

BECOMING A PROFESSION: CRAFTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

Since its beginnings in the WWI propaganda machine, public relations (PR) has had a murky image as the influential force at the sidelines of powerful groups in society. Despite this shadowy existence, the predominant professional body for PR, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) has looked to professionalise the industry. This research explores how these tensions and contradictions play out in the construction of professional identities by examining the on-going construction, contestation and attempted closure of a professional body within a wider web of power relations, and its relationship and resonance with those practicing PR.

Utilising a combination of interviews, participant observation and document analysis, the thesis argues that discourses circulating in texts generated by the CIPR constructs the subject position of the PR professional as someone who is committed to continual development and learning through the professional body's credentialised resources. Nevertheless, this professional subject position isn't always salient in practitioners' identity work where the majority of practitioners draw on alternative discourses that centre on their level of experience and access to powerful networks. The dominant subject position that PR practitioners construct in their identity work is that of shapeshifter: someone who continually adapts their performance of identity with different audiences in order to do their job. This indicates that the CIPR needs to consider how its professional subject position can reflect practitioners' experience of their work as centring on relationships and adaptation to different contexts.

As such, this research contributes to the literature on identities and knowledge work by highlighting the importance of the shapeshifter identity whilst also providing a more nuanced appreciation of how ambiguity operates in knowledge workers' identity construction. It also contributes to the sociology of the professions by demonstrating that closure and credentialism are not the most salient discourses for the modern professional.

Keywords: identities, profession, knowledge work, becoming, PR

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Ultimately, thanks should go to the CIPR and PR practitioners that participated in this research and spoke so eloquently about an occupation that is inherently ambiguous and complex – without their willingness to engage I'd have nothing to say so thank you.

CHAPTER 1: WHO ARE PR?

Public Relations

What my friends think I do

What my mom thinks I do

What society thinks I do

What my boss thinks I do

What I think I do

What I actually do

DEVRIESBLOG.COM

PR Manager

What my friends think I do

What my parents think I do

What my boss thinks I do

What society thinks I do

What I think I do

What I actually do

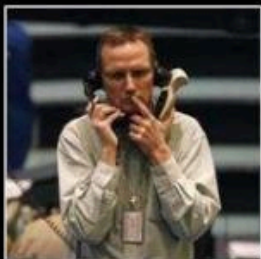
Public Relations Consultant



What my friends think I do



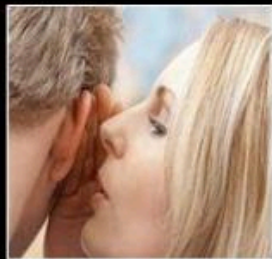
What my parents think I do



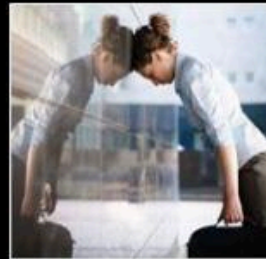
What journalists think I do



What my clients think I do



What society thinks I do



What I actually do

These memes of Public Relations (PR) and the PR practitioner proliferate the internet, being created and shared by PR practitioners as a light-hearted take on their working lives.¹ However, what these memes also demonstrate is the complexity and ambiguity of working in PR, where practitioners are conscious of the fact that they're not understood and at times denigrated. As a former PR consultant I too was aware of the complexity surrounding my work identity, finding it difficult to explain what I did on a day-to-day basis, playing different roles depending on the audience and ultimately, struggling to be always

¹ In common with other 'viral' social media phenomenon the original source of these memes is hard to decipher. Websites such as what-people-think-i-do.com and uthinkido.com provide the templates for these visual displays and interest in them (for a variety of occupations besides PR) spiked at the beginning of 2012 (see: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/02/16/what-people-think-i-do-meme_n_1281144.html or <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/what-people-think-i-do-what-i-really-do>)

considered an expert. Nevertheless, working in PR was also exciting, varied, and at times surreal, enabling a newcomer to the working world to gain a breadth of experience in a relatively short space of time. This research aims to explore these multiple and at times paradoxical facets of PR, considering how against this back drop of ambiguity and at times negativity, professional identities are constructed. As the introduction to the thesis, this chapter will start by providing some background details on the PR industry in the UK as the context for this research. This then helps to establish the research aims and rationale for study. Finally, this chapter will provide an overview of each chapter in the thesis.

1.1 The paradoxes of PR

The history of public relations (PR) as an occupation in the UK can be traced back to wartime intelligence and propaganda strategies during WWI (L'Etang, 2004). From these beginnings, local and central government became the driving forces for PR in the early 20th century. Public relations became a key facet of local government, where the General Secretary of the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO), Levi Clement Hill in 1922, "...suggested every branch should have a press correspondent and a publicity committee." (L'Etang 2004, p.20). This suggestion was acted upon in 1932, with local government seeking to communicate its value to the public, businesses, and the state at a time when the government began to suggest large scale cuts in local government spending. PR retained its importance during WWII, particularly in communicating to the public about those public services that were still operational. Local government also recognised a need to communicate to the public about the changes taking place in post-war Britain, particularly in the planning and the creation of new towns together with public services.

L'Etang (2004) explains that the interest in PR in central government was as a result of a number of different historical developments including:

...the rise of totalitarian regimes in Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere; increasing tensions in international politics; reactions to the increased democratisation of society; technological developments in communications that contributed to the massification of society; and methodological developments in understanding public opinion. (L'Etang 2004, p. 25)

The Second World War also brought with it a renewed emphasis on what information was communicated to the public and what information was held back through the Ministry of Information.

As L'Etang (2004) observes, the private sector made a contribution to the PR industry much later, particularly when threatened by nationalisation and needing to lobby government. The rise of PR consulting and the use of PR by the private sector expanded from the 1960s in response to the boom in consumer culture. The growth of distinct PR consultancies:

...represents a major shift in terms of public relations' place in the British economy and signals the point at which there was a major uptake of public relations services and therefore public recognition of the practice. (L'Etang 2004, p. 92).

PR consultancies gradually developed from specialist sections of advertising agencies, accompanied by individuals from the armed forces, information services and journalism also setting up independently (L'Etang, 2004).

