suggest that as many as 85% of international managers conduct more than half their work in global teams (Maznevski & Athanassiou, 2006: 631).

This may be because meetings are an important glue holding the firm together. As a formalized focal point for communication, meetings ensure the communication necessary for the integration, coordination and collaboration, which establish the organization as a singular organizational actor (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996). Moreover, acting as a microcosm of the organization (Schwartzman, 1986), meetings serve to enact "shared meanings that define roles and authority relationships that institutionalize the pattern of leadership" (Smircich & Morgan, 1982: 259), helping to stabilize the wider organization (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008).

IM scholars recognize the importance of connecting the organization cross-borders, particularly for knowledge flows, and strategic organizational models in IM envision linking mechanisms that require regular communication between members of dispersed teams. These include not only distributed temporary teams including task forces or project teams, but also permanent managerial teams such as coordination committees (Prahalad & Doz, 1987), "functional analogs" (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), global account management teams (Birkinshaw et al., 2001), and/or "magnets" (Doz et al., 2001). Nonetheless, few have looked in-depth at how such teams function.

Two Types of Global Virtual Teams: Global Management Team (GMT) vs Global Project Team (GPT)

Our knowledge of groups regularly communicating across locations has been generated from scholars studying virtual teams. This research is biased towards expert groups in technology, including global teams focused on tasks such as product innovation, learning programs, and project management (Gilson, Maynard, Jones, Young, Vartiainen, & Hakonen, 2015). Typically, GVTs are defined as geographically dispersed, electronically dependent, and nationally diverse. They are temporary and task-focused, with membership based on expertise. They are often structurally dynamic, as projects progress and required skills change (Chudoba, Wynn, Lu, & Watson-Manheim, 2005; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).

As suggested above, though, multinationals rely on a much broader set of virtual "teams" (Maznevski & Athanassiou, 2006; Saunders & Ahuja, 2006), including permanent groups of managers organized for operating the business rather than focusing on a project: groups I term "Global Management Teams" (GMTs). Most of the senior and executive managers in my study are members of GMTs, and their cross-regional meetings compose what they refer to internally as the *"cadence of meetings"* that structure the company's coordination and control. These ongoing regularly-scheduled meetings are based on their role in the organizational structure, and typically include representatives from each region and/or major market (e.g. the engineering staff team is led by a central Director of Engineering and composed of engineering heads from each region). Thus, the team is structurally stable: members only leave if their role changes, and they are replaced by the individual taking over in the existing role.

While a GMT is still a global virtual team, these characteristics set it apart, suggesting that there are two sub-groups within GVTs: Global Project Teams (GPT), as described in much of the GVT literature, and GMTs (see Table 7 for a summary of GPT vs GMT characteristics).

Table 7: Key Characteristics of GTTs as compared to GMTs

	Global Task Teams	**Global Managerial Teams**
Location	Geographically dispersed	
Communication Mode	Electronically dependent	
National Make-Up	Nationally diverse	
Core Purpose	Project	The business itself
Time-Frame	Temporary	Ongoing
Nature of Work	Task-focused Often decomposable	Organizational coordination Strategic sensemaking Organizational control Often not decomposable
Membership	Expertise	Structural role in the firm
Structural Character	Structurally dynamic	Structurally stable

MNEs increasingly rely on a variety of information communication technologies (ICT) to keep teams connected, but technology has been a double-edged sword. Through email, instant-messaging, phone, and electronic meetings, managers at CC stay in touch with colleagues working around the globe. However, as the work in Chapter 4 shows, while technology allows for communication without travel, thereby solving the problem of distance, it does not solve the problem of time. In fact, technology makes it worse. The problem isn't time per se, but temporalities – work calls and meetings which happen outside work-time – and it is through technology that temporalities of work-time and family-time come into conflict. In effect synchronous electronic meetings establish a globally-integrated, standardized temporality, but participants remain locally-embedded.

