

Organisational Identity Work in Adapting Teaching and Learning in Higher Education During the Emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence

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SUMMARY

This interpretive study examines the organisational identity work facilitated by the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence at a higher education institution. Interviews with management, and lecturers explored their interpretations of emerging artificial intelligence practices and their impact on teaching and learning. The findings reveal four primary organisational identity work: rooting, rejecting, adjusting organisational identity, and sensing obstacles to the emergence of organisational identity related to artificial intelligence. Notably, the findings indicate that organisational identity work is linked to diverging interpretations of how change occurs and how new AI-related practices are integrated into teaching and learning. This study enhances our understanding of organisational identity by providing accumulating evidence that demonstrates its continuous evolution, as its construction as socially situated and grounded in practices. Adaptation occurs as members enact a new organisational identity alongside the existing one through practices.

Keywords: organisational identity work, materiality, change management, higher education, generative artificial intelligence, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Organisational identity expresses an organisation's self-defining characteristics, reflecting its central, distinctive, and enduring features (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Tripsas, 2009; Whetten, 2006). It influences products and services (e.g., Tripsas, 2009) and it is an integral part of organising (Brown, 2021). The conceptual understanding has evolved from static organisational identity to recognizing its dynamic and constantly changing nature (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013). This shift challenges a unified organisational identity (e.g., Fachin & Langley, 2024; Watson, 2016), and scholars have adopted organisational identity work (e.g., Kreiner & Murphy, 2016) lenses. It explores how organisational members actively try to create, sustain, share, and/or change their organisational identity. Organisational identity work can be especially salient during changes. Exploring an organisational identity feature that is simultaneously central and enduring alongside new organisational identity features enhance our understanding of how members adapt to ongoing changes.

From this perspective, members' interpretations of an organisation's material features (Watkiss & Glynn, 2016) and practices (Ravasi & Canato, 2013) provide an opportunity to analyse organisational identity work. The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) challenges higher education (HEI) and its members to evaluate their teaching and learning practices critically. This triggers organisational identity work (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016). In this study, artificial intelligence serves as an organisational identity anchor because technology facilitates organisational identity claims (Schultz & Hernes, 2013) and GenAI particularly has accelerated discourse about teaching and learning are redefined (e.g., Ogunleye et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding this helps us better understand organisational adaptation to ongoing transformation and the emergence of new organisational identity. Considering this, we ask our research question of *how and why organisational identity work helps and hinders organisational members to adapt to ongoing transformation*.

Specifically, we draw on a study conducted at a HEI by interviewing its top and middle management, and lecturers most of whom were interviewed twice. The data was analysed using hermeneutic research orientation (Mees-Buss et al., 2022), enabling us to interpret informants' organisational identity work. We aimed to understand how various kinds of organisational identity work can advance organisational change. Our study shows four primary forms of organisational identity work: rooting, rejecting, adjusting organisational identity, and sensing obstacles to the emergence of organisational identity related to artificial intelligence. Each is linked to differing interpretations of how change occurs; it can be self-directed, while others call for leaders to orchestrate and direct ongoing change in integrating new AI practices into teaching and learning.

Together, these findings help us better understand how and why organisational identity evolves when organisation members engage in organisational identity work that is socially situated and grounded in emerging practices. Through this process, a new AI-related organisational identity co-emerges with the existing one, enabling adaptation to ongoing transformation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organisational identity work

Organisational identity work has recently emerged in management literature to illustrate how organisational members actively engage in changing their workplace and its self-defining features. It involves "discursive, cognitive, and behavioural processes that help individuals and collectives create, sustain, share, and/or change organisational identity" (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016 p. 279). This process is inherently complex, as it involves the participation of multiple members who contribute to its construction. When members have different priorities, preferences, and interests, organisational

identity work reflects micropolitics within organisations and their members' socially constructed realities, making an organisational identity fluid and constantly evolving (Watson, 2016). During changes, "identity elasticity" can emerge, reflecting organisational identity work that simultaneously stretches an identity together (Kreiner et al., 2015). Furthermore, organisational identity work requires reconciling which identity features should remain stable and what should evolve in response to the organisation's emerging demands (Golant et al., 2015).

Organisational identity work can become particularly salient during significant changes or industry disruptions, as members must understand the internal or external changes and their implications for daily work practices. Leaders play an important role in organisational identity work because they can set the tone for what their organisation stands for during changes (Kreiner et al., 2015) and create a vision for their organisation's self-defining features (Ernst & Schleiter, 2021). Their personal identities and engagement with organisational issues influence the construction of organisational identity (Fachin & Langley, 2024).

However, organisational members are not passive recipients of management-designed identities; they actively construct organisational identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). One way this active construction occurs is business model experimentation, where members prototype, test, and adopt different business models. This enables new organisational identities to emerge through practices, illustrating how 'becoming' is shaped by 'doing.' This helps members play with new organisational identities, cope with losing an old identity, and aspire to a new one (Bojovic et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent research has challenged the traditional view of organisational identity as homogenous and stable, which management can control, illustrating that it is constructed by multiple groups with diverging interpretations (Ernst & Schleiter, 2021).