Public relations, infiltrated by journalists in the post-war era, gave the industry added professional status and helped to distance it from advertising. However, it also signalled the beginning of a blurring of the boundaries between journalism and PR and thus the development of a contentious relationship between the two disciplines (L'Etang, 2004). As the public relations occupation grew it came under attack by journalists, particularly as it was seen as a threat to their independence and their livelihood as the journalism sector faced decline. PR's origins in propaganda fuels this 'shadowy' reputation, however the rise in consumer culture has served to ensure PR's significance and continuing growth as an occupation.

The most recent survey of the UK PR industry highlights it employs an estimated 61,600 and has an estimated annual turnover of £7.5 billion (PR Census, 2011). The composition of the industry is approximately 2:1, in-house practitioners (i.e. practitioners that are employed by and work for one organisation) to consultant practitioners (i.e. practitioners that work for a consultancy and represent a number of clients), with between three and six thousand PR freelancers in the UK (PR Census, 2011). The sector also looks set to continue to grow as the CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations) reports that PR remains one of the top three career choices for graduates in the UK (CIPR, 2012a). With an awareness of its pejorative societal image but continued growth as an industry, PR demonstrates aspirations to achieve a status more akin to that of traditional professions.

The UK PR industry has two main professional associations to represent the sector, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA). The professional body that PR practitioners can join on an individual basis is the CIPR. The creation of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) was born out of the rise of public relations in local government in the 20th century:

In particular, the nucleus of public relations officers within the local government trade union, the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO), was responsible for the formation of the IPR and for the development of its mission to professionalise the occupation. (L'Etang 2004, p.18)

Therefore, the need to professionalise in local government resulted in a need for professionalisation in PR, which had been recognised as a key facet of local administration. Local government PR officers (PROs) came together for a first meeting in October 1946 where there were 12 in attendance, this number grew to 16 at a second meeting on 6 November 1946 which was, "...formally constituted as the Standing Conference of Public Relations Officers..." (L'Etang 2004, p.58). From there, representatives from beyond local government were sought and the IPR was formally established in February 1948. A council and committee structure followed, together with special interest groups, the first one rather unsurprisingly being local

government. The first Annual General Meeting was held on 30 September 1948 and the first conference in 1950 (L'Etang, 2004). At the time of its inception the IPR attempted to create barriers to entry by withholding membership to those employed by press agencies and two classes of membership were established, 'full' for those that could demonstrate they were a PR executive and not a press agent and 'associate', "...for those who had an interest in public relations, such as a managing director of a company, but who did not themselves practise." (L'Etang 2004, p. 69).

In 1949, the IPR council drew up a 'Statement of Standards' but had no formalised code of conduct. However, in 1957 the IPR struggled to expel a high profile member for improper conduct, thus raising the need for an established code. Nevertheless, this code was not formulated until 1963 in line with the Institute's incorporation and recognition by the Board of Trade.

Since its inception, the IPR has struggled to establish a system of entry to the Institute according to qualifications. L'Etang (2004) considers that this aspect of the IPR's development indicates how the organisation considered education as purely instrumental rather than believing education, in the guise of theoretical knowledge to underpin expertise, could help in gaining a more respectable status for PR practitioners. Despite this, in 1998 the IPR managed to introduce its own diploma as a tool by which to control entry to membership. As L'Etang (2004) explains: "The motivation behind this development was to achieve "Chartered Status," for which the Institute had to demonstrate that 50% of its members held an approved qualification." (L'Etang 2004, p. 200). Nevertheless, the IPR had to engage in prolonged negotiations with the Privy Council concerning their system of professional development and qualifications before they were awarded the Royal Charter in 2005, becoming the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

Today, the CIPR currently has over 9,500 members (CIPR Annual Report, 2011) and membership figures have more than doubled in the last 10 years (CIPR, 2012b). Two thirds of CIPR members are based outside London with 45% of members working in PR consultancy and 55% working in-house

(CIPR, 2012b). In terms of the key elements of its remit, it too is a representative body for the PR occupation and as such, has a code of conduct to which members are accountable; it also accredits university diplomas and degrees and provides its own training and networking programme as well as several awards schemes for recognition of best practice.

The professional association also runs a CPD (Continuous Professional Development) programme (CIPR, 2012c), which at the time of data collection for this research is not mandatory for membership, but after completing three years of CPD a practitioner can attain accredited practitioner status. In May 2008, the CIPR announced that it had been approved to assess PR practitioners for individual chartered status (CIPR, 2008) with the first tranche of chartered practitioners announced at the end of 2009/beginning of 2010.

Established in 1969, the PRCA is a trade association and as such, consultancies and in-house departments join the body at an organisational rather than individual level. The creation of the PRCA coincided with the boom in consumer culture and the rise of consultancies during this period (Howard, 2011). Whilst the IPR formally approved the need for the Institute to represent consultancies in May 1960 (L'Etang, 2004), tensions between large consultancies (often still owned by large advertising agencies at this stage) and independent consultants emerged and the incorporation of the IPR in 1963, which required membership to be only of individuals, allowed a new body to be created to represent consultancies (L'Etang, 2004). On 28 October 1969, ten founding members of the PRCA created the formal structures of the trade association in a meeting at the Westbury Hotel, London. As Howard (2011) explains:

Article of Association were confirmed by the attending solicitors and at the next meeting, held a couple of weeks later, the officers of the Association were appointed and its committee structure agreed. Members had to be established public relations companies and could not be simply a division of an advertising agency. (Howard 2011, p. 5)

Many of these founding members originated from the IPR, but felt that an independent trade association was required to represent the consultancy element of the PR industry.

The Association's priorities are to act as a representative voice of PR organisations (in a public, stakeholder and lobbying capacity) as well as to provide PR organisations with extra information and resources in order to make them more successful, whether it be training and qualifications, networking opportunities, or market intelligence (PRCA, 2012). The association also has a code of conduct members have to abide by and membership currently stands at over 317 agencies and over 87 in-house teams (PRCA, 2012).

The PR industry is thus an expanding sector and a popular career choice and despite its shadowy beginnings, it is currently seeking a professionalised status, emulating the chartered status of the likes of accountants and surveyors. As a former PR practitioner, my research interest lies not only in examining an industry I used to work in, but in particular to explore the construction of professional identities in this sector. The central paradox of PR's negative reputation yet increasing growth and influence, combined with its aims to professionalise, suggest, for the individual PR practitioner, a conflicting discursive arena in which to conceive of yourself, your professional practice, and your image.

