Me with my Client: Consultants' Relational Identity with their Clients and its Implications for their Conduct of Work

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ME WITH MY CLIENT:
CONSULTANTS' RELATIONAL IDENTITY WITH THEIR CLIENTS AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR CONDUCT OF WORK

a dissertation

by

MAMTA BHATT

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ME WITH MY CLIENT:

CONSULTANTS' RELATIONAL IDENTITY WITH THEIR CLIENTS AND ITS

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR CONDUCT OF WORK

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Abstract

Organizational research on individuals' identity focuses primarily on social identity, i.e., the self-concept they derive from their membership in a group, paying limited attention to relational identity or their self-definition in their role-relationships and its consequent implications for how individuals in these relationships get their work done. In this study, I address this gap by examining the nature of consultants' relational identity, i.e., their sense of self in their role-relationships with their clients and its implications for their conduct of work. Analysis of 50 in-depth interviews with consultants reveal that their relational identity can be understood by two dimensions: perceived sense of involvement with the relational other and perceived sense of influence over the relational other. Taken together, they explain four distinct ways in which consultants manifest their relational identity, namely: comprehensive, defined, associative, and impoverished relational identity. Further, I found that relational identity is associated with the degree of informality in the conduct of work between the two individuals in the role-relationship.

Dedication

To my husband and son,
Himanshu and Arnav,
whose love and support strengthened my resolve to reach this goal,
and made this journey enjoyable and gratifying.

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I wish to express my gratitude to all the people – teachers, fellow scholars, friends, and family - who advised, supported, and helped me in completing this dissertation. I was fortunate to have Mary Ann Glynn as the chair of my committee. I have benefitted immeasurably from her insights, thoughts, and judgments in giving shape to this research. I appreciate (and admire) her patience through all the countless iterations of this study; her constructive criticisms were always thought-provoking and helped me in focusing my ideas despite my occasional stubbornness. I will be happy, if one day, I become an advisor even half as good as she has been to me. Her guidance and mentorship have had an indelible mark on my development as a scholar and I will forever be indebted to her; I wish to thank her from the bottom of my heart for all the energies she has invested in me.

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picture but also helped me explore the theoretical aspects more richly and deeply. I have learned a lot from her and these takeaways will guide me in my future career as an academic.

I was blessed to be part of a rich research community at Boston College and will cherish this experience for the rest of my life. In particular, Mike Pratt provided insightful comments in refining the analysis and bringing in rigor to this study. He has gone out of his way in taking a keen interest in this research (and all my other professional endeavors); I value his input and counsel and really appreciate all the help and support. I am also thankful to Steve Borgatti, Judy Clair, Judy Gordon, Spencer Harrison, Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, Bill Stevenson, and Mohan Subramaniam for their help both directly in the form of feedback at various stages of this research and indirectly in developing me as a researcher via classroom teaching and other formal/informal interactions. Finally, I want to thank graduate students at Boston College and beyond for all their wit, knowledge, and insights. It was this sense of community that pulled me through to the very end. I am grateful to Rick Cotton, Rich DeJordy, Amy Gannon, Dan Halgin, Najung Kim, Jamie Ladge, Mark Lavine, Reut Livine-Tarandach, Moriah Meyskens, Camille Pradies, Ryan Raffaelli, Chris Roussin, Laura Singleton, Ian Walsh, and Lee Watkiss.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

*I felt that (the client) was a boss and that (the client) was always right and that (the client) was never wrong. And I felt that I'm just a developer, a **hired help**, that's it.*

- Consultant Rich about self in relation to his client

*I was like a **bullet proof vest** for (the client) where I was really trying to protect her for tough decisions that she had to make.*

- Consultant Bill about self in relation to his client

Motivation for the Study

Relationships are an important aspect of our work lives. As Flum (2001: 262) noted, "to work is to relate;" for most people, "working is inherently social" (Blustein, 2001: 180). Much of organizational research to date has tended to focus on understanding the dynamics of relationships at work. For instance, there has been a plethora of work on relationships in the areas of careers, leadership, and social networks (see Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, for a discussion). This research provides us a wealth of insight about the nature of relationships and their implications on outcomes such as performance, well-being, one's development, and behavior (e.g., Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003; Flum, 2001; Hall & Kahn, 2002; Morrison, 2002). The importance of interaction and relationships has also been emphasized in the research on roles. The structural and symbolic perspectives on roles, although different in terms of the extent of agency an actor has in accomplishing her role, concur on the assertion that roles are essentially enacted in interaction with others (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Sarbin, 1954; Stryker & Statham, 1985). For instance, managers interact with subordinates, doctors with patients,

consultants with clients, and professors with students. Despite the importance of role-relationships at work, what has been missing is a focus on understanding individuals' relational identity, i.e., their definition of self or who they are in their role-relationships, for example, who a manager is in relation to the subordinate, etc. (Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

"Self is relational" (Anderson & Chen, 2002: 619) and individuals' sense of "who am I?" in the organizational context is in part based on the role-relationships they take on (Brewer & Gardener, 1996). However, past research in the field of organizational behavior has focused primarily on individuals' personal identity or social identity (e.g., Ashforth, 2001; Chreim, Williams, & Hinnings, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Personal identity regards the individual as autonomous and refers to those aspects of self that distinguish the individual from others (Brewer & Gardener, 1996). Both relational identity and social identity are social extensions of the self; nonetheless, there is an essential difference between the two. As Brewer and Gardener (1996: 83) argue, social identity refers to "impersonal bonds derived from common identification with some symbolic group or social category" such as work-group, organization, profession, etc.; on the other hand, relational identity is based on "personalized bonds of attachment." In other words, relational identity is the identity derived from dyadic relationships (e.g., parent-child, doctor-patient) and not from a "general social category" (e.g., parents, medical professionals). Thus, social relations and not membership in a social category are the basis of relational identity.

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Recently, Sluss and Ashforth (2007) made a foray in theorizing about relational identity in management, and proposed that it is constitutive of person- and role-based identities of both the individuals in a role-relationship. However, relational identity so far has not been examined empirically and our understanding of its nature is rather limited. For instance, we do not know how individuals express their relational identity and what factors are associated with this expression; by expression of relational identity, I mean individuals' statements about how they see themselves in relation to the other in a role-relationship. Further, we know little about the implications of relational identity for how individuals in a role-relationship work together. Past research in social-psychology argues that relational identity shapes many outcomes; it also gives people a sense of their existence vis-à-vis their relationship partner and provides "order to their interpersonal encounters" (Chen et al., 2006: 167). One could therefore argue that relational identity might shape the way in which the two individuals in a role-relationship interact to get their work done. For instance, consultants who see themselves as a "bullet proof vest" or as a "hired help" (as illustrated in the opening quotations) may interact with the client differently. However, there has not been any empirical examination of this link.

In this study, I address these gaps by examining the relational identity of consultants vis-à-vis the clients they work with (referred to as the client from here on). My interests here are two-fold: first, I investigate the nature of relational identity to shed light on its key content and structural features and second, building on research in social psychology, which suggests that relational identity guides interpersonal encounters (Chen

et al., 2006), I examine how consultants' relational identity vis-à-vis the client might be associated with how the consultant and the client interact to get work done.

Research on relational identity is important for several reasons. First, interactions and relationships are an essential aspect of one's work. As such, "self-definition in organizational contexts is predicated at least partly on" one's role-relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 10). Focusing on only personal and social identities, which do not take into account how individuals define themselves when in relationship with a partner, therefore, provides an incomplete understanding of how one experiences work. Second, relational identity has been argued to have a bearing on interpersonal interactions. Hence, examining relational identity may help to capture the interpersonal and dyadic dynamics between the individuals in a role-relationship. In turn, this might explain how they interact to conduct their work.

Research Questions and Approach

The aim of this study is to elaborate theory in the area of relational identity. Past research on the construct (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Chen, et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) defines the construct, and argues that it is constitutive of role- and person-based aspects and has implications for many individual and interpersonal outcomes. However this research provides us limited understanding about the nature of relational identity at work. For example, we know little about what the content and structure of relational identity look like, how they vary across individuals, and associate with how two individuals interact to get their work done. Existing gaps in the literature led to questions

that guide this study. I examine two research questions: 1) What is the nature of individuals' relational identity at work? 2) How is relational identity associated with the way they interact with the relational other to get work done?

I address these questions by investigating the relational identity of consultants as they perceive it in the context of working with their clients. In particular, I focus on consultants employed in professional consulting firms. Engaging professional consulting firms is increasingly becoming common in areas such as management, new product development, and information systems implementation (Anand, Glick, & Manz, 2002), with global consulting revenues reaching $345 billion in 2010 (based on a report by Plunket Research Ltd.). As firms turn to external sources of knowledge (Anand et al., 2002) such as professional consulting firms, research on consultants' relational identity vis-à-vis their clients and its implications for the conduct of work is very timely.

Also, client relationship and interaction is an integral aspect of consultants' work (Kitay & Wright, 2003; Kitay & Wright, 2004). For instance, in case of IT implementation, firms often use consultants not only for implementing systems but also with a "less tangible goal of acquiring new implementation, operational, maintenance, and training knowledge" (Ko, Kirsch, & King, 2005: 60). Such projects often involve close interaction between consultants and the clients' employees. Since client relationship is a key aspect of consultants' work, this setting is very appropriate for investigating relational identity.

The study uses a qualitative methodology for examining relational identity. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 IT and management consultants engaged in

professional consulting firms. I, thus, study relational identity from the perspective of consultants, which includes their perception of the clients' employees.

Study Contributions

My dissertation offers important contributions to the research on relational identity. Relational identity so far has only been theorized in the organizational literature; I investigate it empirically by examining relational identity of consultants vis-à-vis their clients. My analysis of interviews with consultants reveals two key dimensions – involvement and influence - that are associated with variation in relational identity across individuals. These dimensions provide a way to compare and contrast expressions of relational identity at work. Also, taken together, these two dimensions shed light on different ways in which individuals construct their relational identity at work. The dimensions and the framework of relational identity proposed in the study can serve as a basis for future research to study different types of work-relationships.

In addition to shedding light on the nature of relational identity, I highlight the implication of relational identity on the way the two individuals in a role-relationship interact to get their work done. My research contributes to the understanding of how relational identity associates with the extent of informality in interaction and thus, links identity with the conduct of work in a role-relationship.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I review the theory informing this study. In particular, I discuss the focal constructs, i.e., relational identity

and informality in the conduct of work. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research methodology

and in Chapter 4, I describe the findings based on analysis of interviews with 50

consultants.   Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss a generalized framework of relational

identity followed by implications for research, theory, and practice, and limitations for

the study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY INFORMING THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theory informing this study. I first review the concept of relational identity, drawing from the management and socio-psychological literature. Here, I define the construct, draw out differences between relational identity and other similar constructs, discuss the key content and structural features and implications of relational identity, and explore the gaps in the existing research. I then discuss an aspect of the conduct of work, namely informality in interaction, which may be associated with relational identity. This is followed by a discussion of relational identity in the setting that I am examining. Finally, based on the review, I unpack the research questions posed in this study.

Identity Defined

Identity has been studied at many levels, for instance individuals, group or team, organization, culture, etc. The questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" capture the core of identity at these different levels of analysis (Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, & Hatch, 2006). I focus on individuals' identity, which is defined as the meanings they ascribe to themselves (Gecas, 1982). Individuals' identity has three bases or loci – a) personal identity or those aspects of self-concept that differentiate the self from others, b) relational self, i.e., "the self-concept derived from connections and role-relationships with others" (Brewer & Gardener, 1996: 84), and c) collective self, which refers to the social identity that one derives from membership in a group or category, such as occupational roles, race, gender, organizational membership, etc. (Ashforth, 2001).

The framework proposed by Brewer and Gardener (1996) essentially suggests that

identity is dynamic. People can identify themselves as individuals, relationship partners

or members of a group in a particular situation and their identity can change over time in

interaction with others. For example, many roles can be experienced in terms of a social

category (e.g., nurses, teachers, parents, consultants) or specific role-relationships (e.g.,

nurse-patient, teacher-student, parent-child, consultant-client). In this study, I focus on

individuals' relational identity at work or the identity that they derive from their work-

based role-relationships. Roles are the "building blocks" of an organization (Sluss &

Ashforth, 2007) and a key aspect of our work lives is interaction with others in role-

relationships. Thus, role-relationships are an important source of an individual's identity

and may bear upon many work-related outcomes.

Relational Identity Defined

Relational identity refers to "the self-concept derived from connections and role-

relationships with others" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: 84; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). It

includes aspects that characterize an individual's self when relating to a relational other

(Chen et al., 2006: 153). Relational others refer to individuals with whom one shares a

relationship with. As Figure 2.1 depicts, relational identity captures an individual's sense

of "who I am" or "how I define myself" when in relationship with another person. For

example, a person's relational identity with his or her mother is "me when I'm with

mom" (Chen et al., 2006: 153). In an organizational context, a manager's relational

identity with the subordinate denotes who a manager is when in context of his or her

subordinate. Similarly, there could be many other role-relationships, for instance, service provider-customer, doctor-patient, etc.

FIGURE 2.1

Relational identity

Self
"Who am I?" ← Relational other
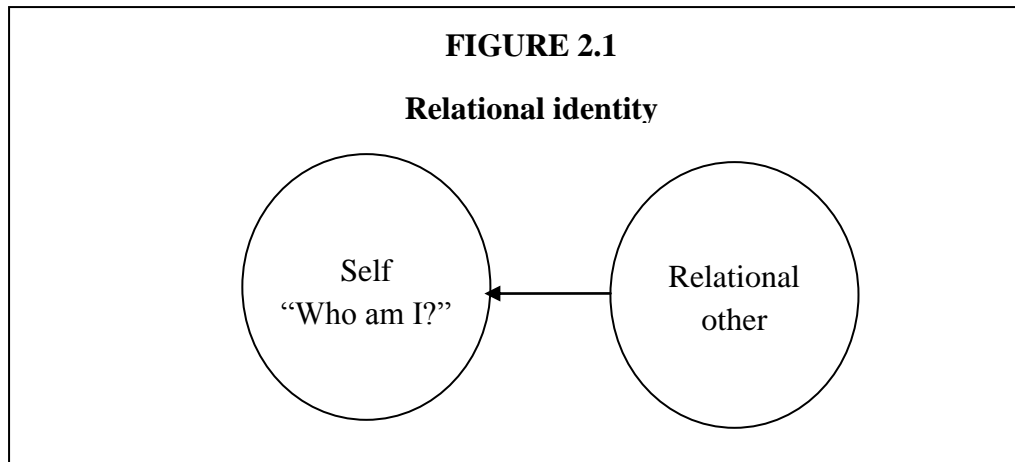
People possess multiple relational identities, which exist at different levels of specificity. An individual may have a relational identity in a specific role-relationship, called relation-specific or particularized relational identity (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), for example, a manager's sense of self in relation to a specific subordinate. They may also have a more generalized relational identity, which refers to their self-definition in context of a relationship domain, (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), for instance, how a manager sees himself or herself in relation to his or her subordinates in general. The generalized and particularized relational identities inform each other in terms of setting expectations and guiding behavior.

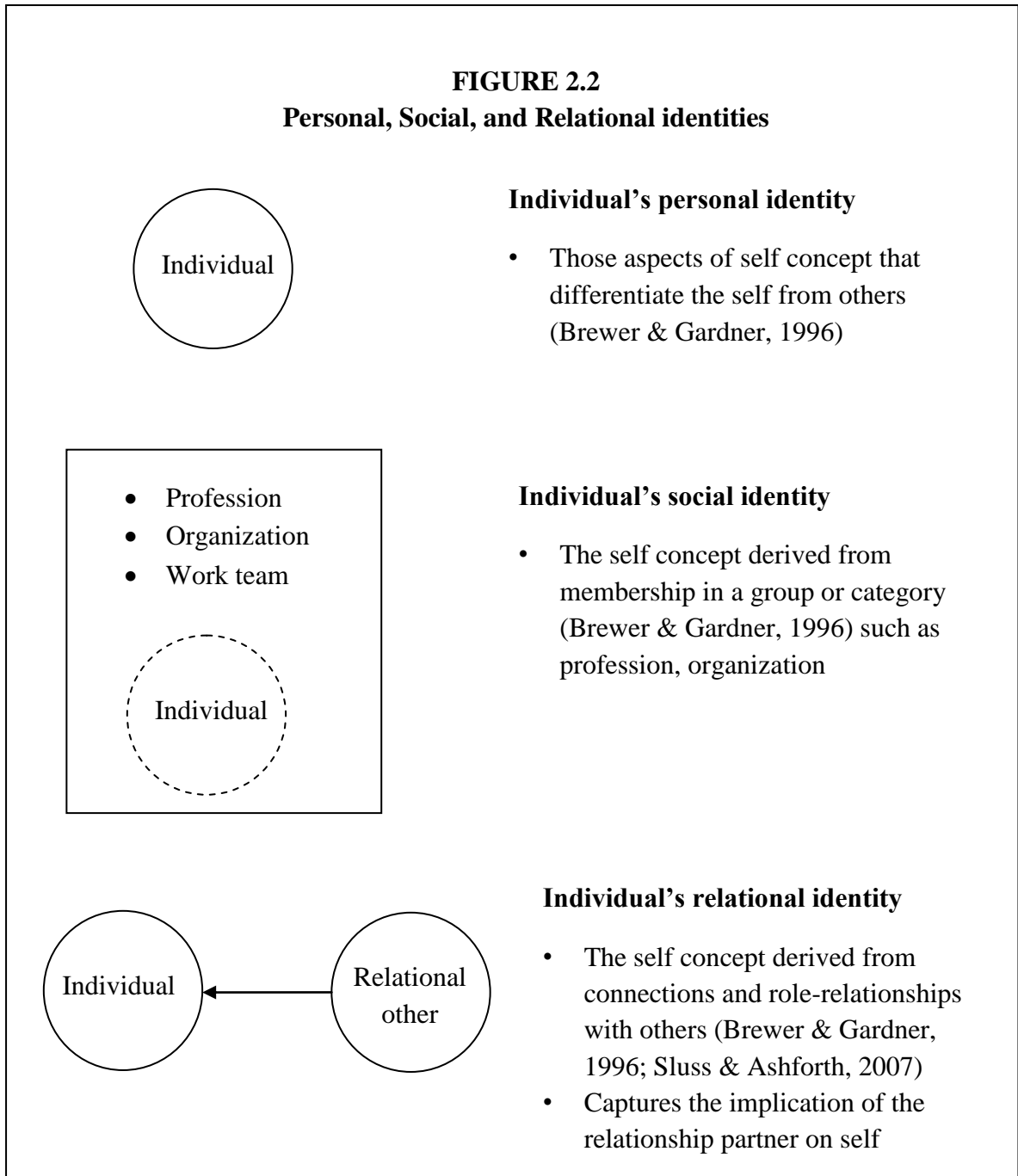**Distinguishing Relational Identity from Related Constructs**

There are many similar concepts that focus on identity of an individual, their relationships, and the work they do. In this section, I draw out differences between them

and relational identity. My purpose here is to clarify the construct of relational identity as well as to make the case of why we need to look at it when there has been research on other similar concepts.

Relational identity versus personal and social identities. Relational identity of an individual is different from his or her personal and social identities (see Figure 2.2). It explicitly involves a connection with the relationship partner and is person's self-definition in context of this relational other (Chen, et al., 2006). Personal identity, on the other hand, entails putting a boundary around an individual's self. It involves interpersonal comparison with others and looking at the individual as an autonomous entity (Chen et al., 2006).

While both relational identity and social identity are "social extensions of self" (Brewer & Gardener, 1996: 83), they differ in their level of inclusiveness. Social identity is derived from being a member of a group or category, such as profession or organization, and hence, subsists on an impersonal bond with other group-members (Chreim, et al., 2007). For instance, professional identity entails drawing a boundary around the occupational group and is associated with the enactment of professional role. These social identities do not take into account how individuals' sense of self may be shaped by their ties with a relational other, which is the focus of relational identity. Thus, relational identity involves connection with known and identifiable relational others. Further, relational identity is unique to an individual, and it evolves out of the dyadic interaction between the individual and the relational other (Anderson & Chen, 2002). As such, there may be variability in an individual's self-definition in relation to different

relational others. On the other hand, social identities, such as professional identity, are

shared among the group members and when activated, an individual becomes an

interchangeable exemplar of these groups.