Materiality and organisational identity

Organisational members interact with material objects and practices, such as GenAI, to express their organisation's self-defining features, illustrating the relationship between materiality and organisational identity (Watkiss & Glynn, 2016). Practices refer to behavioural routines, tools, and concepts that help achieve specific organisational goals (Canato et al., 2013). Materiality is often unacknowledged in organisational identity literature, although it has been argued that it can offer new insights into how it shapes organisational identity. Materiality in technology differs from physical objects (Leonardi, 2012); the materiality of technology considers how technology can be used, making some actions possible, and thus, it can have consequences for organizing. Generative artificial intelligence can be understood as a material object because it shapes organisational practices when people interact with artificial intelligence in specific contexts (Orlikowski, 2000). For example, in higher education, it can mean that lecturers take GenAI as part of the curricula, learning assignments, planning, and organizing their work. Thus, it is embedded into course teaching and learning practices.

In addition, technology and its use can serve as a medium for negotiating meaning (Kaplan, 2011), for example, in environments where rapid changes occur. Then, practices become materially mediated, which can mobilize action because "technology is not simply an object but rather is implicated in a set of practices" (Kaplan, 2011). Materiality is vital in organisational identity construction because the material features of products (or technologies) facilitate identity claims (Schultz & Hernes, 2013), expressing who we are. Therefore, when a new technology emerges rapidly, it can facilitate organisational identity construction because it evokes organisational members to integrate new technologies into practices in their daily work.

METHODS

Our social constructionist and interpretative study explores organisational members' interpretations and practices of using artificial intelligence in teaching and learning, their link with organisational

identity work. We aim to understand how GenAI helps and hinders an organisation's adaptation to ongoing transformation. The social construction approach concerns how people describe and experience their social world (e.g., Gergen, 2003), which researchers must interpret (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). Our analysis is based on hermeneutic research (e.g., Bøe, Bertelsen, Larsen & Topor, 2023; Mees-Buss et al., 2022), emphasising the dynamic relationship between interviews and context (e.g., Smith, 2007).

Research context

This study was conducted at a HEI in Northern Europe (BusinessUNI, pseudonym), which educates business and information technology professionals at the bachelor and master levels. It has strong ties with local industries, such as financial institutions, and collaborates closely with the travel and retail sectors. Additionally, it offers pedagogical degrees to lecturers in higher education and vocational training. The organisation is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovation hub in its broader European university network. It aims to encourage its researchers, lecturers, and students to collaborate with AI in different ecosystems and industries. Despite its prestigious status as an AI innovation hub, that position has remained distant for many lecturers and students and has low visibility locally. Furthermore, the funding of HEIs has changed in recent years, with the role of research having increased. Importantly, BusinessUNI researchers have successfully gained external and competitive national funding exploring the use of AI in business and education.

In November 2022, OpenAI launched GenAI. It is a technology “designed to learn patterns from input data and generate novel, yet statistically similar, output” (Townsend et al., 2023, p. 8), and it can produce original content, such as images, music, and text. The fast emergence and development of GenAI surprised the organisation and its members. However, a positive outcome was that GenAI, and its various applications, opportunities, and threats became a topic of discussion among numerous organisational members.

An initial sentiment among many lecturers was fear and worry about what would happen to students' learning, and a general discourse seemed to emphasise restricting the use of GenAI. Arguably, one reason for this is that some students misused GenAI opportunities in their submitted learning assignments shortly after the launch of GenAI. Simultaneously, some lecturers did not know how to approach GenAI, which caused tensions among them. This is important because learning reflects students' professional growth, and lecturers offer students opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need when entering professional life (Bathmaker & Avis, 2005). At the same time, some lecturers were beginning to keenly explore new possibilities in their work and in the business sector. This range of reactions further highlights the dynamic nature of identity work associated with transformation.

In spring 2023, three local HEIs, including BusinessUNI, arranged a joint workshop on GenAI and its impacts on learning for those lecturers who wanted to understand new technology better. BusinessUNI also had an ongoing project exploring how AI impacts lifelong learning and can be leveraged in higher education. We worked on that project, and it enabled us to collect data and analyse a technology disruption in higher education. We decided to explore how the emergence of artificial intelligence in general and GenAI influences studies, work, and organisation. At that time, a dominant discourse in the organisation emphasised that GenAI is a tool. More importantly, it was understood that GenAI put pressure on renewing students' learning assignments.

Additionally, the Rectors' Conference, consisting of 24 rectors in HEIs, published the first guidelines for using GenAI in learning at HEIs in June 2023. These guidelines did not receive attention in the organisation because they were published at the end of the term. The main point of these guidelines was that AI is part of the learning process and working life skills; the role of AI was to support students' learning, and its ethical use was emphasised. In August 2023, BusinessUNI published its first guidelines for lecturers and students in a single PowerPoint presentation, including pedagogical recommendations for teaching and specific guidelines for students.

