

Socialising identity change within established organisations: an analysis of a newly accredited European public university

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Abstract

Studying identity has become crucial to understand the nature of organisations and their social role. If an organisational identity is described as the central, distinct, and enduring element of an organisation (Albert and Whetten, 1985), how can it be successfully changed? Employing qualitative research methodologies, this study investigates the nuanced processes of identity change within organisations undergoing an institutional change. The research focuses on the case of an established European public institution (*university A*) that, following the attainment of a prestigious triple-crown business school accreditation (*BS accreditation*), underwent a transformative journey towards a new identity (*business school A*). The findings reveal how, following an institutional change, an interplay of centralised and decentralised processes of sensemaking and sensegiving helps organisational members negotiate a new identity towards potential consensus. The paper contributes to identity management literature revealing how consensus around a new identity can be only achieved through effective socialising strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A change in organisational identity may be initiated as a strategic transformation by organisational leadership, working as a clear and inspiring vision or future representation of the organisation (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Venus et al., 2019), as well as an institutional change (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998; He and Baruch, 2009). If institutional changes may trigger widely diverse responses from different organisations (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998), He and Baruch (2009, p. 575) show how they are often correlated with identity ambiguity, obsolescence, and legitimacy crises. As identity constitutes the ostensibly central, distinct, and enduring element within an organisation (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1996), managing identity changes is a delicate process of balancing. Identity changes may be triggered either by top-down (i.e., management decision) or bottom-up (e.g., organisational members) processes (Ashforth et al., 2020). The interaction between these two determines the final identity outcome. So, if organisational members perceive an identity change as a threat, ambiguity and tensions between the micro-level identity processes (Ernst and Schleiter, 2021, p. 892) and collective social identity (Hay et al., 2021) can lead to resistance, raising the likelihood of identity change failure (Van Os et al., 2015). This highlights the key role of the liminality moment, as transition phase from letting old a previous identity to assuming a new one (Paton and Hodgson, 2016) and as a crucible experience (e.g., a traumatic moment urging individuals to review their values and assumptions; Bennis and Thomas, 2011) for the success of identity change. Hence, the study of identity change requires a careful examination of the reciprocal impact between the multiple sensemaking processes among organisational members as they try to incorporate a new identity (Weick, 1995) and the sensegiving processes through which organisational leadership tries to influence the new identity perception (Harikkala-Laihinén, 2022). For this, reflected analysis of both top-down narratives (Ernst and Jensen Schleiter, 2021) and bottom-down discourses within organisation and how they influence each other in a process of identity activation, through which organisational members challenge and make sense of the new identity (Hatch et al., 2015) is fundamental.

While various scholars have studied the processes of organisational identity development (Fiol, 2002; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Coupland and Brown, 2004), a limited number have explored specific aspects of identity formation in organisations (Czarniawska and Wolff, 1998; Corley and Gioia, 2004; Clegg et al., 2007) and the process of organisational creation of identity, understanding the factors that contribute to its formation (Gioia et al., 2010) and transformation (He and Baruch, 2009), especially under institutional change. In particular, there remains a limited understanding of how management actions and organisational members' identities interact to shape the new identity perception and how this, in turn, affects strategic identity change processes (Harikkala-Laihinén 2022). If this asks for further research on processes of identity formation and change, this study aims to bridge a connection between these two research streams to provide deeper understanding of the interrelation between processes of new identity formation and development. This research strives to understand how a process of identity change triggered by an institutional change can be managed in a way that builds consensus among members of an organisation.

This paper tries to answer this question by studying the case of an established organisation, a European public university, whose management department, after being granted a prestigious *BS accreditation* that identifies high-quality business schools, started the formation of a new entity.

For privacy, we will refer to the university as “*university A*” and to the new entity as “*business school A*”. Through this case, this paper wants to understand how an institutional change (i.e., receiving BS accreditation) affects the processes of identity change and reformulation within an organisation (i.e., becoming *business school A*). Through a qualitative approach, this paper discusses how the tension between the top-down strategic decision to change the organisational identity and the bottom-up sensemaking by the organisational members affects the construction of this new identity. Focusing on this dualism, this research extends existing knowledge on identity formation and the role of organisational narratives at multiple levels in it to create shared meaning and direction to offer implications for managerial practice.

Therefore, the final research question became the following:

RQ: How does an institutional change trigger a process of identity change within an organisation?

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods have been extensively used to study identity change within organisations, as they enable the exploration of complex and subjective components of individual interactions (Caza et al., 2018). Since organisational identity formation is a multifaceted process that involves a wide range of interplays between external and internal influences of difficult conceptualisation and measurement (Gioia et al., 2013), qualitative methodologies enable researchers to delve into the intricacies of individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, offering a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the basic procedures involved, encompassing the intricacies of how people perceive, navigate, and adjust their identities in reaction to their surroundings within an organisation (Kroger, 2007). An interpretive approach was considered suitable for identifying and analysing the root causes and obstacles involved in this process of change (Dey et al., 2018; Fillieri et al., 2017). Given that a grounded theory approach is appropriate for explanatory studies in a domain with limited knowledge about the phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) such as the shifting nature of identity, we opted for its adoption