FIGURE 2.2
Personal, Social, and Relational identities

Individual's personal identity

- Those aspects of self concept that differentiate the self from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996)

Individual

Individual's social identity

- Profession
- Organization
- Work team

- The self concept derived from membership in a group or category (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) such as profession, organization

Individual

Individual's relational identity

Individual ← Relational other

- The self concept derived from connections and role-relationships with others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007)
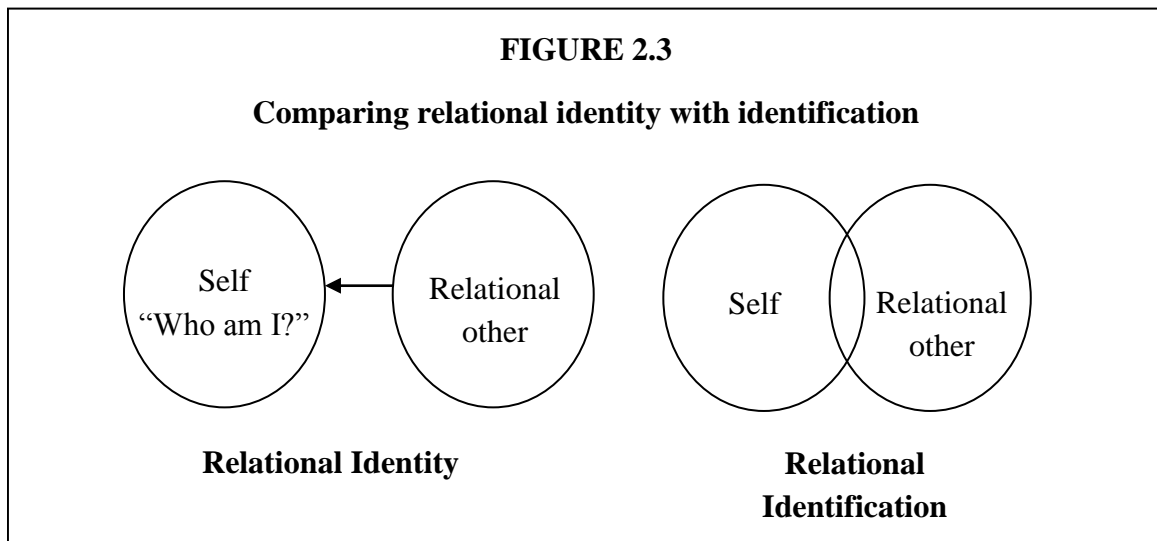- Captures the implication of the relationship partner on self

While these three bases of self, i.e., personal, social, and relational identities, are theoretically different, there may be some degree of overlap or a relationship between them. To illustrate, while the relational identity of an individual is relatively unique and perhaps reflective of the person's individual identity, some social identity elements may be a part of the relational identity too (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). One possible form of social identity is the professional identity of the individual which is his/her self-definition as a member of a profession and is associated with the enactment of a professional role; for example, relational identity of a teacher vis-à-vis his/her student may include the elements of teacher's professional identity or how all teachers enact their professional role.

However, the overlap between relational identity and the other two bases of identity does not make their differences any less significant. Individuals' behavior and motivations may differ depending upon which base of self is situationally active or salient; as Brewer & Gardener (1996) argued, there are different basis of evaluation and motivation associated with the personal, relational, and social identities. Further, these different bases of selves may be in a conflict with each other as well, for example, an individual's behavior in relation to a significant other may be uncharacteristic of his or her behavior outside of this relationship (Chen et al., 2006).

Relational identity versus relational identification. Relational identity is also different from relational identification. Brewer and Gardener (1996) and many other identity theorists, treat the two terms as synonymous (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) suggesting that the activation of relational identity leads to blurring of boundaries between the self and the

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partner. However, other theorists regard relational identity as distinct from significant others themselves (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). In other words, relational identity is "composed of self knowledge that is distinguishable from, but linked in memory to, knowledge about significant others" (Chen et al., 2006: 153). It refers to the identity derived from role-relationships and answers the question, "who am I in this role-relationship?" On the other hand, relational identification is defined as "the extent to which one defines oneself in terms of a given role-relationship" and answers the question, "how much do I internalize that identity as a partial definition of self?" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 11). Thus, these two concepts are highly related, yet while relational identity refers to the nature of self-definition, relational identification implies the extent of identification with the other (see Figure 2.3).

FIGURE 2.3

Comparing relational identity with identification

Self
"Who am I?"

Relational
other

Self

Relational
other

Relational Identity

**Relational
Identification**

Relational identity versus roles and relationship. Similarly, relational identity is different from roles. Roles refer to the characteristic behaviors of individuals in a particular position or context (Biddle, 1979). For instance, the role that a consultant

performs for the client and consulting firms may include advising, making proposals, analyzing the financial reports, developing strategy, creating intellectual property, obtaining relevant information, facilitating the choice of available options (Argyris, 1970), and implementing software. These may, in part, be determined by the contract between the consulting and the client firm. While these roles include consultants' behaviors, they do not involve their beliefs and knowledge about the self in this relationship. Similarly, relationship refers to the bond between the two individuals. It is a property of the dyad whereas relational identity is the meaning an individual derives from the relationship and resides in the individual.

Relational identity versus other relational constructs. In the field of social-psychology, in addition to relational identity, there are other approaches that delve into self in relation with others, for instance, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (IOS) (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), relational-interdependent self-construal (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), and interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These approaches involve self in a relationship; however they are different from relational identity as conceptualized in this study.

For instance, Aron and Aron's (1986) IOS suggests that in close relationships, a person may expand the self to include the resources, characteristics, and perspectives of the other. In other words, close relationships involve self-expansion or self-extension to include the significant other in one's definition of self or merging of self and the one with whom one shares relationship with (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et. al., 1992). Self-expansion and inclusion of the self (IOS) are involved in relational identification which

essentially is the "(partial) definition of oneself in terms of a given role-relationship" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 15).   As such, these concepts come closer to relational identification and not relational identity, which refers to how individuals define themselves in their role-relationships.

Similarly, like IOS, relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC) too is closer to relational identification rather than relational identity. RISC refers to a "tendency of oneself to think in terms of relationships with close others" (Cross et al., 2000: 791) and as such posits that the understanding of self is based on the premise that a person is connected to others. The RISC scale assesses the degree to which individuals include close relationships in their self-concepts (Cross et al., 2000) and focuses on individual differences in this self-construal. It does not provide any details about the content of one's relational self (Chen et al., 2006).

Finally, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that while North American cultures foster independent construal of self, Japanese and other East Asian cultures facilitate an interdependent self-view, i.e., relationships with others in specific contexts define the self in these cultures. According to them, interdependence includes the awareness that one is a part of a larger social group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Markus and Kitayama's (1991) idea of interdependence involves personalized relationships as well as memberships in groups, and thus their conceptualization is broader in scope than relational identity (Chen et al., 2006), which is the identity based on role-relationships. Further, relationships may be important in defining self not only in Japan but also in other cultures (Chen et al., 2006).

Features of Relational Identity: Content and Structure

The literature on social identity makes distinctions between two central features of identity: its content and structure. These features can also be used to understand the nature of an individual's relational identity. I draw from this research to elaborate upon relational identity content and structure.

Relational identity content. Identity content refers to "one's self-beliefs and self-evaluations—to how one answers the questions 'Who am I?' and 'How do I feel about myself?' (Campbell, Assanand, & Paula, 2003: 116). Content provides meaning to self (Oyserman & Lee, 2008) and includes the "total amount of information" that a person associates with the self (Showers, Abramson, & Hogan, 1992: 479). Thus, content essentially constitutes self-hypotheses held in memory and may include knowledge components (e.g., traits, physical characteristics, roles, values) that one assigns to oneself (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallee, & Lehman, 1996).

In the same vein, one may suggest that relational identity content refers to the meaning one derives in a role-relationship and includes information about different bases of self and domains (e.g., interpersonal, achievement) that one includes in ones self-definition. For instance, relational identity is argued to be constitutive of "attribute- and role-based conceptions of the self in the context of relevant significant other" (Chen et al., 2006: 154; Anderson & Chen, 2002; Fiske, 1992). For instance, as Chen et al. (2006: 154) mentioned, an individual's relational self vis-à-vis his younger sibling may include personal and attribute-based aspects such as "jokester" and "fun loving" and role-based self-aspects such as "authority figure." As Figure 2.4 depicts, Sluss and Ashforth's

(2007) recent conceptualization of relational identity also suggests that it incorporates the role- and person-based identities of the two individuals in a role-relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Next, I elaborate upon the constituents of individuals' relational identity at work, i.e., role- and person-based identities.

Role-based identity. A possible form of generic self knowledge associated with relational identity is the self-conception in roles vis-à-vis the other (Anderson & Chen, 2002). Roles are characteristic behaviors of individuals in a particular context (Biddle, 1979). Role boundaries set the limits for roles by demarcating the activities that belong to the role and facilitate "the articulation of a role identity by circumscribing the domain of the role" (Ashfoth, 2001: 6). Role-based identity thus includes the "goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons typically associated with the role" (Ashforth, 2001: 6). It draws from social identity theory (SIT) (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995) and identity theory (IT) (Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991). Both SIT and IT suggest that a person derives his or her identity from membership in a category. As such, role identities "anchor or ground self-conceptions in social domains" (Ashforth, 2001: 27) and are independent of the person who enacts the role (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

While role identities refer to what that person would typically do in that role, relational identity includes that part of the role-based identity of the two individuals that is relevant to that role-relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). For instance, in a superior-subordinate role-relationship, superior's role-based identity may be based on roles such as monitoring performance, setting directions, career advising, mentoring, strategic planning with the management, public relations, and customer management. However,

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superior's relational identity vis-à-vis the subordinate will be based on only those roles

that are relevant to their role-relationship. As such, strategic planning with the

management, public relations, and customer management may not be a part of superior's

relational identity vis-à-vis the subordinate.

FIGURE 2.4
Constituents of Relational identity
(Sluss & Ashforth, 2007)

Role characteristics of A

Goals, values, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons

Role characteristics of B

Goals, values, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons

Relational identity of Individual A vis-à-vis Individual B

Individual characteristics of A

Personal qualities, needs, preferences, strengths, weakness

Individual characteristics of B

Personal qualities, needs, preferences, strengths, weakness

Further, relational identity includes not just the role (which refers to what an

individual does) but the meaning that individuals derive in that role vis-à-vis the

relational other. This self-definition may also include evaluations of their self importance

or self-worth in a role-relationship (Dutton et al., 2010). For instance, an individual's

relational self with his or her manager may be composed of the sense of being inferior and deferential.

Person-based identity. This includes unique aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the person from others (Brewer & Gardener, 1996). It refers to the personal qualities, interaction styles, beliefs and values, expectations, strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of an individual (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Role-based identities have a "room for idiosyncratic enactment" (Ashforth, 2001: 28), i.e., individuals have a certain amount of latitude in enacting a role-based identity according to their preferences and styles (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Thus, relational identity includes those personal attributes of both the individuals in a role-relationship that bear upon the roles (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Individuals may bring in different aspects of their personal identities to the role-relationship. For instance, a manager may relate to the subordinate in terms of their common interest in sports or similar experiences, such as being parents.

Relational identity structure. Identity is multifaceted and structure captures how individuals incorporate their multiple identities in their overall self-concept (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Thus, identity structure refers to how the contents of identity are organized (Campbell, et al., 2003; Showers et al., 1992). There are two principal ways of looking at structure - plurality or breadth, which reflects diversity of self and complementarity, which signals synergy or coherence in different self-aspects (Campbell, et al., 2003; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Dutton et al., 2010; Showers et al., 1992). I will now elaborate upon them and discuss how they may help in understanding the nature of relational identity.

Plurality. Individuals may use a number of self-aspects to represent themselves in a role-relationship. *Identity plurality or breadth* refers to the multiplicity of self-concept or the number of distinct self-aspects or cognitive categories used to depict self (Campbell, et al., 1996; 2003) vis-à-vis the relationship partner. Relational identity will be relatively plural and broad when an individual relates to another in a role-relationship in multiple and different ways, for instance, as a role-occupant and also as an individual where he or she brings in personal aspects to the role-relationship. On the other hand, relational identity will be relatively singular when an individual relates to the relational other mainly in terms of his or her role. Thus, plural identity will not only include a number of self-aspects but they will also be non-redundant.

Complementarity. The other aspect of identity structure is complementarity, which indicates the extent to which different self-aspects are compatible; i.e., individuals find their distinct self-aspects synergistic and try to forge linkages between them (Dutton et al., 2010). When individuals observe lower relational identity complementarity, they find their different self-aspects (for example their role and personal aspects) conflicting (Dutton et al., 2010). In such situations, they may resort to either identity compartmentalization or identity deletion (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Identity compartmentalization is characterized by segregation of different self-aspects, for instance, individuals may keep their professional and personal aspects separate. Identity deletion happens when they consciously chose to limit the expression of a number of self-aspects (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). For instance, an individual may try to shed or get rid of their personal identities while relating with the other at work.

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On the other hand, when relational identity complementarity is relatively high, individuals find their different self-aspects compatible (Dutton et al., 2010). In such a situation, they may resort to identity aggregation or identity integration (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). In case of identity aggregation, individuals try to forge links between different self-aspects, for instance, they may try to bring in their personal identities to the role-relationship with the belief that it facilitates their role (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Identity integration happens when individuals synthesize different self-aspects to a new hybrid identity. For instance, individuals may see no barriers in their role and personal self-aspects, while relating with the other.

Limitations of Past Research on Relational Identity

Past research on relational identity is limited in many ways. Most of this research has been theoretical. Previous empirical work in the field has explored the connection between relational identity orientation and diversity-related organizational outcomes (Brickson, 2000), social exchange choices (Flynn, 2005), negotiation outcomes (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishi, & O'Brien 2006), and organizational justice (Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006). In this research, the focus has been on understanding the extent to which individuals define themselves as relationship partners; what has been paid relatively limited attention on is the nature of relational identity. While Sluss and Ashforth (2007) introduced a framework of relational identity and argued that relational identity integrates the role- and person-based conceptions of self, this work only provides the starting point

in understanding the construct in the field of management and many questions still remain unanswered.

To elaborate, given Sluss and Ashforth's (2007) assertion that relational identity is constitutive of role- and person-based aspects of self, can we draw any inferences about the nature of relational identity? For instance, can we say something about the key features of relational identity such as its content and structure? We do not know how these components are expressed - do all individuals include both these components in their relational identity or is there a variation in how they constitute their relational identity? Also, are there any nuances to individuals' expression of their role and personal identities in their relational identity, for example do they express their selves in their roles in transactional or inclusive terms? Further, are there any dimensions or factors that may explain variations in the expression of relational identity? I attempt to address these gaps in my research. In particular, I do that through my first research question, where I investigate: What is the nature of relational identity at work?

Implications of Relational Identity

Relational identity has implications for various psychological processes and outcomes. For instance, it has been argued to have a bearing on the affect and emotion experienced in relation to the other (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Chen et al., 2006). There has been evidence from other perspectives on self and significant others that support this argument. Past research suggests that when a person finds a role-relationship with a specific individual incongruent with the typical role-relationship with self and the

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relational other, they experience negative affect (Baum & Anderson, 1999). Similarly, attachment theorists have theorized about feelings such as fear of separation and joy of uniting with people one is attached with (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Further, research on relational schemas also suggests that secure relationship schemas bring out positive affect (Mikulincer, Gillath, Halevy, Avihou, Avidan, & Eshkoli, 2001). There has also been evidence that emotions such as embarrassment (Keltner, Young, & Heatherton, 1997), guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), and jealousy (Buss & Schnitt, 1993) are elicited in social interaction with significant others.

Similarly, relational identity has implications for behaviors expressed towards the relationship partner (Chen et al., 2006). For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991: 230) suggested that relational self involves tasks related to belonging and fitting in, occupying one's proper place, engaging in appropriate action, and promoting the goals of the relational others. The related literatures of transference and attachment theories also provide evidence that behavior is an integral aspect of relational selves. For instance, the transference literature suggests that activation of relational self initiates a behavioral confirmation cycle, i.e., when relational self is activated with a new person, the individual tends to behave according to the beliefs and expectation that are consistent with the associated relational self (Berk & Anderson, 2000). Similarly, attachment theories suggest that people display different attachment behaviors such as exploration, care-giving, and support seeking in a relationship.

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FIGURE 2.5
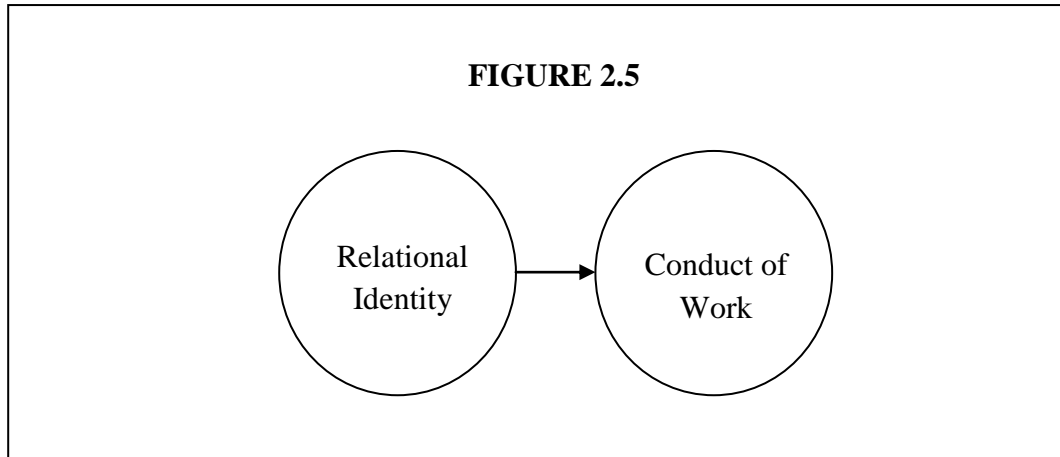
Perhaps, one of the key implications of relational identity at work draws from the proposition that it helps an individual locate his/her place vis-à-vis the other and hence guides the interpersonal interaction. As Chen et al. (2006: 166) argued:

> Relational selves serve orienting and meaning functions by informing the individual of his or her place in the social world and imparting meaning to this place. That is, given that they designate the self in relation to significant others, relational selves help people confirm their existence vis-à-vis others in the social environment and thereby impart order to their interpersonal encounters.

Thus, past research in social-psychology argues that relational identity plays a "pervasive role in people's daily interpersonal lives" and shapes a range of outcomes. It emphasizes that it gives people a sense of their existence vis-à-vis the relationship partner and provides "order to their interpersonal encounters" (Chen et al. 2006: 167). Drawing from this research, one may argue that relational identity at work bears upon the interaction dynamic of individuals in a role-relationship and as Figure 2.5 depicts, may associate with how two people in a role-relationship interact to conduct their work.

A key way of describing "modes of social activity" in work organizations is informality in interaction (Morand, 1995: 831). Since relational identity, by providing an

individual with a sense of place and orientation, shapes interpersonal encounters (Chen, et al., 2006), one may argue that it will have implications for informality or formality in the interaction of the two individuals in a role-relationship.

Understanding the association of relational identity on informality is important for two reasons. One, as Morand (1995) argued, interaction is intertwined with work accomplishment. As such, understanding informality in interaction essentially sheds light on the manner in which work is conducted. Second, the extent of informality of interactions bears upon a variety of organizational outcomes such as innovation (Allen, 1977), cooperation within teams (Pinto, Pinto, & Prescott, 1993), performance of teams (Kraut, Fussel, Brennan, & Siegel, 2002), information flow, creativity, and perceptions of fairness (Morand, 1995). In general, these outcomes are important for organizations but they are especially salient in case of consulting relationships, which are a focus of this study.

Informality in the Conduct of Work

As Morand (1995) argues, informality and formality can be understood as "interaction orders" (Goffman, 1983), which embody a set of understandings about how actors conduct themselves. These terms are used by actors to describe social situations (Atkinson, 1982; Morand, 1995). Individuals working together in a common situation, for instance two persons in a role-relationship, tend to generate these conventions or rules of co-mingling. These rules, then, guide their interaction and establish the way in which those people conduct themselves in a situation where they are together. Thus, formality

and informality are two sets of interaction orders that embody different conventions of conducting oneself in a social or interpersonal situation.

Formality and informality have been used in the literature to connote a variety of aspects of interaction. For instance, authors have used these terms to refer to "structuring and predictability of discourse" (Irvine, 1979: 774), with formal situations being subject to greater number of rules in speech and interaction and as such having lesser spontaneity as well as variability of topics in conversation (Morand, 1995; Wolfson, 1976). These specific rules may concern aspects such as the type of questions that may be asked, who will speak first, and turn taking in conversations. In a formal interaction, speech turns are allocated, there are not many overlaps or interruptions in conversations, and there are relatively fewer changes in these topics. Formal interaction would also involve more planning, schedules, and advance preparation. An informal interaction, on the other hand, is loose and free flowing. It is not pre-scripted and involves random conversation and brainstorming. Individuals can have water cooler conversations and meet each other down the hallway instead of scheduling formal meetings (Fayard & Weeks, 2007).

Further, extent of formality also refers to the characteristics of the social situation, for instance, a formal situation is characterized by seriousness and respect (Irvine, 1979) and would entail use of etiquettes and polite behavior. Individuals will use a respectful tone or manner of speech and would observe greater decorum and use more formal word choices, as Morand (1995) illustrated, "Could you tolerate a slight imposition?" versus "Mind if I butt in?" Further, formal interaction is also characterized by the use of last names and titles; even in cases where individuals address each other using first names,

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there is a certain degree of deference in how they express themselves. Informal conduct of work, on the other hand, would involve levity and joking behavior, expressions that are casual and colloquial (Morand, 1995; Irvine, 1979), and use of first names and manner of speech that connotes equality (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008).

Past research makes certain arguments about factors that may be associated with informal interactions. In particular, external and technological environments, organizational culture and structure have been found to have a bearing on the extent of formality at workplace (Morand, 1995). For instance, organizations where problem solving is non-routine in nature and innovation is important, interaction is relatively informal as this allows for idea generation and creativity. Similarly, mechanistic organizations would usually have formal interaction and organic organizations would have informal interaction. Another factor is the setting, which refers to the physical construction of the space. Offices that have open spaces have more informal interaction as people feel it is acceptable to stop and talk to each other instead of scheduling a meeting in advance (Fayard & Weeks, 2007).