Our first round of interviews took place in the autumn of 2023, and we also facilitated a workshop for lecturers and students. Participants in this workshop expressed their enthusiasm for AI and the need for collaboration between students and lecturers to develop teaching in the era of GenAI. In January 2024, we reported our initial findings to the top management of BusinessUNI. In this report, we stated that students and lecturers need support and training to adapt to AI.

In the spring of 2024, it was generally acknowledged that students had intuitively started learning to use GenAI and where and when it works and does not. Additionally, a vice-rector responsible for teaching initiated an “AI team” consisting of researchers and lecturers (including us) who had actively discussed and developed the use of AI in education. We had a possibility to share our initial insights from this research and how the organisation and implementation of AI should be developed. The AI team provided the vice-rector with recommendations on how to develop teaching. Based on recommendations, the AI team created new learning material, such as online lectures, for lecturers about opportunities to use AI in teaching. The AI team started to design training with the HR because lecturers' skills in using GenAI varied significantly.

We continued our second round of data collection in the spring of 2024 and reported our initial findings to the top management in September 2024. Based on our interpretation of the research material, we recommended paying attention to organisational identity and the role of GenAI leveraged pedagogy in learning. We emphasised the rapid development of AI applications, arguing its transformative impact on higher education. The Rector’s Conference updated its AI guidelines. BusinessUNI invested in AI in the fall of 2024, acquiring Microsoft Copilot license for all its students, lecturers, and staff. Additionally, it acquired other AI programs, such as Keenious Plus, to help students, lecturers and researchers find relevant articles and updated its AI guidelines for students. Finally, BusinessUNI started a strategy renewal, which aimed, for example, to clarify its position on using AI in teaching and learning and explicitly state its strategy in a way that reflects organisational identity.

Insider perspective

Because we were working at BusinessUNI, we adopted an insider perspective into our analysis. It has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is having insights into social processes (Ravasi & Canato, 2013). We had a colloquial relationship with many of the informants, and thus, we had easier access to the field. On the other hand, there is a danger of lacking a critical distance to the research context and being biased. Being an insider and a member of a particular social group can lead to role conflict because, as colleagues, we are expected to behave in a certain way and have specific rights and duties. In contrast, as researchers and AI experts, we have distinct roles and obligations (Toy-Cronin, 2018), such as providing knowledge created with scientific criteria.

Data collection

Our primary data source was interviews with BusinessUNI leaders, lecturers, and students. Most informants were interviewed twice, in fall 2023 and spring 2024 (see Table 1). In total, we conducted 72 individual interviews and two group interviews. On average, interviews lasted 43 minutes and were conducted face-to-face or using the MS Teams application. All interviews were transcribed, and we had 1296 pages of text (single-spaced, font size 12). Informants included five top managers, six middle managers, 20 lecturers, and 11 students. Top and middle management were chosen based on having a significant role in the organisation. Lecturers were recruited to represent different areas of expertise (e.g., leadership and management, marketing, accounting, and languages). We recruited students with the help of lecturers who told them about the opportunity to participate in research. Both lecturers and students were motivated to participate in the study to have a voice and impact on how AI will be implemented in work, teaching, and learning at BusinessUNI.

----- Table 1 approximately here -----

Hermeneutic data analysis

Interviewing (top) management, we had to understand that they have to lead the organisation through times of change. On the other hand, lecturers try to navigate during times of change. Since we represented specialists in AI and education, lecturers might have been searching for verification of their thoughts in interviews. Finally, the student can be careful in their statements; being interviewed might be a new situation. Thus, they might provide socially desirable answers.

Our analysis relies on hermeneutic orientation, emphasising interpretation and meaning in qualitative, interview-based research (Bøe et al., 2023). Hermeneutic orientation in data analysis requires that “researchers delve into their and participants’ subjective words” (Mees-Buss et al., 2022, p. 415). The hermeneutic analysis emphasises the dynamic movement between parts (e.g., interview transcripts) and the whole (e.g., research context), even though there are no mechanical rules (Smith, 2007). Moreover, this explains the constitutive relationship between text and context (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). The role of the researcher is to act as a detective while exploring informants’ lived experiences (van Maanen, 1979; Mees-Buss et al., 2022) and be both curious and critical of their accounts. Researchers must ask how, why, and where data was produced (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). In our study, the insider perspective (Toy-Cronin, 2018) is important because it helped us better understand the data. Unfortunately, we did not keep diaries of our subjective processes.

In an analysis, the first layer of interpretation focuses on “what does this mean for an actor” (Schütz, 1960 – as cited by Mees-Buss et al., 2022). What they say is situated in the context and is historically and biographically mediated (Van Maanen, 1979 – as cited by Mees-Buss et al., 2022). While interpreting these, exceptions, outliers, rare instances, and minority views are important (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). The second layer of interpretation, on the other hand, represents the researchers’ social world that must be tested numerous times (Van Maanen, 1979 – as cited by Mees-Buss et al., 2022), in which anomalous findings are important connecting what we do not know well enough yet. In the second layer of interpretation, contextualization is the key to enhancing our understanding (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). Organisational identity work represents a second layer of interpretation in this study.