1.2 Studying professional identities

One of the first things that people in modern societies tend to ask strangers in a social situation, such as a party or a business function, is: 'what do you do?' The job that we do...is one of the most defining aspects of our identities. In other words, what we do is intimately linked to who we think we are... (Kenny *et al.* 2011, p.70)

This thesis is concerned with how both the PR professional association and individual PR practitioners construct professional identities and the discourses drawn on in this process. The research asks what does it mean to be a PR professional? In doing so, it focuses on three interrelated questions: (1) how

do professional association texts aspire to construct the PR profession and professional; (2) what discursive referents inform PR practitioners' identity construction; (3) how does the professional body inform PR professionals' identity construction?

In the context of these research aims, the study centres its gaze on the CIPR as the main professional body that individual practitioners join.² Therefore, this research not only provides an opportunity to step back and reflect on a professional identity I used to embody, but is also timely because the CIPR's creation of the chartered practitioner status means that the notion of what constitutes a PR professional is currently being defined by the Institute as it goes through this next milestone in its professionalisation project.

This research is also significant in relation to its theoretical contribution. Whilst the literature on identities is wide-ranging with a breadth of ontological approaches, this study is informed by post-structuralist understandings of the concept, highlighting the fluid, fractured and continual construction of identities (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Meanwhile, whilst the sociology of the professions also represents a variety of ontological approaches, the more dominant conceptualisation of the topic has been informed by structural/institutional approaches, considering the profession as a distinct occupational unit and organising principle (e.g. Abbott, 1988). Consequently, this research considers the inter-relations between the literatures, engaging in a study of professional identity construction that also interrogates what is meant by professional and focuses on the salience of a professional subject position constructed in texts by the professional body for individuals' processes of professional identity construction. Equally, the study engages in research on a profession that emphasises its discursive role in the formation of resonant professional identities. Therefore, a nuanced account of the creating of a profession and its attempts to create professionals is provided. Consequently, in seeking to interrogate how 'professional' is understood by

² As the CIPR is committed to individual membership, the relationship between the individual practitioner and the Institute is more pertinent to the research questions than with the PRCA, the other predominant professional association, where membership is purely governed at the organisational level.

two significant stakeholders in the professionalisation project, the research not only considers the on-going construction of a profession but also the construction, contestation and negotiation of professional identities by both the professional body and practitioners in this discursive arena.

1.3 Thesis route map

The following two chapters evaluate the literature that informs this research, with *Chapter 2* focusing on conceptualisations of identities. This chapter assesses the different ontological approaches ranging from the cognitive group identification of Social Identity Theory (e.g. Tajfel, 1981), to interpretivist and dramaturgical appreciations of identity formation in interaction (e.g. Goffman, 1959), and critical accounts of identities that explore their control and manipulation (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The rest of the chapter then focuses on post-structuralist understandings of identities, considering the central tenets of the approach such as: power and discourse (e.g. Foucault, 1977), subjectivities (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1989; 1990), and identity (re)construction (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). In doing so, the chapter concludes with an appraisal of how this study understands and operationalises a post-structuralist approach to identities.

The literature on professions is the focus for *Chapter 3*, outlining functionalist appreciations of the profession as a checklist of attributes (e.g. Greenwood, 1972), as well as more dynamic and power-sensitive conceptions of profession that focus on the social closure and control of an occupation (e.g. Johnson, 1972; Parkin, 1979; Larson, 1990). Debates in the literature concerning the potential demise of the profession (e.g. Reed, 2007; Ackroyd, 1996) are also discussed together with emergent forms of 'expert labour', such as knowledge work (Alvesson, 2004). Finally, the chapter considers profession as an individual disciplinary mechanism, exploring research that looks at the use of the discourse of professionalism to self-discipline workers (e.g. Fournier, 1999). The remainder of the chapter examines empirical studies of professional identities, considering their ontological variance and how they conceive of profession. The chapter ends by highlighting that research so far has either only been concerned with the structural make-up of

the professional unit (e.g. Ramirez, 2009; Collins *et al.* 2009) or the construction of identities in a professional context (e.g. Grey, 1994; Iedema *et al.* 2008), and therefore research that considers how being a professional is understood and constructed has a contribution to make to the literatures on sociology of professions and identities.

Following evaluation of the identities and professions literature, *Chapter 4* establishes the conceptual framework for the study highlighting how the concepts of identities and profession are understood and operationalised in this research. Informed by post-structuralism, the conceptual framework emphasises identities as fluid, multiple and constituted in discourse, and therefore continually constructed, contested and re-framed. With regard to professions, the conceptual framework highlights the attempts to construct and circulate professional discourses and subject positions that resonate with those practicing. Therefore, both identities and professions can be considered as in a state of 'becoming' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology and research design for this study, considering the linkages between the research's ontology, epistemology, method choice, implementation, and analysis. Issues of validity and reflexivity are also discussed. As such, the chapter evaluates ontology and epistemology informed by post-structuralism and the methodological implications. The chapter also assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each method together with ethical considerations for the research. An account of how the research was conducted is then provided, together with rationales for the choices made as the data collection and analysis phase progressed.

Chapter 6 is the start of the three empirical chapters, highlighting the CIPR's construction of the PR profession and PR professional as well as the problems in establishing its professional discourses. These challenges inform the CIPR's future aspirations for practitioners to continue to voluntarily commit to the organisation because this commitment will imbue them with a higher mark of quality than those who do not engage with the professional association. The chapter ends by highlighting that the CIPR's ability to appeal

to practitioners' professional identities is therefore fundamental to the future survival of the organisation.

Meanwhile, *Chapter 7* turns its attention to the PR practitioners, beginning with an account of their frustrations regarding the ambiguity of the job. The remainder of the chapter assesses the salience of CIPR subject positions in practitioners' identity construction processes, highlighting that some draw on the discourses and subject position read in CIPR texts, whilst others draw on alternate discourses to construct their professional identities and consider it their employers' responsibility to engage with the CIPR.