In addition to aspects of the organization, individuals' identities could also have an implication for the extent of formality in interaction. For instance, "positional identities" (i.e., those related to one's social rank and positions that are widely or publicly known) associate with formality; on the other hand, personal identities, which are more individualized, associate with informality (Irvine, 1979: 778). Drawing from this, one might suggest that relational identities that are constituted of both role- and person-based elements will be characterized by relatively informal interaction; on the other hand,

relational identities that are constituted of only role-based self-aspects will be characterized by social distance and hence formal interaction. Also, relational identities that invoke differences in status or rank and a sense of respect or deference due to these differences may be associated with formal interaction. Since there has not been any work that dwells upon the association of relational identity with informality in interaction, I address this gap through Research Question 2: How does relational identity relate to the conduct of work? In particular, I investigate relational identity and its implications for informality in the interaction of the two individuals in a setting where relationships are a key aspect of work, namely the consulting relationships. I now describe relational identity in this setting.

Relational Identity of Consultants vis-à-vis their Clients

This study aims to address the gaps in the existing research on relational identity by empirically examining it in the case of consultants employed in professional consulting firms. I now discuss my conceptualization of relational identity in this setting. Consultants employed in professional consulting firms are permanent employees for the consulting firm that sends them to the client for specific projects. Client firms often employ consultants, also sometimes referred as knowledge contingent workers (Anand et al., 2002), as subject matter experts in new product development, information systems design and implementation, etc. This is especially prevalent in high technology industries, where the firms need that expertise for a relatively shorter duration (e.g., for adapting entrepreneurship resource planning or ERP software for the client) and do not

see any sense in employing people on a permanent basis. They rather hire them on a

contract for a specific period (Anand et al., 2002). Similarly, firms also engage

management consultants, who range from those employed in large- and medium-sized

consulting firms to independent practitioners (Kitay & Wright, 2003).

Engaging consultants has many advantages. It has been argued that the "most

significant impact of contingent work may be on the knowledge stock of the firm"

(Matusik & Hill, 1998: 681). In particular, consultants are regarded as the core agents in

the dissemination of knowledge in the form of tools and practices (Sturdy, Handley,

Clark & Fincham, 2008). Permanent workers can benefit from their coexistence by

observing how consultants approach tasks differently and questioning the ways that are

being taken for granted in their firms (Matusik & Hill, 1998). These advantages

essentially point to the interactional nature of their work with the clients.

In this study, I focus on understanding consultants' relational identity vis-à-vis

their typical client. Drawing from previous research, I define relational identity of

consultants as their self-definition in their role-relationship with their client employees

(Brewer & Gardener, 1996; Chen et al., 2006) or consultants' self expressions of "me

when I am with my client." While most research on relational identity tends to look at

hierarchical relationship (e.g., Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; 2008) in individuals who belong

to the same organization, I focus on the relational identity in a role-relationship that spans

across organizational boundaries. The characteristics of this setting are theoretically

important for studying relational identity. Even though consultants are technically (or

contractually) organizational outsiders, they typically perform tasks within the client

organization (Bartel & Dutton, 2001) and have extensive contact with the client employees (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). As a result, consultants may not perceive themselves clearly as outsiders in the client organization but instead as insiders or perhaps as straddling the boundary with some ambiguity. Their perception of boundaries has been found to have a bearing upon kind of roles they take on (Kitay & Wright, 2004). Since relational identity is based on individuals' connections and role-relationship (Brewer & Gardener, 1996) and is argued to be constitutive of their role-based identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), it may be said that consultants' perception of insider-outsider boundaries in the client relationship may bear upon their construction of relational identity.

Further, I explore relational identity from the consultants' perspective and include their perceptions of self in context of their client. Consultants may possess relational identities at different levels of specificity. For instance, they may have a particularized relational identity vis-à-vis a specific client or a more generalized relational identity with their clients in general. In my research, I focus on consultants' relational identity in context of a typical client employee. Additionally, I focus on consultants' relational identity and not their relational identification as my purpose is to understand the nature of their relational identity and not the extent to which they define themselves in terms of the given role-relationship (i.e., relational identification).

Most identity theorists in the social-psychology and management tradition opine that relational identity captures the implication of the relationship partner on self and is constitutive of role- and person-based conceptions of self vis-à-vis this relational other.

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Hence, one can argue that consultants' relational identity will include their role-and person-based self-conceptions. Drawing on past work on consultant-client relationship, I now elaborate upon these two elements:

Role characteristics: Past research has identified many consultants' roles. Under the broad role of helping the client in moving forward and adding value (Kakabadse, Louchart, & Kakabadse, 2006), business consultants may perform the resource role, which involves helping the clients in solving problems based on their past experiences (Kubr, 1996); expert role, which involves bringing the expertise and skills that the client lacks (Schein, 1988); and other roles such as obtaining relevant information, facilitating the choice of available options (Argyris, 1970) and organizational learning (Turner, 1988). Relational identity of consultants vis-à-vis their clients include only those aspects of role-based identity that are relevant for the consultant-client relationship, such as advising, but does not include their activities internal to the consulting firm, such as developing intellectual property, conducting appraisals, etc.

Consultants' roles may differ in the extent to which their relationship with the client is transaction based or involves forming relationships (Kitay & Wright, 2003; 2004). Consultants may form a close relationship with the client's employees to perform the partner or implementer role (Kitay & Wright, 2003). In this case, they "become embedded within the fabric of the client enterprise for greater or lesser periods of time" leading to blurring of the insider-outsider boundary (Kitay & Wright, 2004: 12). As such, client's expectations from the consultants may not be restricted to the contract or their job description (Katz & Kahn, 1978). On the contrary, they can have a detached

relationship with a lower level of interaction with the client's employees and take an advisor or provider role (Kitay & Wright, 2003), in which case the boundaries between consultant and the client's employees are relatively clear-cut (Kitay & Wright, 2004). Thus, consultants may have multiple roles; depending upon the situation, client and their own style, they adopt appropriate roles (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Chapman, 1998). One may speculate that perceived closeness of relationship may associate with consultants' expression of relational identity.

Individual characteristics: Relational identity of a consultant vis-à-vis the client includes those personal characteristics of the consultant and the client that bear upon their role-relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Some aspects of their personal selves that consultants and the clients may bring to the role-relationship include shared interests, similar experiences, etc. Also, consultants' relational identity vis-à-vis client's employees may include their personal style in dealing with the client's employees, i.e., whether consultants prefer a close or detached interaction with them. Further, the competence and level of confidence of the client have a bearing on the power distribution in the consultant client relationship (Fincham, 1999), which may in turn, associate with relational identity.

Research Questions

Given the theoretical background and past work on consultant-client relationship, I now elaborate upon the two research questions: 1) What is the nature of relational identity at work? 2) How is relational identity associated with the conduct of work? Unpacking these two questions implies a number of other questions, i.e.:

a) What is the nature of relational identity at work?

    i. What is the relational identity content of these self-descriptions, i.e., what are the key self-aspects included in consultants' self-definition?

    ii. What does the relational identity structure of consultants look like, i.e., how do they organize these different relational self-aspects?

    iii. How does the expression of role- and person-based self-aspects vary across individuals?

b) How does relational identity associate with the conduct of work?

    i. How does it associate with the extent of informality in interaction between the two individuals?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the concept of relational identity. In doing so, I discussed the components of relational identity and distinguished relational identity from relational identification as well as social and personal identity. Further, I drew comparisons between relational identity and other constructs that focus on self in a relationship, such as IOS, RISC, and interdependent self-construal. I then identified gaps in the existing research on the construct. In particular, the gaps pertain to the nature of relational identity and its implication for how individuals work together. Following this trail, I described an aspect of conduct of work that may associate with relational identity, namely: informality in interaction. In the end, I described relational identity in the setting that I am investigating and elaborated upon the research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this dissertation, I investigate the nature of relational identity and its implications for the conduct of work. In doing so, I build upon previous work on identity in general and relational identity in particular (e.g., Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Thus, my aim is *theory elaboration,* which refers to the "process of refining a theory, model, or concept through qualitative data analysis" (Vaughan, 1992: 175). Qualitative methods have been used to study individuals' identity (e.g., Kreiner, et al., 2006; Pratt et al., 2006) and are particularly well-suited for studying individuals' interpretations and perceptions of phenomenon (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Hinings, 1997; Maitlis, 2005). Since my focus is to understand relational identity from the perspective of participants, qualitative methods were especially appropriate to conduct an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. To this effect, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 IT and management consultants employed in professional consulting firms to examine their relational identity vis-à-vis their clients.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. First, I provide an overview of the research context and the rationale of studying it. I then describe the data collection process, where I discuss the sample and the interviewing process. I end with a description of my analytic technique.

Data Collection

Research context. In order to elaborate theory in the area of relational identity, I interviewed consultants employed in professional consulting firms. Client relationship is

a key aspect of consultants' work, making this context very appropriate for studying the construct. Client firms engage professional consulting firms (e.g., Accenture, McKinsey & Company, Pricewaterhouse Coopers) as subject matter experts to identify and solve specific problems in fields of management, information systems design and implementation, and new product development, etc. (Anand, Glick, & Manz, 2002). Most consulting firms emphasize the importance of client relationship explicitly on their websites. Research also suggests that relationships between *individual* consultants and *individual* members of their client firms are an important aspect of consultants' work with the clients (Arnold & Nguyen, 2006; Kakabadse, et al., 2005). Consultants normally spend a substantial amount of time at the client organization; for instance, many consultants in my sample spent all 5 days of the week working at the client firm, where client interaction formed a significant aspect of their work. Thus, consulting relationships are a particularly apt setting for studying relational identity.

While the specific emphasis on relationships makes the consulting relationship well-suited for studying relational identity, the experiences of consultants are also generalizable to the broader workforce and role-relationships such as, manager-subordinate, doctor-patient, coworker-coworker, etc. Past research argues that roles essentially create task dependencies necessitating interaction among role-occupants for task accomplishment as well as fulfillment of social-psychological needs (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). Given the importance of interaction in role-relationships in general, my findings on consultants' relational identity construction may find an application in case of other role-relationships as well. Consultants in my sample themselves mentioned that

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their relationship with the client has similarities with other role-relationships within their own organization. This quotation from a participant of my study conveys the idea:

I don't see a real difference between that dynamic in consulting as opposed to just being in a fulltime staff position, and you're just trying to suck up to your boss. Everybody wants the boss to like you more than anyone else. So, in this case, our boss is the client. – MF25

Sample. The primary method of data collection involved 50 interviews that I conducted with IT (n=25) and management (n=25) consultants employed in professional consulting firms. The criteria of selection was to identify IT and Management consultants engaged in U.S. based professional consulting firms who spend at least a part of their time in the project interacting with a client. The participants were currently residing in the United States but varied in terms of their nationality - 58% were from the US and the rest were from India, China, Ireland, Russia, Columbia, UK, Laos, Switzerland, and Tunisia (see Table 3.1). Two participants did not disclose their nationality. I recruited consultants individually and not through the consulting firms, thus participants were from 23 different consulting firms. The consulting firms varied in terms of their size (i.e., from a few employees to many thousands of employees worldwide) and ranking in the industry (from top firms in the industry to unranked ones). This allowed me to examine the perspectives of consultants from a wide-range of firms. Demographically, 68% of the participants were men and 32% were women, their average age was 37.5 years, and on an average they had spent 8.5 years in the consulting profession.

To gain access to the sample, I used snowball sampling. I contacted people I knew to ask for names of potential participants who matched the selection criteria of my study; these later helped in recruiting additional participants.

Table 3.1

Category	Description
Type of Consultant	IT (50%), Management (50%)
No. of firms	23
Nationality	American (29), Indian (6), Chinese (4), Irish (2), Russian (2), and British, Colombian, Lao, Swiss, Tunisian (1 each), 2 Did not Disclose
Gender	Men (68%), Women (32%)
Average age of consultants	37.5 years
Education (Highest level)	Masters: 24; Bachelors: 23; PhD: 2; Associate degree: 1
Average years spent in consulting	8.5 years

Interviews. The interviews were semi-structured (see appendix A for the interview protocol) and lasted for approximately one hour on average. I began with about 10 questions about their career background, their consulting firms, and their experience of working as a consultant. These were followed by open-ended questions, which formed the main part of the interview. I asked the participants to think about a typical client, i.e., the type of client they most commonly interact with in their line of work. Most of the open-ended questions were about their experience with this typical client. Once the participants settled on a specific client who they regarded as typical, I asked them questions that were directed towards understanding: 1) their relational identity vis-à-vis their typical client, 2) relationship (e.g., with the typical client, fellow consultants, and other members of the client organization), 3) experience at the client organization, and 4) the way they interacted with the client to get their work done. For instance, a few

questions focusing on understanding relational identity were: "How did you see yourself in relation to the client? What are a few words that come to your mind as you describe yourself in relation to the client? What was core or central about how you saw yourself in relation with the typical client in this situation?"

During the interview, I made sure to direct consultants' attention towards their interaction with a typical client so as to avoid a more generalized sense of self as a consultant or a focus on just a single and perhaps idiosyncratic client. I emphasized on understanding consultants' experiences with their typical client because of two reasons. First, my research questions were focused on understanding how individuals construct their relational identity at work. Asking about a typical client helped me capture interviewees' average cognition and get a sense of individual differences in the construction of relational identity. Second, since I interviewed only consultants and not the client, my data was based on consultants' perception of the client. As such, I wanted to make sure that their perceptions were not dependent on the differences among the clients. Towards the end of the interview, I also asked the consultants to talk briefly about their experience with another client who they perceived was different from their typical client.

The interviews were conducted over the phone. This allowed me to include consultants from different parts of the country. Also, consultants often travel every week to be at the client site, and therefore, telephonic conversation was the most appropriate method available. Phone interviews were greatly facilitated by consultants' natural comfort and familiarity with talking over the phone. They often interact with the client

and their fellow consultants through conference calls, and as such, talking over the phone was a familiar mode of interaction for consultants.

On the specific modalities of the interview, I emailed the informed consent forms to the interviewees in advance (see Appendix B). At the very beginning of the interview, I told the interviewees what the purpose of my study was, assured them of confidentiality, and sought and recorded their oral consent. I used a digital recorder to record the interviews. After the first few interviews, I listened to the recorded tapes and took detailed notes, which I used to make slight modifications to the interview protocol. To illustrate, one of my probes about consultants' relational identity (e.g., how did you define yourself in relation to the client?) did not elicit much response. I realized that the interviewees were finding it difficult to respond because of the way the question was worded. So, I modified this probe a little to "any examples of how you would describe yourself in relation to the client?" This helped me in getting responses about consultants self-definition or who they were in context of their clients. For instance, some of the ways consultants described themselves included advisor, guardian, hired-help, and servant. Finally, I had the tape-recorded interviews professionally transcribed verbatim. The average length of the transcript was 35 pages with the shortest being 23 pages and the longest being 55 pages long; and all together, 50 interview transcripts totaled 1800 double-spaced pages.

Data Analytical Strategy

I began by reading interview transcripts very closely, word by word, in order to get an overall sense of consultants' responses. In my interviews, I asked consultants questions pertaining to their relational identity in different ways. These questions included, "How did you see yourself in relation to the client? What words or phrases come to your mind as you describe yourself in relation to the client employee?" Their responses to these questions included their description of themselves when they were with their clients. They often expressed themselves in relation to the client in ways that reflect one's identity, for instance, they mentioned, "I saw myself as……," "I think I was………," "I felt like….," "I was………." "I viewed myself as……," and "We were…."

I first read through the transcripts and identified such statements that depicted interviewees' view of themselves vis-à-vis the client. In doing so, my focus was on including consultants' self-expressions in relation to the client and not their identity statements in general. For instance, I did not include statements such as "I am a consultant….and the type of work that I typically do for managing consulting revolves around organizational strategy and strategic planning" because here the consultant is talking about herself in terms of what it means to be a consultant in general (and not about herself in relation to her typical client). In many cases, consultants used "we" where they included the client in their self-description or "you" to describe themselves. For instance, when asked about how they saw themselves vis-à-vis their client, some consultants expressed, "we were peers" or "we were friends." Similarly, a consultant

described herself as "you are a hired help" where she used "you" to essentially express how she saw herself in relation to the client. I included these statements as relational identity statements as they were essentially consultants' reflection about themselves.

The next step was to analyze the responses of interviewees with regard to the first research question where the goal was to ascertain the nature of relational identity. Table 3.2 depicts the codebook that includes the major themes and descriptions of the first order codes. As I went through the transcripts, I discovered that there were variations in how consultants described themselves or talked about themselves and the client. As I started looking for potential consistencies and differences in their self-descriptions, two key dimensions seemed to be associated with the variation: 1) Perceived sense of involvement and 2) Perceived sense of influence.

First, I found that consultants varied in terms of the extent to which they cognitively and emotionally connected with their client. This was manifested in various ways in their expressions, for instance, through their suggestions about the extent to which they felt integrated and included in the client team (e.g., "I felt at home" with the client), perceptions of shared purpose with the client (e.g., "we were in it together"), and emotional connection with the client. These signified consultants' perception of connection with the client; I, therefore, grouped such expressions under the dimension - Perceived sense of involvement with the client. Since I was investigating relational identity, there were questions in the interview protocol that specifically focused on understanding consultants' perception of their relationship with the client. Perceptions of involvement were central to consultants' self-descriptions and all 50 of the interviewees

touched upon the notion of how connected they were with the client. This is understandable since involvement alludes to the relationship consultants shared with the client, which is a key aspect of consultants' work (Kitay & Wright, 2003; 2004).

I sorted consultants' statements of involvement into high and low. Perceived sense of involvement was identified as relatively high in 68% of consultants. These consultants suggested that they felt connected with the client. They expressed emotional involvement (e.g., "I approach the client with both mind and heart"), sense of inclusion and integration (e.g., "I was an integral member of the team;" "It was like being a part of the family"), and sense of common fate and interdependence (e.g., "we sank or swam together") with the client. Sometimes consultants also expressed their involvement with the client by downplaying their role as a consultant (e.g., "I don't look at myself as a true consultant"); these statements were also coded as depicting high involvement.

In the same vein, perceived involvement was coded as relatively low in 32% consultants who expressed emotional detachment (e.g., "it's not a very emotional thing. It's mostly about obeying the rules and performing the work you're assigned"), sense of separation with the client (e.g., "we felt a little bit like we were renters as opposed to actually buying into the neighborhood;" "there was definitely a line drawn;" "I was an outsider;" "I saw myself as a third party advisor") and sense of having different goals (e.g., expressions suggesting that there was "divisiveness about goals" and that the consultant and the client "had different goals").

There were cases where consultants' sense of involvement seemed to have evolved from low to high during the course of the project. In such instances, I coded

these cases as high or low involvement based on what they felt the majority of the time. For instance, if the consultant expressed high involvement for two-thirds of the time in the project and low involvement for one-third of the time in the project, I coded the participant as having high involvement.

Second, consultants talked about the kind of impact they had over the client in affecting the process and outcomes of the project. This essentially reflected their perception of their role in shaping the process and outcomes of the project through decision making and direction setting (e.g., statements such as "I guided the client through the process"). I grouped such statements into a dimension – Perceived sense of influence which is indicative of the kind of voice and power they had in their role-relationship. All 50 interviewees touched upon the aspect of influence while talking about themselves. Since influencing the client is an important part of consultants' work (Fincham, 1999), the emergence of this as one of the key factors in explaining the variation in consultants' relational identity is explicable.

Like involvement, I categorized sense of influence as high or low. Sense of influence over the client was identified as high in 60% of consultants who perceived that they engaged in activities such as decision making and direction setting to shape the course that the project took and saw themselves influencing the project strategically and not just tactically. I found that consultants talked about their influence in shaping both the outcome and the process of the project. In many cases, the consultants had a much greater impact compared to the client (e.g., "I was providing advice in terms of what direction to move into") and in some, they saw themselves influencing the project along with the

client (e.g., "we together attack a particular question;" "we were like peers accomplishing the task together"). However, in both these scenarios, consultants perceived that they played an important role in influencing the client towards shaping the decisions related to the project; I therefore coded these statements as high influence.

Sense of influence was identified as low in 40% consultants who perceived that they were essentially taking orders and following directions of the client who they described as having a much greater voice in shaping decisions related to the process and outcome (e.g., "I was taking orders from the client;" "I was reporting to the client and the client was my manager"). These consultants saw themselves helping in the tactical and day to day matters (e.g., the consultant was "helping the client in his busy day" and "in executing what the client thought needed to be done") rather than influencing the course of the project.