Data analysis

We started our analysis during the first round of interviews by writing short summaries immediately after each interview. These summaries capture the initial interpretation and core of each interview, and in the analysis stage, they help researchers orient themselves to the data at hand. We shared our insights and thoughts in regular meetings and unofficial discussions among ourselves. These summaries and discussions taught us that the overall attitude (students, lecturers, and management) towards GenAI was positive regardless of the participant’s relationship with AI and GenAI (e.g., a tool). Moreover, the importance of learning was regarded highly. However, many lecturers expressed concerns about the potential for misusing GenAI in learning. Interviews anticipated future changes in their work and studies, and interviewees were keen to receive training. Not only did we discuss what we learned from the data, but we also discussed what was missing from the data (i.e., negative cases). To our surprise, lecturers largely bypassed the topic of how GenAI could augment learning. Therefore, our concern was whether the potential of GenAI had been grasped.

These insights were adopted to a second round of interviews to understand “what is going on here?” We started to detect the main themes of the study. We integrated these themes into the context of BusinessUNI and HEIs. One emerging theme was that some lecturers had developed practices for using GenAI in their courses: “*I like to try new things, and I would like to be bold even more in the future,*” or they were taking professional responsibility for it “*I want to learn as much as possible of how to benefit and use AI.*” More importantly, participants actively engaged in organisational identity work in these interviews: “*A vision about our future (...) and education during AI era. What is the vision and where we want to be and profile ourselves,*” meaning that organisational

members are active in defining, adapting and maintaining their organisational identity (Kreiner et al., 2015), negotiating who they want to be in the era of AI. “*We have a really good machine, and we can scale it up quickly because we do it systematically before teaching starts,*” meaning that the organisation is adapting. Therefore, organisational identity work became the focus of our analysis.

In the first round of coding (using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software), we identified data segments where participants referenced their work or organisational identity and artificial intelligence. In the second round of coding, we tried to understand the meaning of what participants had said and “what things stand for” (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). For example, “*Even though I am not an AI front-runner or promoter, I still say that I am professional (...) what is my relationship with AI, and I also think about from the research and teaching perspectives, and what I can do for those*” is an example where a lecturer is defending professional values, which often emerged with organisational identity work. This comment reflects the critical approach of (over) using GenAI; s/he calls for ethical discussion when the interview is linked to the context. Moreover, this is an example of work and organisational identity work in which an organisational member is using his/her professional identity to justify how using AI and GenAI can be rooted in organisational practices as long as it is done ethically. Therefore, the practice of using AI and GenAI is closely interlinked with the constructed work and organisational identity, representing our social world in the context of this study (Mees-Buss et al., 2022).

In the second round of coding (using MS Excel), discussions with the research group were critical in enhancing understanding of the research material. We discussed different data segments and how those could be interpreted. In addition to that, we created and tried a chatbot using OpenAI as a discussion partner in an analysis. For a chatbot, we created a document of hermeneutic analysis, along with explanations of first- and second-order coding, organisational identity, and organisational identity work. We did experiments on this if coding was complicated in long quotes: we explained the main points of the quote as a prompt. Chatbot often generated several interpretations of the quote, representing already established organisational and management science ideas, such as identity tensions or temporal orientation of organisational identity. Therefore, insightful codes emerged from discussions with other researchers with a theoretical and/or contextual understanding rather than with GenAI.

The third coding round concentrated on understanding a set of quotes that reflect organisational identity work (e.g., rooting organisational identity). This involved reading them all together, considering the context and our understanding, and asking and categorizing them (Caza et al., 2018; Grodal et al., 2021) what leadership practices they represented and how they related to ongoing change.

FINDINGS

Four different organisational identity work categories emerged from the analysis. Firstly, *rooting organisational identity work* emerged when new AI practices were integrated into the organisation’s current teaching and learning. Secondly, *rejecting organisational identity* emerged when the members rejected incorporating AI practices into current teaching and learning. Thirdly, *adjusting organisational identity* emerged in the data when organisational members adapted emerging AI practices in teaching and learning to new situations, norms, and operating environments. Fourthly, *sensing obstacles to organisational identity emergence* occurs when organisational members critically evaluate current actions and identify barriers hindering the emergence of new AI practices in teaching and learning. Next, each organisational identity category is explained in more detail, including how they advance or hinder the organisation’s adaptation to ongoing transformation and how members enact a new organisational identity alongside the existing one through practices.

Rooting organisational identity means integrating new AI practices into current teaching and learning.