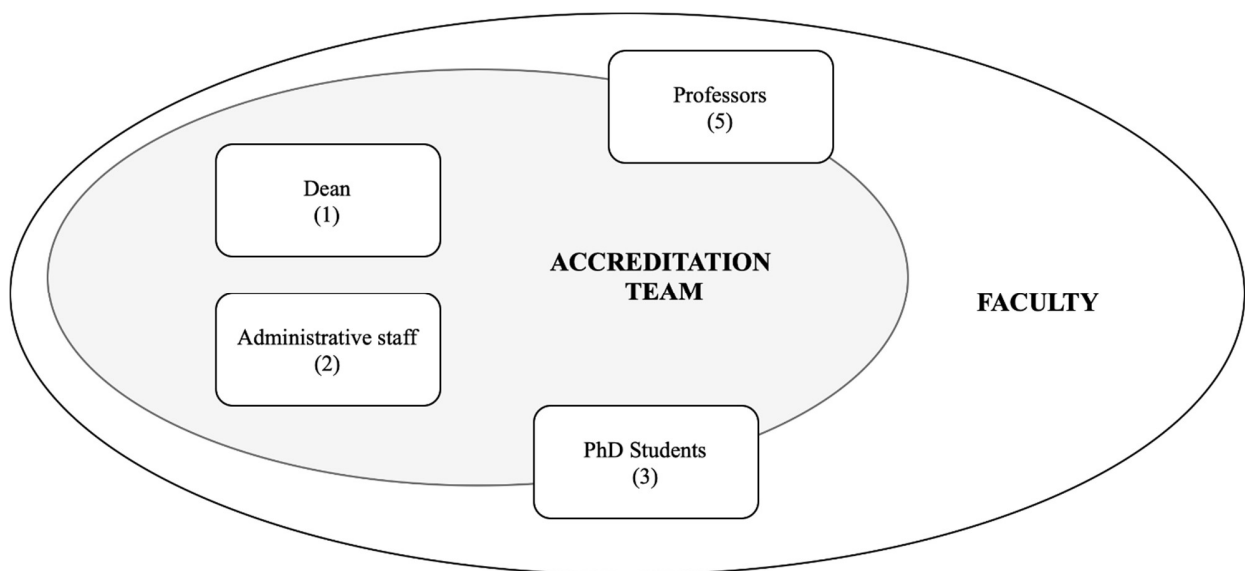
2.1. Data Collection

According to Gioia (2003), socially constructed reality emerges from conversations based on individuals' beliefs and experiences. To capture this dynamic, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews adopting a Critical Incident Technique with a sample composed of organisational members that had been directly affected by the institutional change to grasp all interpretations and meanings that each of them had attached to each event during this process of institutional shift, and subsequent identity change, from a management department into a business school with the pursuit and attainment of the prestigious accreditation. Participants were provided with a timeline to fill with all the key events and milestones related to *business school A* becoming an accredited business school before the interview as a form of assistance to the recollection and elucidation of the key incidents related to this identity change process. During the interview, participants were asked to explain their view on how each event contributed to the development and construction of *business school A*'s identity within the whole organisation, trying to recall the events, the thoughts and emotions related to every single incident mentioned.

2.2. Sampling decisions

Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were used to optimise data collection by combining the strengths of both techniques. The goal was to assemble a representative sample of individuals directly impacted by the change and rebranding of *business school A*. Participants were selected based on specific criteria to construct an informative and relevant sample to obtain valuable all-rounded insights on the events, building a heterogenous group composed of people having different roles in the institution and different levels of involvement in the whole accreditation process to capture the varied reactions and sense-making nuances related to the institutional change. Interviews included key figures that were directly and actively involved in driving the change, such as the Dean and the team working for the *BS accreditation* attainment (i.e., BS team), but also organisational members who had to adapt to the change with no direct involvement in the strategic planning, such as members of administrative board, PhD candidates, students and professors who were bystander observers during the process but whose viewpoints were crucial due to their pivotal roles within the institution.

Fig. 1. The composition of the sample.



2.3. Data collection

10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 11 participants, either in person, online or in hybrid format, all in English. While online interviews could reduce control on contextual variables (James and Busher, 2009), semi-structured interviews also allow enough flexibility and control by both participants and the interviewees to adjust questions to the pace and context of the conversation and make better use of the knowledge-producing potential of dialogue (Brinkmann, 2020). The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour each. The three researchers were present to most interviews. Before starting the interview, the interviewee was informed about commitment to confidentiality and anonymity to incentivize honest personal opinions on the BS accreditation process. For understanding how institutional change leads to identity change, participants were also asked to fill a timeline map with events that they perceived as key in this process, which were discussed in detail during the interview.

Findings were triangulated across multiple hierarchical levels (i.e., professors, students, and administrative staff), sources (interviews, websites of *university A*, and timeline maps), and the journals of the three researchers.

Differential involvement of three researchers, with one being a main interviewer and the other two taking notes in their journals, and a two-phase intercoder agreement were useful for *reflexivity* purposes. Through purposeful sampling and snowball technique, *negative-case analysis* was included by conducting interviews with members of the group that did not support the change into a fully accredited entity. An ongoing process of *member checking* throughout interviews was implemented, also using the last three interviews to corroborate the soundness and robustness of emerging categories and findings. Three external researchers also checked the findings for an external *audit trail*.