While this was not the core of this study, I also tried to get a deeper understanding of variation in these two dimensions across consultants by examining the factors associated with them. For doing this, I first grouped the interviews in high and low involvement and influence respectively and looked for consultants' statements that linked with these two factors. Some of the factors that emerged as important include consultants' perceptions of their relative experience and expertise vis-à-vis the client (e.g., "I've done this (kind of project) many times, so I'm kind of guiding him through the process"), consultants' as well as their client's individual preference and approach towards relationship (e.g., "I want them to feel like I am a member of the team;" "(the client) emphasized the teamwork piece;" "the client always saw me as a vendor"),

amount of interaction with the client (e.g., "For this particular client, we feel like insiders because we've been there for a long time, we've consulted with this client for over ten years;" "the client was skeptical in the beginning but ……spending more time (with him) and listening to what his concerns were made things better), the nature of their and their client's assigned positions (e.g., "the client was the project sponsor and she made all the decisions for the project"), and norms and expectations of the consulting and client firms (e.g., "our company doesn't expect you to become part of the client infrastructure;" "At this particular client, all the consultants kind of sat together in like a big bullpen area").

Once I analyzed the dimensions - involvement and influence - on which consultants expressions varied, the next step was to understand what this meant for their relational identity in context of their clients. Drawing from the broader literature on identity (e.g., Showers et al., 1992; Campbell et al., 1996; 2003), I looked at two aspects of relational identity, namely its content (i.e., what constitutes relational identity) and structure (i.e., how these constituents are organized). I used these works as broad guidelines to organize and analyze the data. To begin with, I grouped relational identity statements of 50 consultants into four categories that represented the interaction of perceived sense involvement (high or low) and perceived sense of influence (high or low). I then examined the content and structural features of relational identity that distinguished each of the four categories of relational identity.

In the first step, the codes were heavily grounded in the data and were usually created using actual words of the interviewees. For example, some consultants described themselves as "I was like client's insurance policy," "I saw myself as client's

bodyguard," "consiglere," "guardian," "we were both musicians," "it was just like being a team member - we would go out for beer and stuff.... we were discussing cricket." I began by coding them using these exact words, for example, bodyguard, guardian, musician, etc. As I went through a subset of transcripts, a lot of codes came up. Once I had such descriptors for a given form of relational identity, I looked for consistencies in them to consolidate them into more abstract categories (Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). That is, I began looking for similarity in the salient idea conveyed in these self-descriptions and started grouping similar codes together into broader more abstract codes. In doing so, I drew from past work on relational identity; for instance, past research on relational identity argues that it is constitutive of role- and person-based conceptions of self vis-à-vis the relational other (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Drawing from these works, I labeled self-descriptions such as "guardian," "consiglere" as *role-based self-conceptions* since these were essentially the meaning that the consultants derived in their roles vis-à-vis the client. Further, I coded self-expressions such as "we were musicians" as *personal/social identities* as these were other personal and social identities that consultants brought to this role-relationship.

Next, I looked for potential consistencies and differences in the expression of role and personal/social identities in the four categories of relational identity. I found, that consultants' relational identity varied in three ways. First was the extent to which consultants brought their role, personal, and social identities to the role-relationship. While in case of some consultants, relational identity was constituted of only their role-based self-conceptions, in others, the consultants brought in both their role as well as

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personal and other social identities in their expression of relational identity. For instance, relational identity of consultants who perceived high influence and high involvement included role-based conceptualizations of self as well as their personal identities. I labeled the relational identity corresponding to high influence and high involvement as "broad or plural" which essentially reflects identity structure (Showers et al., 1992; Campbell et al., 1996) of these consultants. Similarly, relational identity that included only role-based self-conceptions was labeled as "narrow or singular."

Second variation in relational identity was associated with consultants' perceptions of relationship between their role- and person-based self-aspects. Consultants made explicit mentions of how personal aspects facilitated (e.g., "it was a very good working relationship. I think it also stemmed from the fact that we did just get on at a personal level as well") or came in the way of their roles. Their descriptions about the relationship between role- and person-based self-aspects was consistent with past work on synergy or complementarity in identity structure (e.g., Dutton, et al, 2010; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). I drew from these works to code consultants' perceptions of the relationship between their different self-aspects.

To illustrate, relational identity of consultants who regarded their role- and person-based self-aspects as *compatible* (e.g., the idea that relating personally helped in "disarming" the client;) and tried to either *integrate* (e.g., "we were friends") or *aggregate* their personal aspects in their relational identity (e.g., "I took an interest in Ryan - not just as a deputy CIO but as an individual, and we talked about things outside of work") was coded as having high complementarity. In contrast, consultants, who

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found their role- and person-based aspects incompatible and compartmentalized (e.g., "you need to distance yourself away from being friendly or being quote/unquote like a friend to them") or deleted (e.g., self-expressions such as "I saw myself as playing a role") their personal aspects from their relational identities, were coded as having less complementary relational identity structure.

Third, I also found that there were nuances in the nature of consultants' role-based self-conceptions. They mainly varied in two ways. One was related to the limits of their sense of responsibility towards the client, for instance whether it was limited to the contract or went beyond the contract. To illustrate, while some described themselves in their roles using expressions such as "guardian," "all-encompassing advisor," "insurance policy," others suggested that they were "merely resources" and "consultant." These self-descriptions seem to vary in the perception of their extent of responsibility towards the client. I coded role-based self-conceptions such as "guardian" and "insurance policy" as inclusive as they conveyed a wider sense of responsibility towards the client that extended beyond the contract to include themes such as sense of protection and concern for client's own career. On the other hand, I coded role-based self-conceptions such as "resource," "vendor," and "consultant" as transactional as they conveyed a sense of responsibility that was limited to the contract.

Further, I found that the content of consultants' role-based self-conceptions varied in terms of their sense of control over the client. For instance, while some saw themselves as drivers of the project (e.g., "I was the expert and I decide what to do and I tell the client what to do"), others saw themselves in subservient and deferential roles (e.g., "I am

there to serve them…and do whatever it is that they need to have done, whatever they would like for me to take care of for them. And I'm not there to argue. I'm not there to say what's right or what's wrong."). I labeled these role-based self-conceptions as agentic and receptive role-based self-conceptions respectively drawing from past research that defines agentic roles as those exhibiting "instrumentality, dominance, competence, and efficiency in goal attainment" (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007: 751).

While doing so, I made sure that these role-based self-conceptions were the meaning that the consultants derived in their role vis-à-vis their clients or how they saw themselves in their role in relation to the client and not the activities they performed (e.g., "I helped (the client) do the analysis and think through the recommendations") or their assigned roles (e.g., "(the client's) view and his personality was very much sequential, engineering background, and I had to get him to understand that a lot of times in a business development process, it's more fluid"). Also, some of the self-descriptions, such as "guardian," "consiglere," and "coach" conveyed that the consultant was going beyond the project to help the client as well as was playing a driving role. Such role-based self-descriptions were coded as agentic as well as inclusive.

The result of this part of the analysis was a set of four forms of relational identity, each described by its key content and structural features. The second focus of the analysis was to examine Research Question 2 and identify potential patterns in the association between relational identity and consultants' perceptions of how they worked with the client.

In analyzing Research Question 2, I looked for explicit references of how consultants perceived their work-based interaction. While relational identity may relate to the conduct of work in many ways, one aspect that became apparent in my data was the informality of interaction. I found that participants often referred to the ways they interacted with the client such as "need to schedule meetings in advance," "back and forth free flowing conversation", "comfort in talking about office politics and leaders." These descriptions had themes related to the expression and use of language, the kind of topics covered, and scheduling and structuring of interaction and conversation.

Once I generated many such codes from my analysis of a subset of data, I went back to theory to understand how these fit in the broader literature of work-based interaction. I found that these codes were similar to the linguistic elements and conversational turn taking and topic selection aspects of informality in interaction (Morand, 1995). I, therefore, analyzed and refined my codes and consolidated them under the theoretical dimension of informality in interaction. I also drew from past work on informality to understand the variations in perceived interaction. For instance, past research makes distinctions between formality and informality to suggest different features associated with these modes of interaction - while formal interaction is characterized by structured communication, scheduled meetings, and a need to be prepared in advance, informal interaction involves unstructured and fluid communication, spontaneous meetings, and ease of communication. I used these to code the extent to which consultants perceived their interaction as informal.

After analyzing the data, I looked for the recurrence of themes across the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1991) to determine the level of support. That meant, for each type of relational identity, counting the number of times the features and outcomes appeared across interviewees. To assess the strength of evidence, I used the three levels of support. Evidence was considered strong (***), when 60% or more participants in a particular form of relational identity were judged to have that feature or outcome; moderate (**) when 25-60% of participants in a particular form of relational identity were judged to have that feature or outcome; and tentative (*) when less than 25% of participants were judged to have that feature or outcome. Figure 4.1 and 4.2 in the findings chapter depicts the framework that emerged from the analysis along with the strength of evidence.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology followed in this study. In particular, I elaborated upon the research context, sample, interviewing process, and analytic technique. As discussed, while existing theoretical work on relational identity and informality informed my analysis, it was essentially an iterative and emergent process. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings based on this analysis.

TABLE 3.2

FINAL CODEBOOK: DEFINITIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DATA

DIMENSIONS OF RELATIONAL IDENTITY	
Perceived Sense of Involvement with the client	
High sense of involvement: Use for references to emotional attachment, cognitive connection, sense of integration and shared purpose with the client, sense of inclusion at the client firm	• Statements about being integrated with the client, being integral part of the client team/firm, not being an external entity (e.g., "I was an integral team member;" "I felt like one of them") • Statements downplaying that one is a consultant (e.g., "I don't think of myself as a consultant") • Statements suggesting that one was like an insider at the client firm (e.g., "I was an insider") • Statement suggesting interdependence and working towards a common goal (e.g., "coexisting;" "being together;" "we were in it together") • Statements suggesting emotional connection and compassion towards the client (e.g., "I wanted to make sure I kept him up to date…so that he wasn't going to be surprised later; we shared an intimate relationship") • Statements suggesting mental connection with the client (for e.g., "we could read each other's mind")
Low sense of involvement: Use for references to emotional detachment, cognitive separation with the client, assertions of having different goals, assertions about not being integrated or included at the client organization	• Statements about not being integrated with the client and being an external entity (e.g., "I am a third party advisor;" "I am not part of the team, but helping out a key member of the team") • Statements emphasizing that one is a consultant and an outsider at the client organization (e.g., "I was an outsider") • Statements suggesting division in terms of goals (e.g., "we have different goals") • Statements suggesting emotional detachment; being dispassionate towards the client (e.g., "we do analysis based on value and not emotions")
Perceived Sense of Influence over the client	
High sense of influence: Use for comments suggesting consultant's engagement in activities such as decision making and direction setting, providing	• Statements depicting that consultants made decisions or guided the client related to the process and outcomes of project either with the client or alone (e.g., "we could both take decisions")

strategic direction about the project outcome and processes	• Statements depicting consultant was providing directions to carry out the project (e.g., "I was advising the client to operate in a certain way") • Statements depicting consultants' role in shaping the overall or strategic course of the project or key decisions about the project ("I was going to make some recommendations, …or changes to the way the client had set things up;" "I was giving recommendations for the entire firm)
Low sense of influence: Use for comments suggesting engagement of self in activities such as order taking, following the directions, accomplishing day to day mundane jobs; also use for references about client (and not self) being the one who is making decisions and setting directions	• Statements suggesting that the consultants were following the instructions of the client "I was reporting to the client" • Statements suggesting that the client was the one who made the decisions and controlled the resources and the consultant was following the decisions and orders ("she (the client) was the who controlled the resources") • Statements suggesting that the consultants were helping the client with activities which were tactical and day to day in nature •
Factors associated with variation in the dimensions	
Relationship preference and approach of the consultant and client: Use for references to consultant's or client's personal choice to form or not form a relationship with each other	• Statements suggesting consultants wanted or preferred to form a close relationship with the client (e.g., "I want them to feel like I am a member of the team") • Statements suggesting consultants' personal preference to keep a distance from the client (e.g., "I have a pretty clear view of what consultants are the role they play in organizations which is this third party") • Statements suggesting client's preference to integrate with the consultant (e.g., "(the client) emphasized the teamwork piece") • Statements suggesting client's preference to keep a distance ("the client always saw me as a vendor")
Nature of assigned position: Use for statements suggesting that the assigned position or role of the consultant and client associated with decision making	• Statements suggesting that consultant's or client's assigned position involved decision making or direction setting (e.g., "she (the client) was the project sponsor and she essentially owned the project and made all decisions;" "I was the operation manager on my company's side, and he (the client) was the operation manager on his company's side")
Relative expertise and experience: Use for consultants' expressions about their expertise and experience relative to the clients'	• Statements suggesting that the consultant had far more experience and/or expertise and took major decisions about the project (Tim was definitely new to managing this scope of effort. What we were doing was really defining changes to organization) • Statements suggesting own lack of expertise and experience, hence was directed by the client and was involved in execution or day today activities (e.g., "I mean because

	that was not a space I worked in before so I wasn't that familiar with it but I definitely helped execute them")
Norms and expectations of the consulting and client firms: Use for references about consulting firm's policy or expectation from the consultant about client relationship	• Statements suggesting consulting firm's expectations about forming close relationship or keep a distance from the client (e.g., "(the consulting firm) expected us to work together as a team;" "I come from a model of consulting where we, our preferred style is to partner with people") • Statements suggesting client and consulting firm's policies or expectations about having a distant or more involved relationship with the client (e.g., "there was at least one executive (at the client firm) who said I expect to see no differentiation between the teams")
Amount of interaction with the client: Use for suggestions that past history of working with the client or time spent together in the discussed project facilitated involvement/influence	• Statements suggesting that time spent with the client in the project due to interdependent roles, etc. facilitated or led to involvement/influence over time (e.g., "we were literally sitting in the same room…it was almost like I said a war room for our team….. so it definitely felt like a team effort) • Statements suggesting that past relationship with the client had a bearing on involvement/influence (e.g., "for this particular client, we feel like insiders because we've been there for a long time, we've consulted with this client for over ten years. So, we don't feel like outsiders") • Statements suggesting that not having past relationship or enough interaction resulted in client skepticism about their abilities and intentions (e.g., "the client was standoffish in the beginning")

RELATIONAL IDENTITY CONTENT AND STRUCTURE
Relational Identity Plurality

Inclusive role-based self conception: Use for consultants self expressions depicting a role that transcended the contract, holistic role that was not limited to the specific assigned task, activities that were outside the scope of the project e.g., concern for the client's career and personal standing	• Statements depicting a holistic conception of role to include aspects such as sense of protection and personal concern for client, responsibility for tasks/goals outside of the scope of the project for example, in decisions outside the scope of the project, helping out even when the project is over (e.g., "I play an all-encompassing advisor role with Mary, (although the project is over), today the client called out of the blue for my opinion");" I saw myself like a "bodyguard," "insurance policy). • Statements depicting self being responsible not just for the project but for the

	client's personal career (e.g., "I felt a certain obligation for (the client) and not just to the client organization") • Explicit references to doing extra for the client (e.g., "I could go an extra mile")
Transactional role-based self conception: Use for self expressions depicting a role that was limited to the project, clear boundaries about what a consultant would/could do	• Statements depicting role-based conceptions of self that are limited to the assigned contract (e.g., "It's more of an okay, this is a business transaction, this is a business relationship. We will do this project, and we will move on.") • Self expressions depicting self as drawing boundaries in the roles and responsibilities (e.g., "we do not present client's material") • Statements depicting self as constrained in doing a role or self doing a limited role (e.g., "I am just a resource")
Agentic role-based self conception: Use for expressions depicting consultant's control over the engagement, description of self in a leading, driving, initiating, guiding role that was important for the accomplishment of the project	• Consultant's self expressions depicting their importance in driving and leading the project (e.g., "I was essentially calling the shots") • Consultant's self expressions emphasizing that they were helping the client who had no idea what to do (e.g., " "I saw myself as someone who could enable the client with his weakness"; "I was the expert and the client could not have accomplished the project without me;" expressions such as I was a "coach", "mentor") • Consultant's self expression of parity with the client in leading the project (we were like "peers and could make decisions;" "co-leaders")
Receptive role-based self conception: Use for expressions depicting lack of control, self-definition as a subordinate, sense of subservience and deference	• Consultant's self expressions depicting their sense of deference towards the client (e.g., "I definitely looked up to the client") • Consultant's self expressions depicting their sense of subordination/subservience (e.g., "I am not there to argue, ask questions"; I was a "servant," "helpmate," "execution-focused) • Consultant's self expressions suggesting dispensability and downplaying the importance of their selves in relation to the client ("with a guy like him, I feel powerless")
Personal and social identities: Use for references to sharing ones personal interests, commonalities such as membership in organizations (e.g., alma-mater), idea that one could relate as an individual	• Statements depicting sharing personal interests (e.g., "we were both musicians;" "we were baseball fans") • Statements depicting membership in groups/categories outside of the present work (e.g., "we went to the same school," "he is also an ex-member of my consulting firm") • Explicit references that consultants' relationship with the client extended beyond work (e.g., "it wasn't just work. She (the client) has become a personal friend as well through all of our work together."

Absence of personal and social identities: Use for lack of personal and social aspects in one's self descriptions vis-à-vis with the client	• Absence of personal aspects in self-descriptions • Self-descriptions that portray consultant as a commodity (e.g., we were disposable resources") and just a role bearer (e.g., "I saw myself playing a role")
Relational Identity Complementarity	
Compatibility and integration/ aggregation: Use for claims that sharing personal identities facilitated role-accomplishment; self expressions denoting a shared identity (e.g., being friends), and consultant's efforts to relate with the client personally	• Statements depicting that sharing personal aspects was helpful in role-accomplishment (for ex., "good working relationship stemmed from the fact that (they) did just get on at a personal level as well;" "(if) you're able to establish a good relationship, you're able to influence some of the key decisions that are being made") • Statements depicting consultant's efforts to relate with the client personally (e.g., "I took an interest in Ryan -- not just as a deputy CIO but as an individual, and we talked about things outside of work.") • Self expressions depicting integration of role and personal to create a shared identity (e.g., friendly colleagues, friend, professional friend)
Incompatibility and compartmentalization/ deletion: Use for references about personal and role identities constrain each other and consultants' efforts towards to keep them separate or delete personal self aspects from relational identity	• Statements depicting that personal and role aspects of self as mutually constraining/conflicting and the idea that being friendly comes in the way of providing objective advice (e.g., "if you have to use me properly, you have to keep us at arm's length properly because otherwise you will lose value") • Statements referring to downplaying and deleting of personal aspects in relation to the client (e.g., I was not X having beer) • Statements depicting consultants efforts to actively compartmentalize their personal and role identities from their relational identity (e.g., "you need to distance yourself away from being friendly")

CONDUCT OF WORK	
Perceived Informality in Interaction	
High informality in interaction: Use for references about unscheduled meeting, fluid conversation, variability in topics of conversation, levity in conversation,	• Statements depicting unscheduled and spontaneous communication (e.g., "I could just swing by and say hello") • Statements depicting lack of order or structure in how consultants and clients interact such as unscripted meetings, unregulated turn taking, informal brainstorming (e.g., we could have "informal brainstorming") • Statements suggesting varied topics of conversation and easy switching from one topic to the other (e.g., the idea that the client could talk about leadership, politics, etc.) • Statements suggesting joking in conversation (e.g., "we could joke around") • Statements suggesting ease of expression in emails and face-to-face conversation (e.g., no rules for addressing the client")
Low informality (or high formality) in interaction: Use for references about scheduled meeting, structured and pre-planned conversation, formal preparation for meeting, protocol and rules about written and verbal communication	• Statements depicting scheduled communication (e.g., "we used to meet every other week") • Statements depicting existence order or structure in how consultants and clients interact such as scripted meetings, regulated taking turns (e.g., descriptions of interactions suggesting structured question and answer sessions) • Statements depicting seriousness and attentiveness in interaction, planning and formal preparation for meetings (e.g., "I had to be extra-prepared") • Statements suggesting consultants following a protocol or decorum in interaction (e.g., the idea that consultant could not contact the client directly but through his firm")

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study investigates the nature of consultants' relational identity and its implications for their conduct of work. In this chapter, I address the research questions and present the findings based on in-depth qualitative analyses of interviews with 50 consultants. I begin with a brief illustration of consultants' statements of relational identity vis-à-vis their clients. I then discuss two dimensions that emerged as key in differentiating relational identity across these 50 interviewees, namely: 1) Perceived sense of involvement with the client, and 2) Perceived sense of influence over the client. I follow with an analysis of how these two dimensions associate with the content and structure of relational identity. Finally, I discuss how relational identity is associated with an aspect of consultants' conduct of work with their clients, namely perceived informality of interaction.

Expressions of relational identity

Expressions of consultants' relational identity were their statements about themselves in relation to their client - these were in the forms of words and rich self-descriptions. Consultants described themselves vis-à-vis their client in a variety of ways. For instance, some of the words they used included "guardian," "expert," "servant," "peer," "friend," "just a resource," "hired help" "musicians," and "grandparents." Table 4.1 includes a few illustrative relational identity statements of consultants:

TABLE 4.1

Relational Identity Statements
I was the expert on what they were looking to do….. what I always like to do is you kind of go in and you set up somebody so they have all the knowledge and tools and everything they'll need to carry on after you're gone.
I was like a bullet proof vest for (the client) where I was really trying to protect her for tough decisions that she had to make.
It was like going to the inquisitor. I mean, [I] felt like a slave…you could be whipped..for the silliest of things.
I definitely saw myself as someone that (the client) trusted - that he would turn to for both advice on how to do things and helping getting things done. So (I saw myself as) just an equal part of the team.
We were, personality wise, compatible. We're both musicians, so we would talk about music and stuff a lot. We have both actually played music at church on Sundays. That gave us some commonality. He's a little bit younger than me, but he's got grandkids too, so we had that in common. So we thought a lot alike, I think…..We'd talk about stuff outside the project, just because we became friends.