Showing the direction and setting the goals refer to situations where organisational members, in particular, lecturers, explain how AI practices should be integrated into current teaching and learning and what the organisation should achieve by doing so. The following script illustrates this situation, in which a lecturer speculates about the core of the organisational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006) and integrates AI as part of teaching:

If our core is to educate students to be strong players at work and establish them a good competitive position in the job markets (...) We understand what happens in the future and are the first to take it [artificial intelligence] as part of our teaching. It will become part of our expertise; of course, we will implement it into practice as part of the curricula. (Lecturer#2).

More importantly, when organisational members set goals and show direction for implementing AI practices, they frame it as a collective effort. Consequently, they were rooting organisational identity and integrating AI into current teaching. Consider the example from the lecturer interview:

Let us apply and take AI into practice and discuss its role [in learning and part of teaching identity]. (Lecturer#10).

When lecturers engaged in organisational identity work initiated by AI practices, they often acknowledged that change is a collective effort.

Creating collective standards refers to lecturers reflecting on their interpretations of AI practices in their higher education context and how they saw AI should be used in teaching and learning. The following quote illustrates this situation: A lecturer first compared his or her organisation to two other HEIs in the same area, arguing that they are more transparent in their general guidelines. Then, s/he continues arguing that if a student is caught cheating [in learning assignments or thesis], how the process continues [with disciplinary actions], which are not visible:

If a student is caught misusing GenAI, lecturers must follow procedures that are not visible to students. While AI might have been mentioned in newsletters or other publications, could we make it more visible? (Lecturer#16).

On the other hand, another lecturer speculated that in the business context, using GenAI will be a standard soon. Therefore, BusinessUni must consider the impacts on student evaluation:

Our students are the future professionals who know how to use this tool [GenAI]. However, it changes how our students [and their learning] are evaluated. (Lecturer#2)

Later, the same lecturer continued arguing that having AI as part of the curricula brings advantages to students when entering the work life:

Students have an opportunity to use different kinds of AI tools. Taking them [AI tools] as part of the curricula in a business-orientated way will put students in an advantageous position in the job market.

Although many official change decisions, like integrating AI into curricula at HEIs, fall under the responsibility of management, lecturers argued for a collective responsibility for AI practices and how students should use them in their learning. At the same time, the adoption of GenAI was growing among lecturers and students, yet in many ways remained a discreet, individual initiative that, through its increasing volume, began to generate pressure for creating collective standards.

Leaders set boundary conditions while legitimizing new AI practices, which refers to leaders acknowledging bottom-up changes in AI practices and their connection to organisational identity—directly or indirectly (Fachin & Langley, 2024)—while defining the scope and limits of change. Leaders discussed issues such as strategy and pedagogical solutions, addressing what the emergence of GenAI enabled and what is at the core of the organisation. The following quote exemplifies this situation, where a leader discusses how artificial intelligence transforms the organisation; however, the emphasis is on the meaning of learning. S/he further argued that the core is applying knowledge in practice:

We encourage individuals to learn and understand its meaning (...). We keep applying knowledge to practice, which includes personal reflection. Those reflections are authentic in that they cannot be produced with GenAI. Personal reflections are important in the future because connecting with people does not change; in fact, its meaning will increase. (Leader#9).

This quote demonstrates that although organisational identity evolves with emergent AI practices, leaders set the boundaries of how an organisation can change, emphasising the identity's central and enduring features. In another example, a leader takes a student perspective, and an organisation must consider pedagogy:

These technological changes emphasise that we must understand what students do with these tools and what thoughts and ideas they have related to their studies [about using GenAI] that we must consider pedagogically. (Leader#6).

In these cases, leaders anchor organisational identity, for example, on pedagogy and set boundaries for organisational change while legitimizing it. By doing so, they allow organisational members to decide how new AI practices should be integrated into their daily work and studies, enabling new AI-related organisational identities to emerge alongside existing ones. Consequently, change emerges between top-down and bottom-up processes.

Adapting AI practices to augment learning refers to learning study processes in which students use AI as a support tool. In these cases, students explained how they used new technology in learning tasks and, consequently, gained a deeper understanding. The following quote illustrates such a situation in which s/he explains using GenAI:

I must investigate and study the output of GenAI and whether it is so. By doing so, I gain a deeper understanding of what I am searching for from these studies. (Student#1).

Although BusinessUNI released guidelines for using artificial intelligence in learning and studies, students did not refer to them. Instead, they actively adopted AI practices to enhance their learning, highlighting change occurring also through students' adaptation.

Leaders play a crucial role in implementing technological changes and supporting the rooting of new technologies into current practices. By legitimizing these practices, they establish

boundaries that define what can change and must remain stable, thus maintaining a balance and reinforcing what is essential of the organisational identity during transformation. Meanwhile, lecturers show activity while integrating GenAI into teaching and learning. The organisation encouraged its educators and students to experiment with new ideas. Therefore, rooting organisational identity based on artificial intelligence was made possible. These new AI practices were emergent, collaborative, and shaped by numerous active organisational members rather than being dictated from the top. Change thus occurs between top-down and bottom-up processes. Furthermore, students used GenAI to both to automate their tasks and to augment their learning. These contributed to self-directed change, occurring between top-down and bottom-up processes, indicating that change was created collectively. Furthermore, these indicate a new identity based on AI practices emerges alongside the central and organisational identity of teaching and learning.