2.4. Data analysis

After each interview was conducted, it was transcribed with the software Good Tape and checked for verbatim correctness by the main interviewer through manual checking. The coding process adopted a multi-phase approach involving two main phases: a first and second coding. The first coding involved first individual coding with two researchers coding each interview independently. After this first coding, the second coding was characterised by an interplay of meetings and coding refinement into final categories and a tentative conceptual framework. After individual coding tasks, the three researchers met and compared coding twice. First, the two coding and memoing of each interview were compared to reach intercoder agreement on selective coding. After agreeing on first-order and second-order categories and their relationship, which are displayed in Fig. 2 and 3, re-codings of all interviews through these (supposedly final) categories with NVivo 14 occurred. For this final coding, agreement was reached on both the label of each category and the final conceptual framework without any issues. In this meeting some second-order categories were collapsed into third-order categories (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. First-order categories.



Fig 2. First-order categories. Continued.

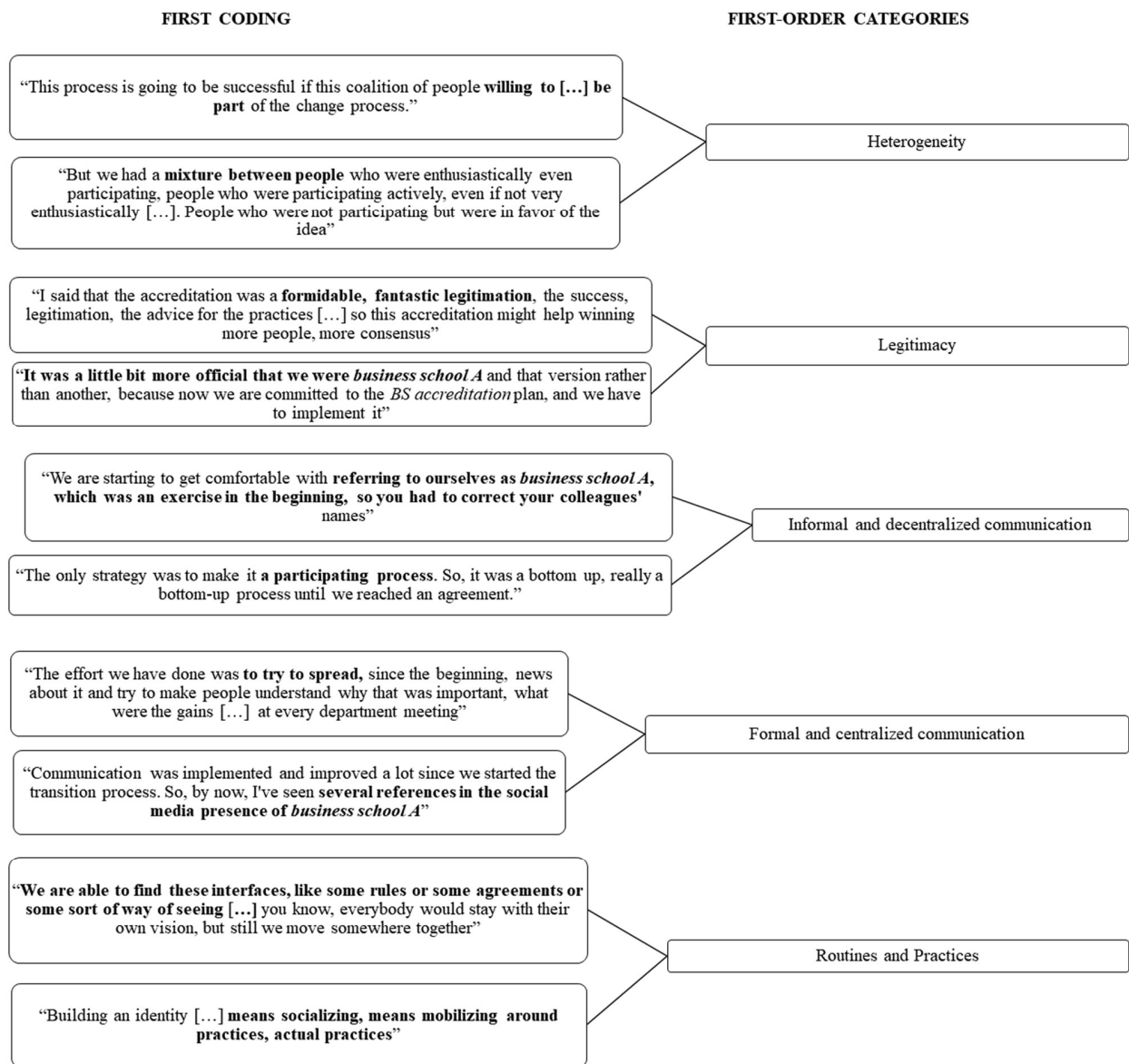
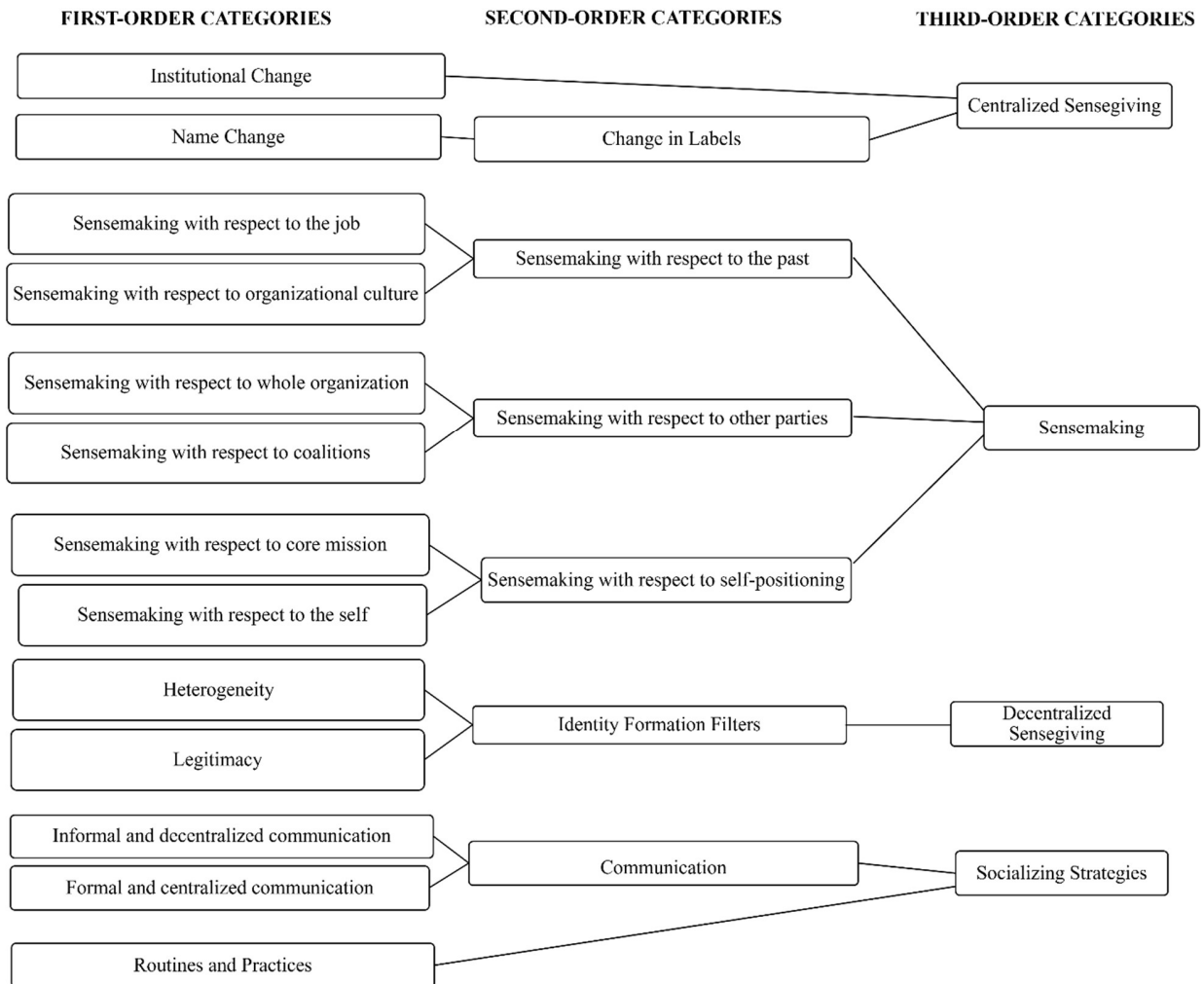