Analysis of these relational identity statements yielded that they varied on two key dimensions – consultants' perceptions of their involvement with the client and their influence over the client. I first discuss these two dimensions followed by how they relate to relational identity.

Perceived Involvement with the Client

The first aspect reflected in consultants' self-expressions was their perception of involvement with the client, which refers to the extent to which consultants saw themselves as being connected to the client. I categorized 68% of consultants as perceiving high sense of involvement with the client and 32% of consultants as

perceiving low involvement with the client. Those who were categorized as having high

involvement perceived cognitive and emotional connection with the client. On the other

hand, the consultants categorized as having relatively low involvement perceived a sense

of separation and emotional detachment. I now describe these variations in detail.

Relatively high involvement. Consultants with a high sense of involvement perceived

cognitive and emotional connection with the client. They often felt that they were

"integrated" with the client and often alluded to perceiving fewer insider-outsider

boundaries at the client organization. Some of the ways they conveyed this sentiment was

by suggesting that they felt "no us versus them," or "consultant versus client" and were

"like part of the family," "integral team member," and "part of the same team." Similarly

a consultant expressed that he was "not an outsider but the interim individual" in the

project. They also saw themselves working towards a common goal. For instance, they

mentioned, "we were in it together" and "we sank or swam together" and realized that

"their problem is the client's problem." Finally, their descriptions conveyed their

emotional connection with their client. For instance, many of them expressed that they

had developed a sense of "compassion," "caring," and "intimacy" towards the client. A

consultant mentioned that she felt a "kindred spirit" with the client and another

suggested, "I always approach (the client) with both my mind and my heart." Similarly:

*We partnered with them in a very intimate way. So, we really felt like colleagues. And,
at the end of our meeting this last week, the partners were trying to talk about ways to – a
little bit jokingly, but a little bit serious too about ways to merge our two firms together,
because they like us so much. So colleagues would probably be the best word. – MM8*

One-third of the consultants perceived high involvement from the beginning of

the project. For around a quarter of these consultants, this seemed to have resulted from a

past history of working with the client. They had already established trust in their previous projects and were also familiar with the client organization and as such felt integrated with the client. As a consultant mentioned, "For this particular client, we feel like insiders because we've been there for a long time, we've consulted with this client for over ten years. So, we don't feel like outsiders." The rest were able to "develop very good relations with the client extremely early on" even though they had no past history of working with the client. It seemed to have happened because the client welcomed them and the consultants themselves also preferred to forge an involved relationship.

However, for the rest of the two-thirds of highly involved consultants, perceptions of involvement seemed to have evolved during the project - they had a relatively low sense of involvement in the beginning of the project but they "were able to warm things up" with time. For instance, a consultant who saw himself as a "strategic partner" and a "peer" also mentioned that in the beginning of the project, he was "the new kid on the block" and saw himself "just as a consultant." As clients understood the intentions and abilities of the consultants and saw them perform, "a lot of the noise is drowned out….and (they were) seen not so much as the outsider." This was further facilitated by the nature of roles. According to the consultants, when the roles required spending time together, they seemed to develop a sense of comfort "working towards a common goal." To illustrate, a consultant mentioned:

After few deliverables where people feel good about them…and (the client) sees that you have the flexibility to adjust things to their needs, to really dig in and figure out what they need, there is a level of comfort that develops where (the client) does not see you as an outside external problem. – MF45

A majority of the consultants who perceived high involvement often acknowledged that they had a preference of forming a strong relationship with the client. They came in the project with the goal of becoming an "integral part" of the team. They considered themselves as "relationship builders" and often alluded to their preferences by downplaying their role as a consultant, for instance, "I want them to feel like I am a member of the team," "I don't look at myself as a true consultant…I like to think I'm one of them. I'm one of their employees." Underlying these assertions is the consultants' preference to work not as an external advisor but as an integral part of the client firm. These consultants seemed to make an active effort to become integrated with the client, for instance, through explicit conversation at the time of signing the contract about having a common team of consultants and client employees.

Similarly, consultants also talked about the client employees' and the client firms' openness towards consultants. Some clients seemed to expect the consultants "to blend in and work as a team" and as the consultants mentioned, "emphasized the teamwork piece," "did a nice job of making them feel welcome," and made them "feel at home." According to these consultants, they were included in activities such as team dinners, important meetings, company activities, etc. and were treated like other client employees. As these consultants mentioned, "(consultants) were sitting next to the (client employees)" and "when we went for lunch, the manager (the client) would pick up my tab." A few consultants even had the computers and email addresses of the client firm and "access to some of the privileges the client has to offer, such as discount on the

gym." Such gestures facilitated consultants' feeling of inclusion at the client firm. As a

consultant expressed:

We interacted a lot with his team and we were treated on an equal basis. We weren't singled out, oh, these guys are consultants from the outside. It was more like we are working towards a goal and it doesn't matter that these guys are consultants from the outside.- MF33

Finally, about two-thirds of the consultants with high involvement perceived the

norms of their consulting firms as being supportive of relationships. While most of them

expressed that their consulting firms have clear norms about partnering with the client, a

few suggested that the burden was upon them to decide how much to integrate with the

client. For instance, a consultant mentioned that the goal of his firm was "primarily to

collaborate on every project." Similarly, another stated that "I come from a model of

consulting where our preferred style is to partner with people." According to them, they

were expected to "work together as a team," and be "perceived not as vendors who

provide FTE (i.e., full time employees) support, instead as value-added partners in their

business process." These expectations seemed to have shaped consultants' actions and

notions of how they should behave with the client.

Relatively low involvement. Consultants who perceived low involvement with the client

saw themselves as being external entities. Out of thirty percent of consultants categorized

as having low sense of involvement, eighteen percent seemed to prefer keeping a distance

from the client, and the rest (twelve percent) perceived the client to be the one who

regarded them as outsiders.

Those who preferred keeping a distance had a "fairly particularistic" and "a pretty

clear" view that they were brought in by the client organization as "third party advisors."

They saw themselves as external entities all through the project and emphasized that they should not "get wrapped up in what they're doing (at the client)" and should "remember that they are not a part of the client organization" and that "they do not end up looking like they belong." Their self-descriptions reflected separation and relatively clearer boundaries between them and the client; for example, "I saw myself in an advisory role, not part of the team, but helping out a key member of the team" and "I position myself strictly from the outside." They often expressed that they and the client "have different goals" and they should be mindful of that. Finally, they also preferred to keep an emotional distance from the client and emphasized that they "do analysis based on value rather than people's feelings." For instance, the following quotation illustrated consultant's sense of low involvement:

You are a third party. If you think about a team sports analogy, you are providing some help to the coach. You are not even the coach. You are providing help to the coach. You are not a player. You shouldn't be on television, you shouldn't be on the score board, you should be off to the side. – MM19

All these consultants emphasized the importance of keeping a distance and often asserted that it was key for providing value to the client. For instance, "if you don't assume a degree of detachment from the problem, you won't be able to hit the problem," and the client also "should keep them at arm's length otherwise they will lose value….and undermine themselves."As mentioned by a consultant:

When you're there (at the client site) that frequently you feel as though you have a role in the company, but you have to remember as a consultant you're not part of the company. You're there as an advisor. And sometimes you need to step away from that role just to remember that they're paying you to be an advisor, not necessarily part of their company even though you need to think with them.- IM29

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The consultants' sense of involvement also seemed to have been driven by the consulting firms' policies about client relationships. They perceived that their firms' expectation was to have a "professional relationship" with the client. All, except one, of these consultants expressed explicitly that they were expected to keep a distance from the client and to provide outside expertise. For instance, a consultant expressed, "Our company doesn't expect you to become part of the client infrastructure. They expect you to enable the client's infrastructure from the outside." These expectations seemed to have guided the way the consultants approached their relationship. According to them, even when the client firm "started thinking of (them) as part of their group" and "like extension of their group," it did not affect how they saw themselves and they tried to balance this situation by "resetting the expectations." As a consultant expressed, "sometimes (client) people get confused - they forget about the fact that we work for different companies and I don't work for them directly. So you remind them every once in a while."

Second was the case of consultants who seemed to feel less involved primarily because of the way they were treated by the client. Their self-descriptions contained themes of lack of acceptance and segregation. For instance, a consultant described himself as, "we felt a little bit like we were renters as opposed to actually buying into the neighborhood."

Consultants' lack of perceived involvement seemed to be driven by their perception of what the clients thought of them. All these consultants expressed that they would have preferred to develop a "rapport" and a "feeling of partnership" with the client

and in fact, were expecting that they would be "welcomed" by the client. However, they

perceived that the client preferred the opposite and did not regard them as "part of the

team" or "one of us." They mentioned that "there was definitely a line drawn" between

them and the client and they were always aware that they were the vendors who

"participate in some form of service offering" and "not an employee." They sensed

"questions of ownership" and "lack of cooperation" in their interaction with the client

and stated that there was "tension" and "divisiveness" about what the project process and

outcomes would be. The consultants were left with no choice but to accept the situation.

As a consultant mentioned:

She (the client) couldn't see me any other way, but I think that is fairly common in my
experience, that they see you as vendors, and there is never a full transition to, you are
not a vendor. It is always a professional relationship. – IM22

The consultants were also often reminded by the client that they were not a part of

the team. For instance, a consultant described that when they were introduced to someone

else, the client "made a distinction right up front, he's an outsider, and he's not one of

us." Such actions led to a feeling of exclusion and a sense that they are not together but

are separate entities. As a consultant expressed:

With Bob (the client), it was - Brian (the consultant) works for this company, he's not one
of us, he's an outsider, he's on this project and it's ending on this date. And I remember
certain experiences where they'll have employee appreciation day or they have like an
ice cream social and I was told, oh, you can come, even though you're a consultant, it's
okay, I'll let you come. So, that's what gives you an outsider mentality.- IM15

In addition to their client, the client firm also seemed to reinforce the consultant-

client divide by keeping the consultants "segregated." These consultants expressed that

they sat in different areas and they were not included in any activity of the client firm; as

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such, it was neither acceptable nor feasible to have a close relationship. As a consultant expressed:

At this particular client, all the consultants kind of sat together in like a big bullpen area….whereas all the employees had cubicles and offices…..there was definitely a division between us, as a consulting company, and the full-time employees. IM9

To summarize, consultants' expressions varied in their sense of involvement with the client, i.e., the extent to which they saw themselves as being connected to the client. The descriptions of consultants who perceived relatively greater involvement had themes of cognitive and emotional connection with the client. On the other hand, the consultants, who perceived low involvement, expressed themselves in ways that depicted separation and distance, and many a times, lack of acceptance by the client. The factors that seemed to associate with the consultants' sense of involvement include their personal preference towards forming relationship with the client, client firms' openness towards the consultants, perceptions and behaviors of the client employees, and consulting firms' policy towards client relationship. Further, several of the consultants perceived that their involvement evolved over time. While in the beginning, they perceived themselves as separate, but as they gained client's trust in their abilities and intention, they saw themselves as more involved. This was also facilitated by the nature of their roles which required working together with the client and spending time with them. Further, amount of interaction led to familiarity and sense of working together towards common goal.

Perceived Influence over the Client

In addition to perceived involvement, the second dimension that emerged from the analysis of consultants' expressions was their perceived influence over the client in terms of shaping the outcome and process of the project. There was a variation in how consultants perceived their influence over the client. Forty percent of consultants were identified as having relatively lesser influence. These consultants perceived that they played a relatively minor role in shaping the project outcome and process and believed that the client was the one who engaged in activities such as taking the key decisions related to the project, providing directions for accomplishing the task, and controlling the resources. Sixty percent of consultants were identified as having relatively high influence over the client. These consultants perceived that they played a key role in taking decisions that shaped the course that the project took and used their expertise and experience to provide help that was more strategic than tactical. Sometimes they did so working together with the client and at other times had greater voice compared to the client. However, in both these cases, consultants perceived that they played an important role in shaping the project and as such I categorized them as having a high sense of influence. I begin by discussing consultants' high sense of influence.

Relatively high influence. Consultants who were categorized as having high influence often perceived that they played a key role in shaping the project. For instance, a consultant mentioned, "I felt good about being able to influence some of the decisions that were made in the program." They were making decisions related to the process and outcome of the project, for example about "what programs to cut and what programs to

leave" and "how (they) should be operating going forward." Even when they did not make decisions themselves, they helped the client in making the decision and think "more strategically and less tactically," for example, a consultant mentioned that he "helped the client develop the distribution strategy and distribution economics."

These consultants were usually hired in the role of advising the client and many of them regarded the client as relatively inexperienced and reliant on their help. They also emphasized their own experience and hence their role in shaping the course of the project. For instance, a consultant mentioned, "I've done this (kind of project) many times, so I'm kind of guiding him through the process." They suggested that given the difference in competence and the nature of roles, the client was looking for consultants' "advice in terms of what direction to move into," and to "find out what the problems are" and "to fix" them. For instance, a consultant commented, "She (the client) would typically seek our advice and interpretation of the discussions because we had those types of meeting far more frequently than she had had (IM20)." As explained by another consultant:

Tim was definitely new to managing this scope of effort. What we were doing was really defining changes to organization, process, and operating model as well as building technology. And, this was a scale at which Tim had never really operated. And, one of the reasons they selected us is our and my specific experience in this space. And so… as we work with Tim, he's looking for how can I help him get to the next level? How can he help me be successful? He's been and lived through experiences…and transformations… like this before. You know how can I use that experience and grow that much more rapidly?-MM35

Several of the consultants who perceived having high influence worked hand in hand with the client like peers. For instance, they mentioned, "we sat and worked side by side with her to both reach the decision and convince the organization that it was the right

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decision" and "we together attack(ed) a particular question." They expressed that they had complementary skills and each of them would bring in their own expertise to the task at hand. As such, they were "co-working together, kind of helping each other out," to "define the scope of work," and take decisions pertaining to the "project, budget, scheduling and the key tasks." Being in equivalent and complementary roles in the project can also be traced to being on similar positions in their respective organizations. As a consultant suggested, "I was project managing on the consulting side, and she (the client) was project managing on the client side." As such, they often found themselves collaborating towards a common objective. To illustrate:

My relationship was that as a peer. He viewed me very much as a business development expert. And, I presented that as really my value to the organization. And, that's ultimately why they chose our organization to help them. I was considered an in house CEO and a resident CEO that would essentially help the existing CEO expand their understanding of how to develop the business. MM43

A few consultants perceived themselves as having high influence almost as soon as they began the project. Some of these consultants had past working relationship with the client and as such had already established their credibility in terms of both their expertise and intention. Others felt that the clients recognized that they lacked the ability to handle the project on their own, were "looking forward to the opportunity to engage in the transformation journey, and "wanted (them) to come and help."

However, in several instances, consultants' sense of influence evolved with time. In the beginning, the clients were "skeptical" and "standoffish" and did not have "enough confidence" in the consultant. They, in fact, began by "questioning whether (the consultants') process and abilities would actually be successful." In such cases,

consultants took some time to prove their intentions and "credentials and (that they) actually do have the expertise." It seemed especially important for the client to understand the consultants' intentions. Many consultants used the phrase "throwing under the bus" to suggest that they gained credibility and voice, once the client developed trust in them and understood that "they will not throw (them) under the bus." They seemed to have done so through conversations with the client, showing output, reinforcing their background and abilities, listening to the client and knowing their concerns, building relationship, and involving the client in the process. For instance, a consultant expressed that in the initial meetings, "I had to have him understand who I was as well and give him insight into my personality and my approach and all of those kinds of things. So besides proving my competency, I felt as though I needed to let him get to know me." Sometimes, consultants believed that the client "let some of the control go over the project" once they developed trust in them; in others, the client seemed to get too overwhelmed with the work and hence "passed over control" to the consultant. Once they established their credibility, their sense of influence was somewhat enduring, for instance, a consultant mentioned that he "asked the client several times to shift their focus, and he agreed each time."

Relatively low influence. On the other end of the spectrum were consultants, who saw themselves as having lesser influence over the client in the project. They expressed that they essentially followed their client's directions who they perceived had more voice in taking decisions for the project, setting guidelines and priorities, etc. They regarded client's opinions as paramount and suggested that even when they thought that they were

"able to influence" a bit, they were conscious about "not push(ing) too hard (as) at the end of the day, the (clients) do what they want to do."

Several factors relate to the consultants' relatively low sense of influence over the client. First, three-fourths of the consultants with a low sense of influence referred to the nature of their assigned roles. It seemed that many of these consultants were in tactical roles and perceived their client to be in strategic roles. They often mentioned that the client was usually the project sponsor and was the one who was responsible for the success of the project. According to them, the client was "the main contributor to making decisions related to the project" including the one about "keeping (them) on the project." They described that their own goal was to "help the client with their job" and make the client's work easy. They were usually reporting to the client and felt that they "needed to put their best foot forward with him." The consultants were "reporting to the client and (the client) was (their) manager from the standpoint of the project." Sometimes, the consultant played a key role in the day to day management of the project but "the buck stop(ped) with (the client)." In many of these cases, their role was such "by design" where they had to "let the client own the process and make changes to the process" and had to accept the client's decisions. For instance, a consultant discussed his role and how he followed client's directions to accomplish it:

I prepared emails for him as well as documents that he presented...what I did was organize our project tasks and get the tasks done…I very often recommended better ways of doing things. Whenever they said they wanted to do something we would go and we would think of the best way to do it, most efficient, fastest, kind of thing and then we would come and present it to him and he would say, "Okay." He would ask some questions and, whenever there was an issue he would come to me or my team leader and say, "Hey can you guys follow up on this? We need to find out. We need to know and we

need to know right now." And usually it would require a couple of hours to figure it out. - MF38

Second, consultants' perception of low influence seemed to be associated with the differences in their expertise and experience. About a half of the consultants with lesser influence stated that they had the specific expertise to support the day to day work of the client, for instance, in a particular process or in making presentations and working on excel; however, the client was "senior," "far more experienced," "was very knowledgeable about the process," and had a broader and overall understanding of the project. They mentioned that "I felt not so good about just not knowing enough about their business" and while the consultants were the "necessary" member of the team, their "knowledge or expertise of what (they) were doing was not very deep." As such, the client was the one who was making decisions, which they were essentially helping in executing.

In addition to their assigned role and expertise, their sense of influence also seemed to relate to their own beliefs and preferences as well as the expectations of their typical client and their consulting firm. In some cases, consultants "wanted" to be a subordinate. They believed that they had a supporting role and regarded the client as "the management." Some of these consultants suggested that their consulting firms also expected them "to follow the directions of the client and do what (the client) wants" them to do. Finally, consultants expressed that the client also expected that "as part of (the client's) team, (the consultant) would follow (the client's) line of thinking" and carry their orders to the 'T.' Even when the client valued their perspective, they were aware

that they were only supporting the client and not making any "final decisions." For example:
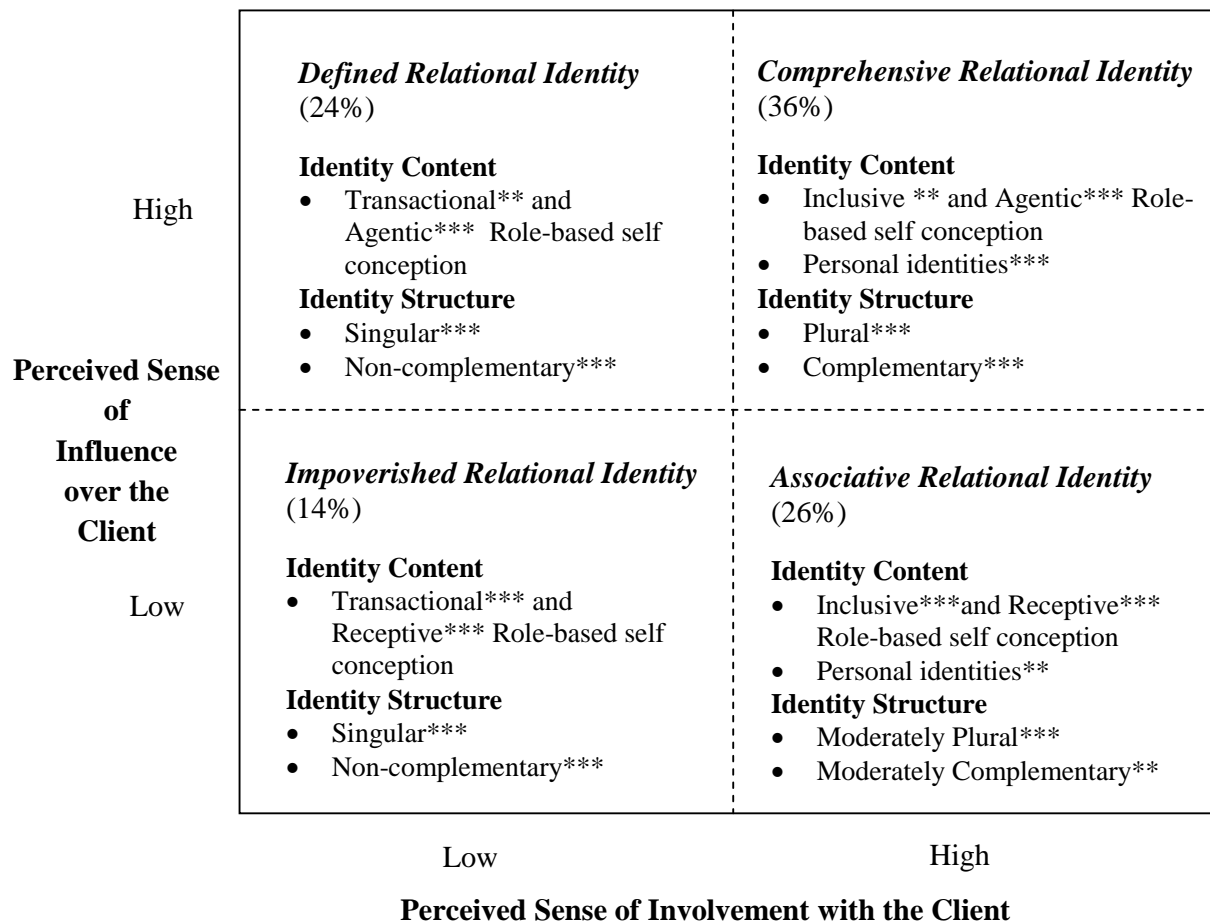
He (the client) valued my opinions, and I felt like I was being valued, but, at the same time, I also knew -- even though I felt like a part of the firm, I also knew that I was supporting the client. So, I wasn't worthy, so to speak, to make all the decisions and that their input, they were the ones who had to make decisions -- IM46

To summarize, the second dimension on which consultants' self-expressions varied was their perception of their influence over the client in terms of impacting the project outcome and process. Almost a half of the consultants were identified as having a relatively high influence over the client, the rest had a relatively low influence. Some consultants with high influence felt that they and the client had equal say in taking decisions and the others perceived that in comparison to the client, they had greater control. The factors that seemed to relate to consultants' sense of influence include their perceptions of their relative expertise and experience vis-à-vis the client, expectations of the client and consulting firms, perceptions and behaviors of the client employees, and consultants' own beliefs and preferences. Further, a few of the consultants perceived relatively high influence over the client from the very beginning of the project. This was mainly due to client's acceptance of the consultants and their expertise as being important for the project. Some other consultants saw their influence evolve over time as they established their credibility with the client in terms of both their ability and intention to bring results.