Rejecting organisational identity refers to situations where organisational members addressed AI practices and rejected incorporating those into teaching and learning. Members often contradicted organisational identities explicitly or implicitly, reflecting their good intentions. They aimed to balance the new situation, where technology was rapidly emerging as a part of learning and teaching processes in higher education.

Defending professional values refers to organisational members being critical of AI practices in teaching and learning. BusinessUNI introduced numerous changes in its course offerings during the COVID-19 crisis; for example, large virtual courses where lecturers never met students or students did not do any group activities. Although the crisis ended, many students preferred large online and virtual courses. The following quote is from a lecturer who previously emphasised the professional value of interacting with students. Then, s/he simultaneously constructed and criticized an organisational identity as a degree factory that had also emerged among lecturers:

I still do not like this degree factory thinking, and due to the emergence of [generative] AI, our group sizes will rise to one hundred. (Lecturer#9).

Another member argued that AI practices and new teaching and learning methods could neglect human interaction. The lecturer then emphasised the importance of maintaining identity, specifically collaborating with work-life, to support students entering professional markets:

We collaborate with working life, and teaching work-life skills is one of our duties (...). If everything is done [by students] with the help of AI in virtual courses, we lose important human interaction. (Lecturer#3).

More importantly, while defending professional values, some employees questioned what will remain when artificial intelligence is integrated into teaching and learning:

We discuss much about meta-skills such as creativity (...) However, what is left with these technological devices and solutions [artificial intelligence]? What is humanity's role, relations between people, social relations, and well-being? Can we enable these in the future so that we can add value? (Lecturer#10).

When lecturers discussed the emergence of GenAI, they acknowledged that it is an inevitable part of new teaching practices. This forced change made professional values salient, contributing to lecturers' critical evaluations of artificial intelligence's role in teaching and learning. Lecturers often linked GenAI adoption to previous course format changes, interpreting it negatively as part of broader

developments in teaching practices. They expressed their critical views in interviews as well as in informal discussions.

Challenging one-sided interpretations of direction refers to lecturers critically assessing the organisation's aims to adapt AI into its teaching and learning practices. They frequently voiced their concerns about its impact on students' learning. The following example from the data illustrates such a situation:

In my opinion, we must be at the top of things and do innovative things [to develop teaching]. However, there cannot be a situation where exams and reports can be done using ChatGPT. I honestly think that students must do something so that they can learn. (Lecturer#8).

Another lecturer expressed his or her criticism of using GenAI in learning regardless of his or her positive approach toward it:

I want to create an atmosphere where it [GenAI] can be used. However, to my surprise, the level of learning assignments has significantly improved, and many students' writing styles are much better. Then, learning assignments start to resemble one another, which is alarming. Are students using similar prompts? (Lecturer#20).

This interpretation of ongoing transformation among lecturers emphasised that emergent AI practices could have negative consequences for learning. Despite these concerns, they were not widely discussed inside the organisation. When lecturers defended their professional values and challenged one-sided direction, leaders appeared to adopt a pragmatic stance toward GenAI's role integration into teaching and learning, neither explicitly hindering or promoting it, thus enabling adaptation to emerge. Altogether, rejecting an imagined organisational identity proposal means lecturers expressed concerns about students' learning and a critically evaluated one-sided interpretation of ongoing transformation. Thus, they acknowledged a central and enduring aspect of organisational identity based on teaching and learning, such as emphasising interactions, which must be adapted into a new AI-based identity.

Adjusting organisational identity refers to situations in which organisational members adapt emerging AI practices in teaching and learning to new situations, norms, and operating environments. This process also involves interpreting the meaning of these new practices while responding to external demands that influence their integration.

The passivity of change became salient when lecturers passively assumed that change would occur on its own. They linked this expectation to the organisation's established social position in the higher education sector and its ability to adapt naturally to the GenAI era. For instance, they emphasised the importance of acquiring a profile in the AI field:

I have an impression that we profile ourselves in this area. (Lecturer#10)

Another organisational member argued that the organisation is in a good position:

I suppose we are in a good position. I don't think that many people use artificial intelligence. (Lecturer#8)

In these cases, organisational members assumed that adjusting organisational identity occurs without active efforts. Although identity work, in general, is viewed as an active process (Caza et al., 2018), these lecturers were implicitly adjusting their organisational changes rather than actively reinterpreting them from the perspective of teaching and learning. This passivity in organisational identity work reflected the organisation's discourse, often highlighting its large size and social standing in the higher education sector.