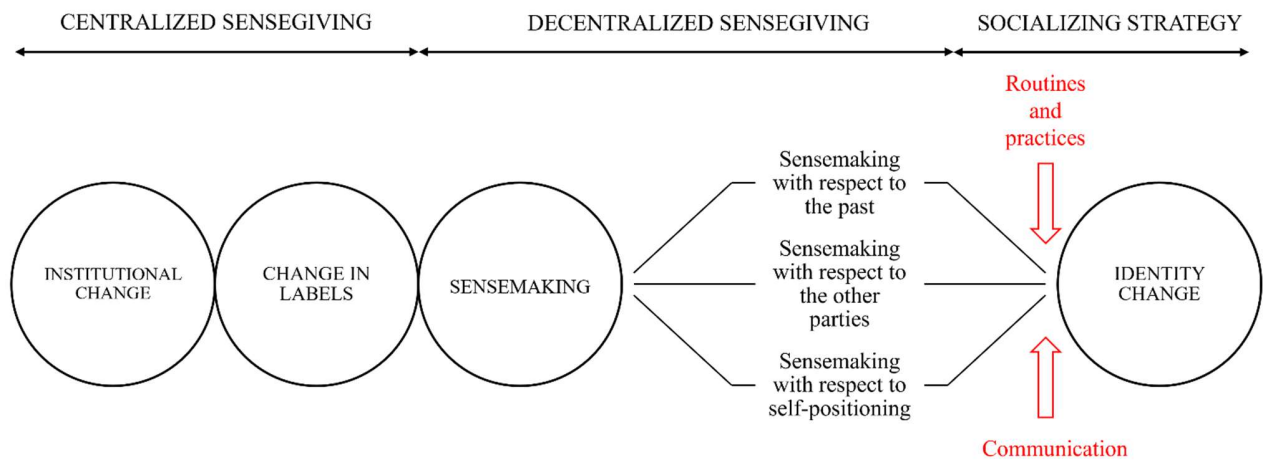
Fig. 3. First-order, second-order, and third-order categories.



3. FINDINGS

If Fig. 2 and 3 display the key categories emerging from the qualitative research, additional quotes can be found in the discussion. However, building a theory requires highlighting their interrelationships, so defining how these second-order and third-order concepts are embedded into a process (Gioia et al., 2013). Fig. 4 introduces a conceptual framework depicting how an institutional change can drive identity change through different processes of sensemaking with respect to the past of the organisations, with respect to other parts of the institution, and to the core mission of the organisation.

Fig. 4. Conceptual Framework.