The ambiguity, complexity and fluidity of PR practitioners' identities are the focus for *Chapter 8*. The chapter begins by returning to ambiguity, exploring how rather than engendering struggle or angst in identity construction, ambiguity is a functioning element of PR practitioners' identities. In turn, the remainder of the chapter focuses on the PR practitioner as shapeshifter, demonstrating how this constitutes one of the fundamental occupational identities for PR practitioners in response to ambiguity. Delineating how it operates for consultants compared to in-house practitioners, the chapter explains that the shapeshifter constitutes someone who can continually adapt his/her identity in order to fit into the myriad of surroundings the PR practitioner encounters in everyday working life. In relation to the CIPR's professionalisation project, the significance of the shapeshifter to practitioners' identities may indicate why the CIPR's subject positions have not proven to be particularly salient in the construction of professional identities.

Chapter 9 discusses the findings in more depth considering how they relate back to the literatures on identities and professions and the contributions the research makes to those literatures. Considering overarching themes that have emerged from the research and their contributions, this chapter considers: the development of the shapeshifter identity, the nuances of how ambiguity functions in identity construction in this empirical context, the power effects of the discourses circulating in CIPR texts, and how the experiences of

the CIPR could be symbolic of the changing nature of the profession as debated in the sociology of professions.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis, summarising the contributions the research has made to the literatures on identities and professions. The chapter also reflects on the research, considering its limitations and what could have been done differently. Moreover, following Johnson and Duberley's (2003) model of reflexivity, the chapter also reflects on my role as researcher in the study and my construction of the research account. Following the reflection on the research design is an assessment of the practical implications of the study as well as an update on developments in the UK PR industry since the data collection phase. With this in mind, the chapter outlines what future research opportunities could be pursued in light of this research.

With the research aims and context defined the focus turns to the current academic literature that theorises around identities and professions, which will be the subject of the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 2: IDENTITIES

2.1 Introduction: why study identities?

As this research is concerned with what it means to be a PR professional, it draws on understandings of identity. Within organisation studies, identities have gained increasing academic attention for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the utility of the concept has been cited as a contributory factor to its popularity as a research topic. As Alvesson *et al.* (2008) highlight:

Identity, it seems, can be linked to nearly everything: from mergers, motivation and meaning-making to ethnicity, entrepreneurship and emotions to politics, participation and project teams. (Alvesson *et al.* 2008, p.5)

As well as a vehicle for studying an array of issues pertinent to organisation studies, Alvesson *et al.* (2008) also consider the notion of identities as providing a new perspective on established topics in organisational analysis. Brown (2001) argues that identities can be used for different levels of analysis at the micro, meso and macro, which serves as another strength for the concept. In a similar respect, Ybema *et al.* (2009) discuss the ability of identities to serve as a focal point for appreciating and interrogating the dynamic interplay of structure and agency:

...the notion of 'identity' may be regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society. Its potential mediating quality lies in its dual character – it refracts what can be seen as a 'permanent dialectic' between the self and social structure." (Ybema *et al.* 2009, p. 300)

Consequently, identities are a useful way in which a variety of organisational phenomena can be studied and a means by which these phenomena can be studied at different levels of analysis.

Secondly, whilst identities have proved to be an important and useful lens through which to study other topics in organisation studies, there is also a cultural shift that has placed increasing emphasis on identities. It is argued postmodernity brought with it the growth in consumer culture and its general

obsession with the 'self' (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1989; 1990; Gergen, 1991; Rosenau, 1992; Collinson, 2003; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Incumbent with this period has been a break from traditional identity anchors such as family, religion and work as increased insecurity and mobility have affected their impact on people's identities (Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2000; 2007; Collinson, 2003). Moving from wider socio-cultural settings to within the organisation, there has been increased interest and focus on identities as forms of normative or socio-ideological forms of control. The notion of identities and their link to work ethic has been explored by researchers for many years (e.g. Collinson, 2003; Watson, 2003b). However, it is argued that the nature of work has changed quite radically in recent decades where power is increasingly decentred and organisational culture is viewed as an important control mechanism (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; Reed, 1999; McAuley *et al.* 2007); and jobs are more service oriented and ambiguous in role delineation concerning knowledge work (Alvesson, 2004) with a focus on multi-skilling (Noon and Blyton, 2007). This means that greater emphasis is now placed on the identities of workers in order for them to perform their jobs (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005). In turn, organisational researchers have looked to explore this dynamic (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Thomas and Linstead, 2002), as observed by Deetz (1995):

...the modern business of management is often managing the 'insides' – the hopes, fears, and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviours directly. (Deetz 1995, p.87)

Therefore, this shift in social-cultural contemporary configurations has brought with it a rise in the interest in forms of consumption and identities (from a functionalist perspective) and concern over cultural/normative controls of identities (from a critical perspective). In turn, the emphasis on the forms of consumption and control, point to and feed upon increased concern over the self (DuGay, 1996).

A third reason for the popularity and increased significance of identities as a topic is as a result of the 'linguistic turn'. Within academic debates the 'postmodern/linguistic turn' (Best and Kellner, 1997) has given identities

greater prominence as a concept (Brown, 2001). Influenced in particular by Foucault's (1977) work, the linguistic turn also has a strong concern with the role of power relations (Clegg, 1998) and disciplinary technologies in shaping an individual's notion of their self (Knights and Willmott, 1999). Thus, the emphasis has been on illuminating the ways in which discourses shape understandings of self and with what effects. This ontological shift stresses the importance of reflexivity and the contestation of identities and thus provides further development for how identities can be envisioned, thereby invigorating the concept's use in research.

The utility of identities as a concept coupled with their theoretical re-imaginings has meant that it has now been studied in an array of forms ranging from national, ethnic, and gender identities (e.g. Wodak *et al.* 2009, Hussain and Baggulsey, 2005 and Seale and Charteris-Black, 2008 respectively), to 'the self' (e.g. Craib, 1998), the organisational (e.g. Hatch and Schultz, 2004), the occupational or professional (e.g. Chreim *et al.* 2007) and the managerial (e.g. Clarke *et al.* 2009). The breadth of perspectives on identities and studies that have used them as a concept highlight their importance to academic research. Consequently, there is significant value in studying identities, not only for the analytical utility the topic provides but also due to its ontological underpinnings that emphasise its importance to understanding the social world. In this context, this research is particularly interested in the notion of multiple identities and the role of discourse and power relations in the crafting of selves and in particular, the dynamic relationship between answers to the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are we?'³ This chapter will explore the different ontological perspectives on identities, focusing on the key features of post-structuralist understandings of the concept. In doing so, the chapter outlines how this research operationalises the post-structural approach to identities, as well as its conceptual value to the study.