Relational Identity of Consultants vis-à-vis their Clients

The interaction of the two dimensions, i.e., perceived involvement and perceived influence can be looked at in terms of a two by two framework. I categorized these dimensions into relatively high to relatively low; taken together, they explain four distinct ways consultants manifest their relational identity, namely: comprehensive, defined, associative, and impoverished relational identity. These patterns vary in terms of their content and structural features and also the informality in interaction.

FIGURE 4.1

Four Patterns of Relational Identity: Elaborating Content and Structure

	Defined Relational Identity (24%) **Identity Content** • Transactional** and Agentic*** Role-based self conception **Identity Structure** • Singular*** • Non-complementary***	***Comprehensive Relational Identity*** (36%) **Identity Content** • Inclusive ** and Agentic*** Role-based self conception • Personal identities*** **Identity Structure** • Plural*** • Complementary***
	Impoverished Relational Identity (14%) **Identity Content** • Transactional*** and Receptive*** Role-based self conception **Identity Structure** • Singular*** • Non-complementary***	***Associative Relational Identity*** (26%) **Identity Content** • Inclusive***and Receptive*** Role-based self conception • Personal identities** **Identity Structure** • Moderately Plural*** • Moderately Complementary**

High — Perceived Sense of Influence over the Client — Low

Low   High

Perceived Sense of Involvement with the Client

Strong Support***   Moderate Support**   Tentative Support*

In particular, I found that the relational identity patterns vary in terms of three aspects of content and structure: 1) Relational identity plurality or breadth, i.e., the extent to which individuals' relational identity is based on different domains of the self and include their role, personal, and social identities that they bring to the role-relationship. 2) Relational identity complementarity which indicates the extent to which these different self-aspects are compatible and hence are integrated (i.e., synthesized to constitute a shared identity) and aggregated (i.e., individuals try to forge links between them) in their relational identity or are incompatible and are compartmentalized or deleted from their relational identities. 3) Content of role-based self-conceptions, which included one, the extent to which they are inclusive and go beyond the contract versus transactional and are limited to the assigned contract; and two, the extent to which they are characterized by agentic roles that are constituted with a sense of control as against receptive roles that are marked with a sense of subservience and deference. I now elaborate upon these four patterns. Figure 4.1 depicts these patterns and their content and structural features.

High Involvement - High Influence: Comprehensive Relational Identity

Relational identity of consultants who perceived high involvement and high influence took a comprehensive form; it was plural, i.e., included both role- and person-based identities, and complementary, i.e., individuals found these role- and person-based self-aspects compatible and tried to integrate and aggregate them in their relational identity. Further, comprehensive relational identity was characterized by descriptions of

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self in agentic and inclusive roles. This type of relational identity was found in 36% of consultants.

Comprehensive relational identity was plural or broad as it included both role- and person-based aspects of their self. These consultants saw themselves in an inclusive role with a much wider sense of their role-responsibility towards the client. Involvement led to personal concern and compassion towards the client. Consultants, as such, saw relatively fewer boundaries in the roles they performed – they "felt a certain obligation towards (the client) and not just the client organization" and were "willing to go the extra mile" for the client to help out in decisions that extended "outside the specifics of (their) contracted work." This took the form of protection (i.e., shielding the client from harm), anticipatory helping (i.e., trying to anticipate issues faced by the client in advance and intervene to address them), helping the client in his personal career growth, and engaging with the client even after the project was over. Some of the words they used to describe themselves include client's "guardian," "confidante," "consigliere," "bodyguard," and "insurance policy." For instance, a consultant expressed, "I was like a bullet-proof vest for (the client) where I was really trying to protect her for tough decisions that she had to make." They also helped the client personally, for instance, a consultant mentioned, that he was not only "helping (the client's) organization but also helping (the client) specifically climb the ladder….it becomes personal suddenly." As expressed by a consultant:

(I play) an all-encompassing advisor role with Mary - it goes well beyond the actual scope of the project we're working on… So, the fact that she called me this morning out of the blue to talk about -- she wants my opinion on what she should be doing -- is a great

role to be in….I know that she trusts me, which is extremely important, and that she'll reach out to me when she wants help. – MM17

Further, perception of high influence over the client was related to consultants' agentic role-based self-conceptions in relation to the client. They described themselves in driving roles such as "guide," "guardian," "advisor," "problem solver," "coach," and "mentor." Several of the consultants mentioned that the client saw them in the same way too. In one case, a consultant mentioned that the client "overestimated how much power we have and how much we can help him out. And I think he was looking for a savior and I'm not sure anybody could be a savior."

Some consultants emphasized their agentic role by downplaying their client's identity and emphasizing that they were "championing the client" and were like a "facilitator to help (the client) achieve his goals." For instance, they described themselves as "essentially somebody who can help (the client) in critical situations where (the client) have no idea what they need to do" and as "somebody who could help the client (who was) having a hard time." Others emphasized that "there was no hierarchy" - they jointly led the project with the client and "worked collaboratively (with the client) to solve the problem" and described themselves as "peer," "partner," and "co-leader" who was solving the problem with the client. For instance, a consultant mentioned, "I see myself as kind of an equal even though I may have expertise that's different from (the client); you really have to form a relationship that's collaborative and working well together." Several of these consultants saw their sense of influence evolve over time; their identities also seemed to have evolved accordingly. For instance, they saw themselves changing from being an "analyst" and "executor" to a "strategic partner." A consultant explained

this by using a football analogy where he saw himself as evolving from a "catcher of a ball" to a "quarterback."

Further, given their sense of high involvement, they perceived fewer barriers between themselves and the client; this enabled the consultants to be "more (them)selves" and they could mesh work with personal aspects. This seemingly was facilitated by the fact that they also had a high sense of influence over the client and could take a lead in connecting with them personally. Many of these consultants mentioned categorically that they did not see themselves as only "consultants" doing the "mechanical role" vis-à-vis their client. They shared common interests and backgrounds with the client which included a wide variety of areas such as sports (e.g., baseball, basketball, cricket), family (e.g., grandchildren, girlfriends, spouses), membership in organizations (e.g., common alma mater, employers), music (e.g., playing music at church on Sundays), technology (e.g., new gadgets), and food (e.g., barbeque). A consultant expressed how he related to the client:

It was just like being a team member, involved- we would go out for beer and stuff…. We were discussing cricket…so it was kind of linking on many other aspects as well. And then we also we talked a bit about the personal lives, about say his biking in France with his girlfriend. It was very friendly and to a certain extent as friendly as I can be with some of my friends where we talk about the personal lives and family life as well. – MM28

Finally, comprehensive relational identity was complementary, i.e., consultants found their role and personal self-aspects compatible and tried to aggregate (i.e., forge a link between them by including their personal aspects in their relational identity) and integrate (i.e., synthesize their role and personal aspects to build a shared identity) them. To elaborate, several consultants believed that relating to the client personally helped in

"disarm(ing) the client" and "getting their trust" which in turn made the client "go an extra mile" for them. It also made "working at the client site much easier." As a consultant expressed, "when you're talking about other things and trying to find out people's interests, you can get them more committed to the project, and they are more likely to help you." As such, they seemed to aggregate their role and personal identities in their relational identities by finding "common grounds" to build a "broader relationship" and "show a bit of personality." For example, a consultant expressed, "I took an interest in Ryan - not just as a deputy CIO but as an individual, and we talked about things outside of work." Many a times, they also suggested integrating their personal and role aspects to create a shared identity with the client; for example, a consultant stated that it was almost like being a "spouse." Others mentioned that they were "friendly coworkers," "friends," and "colleagues."

Low Involvement - High Influence: Defined Relational Identity

Consultants with low involvement and high influence had a defined relational identity – it was singular or narrow, i.e., included only their role-based self-conceptions, and non-complementary, i.e., consultants found these self-aspects incompatible and tried to delete their person-based self-aspects from their relational identity. Also, it included transactional and agentic role-based self-conceptions. This type of relational identity was found in 24% of consultants.

Perception of low involvement was associated with consultants seeing themselves mainly in terms of their transactional roles which were limited to the contract. They

described themselves as "outsiders" providing expert advice and instruction in hands off

fashion and often perceived boundaries in the tasks they performed. For instance, they

did not partner with the client to accomplish the project and "did not make decisions or

present materials for the client" and saw their core capability as providing "fact-based"

expertise. They also seemed to enforce boundaries when they perceived that the client is

getting either too reliant on them or is expecting more than what is called for. For

instance, a consultant expressed that "we (the client and I) work for different companies,"

as such, there are "certain guidelines which you don't cross or which you try not to have

them crossed during the project." A consultant also mentioned that in such situations, he

conveyed to the client, "I don't work for you guys, I work with you. And I am not part of

your organization. I'm part of mine."

Like those with comprehensive relational identity, these consultants also

described themselves in agentic roles where they saw themselves as drivers of the project.

Thus, their role-based self-expressions had themes of control. For instance, consultants

expressed, "I was essentially calling the shots" in the project" and "I was the expert and I

decide what to do and I tell the client what to do." Similarly, when asked about how he

saw himself vis-à-vis the client, a consultant mentioned, "you'd have control over the

engagement." They often described the client as a "novice" and themselves as "an

expert," "knowledgeable," "trusted advisors," "strategic advisor," "third party, objective

advisor," "someone who helps (the client) compete and get her job done," and "a

consultant that comes in and helps (the client) do the job and teaches them." The

consultants also emphasized their importance by downplaying client's skills and abilities;

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they were "teaching," "educating," and "modeling behaviors" for the client and mentioned that they were "highly valued" and "respected" by the client who "just didn't have the expertise or knowledge to successfully complete the project" without them.

Further, consultants did not express themselves as an individual in relation to the client and only saw themselves in their professional role as a "consultant." Thus, their relational identity was singular with rarely any mentions of sharing personal aspects of their selves with the client and in fact, they expressed that they were with the client for a "specific objective" and this was "not personal" and was "business." They also emphasized that this essentially "should" characterize a consultant. According to them, this was in line with the expectations of the clients as well, for example, a consultant said, "the expectations of the clients are what I do." To illustrate, on being asked to describe themselves in relation to their client, consultants talked about their roles:

Our role is as a third party and as an external advisor. And it's crucially important for us to maintain objectivity to be seen as a valuable resource, to be seen as credible, and so I don't want to be part of the organization.- MM19

And:

Well we're there to help, we're there to teach we're there to assist, and we're there to deploy. So those would be four major things that we try to do. And that's what pretty much should characterize any consultant on site at any client. – IM27

These consultants found personal and professional aspects as potentially conflicting and often deleted personal aspects from their relational identity, i.e., consciously refrained from expressing themselves personally in their role-relationship. To elaborate, they seemed to think that personal relationships come in the way of being objective and providing value and keeping a personal distance provided them with "a

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greater degree of freedom in moving towards their solution." They expressed that their value lies in being a "third party advisor" and that is how they should see themselves. They mentioned that they were "there to do a task" as a "professional" and "the client firm was looking for advice and we provided them." As a consultant expressed, "I am very much in the mode of – if you have to use me properly, you have to keep us at arm's length properly because otherwise you will lose value." Thus, unlike those with comprehensive identity, consultants with a defined relational identity perceived that they should not be like a "friend" or "friendly" to the client and should not get personal with the client. To illustrate, a consultant emphasized that the clients are not her friends and she should not be overly socializing with them:

You need to distance yourself away from being friendly or being quote/unquote like a friend to them. Because that's not really what you should be doing. ....You're not necessarily supposed to fraternize with your clients. They are your clients they're not your friends, and I think you always need to remember that. You can always be friendly with them but you shouldn't go out drinking together necessarily! - IM29

High Involvement - Low Influence: Associative Relational Identity

I categorized relational identity of consultants who perceived high involvement and low influence as associative relational identity - it was moderately plural and moderately complementary with partial integration and segregation of role- and person-based self-aspects. The role-based self-conceptions of consultants were inclusive with their sense of responsibility extending beyond their contracted role and receptive, i.e., they were constituted in deference and subordination towards the client. Twenty-six percent of consultants were categorized as having an associative relational identity.

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Consultants with an associative relational identity saw themselves as helping the client in an inclusive and all-encompassing way, i.e., they believed that they were there to help the client in whatever the client wanted, instead of just doing "what is expected of them purely as a consultant." Sometimes, they helped the client by spending "little bit of extra time to take care of" tasks that were "not on (their) agenda to begin with." The client could also approach them for not just the project but also for issues outside of the project. Many of these consultants stated that the client "wanted (them) to be very involved" and be a "part of the team" and not a "contractor." As a result, the consultants seemed to have a sense of inclusion and trust and were able to expand the scope of their work. For instance, a consultant expressed, "Bob allowed me to expand scope and expand my domain to other things as well. So I liked the fact that (he) trusted me enough to expand and to interact with different people."

Further, these consultants defined themselves in a receptive role that was subordinate to the client downplaying their own self-aspects. From the consultants' perspective, the client had a much greater control over the project. They typically regarded the client as their "boss," "manager" or "leader" and themselves as "helpmate," "servant," "subordinate," "dedicated resource to the team," "support," "sounding board," and "execution focused." These self-descriptions reflect their sense of subordination relative to the client and a pairing of their role quite specifically to that of the client. They accepted client's authority and were respectful as well as subservient towards the client. For instance, they mentioned, "I saw myself as – I looked up to (the client). I valued her input quite a bit," and "When I hear the word client I automatically put myself

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thinking of they are the ones that are telling us what to do." They often mentioned that

they felt "powerless" in relation to the client. A consultant even expressed, "I am there to

serve them…and do whatever it is that they need to have done, whatever they would like

for me to take care of for them. And I'm not there to argue. I'm not there to say what's

right or what's wrong." Similarly, a consultant mentioned:

(The client) had very high ownership in the process….So it would be typical that the (client) would be looked upon as sort of a leader, informally, but as a leader, and any decision that are made or any recommendations that we make in conjunction with the client, (the team) would have to carry out. – MF14

Associative relational identity was moderately plural. Several of these consultants

also related to the client "on a more personal level" and regarded themselves as more

than a "worker bee." Their "discussions were not limited just to work," and they "could

hang out socially" with the client where "more personality traits come to surface." A

consultant expressed how she related to the client:

We had non-official interactions. He was a very personable guy. And we became friends outside of the office. And I actually still see him outside every once in a while. He's a good person. His wife is a great person. So, we were really lucky in the sense that we were able to work really well professionally but also developed a friendship that the whole staff had for him. – MF25

However, many a times the client was much senior and was also much more influential

compared to the consultant; for instance, the client was the project sponsor and was

leading the project and the consultant was relatively junior in the team. In such instances,

even though the consultants felt included at the client firm, they did not get the

opportunity to relate to the client personally and perceived that the client "didn't really

have time to be social." In some such cases, the consultants related more interpersonally

with other client employees who were at the same level as them and mentioned that they

"would have been friends" (with the client) if there was more time to interact after work.

Finally, associative relational identity was moderately complementary. On one

hand, they perceived that relating personally with the client facilitated their role; on the

other hand, they were also aware of the client's influence and stature in the project and

felt that getting friendly may, at times, lead to problems. To elaborate, being able to relate

to the client at a more social level, made them more "comfortable" and "less afraid of

being wrong." They felt trusted and "could be much more creative in the way they

solved problems." The client could also approach them for the project as well as tasks

outside of the project. As such, they tried to integrate their personal and other social

identities in their relational identity. As one consultant expressed:

I, as a person, do like to build a little more personal relationship and not just be, oh, you need to do this, this and this. I need to have a good personal relationship where the client can do me favors sometimes and the client feels that I can help them out if they need something. – IM46

However, consultants also mentioned they were cautious about bringing in their personal

aspects to their relational identity. They were conscious of the client's influence in the

project and wanted to ensure that they do not say or do something which they should not.

As such, the consultants seemed to find themselves in a conflict and their relational

identity was often marked with partial integration of different self-aspects, i.e., they

seemed to integrate their role and personal aspects; however they did so with caution and

restraint to make sure that they did not get too friendly with the client. For instance:

We didn't just have a professional relationship, but at the same time, it was not very friendly. And that is the way I would have liked it because if you are too friendly, things might slip out and you might say some things that might offend the client, or that might

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go through to the wrong people. So, that is how I prefer it - that it is a little more than just professional, but not very friendly. – IM 46

Low Involvement - Low Influence: Impoverished Relational Identity

Consultants who perceived low involvement and low influence had an impoverished relational identity – it was narrow and included only consultants' transactional and receptive roles constituted with subservience towards the client; it was not complementary and was marked by segregation and deletion of personal aspects. Impoverished relational identity was found in 14% of consultants.

These consultants identified themselves in marginalized roles and suggested that they were "merely resources," who were hired for a temporary period to accomplish very specific jobs for the client. Their self-descriptions sometimes had themes of constraint, where they felt that they did not have the freedom to expand their scope in the project, and at other times of disinterest, where they were no longer interested in doing anything more than what they were contracted to do. Some of the ways they defined themselves include "just another resource," "consultant," "expendable resource," "merely a technical resource," someone who is "just put in place to work with the (client)," and "participates in some kind of service offering." The consultants seemed to realize the transactional nature of their roles and hence their dispensability, and felt that moment they falter, they would be thrown out. A consultant expressed himself as:

I'm here to clean up and clean up only. I can't go anywhere else but clean the room and once I'm done in the room I'm gone. I'm not allowed to, like, "Oh wait the hallways a mess let me clean that out" or "You're balcony is a mess can I go clean that up?" "No!" I was restricted to the living room and that was it. – MF38

Further, impoverished relational identity was characterized by receptive roles constituted with subservience towards the client. Consultants fitting this category regarded the client as an "authority figure and not so much as a colleague" and themselves as "doers of what the client wanted them to do." As a consultant expressed, "I felt that (the client) was a boss and that (the client) was always right and that (the client) was never wrong. And I felt like that I'm just a developer, a hired help, that's it." Given their perception of client's high influence, their relational identity had themes of subordination where consultants often underplayed and understated their own self-aspects relative to the client and saw themselves under client's domination. For instance, they often talked about working "for" the client instead of with the client. As a consultant mentioned, "with a guy like him (the client), I see myself as more of like a subordinate role." One of the consultants even described herself like a "slave" who "could be beaten." According to them, the client also made the decision related to their appointment on the project and they found themselves at the mercy of the client. For instance, a consultant mentioned, "it felt you were kind of the underdog, that you wanted to make sure they felt like you were worth what they were paying you for." Another consultant mentioned that when they make a mistake they were made to feel like a "scum" or "the thing you scrape off the bottom of your shoe."