The search for balance emerged, particularly in leaders' interpretations of how to adapt AI practices in teaching and learning. They considered technological advances and integrated them with central organisational identity anchoring points, such as pedagogy, another strength of the organisation and enduring feature of organisational identity. By doing so, they explained the actions or plans to advance ongoing transformation. The following example illustrates this situation: a leader explains how new pedagogical methods have been developed with researchers and lecturers.

We have made pedagogical policies and guidelines that consider research. We have considered this with lecturers and experts and considered actions. So, we have been active. (Leader#11).

Following this, the same leader continued to explain what kind of change the organisation should not make due to the emergence of artificial intelligence:

We should not make changes that would diminish human interaction and thinking.

This example shows how leaders actively adjusted the organisation's teaching and learning practices for the GenAI era, balancing technological advancements with other organisational identity anchors. In doing so, they engaged in organisational identity adjustment. More importantly, this illustrates their vital role in aligning new AI practices with other central and enduring features while advancing ongoing change.

Sensing obstacles to organisational identity emergence occurs when organisational members critically evaluate current actions and identify barriers hindering the emergence of new AI practices in teaching and learning. Thus, a new organisational identity cannot emerge.

Expressing frustration with the organisation's functioning became evident when lecturers expressed that the organisation's skills and knowledge did not accumulate. New AI practices related to teaching and learning failed to materialize. This frustration suggests that fragmented practices hinder coherent AI-related organisational identity emergence. Consider the example where a lecturer expressed his or her interpretation concerning pedagogy in the new era:

We are in chaos, and our actions regarding digital pedagogy and artificial intelligence in general are fragmented. We do things related to artificial intelligence here and there, but it is not coordinated (...). We have so many people with skills and knowledge (...). We experiment in our sandbox; others seem to be much faster. (Lecturer#19)

One lecturer criticized the misalignment of projects and teaching:

We have many projects related to AI. However, these [AI] skills and knowledge do not converge into teaching; it is extremely slow. (Lecturer#16).

This was one of the most prominent interpretations among lecturers, who argued that the organisation and its members possess AI skills and knowledge. However, they pointed out obstacles to change and the emergence of a new AI-related organisational identity, hindering the integration of central and enduring organisational identity features into a new AI-related organisational identity. Either implicitly or explicitly, they called for leaders to coordinate efforts and integrate visible AI skills and knowledge into teaching and learning. Therefore, many organisational members sought decisive leadership actions and coordination during significant changes.

Hesitating emerged in leaders' interpretations when they acknowledged that the organisation struggles to internalize new AI practices, especially in daily functions as well as in teaching and learning. They explained this with the absence of more decisive actions. The following quote shows how the leader is making organisational identity claims what it is not (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) and how it should act differently:

We're not very bold, and there is a specific time and place to be bold. So, we should leverage this [AI] as this time suggests. We should go forward and be more dynamic. (Leader#8).

Another leader had similar thoughts:

At this moment, we don't differentiate at all (...) we should make conscious and bold decisions (...) I want that we go forward. (Leader#3).

In these cases, leaders made explicit organisational identity claims about what the organisation is not and should become but did not take decisive actions. Some leaders were in a paradoxical situation, recognizing the need for bold actions but hesitating to enact them. This hesitation could hinder the emergence of a new organisational identity and integrate AI into daily actions as well as teaching and learning. Thus, central, and enduring identity features could not be integrated into the new AI-related identity. The reasons behind this hesitation remain unclear, suggesting a complexity in leadership that is not within the scope of this study. Findings are summarized in Table 2.

----- Table 2 approximately here -----

DISCUSSION

In this study, we have analysed managers', lecturers', and students' organisational identity work. We explored their accounts of organisational change triggered by the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence at the higher education institution. We identified four categories of organisational identity work and how each influenced interpretations of organisational change. These categories were linked to different tactics for integrating a new AI-based organisational identity with core and enduring identity features.

This study contributes to organisational identity literature (e.g., Kreiner & Murphy, 2016) by showing how practices and technology's material features (Watkiss & Glynn, 2016) and linked with organisational identity work. It shows that members adapt to ongoing transformation by anchoring their organisational identity work into central and enduring features (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006). However, these central and enduring features require active organisational identity work to remain relevant when new, groundbreaking technology emerges and has potential to transform the industry.

Enduring organisational identity features can be integrated into a new identity (see Kreiner et al., 2015). However, as we show, this often requires collective efforts and responsibility

from organisational members. Conversely, adaptation may be hindered when professional values are salient, as values are integral to identity. This finding highlights how personal identity influences organisational identity work (Fachin & Langley, 2024). Additionally, adaptation may be hindered when organisational members passively expect change to occur on its own.

Furthermore, this study illustrates that each stakeholder- leaders, lecturers, and students- engaged in organisational identity work differently, emphasising the priorities expressed by them amid continuous change. Leaders set boundaries and legitimize change through their organisational identity work but also need to balance how AI should be used in teaching and learning. Change could also be hindered when leaders were hesitant to act. Interestingly, lecturers sometimes called for leaders' involvement in their organisational identity work to facilitate change. Meanwhile, students actively adapted their learning to AI practices.