³ This understanding of identities is discussed in more depth in section 2.3 with its application to this study outlined in section 2.5.

2.2 Dominant ontological approaches to identities

This first section outlines the dominant approaches to identities – literature on this topic is wide-ranging and can be challenging to carve up into distinct categorisations. Nevertheless, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) highlight that one of the distinct dualisms across the literatures on identities is between a conceptualisation of identities as essential and a conceptualisation of identities as constructed. In this regard, “essentialist theories locate identity ‘inside’ persons, as a product of minds, cognition, the psyche or socialisation practices” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 9) whereas constructed theories highlight how ‘identity’ is itself a social construction and as such, “...identity has been *relocated*: from the ‘private’ realms of cognition and experience, to the ‘public’ realms of discourse and other semiotic systems of meaning-making.” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.4). Accordingly, this section attempts to explore this spectrum of essential and constructed approaches to identities, examining the more mainstream and functionalist social identity theory approach with its emphasis on group identification, moving onto more interpretivist accounts of identities that seek to elucidate the performativity of identities in interaction, and ending with critical power-sensitive approaches to identities that have an emancipatory aim, seeking to highlight and challenge the manipulation and control of identities.

In turn, each of these ontological approaches also encompass different conceptualisations of structure-agency, a dualism considering, “...whether people are free to construct their identity in any way they wish...or whether identity construction is constrained by forces of various kinds...” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.10). Each ontological approach outlined in this chapter tips the balance between agency and structure in one way or another. These interactions of structure and agency according to the different ontological perspectives on identities are observed by Grad and Martin Rojo (2008) in citing the work of Williams (2000):

He notes that when more emphasis is placed on ‘agency’, identity is viewed as the subjective achievement of rational individual subjects, as “a personal effort to sustain the unity of the self among a multiplicity of

potential identities” and when more emphasis is placed on ‘structure’, identity is either “a reflection of individual membership in particular social categories or collectivities” [p.55] or a product of cultural messages and discursive practices that name, classify, discipline and encourage individuals into specific identities. When primacy is given to neither ‘structure’ nor ‘agency’, identity is “the outcome of inter-subjective work in which selves and others are mutually constitutive” [p.80].” (Grad and Martin Rojo 2008, p.16)

Therefore, functionalist approaches place more emphasis on structure, considering how social categories determine identity, and interpretivist approaches place more emphasis on agency where the individual has freedom to construct any manner of identities. A post-structuralist approach to identity draws on both structure and agency but not in any dualist way, as both are discursively constituted. These considerations of structure and agency will be returned to when each ontological position is considered in detail.

2.2.1 Essentialist identification: social identity theory

Functionalist approaches to the concept of identity are essentialist in their consideration of identity as a fixed entity that is intrinsic to the individual. As such, identity constitutes an, “...inner self, which is carried around and can behave appropriately...” (Coupland 2001, p.1105).⁴ This notion of identity can be found in ordinary parlance (Calhoun, 1994) about oneself where you hear individuals referring to themselves as ‘the type of person who...’ Common to this understanding of identity is also a distinction between personal and social identities where the personal constitutes unique elements of identity to the individual and social, “...refers to an individual’s perception of him or herself as a member of a group...” (Alvesson *et al.* 2008).

This focus on the dynamic between personal and social identities has been encapsulated in the conceptualisation known as social identity theory (SIT). Developed within social psychology (Hogg, 2006), SIT considers processes of

⁴ Please note not all essentialist conceptualisations of identities are functionalist (e.g. O’Mahoney, 2011) but this literature evaluation focuses on the dominant functionalist understanding of identity known as social identity theory, which does have an essentialist conceptualisation of identity.

group identification. As Brown (2001) explains this involves, "...relatively simple processes of categorization of the self and others driven by an imperative for cognitive simplification and a need for self-esteem." (Brown 2001, p.115). Derived from the workings of Henri Tajfel (and later collaborations with John Turner) SIT aims to explore uniformities in social behaviour, hence the emphasis on the group dimension coupled with an assumption that individuals prefer a positive self-image (Tajfel, 1981). Consequently, the focus of SIT is on social group identities that individuals identify themselves with as a way of making sense of the world around them and their location within it, as well as to gain a positive sense of self (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). These social group identities can be: societal such as 'man', 'woman'; familial such as 'mother', 'son'; and occupational such as 'doctor', 'labourer'; or even organisational such as 'blue chip employee', 'consultant'. In this context, 'the group' is defined cognitively in terms of how individuals conceptualise themselves as belonging to a certain group. In this sense, "...a group exists psychologically if three or more people construe and evaluate themselves in terms of shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people." (Hogg 2006, p.111).

Particularly favoured in North America, a range of studies has been conducted with the use of SIT in an organisational context (e.g. Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Elsbach, 1999; O'Connor and Annison, 2002; Pratt *et al.* 2006; Tracy and Scott, 2006). These studies often view identification with social identities as causally related to managerial outcomes (e.g. Haslam, 2004) and thus a factor in organisational effectiveness. Despite its popularity and its use in everyday discourse about identity and the self (Ybema *et al.* 2009), functionalist understandings of identity have been criticised by symbolic interactionists for viewing identity as just an individual cognitive, rather than social process (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) and therefore placing too much emphasis on structure to determine identification rather than individual agency. For post-structuralist approaches to identity, criticism centres on how functionalist approaches provide a very simplified account of identity formation (King, 2003) that in turn does not appreciate identities as multiple or in an on-going process of formation (and reformation). A more general critique

concerns the very definite distinction between personal and social identities in the functionalist approach, where what is offered instead is an appreciation of the ways in which personal identities can be socially informed and social identities can be personally derived (Alvesson *et al.* 2008).

SIT remains a popular approach in the study of organisations due to its connection between the cognitive definition of identity according to 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and the resultant impact of this process on the performance of organisations (Alvesson *et al.* 2008). In contrast, another approach to the concept of identities endeavours to realise more of the complexities in identification, and in particular focus on the performance of identities and their construction in social interaction.