The research identifies the following identity change process: after an exogenous institutional change, a centralised change in labels enhances the salience of an identity change by triggering an interplay of sensemaking processes among the different organisational members to make sense of the new identity with respect to the past, to other parties, and to the self-positioning of both the organisations and its members. This research proposes that an institutional change, through a change in labels, may initiate a process of sensemaking of a new identity, which is subject to a heterogeneity of perspectives of organisational members regarding such change. In particular, it claims that this process may not necessarily lead to an effective understanding of a new identity (i.e., identity change) without effective socialising strategies. If heterogeneity of viewpoints may not be solved at all, mobilising resources and socialising the change through both communication and routines may at least generate an acceptance of this identity change through an interplay of sensegiving processes.

Centralised Sensegiving

According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), sensegiving involves any efforts towards influencing and stirring the “meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality” (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Centralised sensegiving involves any attempt of top management to introduce and guide the meanings attached to a new identity, through an institutional change and a change in labels. This type of sensegiving, then, increases both the salience and relevance of a new identity change, guiding the meanings attached by organisational stakeholders to new identity according to the centrally established vision, mission, and core values of the new identity.

1. Institutional change

An institutional change is defined as a change in values, norms, and rules of culturally and socially embedded organisations (He and Baruch, 2009). Hence, it creates a need for a change in identity to fit these new requirements through a new “perimeter” (Interview 1), thus catalysing identity change. “So, the *BS accreditation* process required some form of autonomy and [...] also an image

that was consistent with the usual institution that is certified under the BS certification.” (Interview 1)

Moreover, the implementation of an institutional change requires the development of a strategic action plan to implement new policies and rules into the existing context. This entails a rethinking and reviewing previously existing priorities, structures, and processes to highlight “lines of intervention” (Interview 2), thus a process of organisational sensemaking of this change at an organisational level.

“We introduced in this application the commitment to use clear metrics for evaluating faculty research performance and teaching performance that acted as an engine for change and also for identity change.” (Interview 1)

“BS with the mandate to rethink part of the structure and of the priorities and of the lines of intervention of the business school in the future forced us to start thinking about what the *business school A* really meant, how we saw it and what it did in our minds.” (Interview 2)

“What is important is that the accreditation forces you to do two things [...]. It helps you see where action is needed. The second thing is, it helps you think, it helps you position yourself.” (Interview 4)

If institutional change triggers sensemaking processes within organisation, sensemaking, in turn, affects identity change by involving both meaning-driven and action-driven parts: identity, thus, is “enacted”, as people make sense through it by implementing new routines and practices, but also “claimed” as people develop and attach a new meaning to the new identity.

“The BS accreditation process was a huge sensemaking exercise and an exercise in attaching meaning and attaching behaviours to this idea of now being the *business school A*.” (Interview 2)

2. Change in Labels

An institutional change implies a radical modification of how an organisation and its members are labelled, the process of identity change becomes salient for members, by increasing its awareness. Therefore, a change in labels (e.g., the name of an organisation) plays a crucial role in triggering change awareness in case of institutional change and becomes a starting point for fostering the importance of a change in identity. It enhances the catalysing effect of an institutional change on identity change by increasing its salience.

“We also wanted to give a clearer identity to this object that we were accrediting. So that's why we thought that *business school A* was the entity we wanted to create.” (Interview 5)

“I think it is just a matter of terms. Terms are not neutral, they create a reality [...] showed what we are and what we do” (Interview 9)

However, a change in labels may be perceived as a marketing, “rebranding” or “renaming” strategy with no identity change attached to it. This implies that, if institutional change may trigger changes in labels and how an organisation refers to itself, this does not necessarily imply the development

and formation of a shared understanding of “who we are” now (i.e., identity change) but there are additional factors that we are not considering. Hence, the connection between a change in labels and identity change must be not taken for granted, if specific conditions are not in place.

“I’m not actually sure about the date because the process of renaming and rebranding was a little bit taken under the water.” (Interview 1)

“I can connect to [...] when we finally had to state precisely what we were accrediting and what we decided not to accredit. And that was the moment in which, of course, you need to give a name to this conglomeration of objects.” (Interview 5)

Sensemaking

An institutional change triggers an interplay of multiple sensemaking processes among organisational members, through which they try to understand how to cope with the new with respect to the past (i.e., routines and job positions), the other parties that are either internal and external to the organisation (i.e., headquarters, other units, other members of the organisation, professionals and stakeholders), and the positioning of both the organisation and the individual members. Institutional change, therefore, triggers processes of sensemaking within organisations, before establishing a change in identity.

1. Sensemaking with respect to the past

An institutional change may lead to the implementation of new practices that may affect, if not radically change, the job requirements and job workflow of the members of an organisation. This may cause tensions between “what I have been doing until now” and “what you ask me to do from now on”. This may hinder an identity change process.

“Because you have your own things, you have your research group, you have your research, you have your teaching, you have your research centre, or whatever that is, your own business, let’s say. And then [...] you need to make a revolution around all these things” (Interview 5)

“And there was a point that was clearly well made that we really have to communicate ourselves in a certain way, so introduce ourselves as *business school A* and such, the CVs of professors as well.” (Interview 7)

“A change in the way in which we do things.” (Interview 4)

At the same time, employees may have to cope with a tension between the previous and new organisational culture. An institutional change may lead to a new projected image of the organisations, especially if this involves a change in labels. However, organisational change may still not fit such an image, creating a sense of disorientation among its members, because the new projected image may not fit the perceived image of its members. Both new job practices and new projected image may display a culture that has yet to be developed and fully enacted within the organisation, creating a tension between the past (how the members made sense of who they were as an organisation before the institutional change) and the present (how the members feel that they have to perceive the organisation after the institutional change).

