

**“I don’t even know who I am anymore and frankly, neither do you”
The role of the media in the collapse and reconfiguration of identities**

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1. Introduction

Rich literature on organizational and individual identities construction assumes that identities are relatively stable and longstanding in time (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1991). However, such assumptions presume a certain degree of stability in organizational settings while allocating power to the role of organizational identities in the formation of individual ones. In this paper, we focus on the problems of collapsing identities and aim at exploring how people respond to large-scale crises and organizational failures. By conducting qualitative research across middle managers in a troubled sector and within a troubled economy, we explore individuals’ responses to the collapse of organizational and personal work identities and by using concepts from Lacan, Bourdieu and Ricoeur we conceptualize the problem of identities’ reconfiguration, also bringing forward the role of mediated communication.

Our analysis highlights three important issues. First, the importance of a ‘mirroring’ process as managers constantly attempt to retrieve particles of a new identity from pre-existing identities (family, sports, friend) and in the process of doing so they seek for validation and confirmation. Our analysis suggests that in the crisis and identity collapsing period, pre-existing hidden identities that have been silenced enter the arena of identity formation. Moreover, they are employed to construct new ones, such as the immigrant or ‘insider’. Second, we bring forward the dominant role of mechanisms of information mediation and their critical role in building ideological frameworks, framing the crisis, legitimizing certain identities and producing a projection of fragments of ‘other’ possible identities. We propose that Individuals engage with the mass media in an attempt to place a mirror between a chaotic present and the uncertain future – the process which we approach as ‘the

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construction of projected image'. Third, we explore a narrative and self-biographical approach to this identity reconfiguration process as individuals subscribe to a narrative of the self 'in medias res'. They talk about the past and they design the future, thus building their association with different groups, organizations and the society. Our discussion moves around the notion of 'failing identities' and we draw on Lacan's ideas of lack, Bourdieu's argument on biographical illusions and Ricoeur's understanding of identities as temporary narrative constructions. This paper argues that identity collapses stand both as a conceptual and practical problem to be analysed but also as an opportunity to explore the identity formation processes in organizations.