2.2.2 The performance of identities: interpretive/constructionist accounts

Following an interpretivist paradigm where, "...the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.402), interpretivist/constructionist accounts of identities focus on how individuals create their identities and the meaning around them. Also known as symbolic interactionism (see Knights and Willmott, 1999), this means that emphasis is placed on what meanings people ascribe to the world around them and the role played by interaction between people in understanding the social world. Consequently, within this perspective nothing meaningful is 'outside' interaction and those constructing meaning from it. As such, identities are conceptualised as something that people accomplish in the very social environment of interaction rather than a fixed given that people inherently 'carry round with them'. Therefore, this view of identities is useful because it: "...prompts reflection on how our sense of reality is mediated through symbols and, more particularly, how our selves are socially constructed through interactions with others." (Knights and Willmott 1999, p.74)

One particular research contribution of this understanding is the dramaturgical perspective on identities. Influenced by the work of Goffman (1959), this

approach uses the rhetoric and analogy of the theatre in order to explain identities and interaction. Using language such as 'front stage', 'back stage', 'actors', 'role', 'audience', Goffman (1959) highlights how interaction can involve a person putting on a 'performance'. His starting point is that, "...when an individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have." (Goffman 1959, p.17). Also known as 'impression management', this perspective attempts to compartmentalise when individuals seek to display certain identities/roles and when they are 'true' to their notion of themselves. As the name suggests, it focuses on how people try to create favourable impressions of themselves with others in everyday interaction. As such, identities are considered in this approach as more malleable entities that have to be constructed and managed due to the constraints of the social environment and interaction.

Within organisation studies this approach to identities has been used in particular to look at topics such as, managerial identities (Watson, 2008; Beech, 2008; Down and Reveley, 2009), leadership (Gardner and Avolio, 1998), charisma in management (Weierter, 2001), narratives of indignation in organisational contexts (Sims, 2005), professional narratives in interaction (Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000; Holmes, 2005), identities in transition (Blenkinsopp and Stalker, 2004) and even the identity work of 'cyber workers' (Lee and Lin, 2011) to name but a few. Whilst this approach attributes more agency to the individual in identity formation than compared to more functionalist accounts, the approach has been criticised for being too individualistic in emphasis insofar as it can be difficult to build theories from this perspective as it tends to focus on localised individual social encounters (Kenny *et al.* 2011). Consequently, the impact of – and on – the wider social context by individuals is ignored and any potential power dynamics in identity construction are also marginalised. As an expansion on this more complex understanding of identities, the next section outlines an approach to the concept that focuses on the power dimension of work identities.

2.2.3 Control of identities: critical approaches

Recent critical focus on identities has been concerned with the ways in which attempts may be made to manipulate and control identities. In this context, critical can be considered as where:

..the aim [is] to problematize concepts and representations, to call into question evidence and postulates, to break habits and ways of acting and thinking, to dissipate the familiar and accepted, to retrieve the measure of rules and institutions, to show the techniques of production of knowledge, the techniques of domination and also the techniques of control of discourse. In Foucault's terms, starting from this *(re)problematization*, citizens can take part in the formation of a political will... (Grad and Martin Rojo 2008, p.23)

Critical Management Studies (CMS) of identities similarly strive to, "...expose to critical scrutiny how power operates to construct and stabilize identities in organizational contexts..." (Thomas 2009, p. 170). The emphasis here therefore is to aim to challenge and even change the ways in which asymmetrical power relations operate in identity formation in organisations (Alvesson *et al.* 2008).

Alvesson *et al.* (2008) identify that, "critical scholars have approached identity as a powerful way to understand contemporary relations of control and resistance." (Alvesson *et al.* 2008, p.9). Therefore, research in this area has either examined how organisations have tried to control identities through self-discipline (e.g. Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Grey, 1994; Townley, 1994; Collinson, 2003; Karreman and Alvesson, 2009; Fleming and Sturdy, 2011); or on identities and resistance (e.g. Kondo, 1990; Knights and McCabe, 2000; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Davies and Thomas, 2003; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006; Thomas and Davies, 2005a; 2005b). For example, Grey's (1994) study of management trainee accountants found that the notion of 'career' shaped the identities and behaviour of the trainees whereby the discursive construct of a career became the controlling mechanism by which individuals internalised what they needed to do. In turn, management in the name of their 'career' could manipulate trainees' attitudes and behaviour. Similarly, Fleming and Sturdy (2011) base their research in

the call centre, exploring how 'fun' identity control techniques serve to distract workers from the more draconian controls that function in these types of work environment. With reference to their case study, they show how the normative control of 'be yourself' allows for better customer interaction, whilst also diverting the worker from the monotony of call centre life. Meanwhile, with regards to resistance, research into the introduction of New Public Management⁵ (NPM) in police, social work and teaching, Thomas and Davies (2005a) explored how managers in these various public sector roles resisted NPM by, "...exploiting the contradictions within and between discourses and subject positions." (Thomas and Davies 2005a, p.700).⁶ Many of these studies have been informed by post-structuralist accounts of identities and therefore, post-structuralism will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

2.3 Fluid, complex and discursive: post-structuralism and identities

Post-structuralism approaches identities as fluid, complex and constituted through discourses. In doing so, this understanding of identities emphasises the dynamic of power relations in identity construction, encompasses an understanding of the relationship between subjectivities and subjects, and considers identity regulation, resistance, and identity work as central components of identity construction. The rest of the chapter will outline the key tenets of this ontological position together with some illustrations of the approach in use in research and any critiques that have been made of the perspective. The chapter will then conclude with details of how this approach is operationalised in this research study.

2.3.1 Key tenets of post-structuralist approach to identities

Whilst recognising the constructed nature of identities, post-structuralist accounts also emphasise a conceptualisation of identities as fluid and centred around language (e.g. see Kondo, 1990; Alvesson, 2004; Webb, 2006).

⁵ NPM is a series of reforms commencing in the 1980s that was introduced to bring free-market thinking to the public sector as a new managerial philosophy.

⁶ Studies of identity regulation and resistance will be covered in more detail in section 2.3.1.3

Consequently, identities are, "...in a permanent state of becoming as various social and linguistic constructs (or discourses) vie with one another for supremacy." (Thomas and Linstead 2002, p.75). So within this conceptualisation, identities are ever-changing and shifting entities. Incumbent with this notion of identities as in flux is the idea that identities are multiple because there are a range of discourses an individual can draw on and be influenced by during identity construction (Kondo, 1990; Collinson, 2003). Therefore, "Despite its connotations of individuality and fixedness, then, the term 'identity' buttresses a perspective on the self that emphasizes complexity and dynamicity." (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema 2008, p.3). Therefore, multiple, in flux, and constructed by drawing on discourses, are the central foundations by which post-structuralism understands identities.