This study was conducted at a single HEI, and findings may have been more nuanced if more organisations were studied. Additionally, since this study relied on interviews, future research should incorporate observations to understand better how practices are enacted in real teaching and learning contexts, enriching our understanding of the relationship between practices and organisational identity work. Furthermore, integrating auto-ethnography (Nordbäck et al., 2021) and insider perspective (Ravasi & Canato, 2013; Toy-Cronin, 2018) with interviews and observations would provide rich insights into organisational identity work.

APPENDICES

Table 1. Number of informants in both interview rounds.

	Lecturers	Leaders	Students	Teacher students' group interview	Total
Fall 2023	19	9	6	3	37
Spring 2024	20	10	8	3	41
Total	39	19	14	6	78

Table 2. Definitions of central concepts, their link to change adaptation and their illustrative examples.

Concept	Definition	Adaptation to ongoing transformation	Illustrative example
Main category: Rooting organisational identity	Integrating new AI practices into current teaching and learning practices		
Lecturers showed direction and set goals for AI practices	Explaining how AI practices should be integrated into current teaching and learning and what the organisation achieves by doing so	Change is a collective effort	<i>We have professional teacher training, so we should be front-runners (...) we can make pedagogically justified decisions in the classroom (Lecturer#13)</i>

Lecturers creating collective standards for AI practices	Lecturers reflecting on their interpretations of AI practices and how AI should be used in teaching	Change is a collective responsibility	<i>In the past, responsibility was a cross-cutting theme, in the same AI could be a cross-cutting theme (Lecturer#16)</i>
Leaders set boundary conditions while legitimizing new AI practices	Leaders acknowledge bottom-up changes in AI practices	Change occurs within given boundaries between top-down and bottom-up processes	<i>At the core of the strategy must remain learning and learners, which in turn is related to pedagogy (...) We identify the opportunities of AI and smart ways of using it (...) in the learning situations, we [lecturers] must react to new learning needs. (Leader#9)</i>
Students adapting AI practices to augment learning	Study processes using AI as a support tool	Change occurs through student adaptation	<i>I noticed that I didn't have GenAI in use; learning would be significantly more difficult. By learning I refer to material in English. I personally accept using it because it helps me to learn. I don't get stuck. (Student#2)</i>
Main category: Rejecting organisational identity	Organisational members make references to AI practices and reject embedding those into teaching and learning		
Lecturers defending professional values	Lecturers are critical of AI practices in teaching and learning, and they defend their professional values	Forced organisational change was inevitable	<i>I don't want to read answers that are written by [Gen]AI. Then, a student doesn't learn anything. (Lecturer#15)</i>

Lecturers challenging one-sided interpretation of direction	Lecturers critically assess the organisation's aims to adapt AI into teaching and learning practices	Adaptation to change emerges regardless of concerns	<i>Now, a lecturer can try how learning assignments are planned and done in 20 seconds. Does it mean that the cobbler's child has no shoes? Our tools and skills are not up-to-date, and we should consider these in teaching (...) it is sad that work-life has requirements that students should practice here (...) so, our base is not solid that we open doors to working life because we haven't given much thought to the use of AI in our own work.</i> (Lecturer#15)
Main category: Adjusting organisational identity	Organisational members adapt emerging AI practices in teaching and learning to new situations, norms, and operating environment		
Lecturers' passivity of change	An organisation's social position and its natural ability contribute to adaptation	An assumption that changes occur on its own	<i>[Our] technological skills [related to AI] dynamically develop all the time, and we emphasise that.</i> (Lecturer#10)
Leaders search for balance	Technological advances are integrated into other organisational identity anchors	Leaders are actively adjusting the organisation's teaching and learning	<i>Students at working-life have the same situation [use AI], so they cannot live in a container and we would not allow using modern tools [GenAI] (...) we have to go through</i>

			<i>all the learning assignments (...) it emphasises critical thinking, and the need to evaluate trustworthiness [of information] (...) our students have to understand and study this. (Leader#5)</i>
Main category: Sensing obstacles to organisational identity emergence	Organisational members critically evaluate current actions and identify barriers hindering the emergence of new AI practices in teaching and learning		
Lecturers expressing frustration with the organisation's functioning	New practices in teaching and learning do not materialize, and the organisation's skills and knowledge do not accumulate	Change requires leaders' coordination efforts and integration of skills and knowledge	<i>We have artificial intelligence in many place [in the organisation]. However, knowledge does not accumulate, and there is much internal competition between different units. Who does what? There have been big promises, yet realities have been very different. (Lecturer#17).</i>
Leaders hesitating	Acknowledging that the organisation struggles to internalize new AI practices into teaching and learning	Change can be hindered	<i>We tend to maintain things that we think are right too long (...) we claim to be agile, but we are not (...) in this [Gen]AI thing I identify higher education institutions are different in applying. (Leader#7)</i>

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