“The process towards the *BS accreditation* would have fostered, let's say, a broader cultural process of opening up [...] to practices that were international practices or standard international practices. So I thought that that could be the engine of a cultural change.” (Interview 1)

“We don't see ourselves [...] led in the usual traditional way. But we project ourselves into European, especially, the world of business schools.” (Interview 5)

2. Sensemaking with respect to other parties

Given that identity within organisations involves an “interplay” of different parties (Gioia et al., 2010), multiple identities exist within it. This is even more relevant if the organisation is part of a larger organisation with multiple units (in case of a university, departments) or if multiple coalitions with different ideas on “who we are ” co-exist within the organisation.

“A lot [...] still [...] see a really clear link with *university A* and not with *business school A* as independent.” (Interview 6)

“The main purpose was [...] to improve the school [...] in terms of reputation, recognition [...] as a school to which students could apply (international students) [...] and also [...] in terms of collaboration with other business schools.” (Interview 10)

3. Sensemaking with respect to self-positioning

Upon an institutional change that triggers a change in labels, a tension may emerge with respect to the core values of both the organisation and the individuals working it.

The vision for a new identity, triggered by identity change, may involve a new core mission that an organisation would like to foster which may be perceived as either achievable or not, suitable or not for the organisation by its members. This happens when there is a gap between the actions that the organisation has been taking until the institutional change and what the new identity may involve.

“This public DNA is very important because it means that we have a role in the world that is not the same as the role of a firm.” (Interview 5)

“First of all, we're public. And we really do public service. And I think this is distinguishing compared to most of the business schools around the world. So, we really have this public logic, public management, public service logic within our work.” (Interview 9)

At the same time, individuals also make sense of the change by positioning themselves in it, through either the beliefs they hold on both the process, the new vision, and the new identity.

“We started discussing this idea that identifying ourselves as the *business school A* would be more helpful” (Interview 2)

“I get disoriented because I experience a loss [...] rather than a disorientation in terms of what I'm supposed to do.” (Interview 3)

“Now we're becoming something different. What is that?” (Interview 5)

Decentralised Sensegiving

As previously stated, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) defined sensegiving as any attempt to guide the meanings attached to a new organisational identity. This involves both the top-management centralised efforts to stir identity formation towards their goals through institutional and label changes and decentralised efforts of organisational members, stakeholders, and external parties in influencing the meanings attached to a new identity. Decentralised sensegiving comprises any attempt of decentralised forces (e.g., organisational members, organisational stakeholders, and external parties) in guiding the meanings towards their preferred organisational identity through heterogeneity and legitimacy.

1. Heterogeneity

A crucial feature of identity change between organisations is that it affects a multitude of individuals, and thus, multiple parties, which may include either single individuals or coalitions of them (as previously written), which may diverge more or rather significantly in terms of how they make sense of this change. This may create both tensions but also opportunities for further sensemaking.

“I believe that we are still, still in the middle of [...] finding a shared vision and identity about what we are.” (Interview 1)

“It was more of smoothing out differences and understanding if our perception was skewed because we had very different experiences of what the *business school A* had to offer or whether it was just a continuation of a process.” (Interview 2)

Informal communication (mutual adjustment and agreement) among parties emerges as another crucial part of the sensemaking process of organisational members, which implies that identity change is negotiated. The smoothing of tensions and the reflection on this new identity, thus, has two potential outcomes: it may result in either a shared understanding of the new identity or the perpetuation of multiple coexisting identities. This is why, as it was previously claimed, institutional change, by stirring sensemaking processes after a change in labels, may not necessarily lead to a change in identity.

“A vision of the university system [...] is very rooted in the usual way of managing [...] So I would call it nostalgic. So how it was before. Then there is another group of people that think of themselves as part of a business school [...]” (Interview 1)

“It was more or less 1/3 in the sort of very participating, enthusiastically or not, but very participating group of people. So, we believe in that. Another 1/3 was a sort of a grey area, like, okay, yes, I'm supporting it or it's a good thing we do it. But I mean, I'm going to be peripheral to it. And then we had 1/3 that was more like, okay, fine. If we win it, it's nice. [...] I'm just here sitting and seeing what happens.” (Interview 5)

2. Legitimacy

An institutional change has an additional function in addition to being a trigger for identity change: it may work as a catalyser of the new identity by legitimising it, by showing the salience of the

new identity with respect to new industry-level practices (e.g., business schools and university ratings), meeting new customer needs (e.g., accreditation and rankings as new customer choice variables), and in terms of the creation of a new source of competitive advantage (e.g., increased reputation).

“While applying for BS and the success that eventually arrived will act as a legitimising process for the decisions that were taken and for the kind of interactions that were established to achieve the goal.” (Interview 1)

“Now it was a little bit more official that we were the *business school A* and that version of the *business school A* rather than another, because now we are committed to the BS plan and we have to implement it.” (Interview 2)

“They tried to take this accreditation of BS also to increase the visibility so, it was actually an advertisement for the faculty, for *business school A*.” (Interview 6)

Socialising strategies

Socialising strategies are the nexus that connect institutional change and sensemaking to an effective identity change. If an institutional change triggers multiple and interplaying processes of sensemaking across its organisational members, who make sense of this new identity through negotiation, socialising the change becomes crucial to both increase awareness and legitimacy of the new identity and smooth out heterogeneity. Communication and the development of new routines and practices may help reach a minimum level of shared understanding of this new identity change.