Companies who are heavily dependent on GTTs have found workarounds for the time-zone conundrum by limiting team composition to two time zones, decomposing tasks to reduce synchronous communication, and resetting individual temporalities in the team (e.g. shifting daily work hours or moving to a four-day week) (Carmel & Espinosa, 2011). However, the managers in my study didn't take advantage of these tactics, reflecting the nature of GMTs. Unlike GTTs, GMTs specifically exist to connect all regions in the global organization into a single unit. They cannot limit team composition by time zones, since by definition, these teams require representation from all major geographic centers. Neither is decomposing tasks an option, because the core purpose of these GMTs is to act as a linking mechanism across already modularized regions. Finally, adjusting work schedules isn't feasible; team construction is by structural role, and members are there as a representative of a subsidiary or region. Their value-added is not their skills, but rather their local-embeddedness, and local temporality is part of this experience. Across-the-board, senior managers up late on meetings still came to work early the next day. The few exceptions were more junior engineers involved in product development (i.e. part of a conventional GTT). Thus, like ongoing virtual teams (Saunders & Ahuja, 2006), it is clear that GTTs and GMTs face different coordination challenges. As the definition of "virtual teams" is expanded, additional research could further elucidate the distinctions, setting boundary conditions.

Future Challenges in Global Integration

The focus on the need for global integration balanced with local embeddedness, arose in the 1980's as pressures for global integration increased. However, the organizational designs which first addressed this need were developed at a time when the geographic spread was much more limited than it is in the twenty-first century. Since then, recognizing that most MNEs had become regionally organized, research has focused on integration within regions, and the associated question of the strategic role of corporate headquarters in a regionally-divided world. What is largely missing is empirical investigation of how 21st century MNCs cope with the challenge of integration *across* regions in management and organizational terms, despite its long having been a central concept in strategy and international business.

The central theme of this dissertation is that, with the emergence of new communication technologies and an increasing variety of organizational forms, global integration is something we need to investigate much more closely in the future. Having demonstrated how difficult it can be to accomplish integration for a globally-disbursed MNE, the studies in this thesis raise broader questions for the IM field with respect to temporalities, global meetings and knowledge sharing, the effects of varied forms of 'global' on interfirm relationships, and HQ moves. The experience of CC also points to China's rising economic profile on the global stage and within MNEs as a significant contributing factor in these integration challenges.

Research into this area is not easy on several dimensions. Not only does it require a global scope, but it also entails connecting micro-level processes to macro-level outcomes, leading to a need for in-depth access. In the fields of strategy and organization studies, there have been increasing calls for linking the micro and the macro (e.g. Buckley ; Felin, Foss, & Ployhart, 2015; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). Nonetheless, it is still not the norm. Working across levels of analysis, as is done in this study remains a challenge both for the researcher and the audience, given the strong divides that exist between experts in fields which focus on either micro *or* macro data and analysis, but not both. It is also very unusual to have the micro window into ongoing processes of integration that I had in this research. However, given the challenges that management teams face, there may be growing opportunities for this kind of access, and the specifics of this study suggest several possible avenues for such future research.

Time as an Administrative Restraint for GMTs

The temporal limits on GMTs raises serious questions about the rush to global teams, diffuse headquarters, and networked structures requiring frequent cross-regional communication. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, when sleep-time norms are maintained, the "bandwidth" for synchronous communication is much narrower than prior research has appreciated, since overlapping wake-time for a multi-regional meeting is only a few hours a day, four days a week. Global meetings also consistently require Asian employees to be on the phone at night. Thus integration through these mechanisms is constrained by time zones and comes with a high cost. It is not surprising that research has found that structural differences (geography and time) reduce knowledge-seeking more than personal, national differences in global virtual teams (Haas & Cummings, 2015). In fact, temporality may be an important "administrative restraint" (Penrose, 1959) on the multinational's ability to process global knowledge and manage a networked structure.

Managers and academics alike may need to rethink coordination mechanisms, especially when they rely on synchronous meetings. Communication genres are still heavily based on the assumption that everyone is in the same building, and the default for formal group interactions remains the meeting. Virtuality has also made it easier to invite the world. Like the "cc" feature in email, scheduling meetings on the widely-used Outlook platform is generating volumes of invitations. Almost universally CC managers complained about too many meeting invitations, at times asking themselves, "Why was I invited to this?" But this research suggests that in a global world, scaling up meetings doesn't work. Overall, there needs to be a conscious recognition that global synchronous meetings are a scarce resource and that more sophisticated software will not solve the problem. As such they should be carefully coordinated and allocated; and ideally used only for those tasks which truly benefit from synchronicity.

There is no doubt that for certain forms of integration, synchronous GMT meetings are essential. This was obviously true for the identity work of the global account management team studied in Chapter 3. The joint sensemaking which took place during the Rabbit episode was only possible in a synchronous conversation between locally-embedded managers. Thoughts from one participant were sparked by, and built on the ideas of another, to converge on a shared narrative. And all worked from the collective cognitive map of Alpha's OI which had built up over the years.