2.3.1.1 Foucault and identities

Whilst there is a range of influences on post-structuralist writing on identities, one of the central theorists in the approach is Foucault and his ideas around the inter-relationship between power, knowledge and discourse. In this context, power is considered as a process or practice, which discursively socialises people into distinct ways of thinking about the world and how they should operate in that environment (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Martin, 2001; Clegg *et al.* 2006), hence the preferred term *power relations*. Foucault also utilises the metaphor of a web to emphasise that power should be considered as a network of potentially shifting relations rather than any possession or resource (Clegg, 1998). Therefore, there is an emphasis on exploring the day-to-day practices in which power is embedded that serves to normalise certain ways of perceiving the world (Hardy and Clegg, 1996). This conceptualisation of power also considers its *effects* (Hardy and Thomas, 2013), examining how discourses circulate and resonate with others to come to define understanding of a certain topic. As such, power is often expressed in Foucauldian terms as 'power/knowledge' in order to highlight the symbiotic relationship between the two concepts. Consequently, whilst power and knowledge are not considered as the same thing, where you find one, you will always find the other (McAuley *et al.* 2007).

Together with this web of power/knowledge relations is discourse. It is the primary means through which power operates where systems of discourse use knowledge in order to define reality for organisational members (Knights and Willmott, 1999). As such, these systems of discourse were termed by Foucault (1977) as 'disciplinary power'. Therefore, discourses retain power over individuals in defining the ways in which they can see themselves. Consequently, discourses hold power over individuals in an unconscious way (Hardy, 1996), meaning that no-one is 'outside' of their power (Foucault, 1983). Identities are considered to be constituted in discourse where, "...practices... systematically form the objects of which they speak." (Merilainen *et al.* 2004, p. 544). Therefore, identity construction is the process by which individuals aim to secure their identities by drawing on discourses. Discourse in this context takes on a wider definition than just language, to encapsulate many forms of social interaction such as practices and behaviour as well as more 'tangible' entities such as artefacts, texts and visuals. In this sense, discourses involve both the discursive and the material.

This relationship between discourse and power/knowledge highlights how identities serve as a way in which people are controlled. Discourse and knowledge contribute to defining at the societal level, what are acceptable behaviours and attitudes for people. At the organisational level, this involves prescribing idealised versions of 'workers' that become normalised such as, "...the worker who strives for excellence; the manager who strives to be enterprising; or the service worker who aims to leave every client delighted." (Clegg *et al.* 2006, p.231). These discourses result in individuals controlling themselves in order to 'fit in with' prescribed social identities.

Foucault's conceptualisation of power relations and discourse and their role in identity construction is distinct from the other ontological positions on identities that have been outlined so far because it considers the limitations of individual agency due to the power of discourses to regulate identities. However, Foucault's understanding of power as constituting a dynamic web of relations also indicates that discourses' regulative abilities are also

negotiated, because discourses are both a means by which power operates and an effect of power (Hardy and Thomas, 2013), and therefore degrees of individual agency in identity construction are also recognised. As such:

“...people evolve not just as reflexively self-regarding agents, but also as part-colonized subjects who provide accounts of their selves in vocabularies made available by disciplinary practices.” (Brown and Lewis 2011, p.874).

Consequently, there is a dialogical nature to identity construction between the micro and macro influences on the process. This notion of duality to identity construction also permeates discussion of subjectivities and subjects as another central tenet of post-structuralism.

2.3.1.2 Subjectivities and subjects

Post-structural accounts of identities will often use the term ‘subjectivity’ or ‘subjectivities’. In these cases the word refers to: “...an emphasis on the subject as a focus of social analysis.” (Rosenau 1992, p.xiv). However, as Rosenau (1992) goes on to explain, this interest in subjectivities belies a post-structuralist contention that previous understandings of ‘the subject’ should be discarded. This means that modernist notions of conducting ‘objective’ study/science over a rational and unified ‘subject’ unit should be re-framed. This re-framing has been positioned as post-structuralism’s cry for ‘the death of the subject’ (Mills, 1997), where instead of considering the subject as a unified and distinct unit it should be replaced with ‘the decentred self’ that encompasses the notion of subjectivities, “...as contingent, positional and ever precarious.” (Baack and Prash, 1997). As one of the influential writers concerning ‘the death of the subject’, Foucault considers subjects as constituted through discourses, however due to the dynamic between discourses and power relations, subjects are also displaced amongst discourses, never settling on one unified entity.

Within this reframing of subjects, ‘subjectivity’, “...is a term used to denote an understanding of individual identity as the product of discourse, ideology and institutional practices, at any given moment of time” (Thomas 2009, p. 180).

As Grant *et al.* (2009) highlight, discourses constitute: "...forms of subjectivity in which human subjects are given what is perceived to be a rational, self-evident form that manages who they are and what they do..." (Grant *et al.* 2009, p.217). Consequently, subjectivities concern discursive practices, constituting 'subject positions' that will continually be defined contested and re-framed (Davies and Thomas, 2003). Knights and Willmott (1989; 1990) argue that there is a duality of subjectivities, meaning that individuals can both reflect on themselves and on how others see them. Thus, as Kenny *et al.* (2011) observe, from a Foucauldian perspective, the use of the term subjectivities rather than identities is deliberate in order to emphasise how the sense of who we are has a duality to it in the way that we are *subjects of* and *subject to* power relations that shape our identities (see also Foucault, 1983).

As Collinson (2003) observes, this is one of the main strengths of this ontological position:

Insisting on the need to combine subject and object, structure and action and power and subjectivity, post-structuralist analyses challenge the prevailing functionalist paradigm and the economic and gender reductionism that frequently characterizes conventional organization studies. (Collinson 2003, p.528)

Indeed, the notion of the 'de-centred' self constitutes an ontological shift that distinguishes post-structuralism from other ontological positions as it collapses distinctions between subject-object and structure-agency. In turn, it begins to grapple with the complexities of the social world, viewing it as a continually shifting terrain in which subjectivities are constituted and re-constituted in discourse. The construction of subjectivities is the focus of the next section, outlining the central features of this process.