These consultants described themselves mainly in terms of their marginalized roles and did not relate to the client personally. This seemed to be the case as they perceived that the client "couldn't see (them) in any other way" except as a "consultant," "contractor," "disposable resource," and a "vendor" and it was "always a professional

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relationship." They rarely talked about interacting with the client as an individual and in fact, often seemed to de-emphasize their personal aspects while defining themselves. For instance, on being asked how he saw himself vis-à-vis the client, a consultant said "professional" and explained, "When I say professional, I mean, you are playing a role. I am not me, Ryan, hanging out, having beers, shooting the breeze" and "I saw myself as a very capable and professional vendor. She has hired me to do this role, and I am entertaining that role, or I am feeling that role." Similarly, another consultant suggested:

I saw myself as playing a role. That role is a professional who gets X, who can do this design, do this installation, do this configuration and, therefore, I played that role. Here is what we expect you to be, and therefore that is what I was because that is what they paid me to be. –IM22

As such, impoverished relational identity of consultants was characterized by low complementarity and segregation and deletion of elements of their personal and other social identities, i.e., they kept their role and personal aspects compartmentalized and often got rid of their personal aspects. This was mainly driven by what the client thought of them. It seemed that while they would have liked to have a relationship with the client, they often perceived the client as being unfriendly and lacking in any inclination to engage with them. They were aware that the client perceived them as "not people" and "one of us" but like "disposable resources." They therefore, did not seem to see any overlap in their role and personal self-aspects; as a consultant mentioned, "It's more of an okay, this is a business transaction, this is a business relationship. We will do this project, and we will move on. He (the client) will call if he needs something." Similarly, another consultant mentioned that "as a consultant, the client is not calling you to ask you if your kid is walking yet. So, pretty much all the interactions with them are professional,

even when they are warm, even when she invites you over to her house." As such, the

consultants seem to perceive their relational identity mainly in transactional terms and

made sure that they "minimize (their) interaction" and "that every interaction is

professional, or organized, and clear." As a consultant expressed:

You don't ever think that you're going to become best friends with your client.....I never have any expectations of friendship because, you trust that people are going to mess up and be mean and be rude.- MF38

Thus, the interactions of the two dimensions namely perceived involvement with

the client and perceived influence over the client, help in arriving at four different ways

in which consultants express their relational identity. These patterns are qualitatively

different in terms of their characteristics like plurality, complementarity, and the content

of role-based self-conceptions. I also found that they are associated with outcomes related

to how the consultant and the client interact to get their work done. In particular,

informality of interaction emerged as an aspect of work that emerged as important. In the

next section, I describe how these different forms of relational identity associate with

informality in interaction between the consultant and the client.

Relational Identity and Informality in the Conduct of Work

I found that relational identity of consultants is related to the degree of informality

they perceived in their interaction with their client. Past research argues that informality

entails "loose," "spontaneous" interactions characterized by use of colloquial language

and first names, relatively unregulated turn-taking, unscheduled meetings with a fluid

agenda, and varied topics of conversation with many shifts in topics possible (Morand,

1995: 831). Consultants often talked about these aspects of their interaction with the

client and distinctive accounts of interactions were associated with the each form of

relational identity. In this section, I elaborate upon consultants' perception of informality

in interaction in the fours relational identity forms. Figure 4.2 depicts perceived

informality for the four patterns of relational identity.

FIGURE 4.2

Four Patterns of Relational Identity: Elaborating Informality in the Conduct of Work

High	*Defined Relational Identity* (24%) **Perceived informality in the conduct of work** • Primarily Formal***	*Comprehensive Relational Identity* (36%) **Perceived informality in the conduct of work** • Primarily Informal***
Perceived Sense of Influence over the Client		
Low	*Impoverished Relational Identity* (14%) **Perceived informality in the conduct of work** • Primarily Formal***	*Associative Relational Identity* (26%) **Perceived informality in the conduct of work** • Mix of Formal and Informal***
	Low	High

Perceived Sense of Involvement with the Client

Strong Support***   Moderate Support**   Tentative Support*

Comprehensive Relational Identity: Primarily Informal

Comprehensive relational identity was associated with fluid and spontaneous conversation and greater ease in talking about different topics. These consultants could relate with the client as an individual and could "understand each other's thought process." As such, they felt comfortable and could shift easily from work-related conversation and "joke around with the client" to "put some levity into the project." Further, comprehensive relational identity was also characterized by inclusive role-based self-conception. Since these consultants helped the client in an all-encompassing way, these identities were characterized by conversations on broader range of topics and not just the project. For instance, the consultants thought that the client could confide in them about not just issues related to the project but also politics in the firm, concerns about their bosses or other members of the firm, or any other problem.

Comprehensive relational identity was also associated with the client approaching the consultant "for advice on an ad hoc basis." The consultant and the client could relate to each other at a personal level, had a sense of familiarity and could be "relaxed about coming and seeing each other;" they did not have the need to schedule meetings in advance and could have "water cooler talk" and "light chatting" with the client. Since these consultants saw themselves in agentic role, they could also take a lead in ensuring that the interaction is informal. Many of them also mentioned that they had a "desk next to the client" and "interacted frequently when they were at the client's office." Even when they were not in the client's office, they emailed each other several times a day, used technologies like IM more often for back and forth conversations or "would pick up

the phone and …talk through something." Their meetings with the client were "spontaneous," "not scripted," and were "more like conversations" with "a fluid agenda." For instance, they often had "friendly banters at the outset" and also did not feel the need of having a "planned agenda" or to "structure or rehearse the conversation." As a consultant mentioned:

When I mean informal, I mean we will set up a meeting and just have a fluid agenda. We will be working together on the presentation for the board. And so it was very collaborative in nature and it could be very informal brainstorming without a lot of structure before the start of the meeting. That is what I mean by less formal. – MF6

Many consultants talked about the evolution of their relational identity – from narrow identity with receptive roles to a broad identity characterized with agentic roles. These consultants often suggested that the way they interacted with the client also evolved accordingly. One of the reasons this happened was because in the beginning, the consultants had not established "trust" and "credibility" with the client." They also did not know how the client thought and how much "authority" they will have in the project. As such, they were much more "thoughtful" and "deliberate" in the beginning. For instance, a consultant observed that in the beginning, his experience was like "walk(ing) on egg shells;" he had to "be very, very, very careful and measured in everything (he) say and do" and would spend "more time thinking about what (he would) write in the email." However, their interaction became less structured and more fluid as they developed a broad and agentic identity. As another consultant said, "in the beginning, ...it was more formal…as time went on, and we got to know people, the interactions could be more informal. We could have shorter conversations, shorter emails, faster back and forth communication."

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Defined Relational Identity: Primarily Formal

Consultants with defined relational identity related to the client professionally and saw themselves in agentic roles. They themselves tried to get structure in their interaction by maintaining guidelines about when to meet and not, for instance, they did not meet or talk after the office hours. This was because of their preference to maintain a distant relationship. They saw themselves as "outsider advisors" and also took it upon themselves to enforce boundaries in their interaction with the client. For instance, a consultant mentioned, that it is his "job" to keep their topics of conversation "reigned in to professional." They preferred relatively less spontaneous and more structured way of working, for example, they usually scheduled meetings in advance instead of having impromptu interaction. As a consultant suggested, "we have a fixed time that we talk every other week." To illustrate:

I do try to be outside, because I am outside. I don't try to be part of their company. I don't try to be perceived as part of their company. I try to keep strict guidelines where it's not okay to call me at midnight. Or it's not okay to call me on Saturday or Sunday without previous, authorization or agreement. – IM27

The conversations between the consultants and their clients involved structured question answers or patterns of advising. The way they talked about conducting meetings with the client often depicted following a protocol and a formal code of interaction. For instance, a consultant explained how he advised the client:

We would meet with Jenn both prior to and at the conclusion of the meetings with the external third party firms. I would provide coaching and advice to Jenn on here's the questions you should ask, here's what you can expect to hear from them, here's how I would follow up with those. And subsequent to the meetings she would ask our opinion on what we heard in those meetings. How did we interpret it? Did we think that what they were saying was accurate and reasonable? - IM20

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Associative Relational Identity: Mix of Formal and Informal

Associative relational identity was associated with a mix of formal and informal interactions. Several of these consultants related with the client personally and mentioned that "we both knew each other" and could be "relaxed about coming and seeing each other." They could "pull (the client) in and say stop for a second - this is where we need to go." However, most of the times, consultants only talked about informality in the way client interacted with them and in a very few cases expressed their own ease of interaction with the client. For instance, they often mentioned that the client could come to them and talk about a variety of topics which were outside the project, such as "problems and challenges" related to "everything that was going on." politics in the client organization, etc., but there were not any reference of whether they could similarly reach out to the client. The client also did not feel the need to schedule meetings in advance and could approach the consultant any time with questions and queries. As a consultant mentioned:

He (the client) felt safe to kind of come to me when we would talk about problems or issues. He felt that he could talk to us about the other problems -- even political going on within the organization about the challenges that with personal interactions with other staff members. He could come to us and complain about everything that was going on and give us all the information that we needed in that sense. - MF25

They seemed to focus on informality in client's interaction because they perceived that the client played a driving role in their relationship, and saw themselves in receptive role vis-à-vis their clients. While being able to relate personally with the client facilitated comfort and ease, consultants' sense that the client had more control may have led to a more guarded interaction on the part of the consultant. Several of these

consultants stated that while having an involved relationship facilitated comfort and they could be "more outspoken" about what they want, they were still aware of the client's control and had to be "very respectful" and guarded in their interaction with the client. For instance, a consultant mentioned, "Even though I felt like a part of the client, there was this aspect where I knew that the final decision rested with the client, and that I had to be very careful in the way I interact with the client." They also tried to use a language of deference and formality in their interaction. As a consultant, they had to extend their opinion on different aspects of project, but they made sure they did so in a proper and polite way. For instance, a consultant expressed, "I don't just blatantly come out and say you're totally wrong. It's like have you ever thought about maybe this thing or doing it that way, and approach them that way."

Impoverished Relational Identity: Primarily Formal

Consultants with impoverished relational identity perceived their interaction with the client as highly formal. They neither related with the client personally nor had any sense of control on the task outcome or process. As such, they never felt very comfortable with the client and tried to stick to highly formal behavior. Their interactions with the client were "structured" - they almost always interacted with the client on "an extremely formal basis," in "scheduled type meeting, status meetings." Instead of having a fluid interaction, they thought about when and how to approach the client and refrained from asking questions and checking back informally. They also made sure to "present (themselves) as a much more polished and professional and crisp sort of communicator." As a consultant mentioned, "because we haven't been able to really develop a rapport or

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sort of a feeling of partnership, I would say I am a little bit more formal.....or maybe a little bit more cautious." A consultant mentioned that he was very professional with the client and described:

There are kind of the rules of being professional. You speak in clear sentences. When you email, there are the rules about what emails should look like. They shouldn't be friendly and informal. You don't use texting language. You don't put, I'll be there 4, the number 4, or anything like that. You consider it professional communication. You dress in a certain way. You speak clearly. You position yourself clearly. You treat them respectfully. You use titles when you can; although, I guess you don't use titles. You tend to use first names, but you acknowledge each person's role, acknowledge it as an important role, mainly to get what you want out of them.- IM22

Further, impoverished relational identity included marginalized and receptive role-based self-conceptualization. The client seemed to have much more influence and did not treat them with "any great humanity or great compassion, or great friendliness, or great warmth." As such, consultants felt that they "have got to watch out...and be careful," and needed to "put (their) best foot forward any time that (they) are interacting with the client." They "always had to be aware that everything (they) say can and will be held against (them)." Hence they were always extra-prepared, "very precise about language," and "very careful of what (they) were saying." They "were always pitching (their) thing as a consultant…and were always consulting to him." As suggested by a consultant, "it's like a game of chess. You're always trying to figure out what the next move is going to be, and you always want to be ahead of the game." In some cases, they could not even approach the client directly and had to report to the client through (their) consulting firm's) management as that was the accepted protocol. Similarly, a consultant mentioned:

With somebody like Mike, I see myself as more like a subordinate - I'm not really in a relaxed mode. When I'm not working with Mike, its more easy going….it's more spontaneous, we're trying different things, and let's see if this works, and if that doesn't work, then we'll try something else. You don't have that fear of failure.- IM9

Thus, different patterns of relational identity were associated with consultants' perception of informality.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed analysis of the nature of relational identity and how it associates with consultant and client interact to get their work done. In particular, I discussed two dimensions that emerged as key in understanding the variation in relational identity across 50 consultants. I then described how they associate with consultants' expression of relational identity. Finally, I examined how relational identity relates to consultants' perception of informality in interaction.

CHAPTER 5: TOWARDS A GENERALIZED FRAMEWORK FOR RELATIONAL IDENTITY

In this dissertation, I have focused on the relational identity of an individual vis-à-vis a relational other at work. Relational identity is defined as how an individual sees oneself with regard to this focal other to answer the question "who am I?" in context of this person (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Chen, et al., 2006). Although previous researchers have described relational identity theoretically (Chen et al, 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), there has been very little empirical inquiry into understanding the nature of relational identity. In particular, we know little about the content and structure of relational identity, the dimensions associated with relational identity, and variations in relational identity across individuals. Further, although scholars have argued that relational identity has implications for individual outcomes such as affect, emotion, and behavior enacted in a role-relationship (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Chen et al, 2006), there has been little work in understanding its implications for how two individuals in a role-relationship interact to get work done.
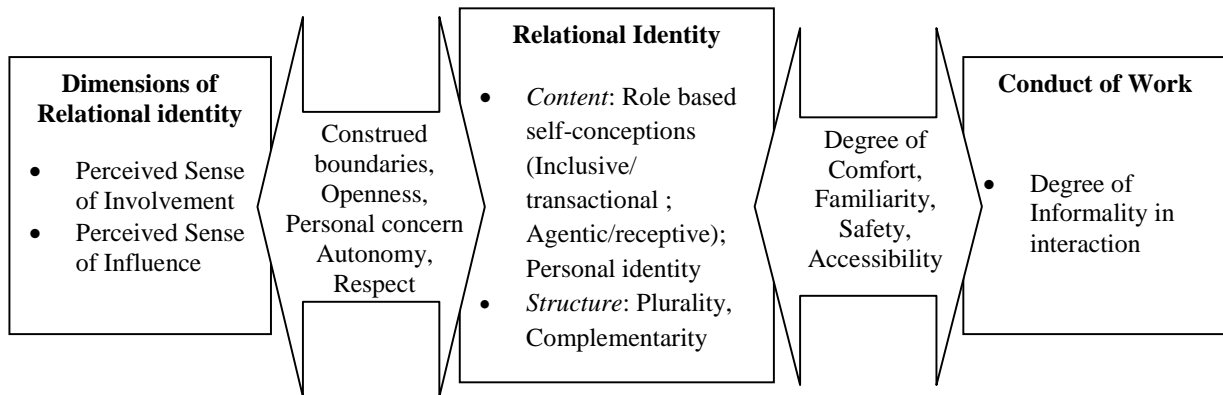
My dissertation sought to address these gaps by posing two questions: 1) What is the nature of an individual's relational identity at work? 2) How is relational identity associated with the conduct of work? In the previous chapter, I presented the findings based on my analysis of fifty interviews with consultants. In this chapter, I generalize from my empirical findings to advance a conceptual model of relational identity, focusing on the underlying mechanisms of relational identity construction and conduct of work.

Towards a Generalized Framework of Relational Identity

Figure 5.1 depicts a generalized framework that is derived from my findings. Because my interview data is cross-sectional, I use double-headed arrows between the major constructs shown in the boxes to indicate an association and not a causal relationship.

FIGURE 5.1

A Generalized Framework of Relational Identity

Dimensions of Relational identity	Construed boundaries, Openness, Personal concern Autonomy, Respect	Relational Identity	Degree of Comfort, Familiarity, Safety, Accessibility	Conduct of Work
• Perceived Sense of Involvement • Perceived Sense of Influence		• *Content*: Role based self-conceptions (Inclusive/ transactional ; Agentic/receptive); Personal identity • *Structure*: Plurality, Complementarity		• Degree of Informality in interaction

My findings indicate that there are two dimensions – perceived involvement with the relational other and perceived influence over the relational other - that are associated with an individual's relational identity. Taken together, perceived involvement and influence associate with four distinct patterns of relational identity, namely comprehensive, defined, associative, and impoverished relational identities (see Figure 4.1). In particular, these two dimensions relate to three distinct content and structural features of relational identity in these four patterns: 1) Plurality, 2) Complementarity, and

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3) Nature of role-based self-conceptions, i.e., the extent to which they are inclusive versus transactional and agentic versus receptive.

Perceived involvement and relational identity. In general, perception of high involvement is associated with a pluralistic relational identity, based on inclusive role-based self-conceptions, as in the case of comprehensive and associative relational identities. Such individuals seem to believe that high involvement facilitates information sharing and find their role and personal aspects complementary. High involvement signifies cognitive and emotional connection with the relationship partner; the two individuals have a shared purpose and there is no "us versus them." Cognitive connection and a sense of being integrated with the other suggest that the individuals regard the other as a part of their in-group. As such, they de-emphasize any group boundaries (e.g., functional, hierarchical, organizational) and relate to each other as individual persons (Miller, 2002).

Further, as argued in the literature on inter-group contact (e.g., Allport, 1954; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakarni, 2003; Hewstone, Rubins, & Willis, 2002; Pettigrew, 1998), shared purpose and interdependence connote that actions of one individual yield similar outcomes for the other; in other words, one's actions do not obstruct the goals of the other individual in the role-relationship. Consultants in this study expressed this by suggesting that "we were in it together" and were like "members of a team." Such a cooperative interdependence reduces biases towards the other (Worchel, 1986) and enhances positive evaluation of the other (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) facilitating self-disclosure in the role-relationship. Therefore, individuals who perceive high involvement

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are open to sharing common interests and experiences and relating with the other as a "whole person" bringing in aspects of their personal selves to the role-relationship (e.g., being grandparents, baseball fans, or music lovers).

On the other hand, when individuals perceive themselves to be less involved, they regard themselves and the relational other as separate entities with different goals. As such, they perceive more boundaries in their interaction and tend to refrain from bringing personal aspects to the role-relationship. Thus, relational identity of such individuals is relatively singular and less complementary and includes only those aspects of individuals' role identities that are necessary for work. For instance, consultants with defined relational identity described themselves as "third party advisors" and "not part of the team, but helping out a key member of the team." These consultants saw themselves mainly in terms of their professional roles - they regarded their role- and person-based self-concepts non-complementary and often resorted to deletion of their personal aspects from their relational identity.

At the same time, individuals who perceive high involvement with the relational other tend to define themselves in inclusive and all-encompassing roles that are not limited to the contract. There are two reasons that might explain this relationship. First, involvement signifies emotional connection and a sense of empathy towards the other. Such empathy motivates people to behave in a more supportive way towards the relational other (Dovidio, et al., 2003). For instance, Batson (1991) argued that empathy stimulates empathic concern and compassion, which leads to an altruistic concern towards the welfare of the other. Second, when individuals describe themselves in

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relation to other with attributes such as involved and friendly, they are more open to interaction with the out-group members (Dutton et al., 2010) and often engage in spontaneous actions of helping others (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006). As such, relational identity of individuals who perceive high involvement with the other is marked with inclusive roles where the relationship "transcend(s) the bounds of the roles" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 18). For instance, the consultants in this study who perceived compassion and intimacy with the client described themselves as a "guardian" and "all-encompassing advisor."

On the other hand, less involved individuals tend to be emotionally detached and, in turn, less empathic and concerned about supporting the relational other personally. Their focus tends to be mainly on role-accomplishment and they see themselves primarily as role-bearers with their sense of responsibility limited to the assigned contract.

Perceived influence and relational identity. Perceived influence over the relational other is associated with the extent to which role-based self-conceptions are agentic or receptive. When people actively work towards a purpose, they are said to exhibit agency (Bandura, 2001). Agency involves qualities such as "instrumentality, dominance, competence, and efficiency in goal attainment" (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007: 751) and those who have agentic traits or characteristics are competent, independent, decisive, assertive, and forceful (Abele, 2003; Rosette & Tost, 2010).

Individuals with high influence perceive themselves as playing a key role in taking decisions that shape the process and outcome related to the task or the project. It has been found that when individuals are making decisions, they perceive greater control

over their work and freedom to make choices (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Discretion on decision-making leads to a feeling of autonomy; as such, they behave proactively and see themselves in agentic as against receptive role where they are regulated by others (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). To illustrate, consultants with comprehensive and defined relational identities constituted their identity with a sense of control and saw themselves in a driving role. Thus, as Spreitzer et al. (2005) argue, self-determination explains the relationships between influence and agentic role-based self-concept.

On the other hand, when individuals perceive themselves as having relatively low influence, they regard the relational other as an authority figure with a much greater voice in impacting the decisions. As such, they define themselves in receptive roles marked with deference and subservience towards the relational other and tried to orient their behavior according to the client (Fiske, 1992). Thus, consultants with associative and impoverished relational identities had a sense of less control and high dependence on the client; their role-based self-conceptions were receptive. For example, some words they used to describe themselves include "servant," "subordinate," "helpmate," and "execution focused."

Individuals with low influence also tend to exercise restraint in bringing in their personal self to the role-relationship, as was in the case of associative and impoverished relational identities. Past research on social relations also suggests that subordinates accord greater personal space to those higher in rank or authority (Fiske, 1992). To illustrate, associative relational identity was moderately pluralistic and moderately

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complementary even though consultants perceived high involvement. While involvement

facilitated personal interaction, consultants also perceived low influence vis-à-vis the

client. As such, they seem to regard the client as an authority figure and felt less open and

safe in relating to the client as a person.