However, this does not hold for all GMT meetings, and establishing parameters for separating necessary vs unnecessary synchronous meetings is critical To aid in this determination, there exist both theory and research that have focused on aligning the form of communication with the appropriate work (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995), though much of it has focused on face-to-face versus virtuality generally, or email more specifically. In this vein, media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), delves into the dynamics of ICT. A rich medium "facilitates insight and rapid understanding" necessary for the transmission and processing of complex and equivocal information (Kraut, Galegher, Fish, & Chalfonte, 1992), making it directly applicable to the communication of tacit knowledge. It is characterized by four criteria: instant feedback, multiple cues, language variety and personal focus (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987: 356). At one end of the spectrum, face-to-face communication is the richest media as opposed to the "lean" communication of unaddressed documents. Similarly, synchronous audio/visual technologies are commonly seen as richer than text-based media (Webster & Hackley, 1997).

Media synchronicity theory (Dennis & Valacich, 1999), a variant of media richness, goes further, building on the observation that reciprocal communication and instantaneous feedback in teams become more necessary as task complexity and interdependence increases. Work in the laboratory (Dennis, Valacich, Speier, & Morris, 1998), and in the field (DeLuca & Valacich, 2006) has shown that synchronicity is superior for interpretive processes leading to convergence on collective meaning. While conveyance, the transmission of new information, is better suited to asynchronous media (allowing individual processing time), convergence is a group process that requires synchronous communication (Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2008). Extending these findings, Maynard and Gilson demonstrate that, synchronicity "should help members exchange ideas, solicit suggestions, and provide feedback" (2014: 19) thus making it critical for sensemaking and creating shared mental models.

Immediate feedback is also important in avoiding negative attributions common in virtual work (Cramton, 2001). When people lack context and situational information, they are more likely to make personal attributions, negatively judging fellow teammates (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Unsurprisingly, then, rich media and synchronous communication are associated with social cohesion in teams (Hambley, O'Neill, & Kline, 2007), while asynchronous media is associated with task conflict (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2006).

Thus synchronous communication is better fit to the task of sensemaking, working with ambiguous information, complex interdependent tasks, and equivocal tasks. In addition, synchronous communication helps in establishing cohesion and shared mental models, and minimizes negative attributions from ICT. In moderating the negative effects of virtuality and providing a platform for exploration, synchronous communication helps create a mutual environment of meaning or "ba" (Nonaka & Konno, 1998), which permits the interweaving of tacit individual knowledge into explicit team knowledge. In other words synchronous virtual communication is the best alternative to face-to-face interactions for a global virtual team working with tacit, ambiguous distributed knowledge.

But further in-depth research comparing the task/fit of different forms of virtuality (rather than focusing on virtual vs. face-to-face) is critical, including investigating management views on high-value vs. low-value interactions in synchronous meetings: all of this with the goal of apprehending exactly how global organizations might use this scarce resource most efficiently.

Meeting dynamics may also provide an important clue to whether synchronicity makes sense. Does the meeting require interaction in a format where people build on each other's thoughts and ideas (multi-directional network interactions)? Or is it a series of one-to-one questions and answers (i.e. two-way discussion in a hub-and-spoke pattern)? Or an information dump (one-way communication from center to the group)? For example, the weekly staff meeting I observed is typically a combination of the latter two. But with staff now participating from around the globe, a regular group meeting might not be the best answer for the simple conveyance of information. Alternatives could include breaking it into two meetings to accommodate different temporalities (without too much duplication for the executive manager leading the group), or using asynchronous communication.

In addition, since asynchronous communication is the default alternative, we need to find ways to use it more effectively. Based on these interviews, it appears that synchronous meetings and calls are often used simply to get attention, versus an email which gets lost in a deluge of daily missives (Whittaker & Sidner, 1996). This raises the ultimate question as to whether we should reconsider expectations of inclusivity and the broad dissemination of information and knowledge which undergird the networked organization, at least in a global context. In other words, we can't just scale up integration mechanisms, we need to transform them.

Companies may already recognize these limitations. In fact, the difficulty of collaborating and coordinating globally might help explain why multinationals remain for the most part regional (Rugman & Verbeke, 2003). The focal firm of this study is global in the sense that it is equally distributed across the major regions, but it is organized with substantial regional autonomy. Even so, it struggles with synchronous global communication that is required for coordination and control.