1. Communication

Communication as a socialising strategy comprises both an informal and decentralised approach, and a more centralised and formal communication.

Decentralised and informal communication defines conversations among organisational members, who may discuss and share their feelings and opinions about the new identity, impacting on each other's sensemaking processes. This affects the overall negotiation, determining whether a shared consensus on the understanding of the new identity is developed among organisational members, which, in turn, affects the effectiveness of the change in identity. More informed members or managers are crucial to identity change as they may raise awareness by spreading more accurate information. Hence, informal and decentralised communication mostly fosters awareness and sensemaking.

“The whole exercise was by definition identity-building and this idea of belonging to the same organisation, which was something that maybe they were a bit lacking before.” (Interview 2)

“We are starting to get comfortable with referring to ourselves as the *business school A*, which was an exercise in the beginning, so you had to correct your colleagues' names and say, no, [...] we are the *business school A*.” (Interview 2)

“We talked about problems openly, so people could also relate to it.” (Interview 5)

Conversely, formal and centralised communication describe the strategy of the organisational leader(s) and, sometimes, top managers to foster the identity change, being used for three purposes: spread information about key milestones, provide an official definition of the values and vision of the new identity, and implement new routines. Therefore, formal communication also increases the legitimacy of the new identity and its new labels. For instance, it may entail defining specific rules on how the organisation should be referred to in conferences, in email signatures or social media, but also the organisation with ad-hoc meetings to discuss key values of this new identity. Hence, formal and centralised communication mostly fosters a shared understanding of the key values and purpose of the new identity and its legitimacy.

“The effort we have done was to try to spread, since the beginning, news about it and try to make people understand why that was important, what were the gains.” (Interview 5)

“I saw that actually they really made a change in the websites and [...] in the communication and also in improving the material made accessible.” (Interview 6)

However, the perceived timeliness of formal communication influences their perceived effectiveness.

“It was probably this issue of time compression [...] that made some passages such as the change of the name and stuff like that a little bit less smooth in terms of socialisation of the change.” (Interview 1)

“I don't remember any big announcement about this change of name.” (Interview 2)

Moreover, the phase in the process influences the type of communication approach. If in the beginning of an identity change process, upon the institutional change, the communication is more centralised and formal, in the process of sensemaking informal communication has a huge impact for negotiating the new identity among organisational members, and in the process of socialising the new identity communication may be dual, thus involving a combination of both.

“There was a moment of involvement of the whole [...], It was much more like let's work in a group and then we extend it to the whole and we get feedback, etcetera, etcetera.” (Interview 5)

2. Routines and practices

As identity is also “enacted”, socialising an identity implies developing new practices and routines that may effectively substitute for the older ones, thus increasing the consensus of the new identity, triggering an effective identity change.

“I think to share the identity now we need action.” (Interview 1)

“BS with the mandate to rethink part of the structure and of the priorities and of the lines of intervention of the business school in the future forced us to start thinking about what

the *business school A* really meant, how we saw it and what it did in our minds. And now we are, we have started, but we still have some way to go.” (Interview 2)

However, if communication is easily and rapidly implemented to foster legitimacy and awareness of the new identity, the implementation of new routines is a major hurdle for organisations. In well-established organisations (e.g., universities), organisational routines may be so well-established as well, that organisational members may perceive radically increased costs in switching to new ones. This is even more relevant if the new identity and its relevance are poorly understood. If members cannot make sense of the new identity or communication strategies are not properly developed, developing new routines may have significant perceived costs for members.

“I just hope that we are able to find these interfaces, like some rules or some agreements or some sort of way of seeing things that is able to decrease the level of conflict and, you know, everybody would stay with their own vision, but still, we move somewhere together.” (Interview 5)

“We are just trying [...] to make *business school A* [...] and sometimes maybe there could be the problem [...] of doing this effectively.” (Interview 6)

Hence, the crucial point is that socialising requires not only the development of new routines and practices (an official action plan) but also decreasing these perceived costs in changing. If this proves why identity change is a long-term process, it also implies that incremental changes in routines and practices may be more effective than radical changes.

“Look, now you can do these 10 things [...]. The only other way is for them to see it in practice when they work in their everyday life.” (Interview 5)

“Some people, less committed, I have to remind them what are the benefits of having become an accredited business school. Others have been contacted by other business schools for collaboration, so the results of the benefit, the return on investment is very much there. And others, they are proud.” (Interview 10)

4. DISCUSSION

Albert and Whetten (1985) describe that identity comprises two components. The first relates to the specific characteristics of an organisation, while the latter is a self-reflexive component, identifying how organisations and its members make sense of who they are. Clegg et al. (2007) define this identity component as a process of delimiting and defining the time and spatial difference of an organisation, by identifying it in terms of “differences and similarities with other organisations” (Clegg et al., 2007, p. 506) across time. While Whetten (2006) defines identity as an enduring characteristic of an organisation, Gioia et al. (2000) consider identity as something dynamic and fluid, whose “seeming durability” is only due to a “stability of the labels” (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 64), while actually the meanings attached to them (i.e., organisational image) change. He and Baruch (2009) state that leadership as well as incremental changes in strategy organisational culture (including value system) may foster the change in identity. Yet, if we accept