Patterns of relational identity. I found that the interaction of involvement and influence

was associated with four distinct patterns of relational identity: comprehensive, defined,

associative, and impoverished (see Figure 4.1). These four major types of relational

identities are not exclusive to a particular role-relationship; rather, in the course of a

relationship, individuals may move back and forth among them.   This finding suggests

that relational identity may evolve during the course of a relationship or shift with regard

to changing circumstances or the relational other. While it was beyond the scope of this

study to examine this longitudinally, several participants talked about an experienced

increase in their involvement and influence over time. In general, the shifts in relational

identity tended to be from associative and impoverished relational identities towards a

more comprehensive relational identity.

Such an evolution of relational identity over the course of a role-relationship can

be explained in many ways. It has been found that increased contact leads to

interpersonal attraction and a more personalized relationship (Dovidio et al., 2003;

Pettigrew, 1986) as well as multiplex role-relationships (Burt, 1983; Sluss & Ashforth,

2007). Such multiplex relationships are based on more than one set of roles (Valcour,

2002), which often transcend the bounds of the assigned roles. Thus, as the consultants

increased the time spent with their clients in the course of a project, they may have felt

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more familiarity or attraction towards the client, which, in turn, led to more inclusive and personal relational identities.

Another factor that may explain this evolution in relational identity is what Pettigrew (1998) described as "learning about others." Over time, contact leads to increased knowledge about the other; with more information about the other, people are more likely to see both the relational other and themselves in a personalized way (Dovidio, et al., 2003). In addition, increased contact may enable the consultants to see more opportunities for involvement with the client, as they discover that they have more in common. As well, the converse might be true: as consultants get to know their client better, they may discover more unattractive aspects of the other. Although beyond the scope of this study, it is interesting to speculate that the fluidity in relational identity may shift in different ways over time and with increased contact. Thus, a relational identity in a particular role-relationship may not be restricted to only one of the four forms that I discovered; rather, it might take different forms with regard to one's experience over time with the relational other.

Relational identity and perceived informality of interaction. A second major finding of my study relates to the association of relational identity with the informality of interaction between the two individuals in the role-relationship (see Figure 4.2). In general, relational identities that are pluralistic, complementary, and include non-transactional roles were found to be associated with informality in interaction. Pluralistic relational identity is characterized by both role- and person-based aspects of the self. Relating to the other personally means likelihood of greater knowledge about the other in

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relational identity; personalization tends to increase perceived similarity and commonality with the other (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), increasing trust and reducing anxiety about, and discomfort with, the interaction (Miller, 2002); consequently, this tends to result in more informal interactions. Furthermore, complementarity is argued to promote authenticity and trust, which facilitates a sense of safety (Dutton et al., 2010), enabling a more informal, and often unguarded approach to the relational other.

By contrast, receptive role-based self-conceptions tend to be associated with greater formality in interaction. Such individuals define themselves as subordinate to the authority figure perceived in the relational other. "Positional identities" (i.e., those related to social rank or structural or hierarchical positions) connote social distance or lack of intimacy (Irvine, 1979: 778). As such, the relational other's position of authority can instill a sense of respect but also anxiety; in turn, this tends to be associated with formality in interaction.

Although a number of the consultants I studied perceived greater formality in the interaction, the client did not always reciprocate; instead, the client sometimes tended to interact in a relatively informal manner. More generally, the perceived degree of formality that consultants perceived was not always reciprocated by the client. This is consistent with Morand's (1995: 854) observation that "interactional work is not equally distributed across high- and low- power actors." While an individual with agentic or directive role-based self-concept may engage in informal interaction through joking or interrupting during conversation, the relational partner with the more receptive role might respond formally. This was seen in associative relational identity, when the client could

be informal but consultants were more formal. Further, the dominant member is found to control the level of formality in interaction (Hoppe, Snell, & Cocroft, 1996), as such, a shift from formal to informal interaction is generally initiated by the one with greater influence (Morand, 1995). To illustrate, consultants with comprehensive relational identity saw themselves in agentic roles and their client in receptive roles. In these cases, it was the consultants who ensured that the interaction remains informal.

Thus, I found that the four forms of relational identity varied in the degree of perceived informality in interaction between consultants and their typical client; while comprehensive relational identity was related with primarily informal interaction, impoverished and defined relational identities were associated with primarily formal interaction. Associative relational identity, which was characterized by high involvement and low influence, fell in between with a mix of formal and informal interaction.

Implications for Theory

This study makes four important contributions to the identity literature. By investigating relational identity empirically, it identifies two key dimensions – perceived involvement and perceived influence - that are associated with an individual's relational identity vis-à-vis the other. Taken together, the dimensions of involvement and influence help in describing the different ways in which individuals construct their relational identity. This finding is important for two reasons. First, past research posits that relational identity is constitutive of role- and person-based aspects of the two individuals in a role-relationship (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The dimensions of

involvement and influence provide the first step towards understanding how individuals express their role-and person-based self-aspects; as such, this study complements previous work on the construct. The findings also reinforce the context specific nature of relational identity (Chen et al., 20006; Anderson & Chen, 2002) by putting forth two dimensions of this interpersonal context that associate with the expression of relational identity.

Second, the assertion that relational identity is constitutive of role- and person-based identities (Chen et al., 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) provides only limited understanding of how an individual's relational identity can be described and measured. This study addresses this limitation by demonstrating that this can be done through structural identity features such as plurality and complementarity, and identity content features such as personal identities and different role-based self-conceptions.

Third, based on the interaction of involvement and influence, I have identified four different patterns of relational identity and show that these patterns vary in terms of their content and structural characteristics (i.e., plurality, complementarity, and the nature of role-based self-conceptions). These patterns supply a missing element in the research on relational identity: a vocabulary with which relational identity at work can be compared and contrasted. They also capture the variance in relational identity that may exist among a pool of diverse role-relationships in organizations. Moreover, these four forms constitute an empirically grounded typology of relational identities upon which future research can be based.

Fourth, this study makes a contribution by showing that relational identity is associated with degree of informality in interaction in a role-relationship. Past research argues that relational identity is key to understanding how individuals define themselves in organizations (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), but have not yet proposed or examined how it might relate to the conduct of work in a role-relationship. Similarly, while researchers have often related informality to context characteristics such as organizational structure and culture (Morand, 1995), there has been little attention to how relational identity may be associated with it. This study adds to the past work in these two fields in two ways: one, by demonstrating that the two are linked and two, by emphasizing the importance of relational identity for understanding how individuals interact in work relationships. Since informality is particularly important phenomenon in creativity, innovation, and problem solving (Allen, 1977; Morand, 1995), an understanding of this link may be helpful for both research and practical purposes.

Limitations of the Study

Like every empirical study, this dissertation has certain limitations. First, it examines the relational identity of consultants who are employed in professional consulting firms. Thus, the data for this study comes from a population where relationships are an important aspect of their work and serve as a key source of identity. Interactions and relationships are important aspect of organizational roles in general (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008), but particularly so in consulting. Thus, I believe that my proposed framework may hold for a wide variety of role-relationships; however one

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should exercise caution in generalizing the findings. Examining the generalizability of these findings is an important agenda for future research.

Second, the findings of this study are based on cross-sectional data. I interviewed fifty consultants and asked them about their interaction with a client they perceived as "typical." As a result, my data cannot speak to the causal nature of relational identity, or its longitudinal or temporal quality as to how relational identity is constructed over a period of time. And yet, several of my interviewees recalled that the nature of their relational identity changed over time, experiences and client contact; understanding the emergent, evolutionary and changing nature of relational identity is an important topic for future research.

Third, my data capture only the consultants' view of the role-relationship and not that of the client partner; thus, my findings are limited to my interviewees' perceptions of the client, the nature of the client relationship, and the conduct of interactions with the client. Clearly, getting the perspective of the other will be critical in fully understanding the relationship between the two individuals involved in a role-relationship. Since relational identity is focused at the interpersonal level, future studies might look at the dyad so as to get the perspectives of both the individuals in the role-relationship. Further, the questions were focused on understanding consultants' perceptions about their typical client. While this helped me in addressing my research question, the responses essentially captured the standard individual difference in consultants' experiences. Future studies may take into consideration the differences in the client by examining cross-situations, for example, consultants' perceptions about the best or the worst client.

Implications for Research

This study can serve as a starting point for researchers who would like to examine relational identity, particularly the generalized framework presented should lend itself to empirical investigation. Here, I suggest several other questions that emerge from my findings.

The first question involves understanding the stability of relational identity patterns and the relationship among different types of relational identities over time. One area to examine would be patterns of change or evolution in relational identities over time and with regard to experience. For example, many of the consultants I studied suggested that they began their role-relationship with an associative or impoverished identity, but over time, their relational identity took on a more complex and comprehensive form. Future research may look at the construction of relational identity over time to understand the process through which identity formation takes place and evolves.

A second question that can be addressed in future research relates to the likely distribution of the four forms of relational identity across different types of role-relationships, different types of individuals, and different types of work settings. For instance, certain relationships may be more conducive to certain forms of relational identity: doctors' relational identity vis-à-vis their patient will likely take a defined and comprehensive form, given the nature of the doctor's expertise and authority, and the patient's receptivity to following medical advice.

Another question concerns examining the relationship between relational identity and work performance-related outcomes. It would be interesting to extend my findings to outcomes such as project success, efficiency, and knowledge management. For example, in the consulting context as well as in insider-outsider research teams (Louis & Bartunek, 1992), an important outcome may be the approach individuals take towards managing insider-outsider boundaries. A boundary decision is a choice of "who I am" (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005) or reciprocally, defining something refers to marking its boundaries (Ashforth, 2001). Since identity and boundaries are related, relational identity may well bear upon how consultants choose to deal with the insider-outsider boundaries at the client firm. It would also be helpful to understand which forms of relational identity are suited for different goals or outcomes. For example, it might be possible that for ensuring efficiency, defined or impoverished identities are more appropriate as one is not spending much time on building the relationship. Conversely, for building repeat business with a particular client, a comprehensive or associative relational identity might be more helpful.

Fourth, the research emphasizes the role of context in shaping relational identity. A relevant question might be about the implications of different types of contexts – organizational, industrial, national - on relational identity. For instance, do consultants from firms based in different countries exhibit differences in the forms of relational identities? Also, what differences are evident in the link between relational identity and conduct of work in consultants from different countries? Similarly, one might look at organizations in different industries. For example, how does relational identity in a role-

relationship (e.g., manager-subordinate relationship) differ across organizations in different industries? One might speculate that relational identity of a manger may look different in a manufacturing organization than in a software firm owing to the differences in norms about hierarchy.

Finally, while this was not the focus of my dissertation, several factors seemed to be associated with the variation in involvement and influence, and hence the different patterns of relational identity. Future research could examine the individual and context related factors that may have a bearing upon relational identities. Such an understanding will be an important contribution to the field of relational identity.

Implications for Practice

This study also has several practical implications. The first implication concerns the variation in features that characterize relational identity. For instance, while in both comprehensive and defined relational identity, consultants take an agentic role, those with a comprehensive relational identity may take a more hands on approach towards helping the client as compared to the ones with defined relational identity. The effectiveness of these patterns may vary depending upon the client's needs; for instance, if the client needs (or prefers) hand-holding, then a comprehensive relational identity may be quite effective. Thus, understanding different patterns of relational identity may help in deploying consultants in a way that is appropriate given the client's needs.

The second implication concerns the connection between relational identity and the two dimensions of involvement and influence. This link is particularly important for

client firms that often spend substantial sums of money for engaging consultants. To illustrate, if they want consultants to take a leading role and also connect with their employees personally (which is a characteristic of comprehensive relational identity), they might provide consultants with a context that offers resources that are supportive of relationships and that allows the consultants to have a voice in making decisions related to the project.

The third implication follows from the relationship found between relational identity and informality in the conduct of work. The optimal pattern of relational identity for an individual may depend upon his or her comfort level with the way work gets done in that particular pattern. For instance, defined relational identity may be particularly well suited for managers who are working on multiple projects or tasks simultaneously and do not have the time and resources to engage in hands on advising. Similarly, an impoverished relational identity may be useful in situations where the consultant wants to do a quick project without any expectation of future association.

Conclusion

Despite the importance of role-relationships in organizations, research on understanding the nature and implications of relational identity has been relatively limited. The goal of this study was to elaborate theory in this area. Based on interviews with 50 consultants, the study advances four major forms of relational identity at work – comprehensive, defined, associative, and impoverished - which differ in their content and structural characteristics as well as their association with interaction patterns. These

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forms can be explained using two dimensions – perceived sense of involvement and perceived sense of influence. The findings and the framework proposed in the study makes several advances in understanding relational identity and hopefully will serve as a foundation for further research in the area.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Instruction to the interviewee) As a background, I would like to ask a few questions about you and your consulting firm.

1. Please tell me about yourself and what you do.

   Potential probes:
   - How long have you been a consultant? What's your current rank in the firm?
   - For how long have you been working with your current consulting firm?
   - Approximately how many projects have you been associated with so far? *(If working for many years, ask)* On an average, about how many projects have you been associated in a year?

2. Tell me about your consulting firm.

   Potential probes:
   - What's the main area of focus of the firm?
   - How big is your firm – does it have many offices?
   - How many consultants are there in your office? How often do you work with other consultants in a project?

3. Tell me a bit about your projects.

   Potential probes:
   - Typically what are the areas you focus on?
   - Typically, what's the duration of projects and your association with them?

(Instruction to the interviewee) Now, I would like you to think back to one of your recently completed projects and identify a client employee who represents a typical client employee, i.e., the kind of client you most commonly interact with. I want to know about your interaction with this person and how you saw yourself in this interaction. I do not need any identifying information about this particular client or the client firm.
Do you have a typical client employee, with whom you interacted in a recent completed project, in mind now? [Pause]
For the convenience in conversation, let's give this typical client a hypothetical name such as Joe, Susan, preserving the anonymity of this person. Please answer the following questions keeping this typical employee in mind.
I would like to begin with asking you about this client employee and your interaction with him/her.

4. What percentage of your clients tends to be like this one?

5. What was this client employee's role in the project?

   Potential probes:
   - What was his/her rank in the client firm (for ex. senior, middle, or lower level)?
   - What kind of responsibility did he have in your project (for example in terms of decision making, providing resource access, etc.)?

6. Tell me a bit about this project.

   Potential probes:
   - What was the duration of the project?
   - When did the project end?
   - How many people from your firm were involved in this project?
   - Preserving confidentiality, was this client firm a big or a small company?

7. What was your role in this project?

   Potential probes:
   - What was the duration of your association?
   - How many days in the week did you spend working in the client firm's office?
   - In all, approximately, how many client employees do you interact with in this project?

8. Tell me about your interaction with this client employee.

   Potential probes:
   - How frequently did you interact with this client employee?
   - What was the duration of your relationship?
   - Did you interact exclusively on work-related activities or did you also have non-work or social interactions (e.g. interacted socially for sports, parties, etc.)?

(Instruction to the interviewee) I have spoken to number of consultants and they talk about their experience with the client varies - sometimes they feel like a part of the client firm; sometimes they do not feel like a part of the client firm; and sometimes they have other feelings.
In your experience with this typical client employee, I would like to know about how you felt about your relationship with the client firm.

9. In your interaction with this typical client, how did you experience the relationship with the client firm?

Potential probes:
- How did you feel about where you stood with the client firm (*if the interviewee asks for clarification say:* For example like an insider or an outsider at the client firm or any other such feeling).
- Did this feeling change at all over you interaction with the client. If so, how? *(If it didn't change, ask),* why do you think it didn't change?

Note: (Question 10 is based on the response to question 9)
10. Can you tell me a story of a situation or interaction that captures or represents the experience with the client firm that you just described?

Potential probes:
- How clear were you about where you stood in the client firm?
- How often or what proportion of times did you feel like this?
- Why did you think it was this way?

(Instruction to the interviewee) You have described where you stood vis-à-vis the client employee and firm in your interaction with this typical client employee. I would now like you to __reflect upon yourself,__ as you saw yourself in this situation.

11. In this situation, please describe yourself in this typical client relationship. How did you see yourself in relation to the client?

Potential probes:
- Any examples of how you would describe yourself in relation to the client?
- What words or phrases come to your mind as you describe yourself in relation with the client employee?
- What was core or central about how you saw yourself in relation with the typical client in this situation
- Is this what you preferred or would you have liked it to be something else? Why?
- In this situation, what aspects about your sense of self did you feel good about? Why? *(Ask for examples)*
- What aspects about your sense of self did you feel not so good about and found challenging? Why? How did you handle it? *(Ask for examples)*

If in question 9, the interviewee suggests that this kind of situation corresponds to the entirety of his/her experience with the typical client, proceed to question 12.

If in question 9, the interviewee suggests that he/she has had other kinds of experiences, continue with question 10 and question 11 for those experiences, and then proceed to question 12.

12. *(Instruction to the interviewee) We have talked about how <u>you</u> felt in this relationship. I would now like to shift gears and try to understand what you think your typical client and fellow consultants thought about this relationship.*

    a) What did the client expect from you? (*If the interviewee asks for clarification, say:* for example, how you should be in your interaction with the client employees).
    b) What did your fellow consultants expect from you? (*If the interviewee asks for clarification, say:* for example, how you should be in your interaction with the client employees).
    c) How did that affect how you saw yourself vis-à-vis the client employee? *(Ask for examples)*

    Potential probes:
    - Did these expectations change? How? *(If interviewee asks for clarifications, say: for example, change with time or with regard to a particular situation).*
    - Do you feel you changed in any way based on the expectations of fellow consultants? How? *(Ask for examples)*
    - Do you feel you changed in any way based on the expectations of the client employee? How? *(Ask for examples)*
    - *If the interviewee's response suggests that there was a mismatch in the expectations of the client employee and fellow consultants, ask -* Did it ever lead to any tension in how you saw yourself? How did you handle it? *(Ask for examples)*

(Instruction to the interviewee) So far, I have asked you questions specifically about your typical client. In the end, I wanted to explore how your experience with other clients may from the typical one).

13. Have you had client relationships that vary from the typical one that we talked about? How are they different from the typical client, if at all? *(Ask for examples)*

    Potential probes:
    - How is your interaction/relationship different with different clients?

14. Would you describe yourself differently in relation with a different client employee? How? *(Ask for examples)*

Potential probes:
- What changes do you see in yourself depending upon the client?

(Instruction to the interviewee) Those are all the questions that I have – is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your client relationships?

In closing, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. Your response to these questions is voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Age:
Nationality:
Education (highest level):
Gender *(Note)*:

(Instruction to the interviewee) Do you have any questions for me? Can I follow up if I have any questions? Thanks a lot for your time and participation in my study. I really appreciate it.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY ON RELATIONAL IDENTITY

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in a research study that investigates how consultants construct their identity in relation to their clients. The expected number of participants is approximately 70. I am inviting you to participate in this study because you are a consultant and interact with the client on a regular basis and your input is valuable for this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. I expect that this interview will take between 45-60 minutes.

I am a doctoral student in the Organization Studies Department at Boston College and I am the main researcher for this project. My advisor for this project is Prof. Mary Ann Glynn. I am the only one conducting the interviews and seeing the individual responses.

Purpose
The purpose is to understand how consultants perceive their identities in relation with the clients. I am interested in hearing about your experiences with your clients.

Interview procedure
I'll be asking you several questions that are designed to understand your experiences with the clients. Most questions will be open-ended; there are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. I'm going both to take notes on your answers and record them. If you wish, at various points you can tell me that you don't want me to record some part of the interview but simply take notes on it.

Withdrawal from the study
You don't have to answer any questions you don't wish to and you can end the interview at any time. There will be no penalties for doing so.

Risks
To the best of my knowledge, the interview questions and your responses have no more risk of harm to you than what you would experience in everyday life.

Benefits

You will not receive any direct benefit from this study. However, I do hope that the reflection will help you develop greater awareness about yourself and your relationships and interactions with the clients.

Compensation
There is no compensation for your participation in this study.
Costs
There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality
The transcribed documents and the notes taken during the interviews will not have interviewees' names on them. Thus, no one other than I will be able to tell for certain who was giving which responses. I will keep the identifying information and audio recordings in a locked box at my home. Only I will have an access to this information. The audio recordings and the consent forms will be destroyed no more than 10 years after the completion of the study. The aggregated results of the study will be presented in professional meetings and published academic articles. However, all identifying information will be kept private in reporting the results.

Questions
If you have any questions at any time while we're talking, please ask me. If you have questions or comments later you can contact me at 617-233-1462 or bhattm@bc.edu or my advisor Professor Mary Ann Glynn at 617-552-0203 or glynnmg@bc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as participants in research please contact the Boston College Office for Human Research Participant Protection, 617- 552-4778.

Certification:
I have read and I believe I understand this Informed Consent document. I believe I understand the purpose of the research project and what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily.

I understand that I may stop my participation in this research study at anytime and that I can refuse to answer any question(s).

I give permission to have the interview audio-recorded.

I understand that my name will not appear on the interview transcript.

I have received a signed copy of this Informed Consent document for my personal reference.

I hereby give my informed and free consent to be a participant in this study.

Signatures:

_____   _____
Date   Consent Signature of Participant

                    _____
                              Print Name of Participant

                    _____
                              Signature of researcher