Organization Identity in Interfirm Alignment and Field-level Implications

For decades, the pull of global customers has been recognized as fundamental driving factor in suppliers going global. When Prahalad and Doz (1987) laid out their global integration/local responsiveness framework, the importance of multinational customers was one of only three pressures identified for strategic global coordination, as opposed to operating integration for efficiencies (Westney & Zaheer, 2009). In many of these discussions, the term "global" is undifferentiated, but, as the experience of CC demonstrates, global can take many forms, across several dimensions, including variations in footprint, organizational structure, and levels of subsidiary control, with implications for how a strategic supplier relationship unfolds.

Research on interorganizational fit has already begun to show that such relationships are more effective when the shape of global looks similar in both organizations, based on game theory. Birkinshaw, Toulan and Arnold (2001) first documented the potential interaction effects of the vendor and customer level of international coordination (i.e. integration) and the need for both to be high in order for the relationship to be successful. Alongside this, they noted potential issues when footprints differ. In this practitioner-focused piece, though, there is little unpacking of what international coordination means. Later, Toulan et al. (2006) demonstrated the importance of interorganizational fit, split into strategic and structural fit, for the performance of the relationship. Although some of the underlying measures of fit related to the importance of and commitment to the global relationship itself, two dimensions - product marketing strategy with regards to global standardization versus local adaptation, and dispersed versus centralized configuration of activities (specifically sales and purchasing) - begin to get at the dimensions of global discussed here, but remain limited in scope.

The results of the present study shift the methodological lens with the effect of further expanding our understanding of global interorganizational fit. Through this new perspective, I identify a more fundamental process at work in establishing and maintaining interorganizational fit, i.e. the construction and maintenance of a shared organizational identity in relationship. Thus the co-construction of OI in relationship has implications not only for OI theory, but also for international management.

In particular, given what we know about the essential nature of OI, the finding suggests two associated effects. The first, already mentioned, is that it will be difficult for a supplier to maintain organizational fit through adaptation when the customer experiences elemental changes in its global shape. The second potential effect is that firms will be limited in their ability to create deep relationships with multiple customers when the pool of customers vary substantially in how they enact the global dimension. This follows because, if the requisite interorganizational fit is grounded in OI, then shape-shifting for each customer will be problematic, if not impossible. For those companies operating in a globally-consolidated industry with a few dominant players, this could become a major limitation to growth and to achieving a balanced portfolio of customers/suppliers.

Finally taking this the next step outward, there may be field implications as well, with the possibility that clusters of similarly-oriented firms tightly connected to one-another form across an organizational field. This could produce ecosystem effects which would both facilitate activities between organizations within the cluster, but also generate unwanted ripple-effects on associated organizations when a single organization within the cluster institutes fundamental change.

Future research will be needed to test these propositions, but this study points to new directions and new ways of seeing by introducing OI work as an alignment mechanism across organizations, and opening up the potential for systemic interactive effects in the face of change.

Moving Headquarters: The Interaction of the Strategic and the Symbolic

There is one final question for future research which is raised by this study, stemming from the CC's divisional headquarters move. As briefly mentioned at the start of the thesis, though the corporation was still based in the US, the headquarters of this division had recently been physically relocated to China. In fact, it was this divisional HQ move that initially stimulated my interest in the company, given the rarity of such a change, despite the existence of theory and research which would predict otherwise. As I started doing my fieldwork, I was drawn into microprocesses which were only indirectly linked to the move. Nonetheless, my research does indicate that there are some real challenges associated with moving a divisional HQ outside the country where the corporate HQ is located, challenges that have yet to be addressed in research.

With the advent of more complex, networked organizational forms, there has long been an interest in the changing role of headquarters. In the last couple of decades this has expanded to include the move of certain key headquarters functions out of the original home country base, including the transfer of business unit headquarters (BU HQ), which are happening with increasing frequency, as well as the less common relocation of central headquarters (CHQ) to another country (see Barner-Rasmussen, Piekkari & Björkman, 2007; Kunisch, Menz & Ambos, 2015). Much of the research uses data from companies based in small European companies, particularly in Scandinavia and Finland. Often seen as an extension of the evolutionary process laid out by Forsgren, Holm and Johanson (1992), the shift of the entire division or central headquarters overseas has been labelled the "third degree of internationalization" (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2007; Benito, Lunnan, & Tomassen, 2011).