the fluidity of an organisation's identity, this fluidity also equips organisations to adapt to external changes (Gioia et al., 2000). This implies that identity change also involves processes of sensemaking at different levels of an organisation. As changing labels positively fosters a new identity, such as the change in the name of *business school A*, becomes a key element that increases the salience of an identity change. Our conceptual framework shows that not only the type of sensemaking but also the interplay between heterogeneous sensemaking processes, between sensemaking and sensegiving, and their timing are crucial. Indeed, while identity can be fluid, this does prevent the existence of tensions between heterogeneity of organisational identities as members differently described "who we are" as an organisation (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). Despite defining identity as the central essence of an organisation, Ashforth et al. (2008) also admit that identities are "relational and comparative" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 328). Hence, within organisations, identity change is affected by the interactions within a collective of multiple sensemaking processes (Ashforth et al., 2008), sometimes through a "social contagion effect" (Hay et al., 2021, p. 182). Ravasi and Schulz (2006) describe sensemaking as a combination of "interorganisational comparison" (Ravasi and Schulz, 2006, p. 453) and "retrospective rationalisation" (Ravasi and Schulz, 2006, p. 454). While the former relates to the comparison between the organisation and other entities in terms of categories and material practices, the latter second implies that organisational culture provides a starting point to make sense of a new identity. This entails that identity is both performative and multifaceted since it requires enacting the identity and sensemaking through interactions among heterogeneous coexisting identities. Hence, it positively contributes to the stream of literature on dynamic identity and its relationship with a change in labels by proposing that a change in labels filters the connection between an institutional change on identity change by bringing salience to the other, initiating, as a consequence, a process of sensemaking.

In terms of institutional change literature, in showing how an organisation's identity may evolve due to an institutional change, He and Baruch (2009) show how correlated changes in regulation and practices may increase the convergence towards a new shared identity. While this may result in a "coercive isomorphism" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), He and Baruch (2009) explain that external pressures (i.e., institutional change) may lead to identity change, which, in turn, creates problems of identity ambiguity and legitimacy, which are addressed by managerial intervention. Yet, while they consider legitimacy from an inter-organisational perspective, our research considers it as an outward and inward process, as legitimation processes take place within the organisation itself. In studying the gap between identity and organisational strategy, Ravasi and Philips (2011) also add communication as a key managerial intervention for more effective identity change. Indeed, they demonstrate that "identity-consistent communication" (Ravasi and Philips, 2011, p. 124) positively impacts the alignment between an organisation's identity and its projected image, if part of a broader strategy of identity management and proper policies are communicated to members. Studying the construction of new identities in well-established organisations, such as universities, Czarniawska and Wolff (1998) highlight the role of the organisational field and action nets (which includes the parties an organisation interacts habitually in the process) in sensemaking processes. Hence, identity requires an effort of "socialisation" as an identity-building exercise (Albert et al., 2000, p. 13). The conceptual framework presented contributes to and combines these two streams of literature by proposing socialising strategies that, by affecting sensemaking, filter the effect of institutional change on driving identity change within organisations. In particular, it

contributes to these two streams of literature by proposing that the strategic combination of both (communication as well as practices and routines) is the most effective strategy to socialised identity change within a well-established organisation after an institutional change, supporting the development of a consensus around a shared social identity (Ashforth et al., 2011; Hay et al., 2021).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the limited literature on how institutional change affects organisational identity, this study contributes to the limited understanding of the topic by proposing a new conceptual model. Findings show that, if institutional change can work as a trigger and catalyser of a change in the identity of an organisation by activating and promoting processes of sensemaking among its members, implementing this identity change successfully may require two important alternative but combined communication approaches (formal/centralised and informal/decentralised) and the development of new routines. Hence, the findings presented in this paper connect two literatures, one showing the role of new practices and another showing the importance of communication in promoting identity change. However, also adding to these two streams of literature by proposing how socialising strategies, combining both routines and communication, foster identity change after an institutional change by filtering and affecting the sensemaking processes of its organisational members. Indeed, while institutional change may drive a change in identity by means of practices and communication, the sensemaking processes that employ both of them while enacting these new routines determines whether it leads to effective identity change. Given that tensions internal to the organisations cannot ever be completely solved, finding some interfaces between the different coalitions, such as rules or agreements, would allow the institutional body to move somewhere together while preserving the pluralism in viewpoints.

However, this study is subject to specific boundary conditions due to the context of study, as it focused on a medium-size public university in Europe. Considering also that the study started when *university A* still had to receive the accreditation and finished almost three months after the announcement, this is an analysis of the impact of institutional changes on identity change processes within well-established organisations in the short-term. Further research may expand the sample of interviewees to better corroborate the conceptual framework understanding how the interplay of heterogeneous sensemaking processes affect consensus building around a new identity. For instance, sampling should aim at reaching a substantial number of interviews in at least each of the three main groups having a different perspective on this identity change as described in various interviews previously conducted. A longitudinal study of this process before the BS accreditation is to be renewed may provide further insights and more substantial results, adopting a medium-to-long-term horizon perspective on this process with the potential to depict a full identity change process as depicted by Kotter's 8-step change model (Kotter, 1996). Since the research highlighted that socialising strategies are crucial to build consensus among the change to this new *business school A's* identity among heterogeneous perspectives on it, adopting a longitudinal approach to this study may help future research to better investigate and try to delineate in more detail socialising strategies as well to better grasp which types of and how socialising strategies, both in terms of routines and communication, impact on the various processes of sensemaking and, thus, which combination of specific routines and communication approaches are more effective in this context.

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