Findings have emphasized the functional nature of such HQ moves, noting that they may be driven by high foreign stock ownership, or tied to high-value subsidiaries where key customers, competition, or talent are located, with the demands of product-markets and internal configuration driving BU HQ relocations, while CHQ respond to external stakeholders (Birkinshaw, Braunerhjelm, Holm, & Terjesen, 2006). In addition, several symbolic dimensions have been found to be an important component, including demonstrating commitment, and creating a global mindset (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2007).

The CC BU HQ move from the US to China was grounded in several of these key factors. The Chinese business had begun to rival US sales, and continues to be the high growth market for the division. Moreover, business in China is moving beyond local sales to subsidiaries of global customers, to important business relationships with local Chinese firms. In addition, the transfer had strong symbolic components. Internally, the shift of the power base concretely signaled the growing importance of the Chinese subsidiary and a commitment to Chinese senior managers, as well as acting as a status marker for the Chinese operations. Externally, it was intended to reinforce a message of corporate commitment to the Chinese market, both to local customers and to the government.

CC literally picked up the executive committee and its core staff (almost all American), and placed it in China, constituting a full, direct move. As the most visible and complete form of relocation, this should have been the most effective; however, though managers in both the US and China perceived the shift in power and status, I found little evidence of fundamental change in interactions. As shown in Chapter 4, the Chinese still felt disadvantaged in global meetings, and in interviews there were indirectly stated concerns about when there would be Chinese representation on the executive committee. And as the observations of the global account team in Chapter 3 demonstrated, Chinese voice was limited, and the NA team continued to dominate the process even when influence should have shifted. In fact, it is striking that while Alpha had given real power to China, CC, despite its Chinese BU HQ, had difficulty adjusting.

CC's BU HQ move represented a shift in strategy, but the move failed to truly change key elements of strategic thinking and decision-making in line with the business strategy. In other words, the cultural changes lagged strategic change. This is not entirely surprising, given what we know about culture in organizational change; however, it adds an important dimension for future study. In particular, what factors are likely to increase or lessen such a lag?

In the case of CC, not only is the executive team overwhelmingly American, with no Chinese participation, but the CHQ and long-standing OI of the firm is American. Thus the fundamental American culture at the top remains intact, serving as an anchor for continued patterns of power, strategic thinking, and decision-making. Based on my work at CC, I would propose that the cultural lag is likely to be more pronounced when: 1. The BU HQ moves out of the core location (i.e. the CHQ location and long-standing center of the company); or 2. The BU HQ isn't integrated locally in the new geography.

The result at CC has been a BU HQ move that is more symbolic than real, suggesting a need for research that goes beyond motives for HQ moves, to the impact of such a move. Associated with this is a rethinking the form HQ relocations take, as well as the relative effects of each form.

China and its Complications for Integration

The challenge of incorporating China was a core theme weaving across interviews and observations. Having become a business partner equal in strength to Europe and North America, China now needed to be accommodated and listened to, in a way unnecessary for minor or peripheral markets. The resultant impact on temporalities of GMT meetings has already been discussed in-depth. Similarly, the shifting power dynamics from NA to China at Alpha, exacerbated by a joint venture structure, became a source of tension for the CC team and its OI (as well as for Alpha HQ, as reported by team members). Finally, despite the large and growing importance of the Chinese market, CC struggled to shift its processes in a way that truly increased China's voice at the top, relegating its BU HQ move to a largely symbolic realm.

China is unlike any other single country market for most MNEs. MNEs are finding that the size of the market has allowed local competitors to become large, entrenched and sophisticated by operating on a purely domestic scale and with products specifically tailored for the Chinese market. Moreover, considerable differences in institutions, including government and culture, exist between western MNE home bases and China, and large geographical distances create logistical challenges. The result is that local adaptation is critical for long-term success in China. At the same time, China's size and growing profile within the MNE organization requires global integration if the MNE is to avoid becoming a bifurcated entity. In other words, China takes the pressures for both integration and responsiveness to new levels.

Further complicating the picture, is the widespread use of joint ventures, sometimes dictated by the government, and often with state-owned enterprises. As in the case of Alpha, locally-directed JVs can become a further source of integration and responsiveness tension when the local partner begins to spread its wings, and many MNEs are just beginning to confront this new reality.

Given these dynamics, China may be the ultimate challenge MNEs face, and a re-examination of global integration and organizational design becomes imperative in light of its emergence.

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