2.3.1.3 Identity construction: identity regulation, dis-identification, and identity work

Whilst Foucault's ideas around discourse and power relations, coupled with theorisation around subjectivities and subjects form the foundations of the post-structuralist conceptualisation of identities, there are also other key

features of identity construction that have been the focus of research within this ontological stance. This section will examine identity regulation, identity resistance or dis-identification, and identity work as central features of identity construction.

One of the most influential theorisations of identity construction within critical organisation studies influenced by post-structuralism is that by Alvesson and Willmott (2002). These researchers begin their conceptualisation by exploring identity regulation, arguing that organisations will attempt to regulate employee identities, providing discourses in which employees position themselves in order to harness commitment from them. Key to the theorisation is the inter-relationship between self-identity, identity regulation and identity work. Self-identity is how the individual reflexively conceives of him/herself drawn from various discursive and experiential sources. It is in a precarious position (see also Knights and Willmott, 1989; 1990) and can often be undermined or questioned by events in the individual's life. Identity work, needed to constantly adapt and maintain self-identity, may be a very conscious activity at times when self-identity is strongly questioned. Finally, identity regulation constitutes the discursive practices that aim to influence identity formation and transformation.

Self-identity can resist or welcome identity regulation depending on how congruent the discourses are with understandings of self; consequently identity regulation is reliant on self-identity for it to achieve its goals. Identity work is instigated by clashes between experience and self-identity and in turn the activity of identity work reforms the notion of self identity (albeit only moderately potentially). As something that tries to work on self-identity, identity regulation is inevitably a catalyst for identity work and in turn that process can serve to reform the discursive practices in identity regulation to make them more appealing to self-identity.

The researchers provide nine targets for identity regulation in the organisational context such as definition of the employee directly, developing employee knowledge and skills, and providing a hierarchical location for

employees. They also consider three overarching and interacting sources of identity regulation for analytical purposes. The first is 'managerial' where discourses supplied by management theory help to construct organisational self-identities such as that of 'leader' or 'manager'. The second is called 'cultural-communitarian' and refers to broader discourses at the level of occupation or society that can be used to resist or bolster organisational subject positions. Discourses within this category include 'team-working' and 'working hard, playing hard'. Finally, there is 'quasi-autonomous' which highlights where resistance can operate at the micro-level.

Whilst it could be conceived as an approach that affords management all the power in defining identities, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) are keen to highlight that instead, the regulation of identities is precarious and often negotiated through the use of identity work. Equally, identity regulation may not be purposefully pursued by the organisation but may be an unintended outcome of some organisational principles and practices. Similarly, employees are not considered passive in this process but able to resist the managerial discourses. Nevertheless, as their self-identity is also precarious, depending on the strength of extra-organisational discourses at work in identity construction, corporate commitment may be more appealing than alternatives.

Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) conceptualisation of identity construction as involving processes of identity regulation, identity resistance or dis-identification, and identity work have each spawned distinct areas of enquiry. With regards identity regulation, a raft of studies has developed the notion of identities as tools for organisational control to explore a wide variety of organisational contexts including the construction of graduate trainees' identities (Coupland, 2001); the gendered identity construction of the commercial airline pilot (Ashcraft, 2007); and studies of identities in the environment of education (Abbas and McLean, 2001; Allen Collinson, 2006) to name but a few.

Many of these studies seek to provide detailed analysis of how organisations

have controlled employee identities. One example is Collinson's (2003) work on surveillance in organisations, which also highlighted the importance of insecurity in understanding subjectivity, power relations and organisations. As such, he demonstrates how workplace selves may be reproduced as either 'conformist', 'dramaturgical' or 'resistant'. Using management consultants as the empirical setting for their study, Karreman and Alvesson (2009) examine how compliance to organisational discourses can be achieved by developing ideas around counter resistance, arguing that in their research, interviewees resisted resistance, instead choosing to comply with organisational discourses.

Whilst the analytical focus has been on identity regulation within specific organisations in particular work sectors, other studies have looked at identity regulation in relation to topics that span a number of organisational settings. For instance, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) apply identity regulation to ageing, looking at how physical and psychological discourses operate to regulate the identities of the older worker as a problem to both business and society. Combined with these discourses is another of 'grief' that serves to encourage older workers to accept that their contribution to the labour force will come to an end. As such, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) are one of the few identity regulation studies that move away from the organisational setting and look at multiple actors that could contribute to identity regulation rather than the traditional dialogic of manager and employee.

As well as identity regulation, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) also indicate the potential for identity resistance. Consequently, some studies have looked in depth at notions of tension, struggle and negotiation in identity regulation. Literature in this area focuses on two elements of resistance. The first, resisting an identity imposed upon you (e.g. by an organisation you work for) and the second, one's notion of self as a source of resistance. Examples of this first focus include the study by Clarke *et al.* (2009) of management in a large engineering firm, which highlights how opposing discourses can be drawn on in identity construction. They suggest that a notion of coherence to identities is not always apparent but rather the complexity of organisational

discursive practices and employees' reactions to said practices, means that antagonistic discourses can operate in identity work of 'the manager'. Similarly, Gotsi *et al.* (2010) looked at tensions in identity regulation in the empirical context of the creative industries. They argue that creative workers have to cope with the multiple identities of 'creative' against a divergent identity of 'business consultant'. In order to deal with the tensions this duality creates, paradoxical techniques are used, one involving segregation of these identities at different times, the other including integration of these identities under a 'meta-identity' of 'practical artist'. Meanwhile, Brown and Lewis (2011) considered how the *principle* of lawyers' time/billing routines disciplined their identity work but the *performance* of these routines was where they could negotiate these disciplinary practices and "...liberate themselves from normalizing and totalizing tendencies of local discourses." (Brown and Lewis 2011, p.885)

Within the context of management consultancy, Whittle (2005) also highlights how consultants navigate the tensions and contradictions of being a 'practicer' and 'preacher' of organisational discourses. Focusing on flexible working, she demonstrates how consultants have not been colonised by managerial discourses but instead can recognise the need for a 'dramaturgical self' to perform these discourses when required despite their cynicism. The notion of switching between different identities when tensions arise is also outlined in Robertson and Swan's (2003) research on IT consultants. This switching was required to deal with the dissonance when employees' 'subjective' identity of 'scientist' came in opposition with the organisation's normative identity of 'consultant'. As Beech (2006) observes, authors such as Alvesson and Willmott (2002), Knights and McCabe (2002) and Collinson (2003) have argued that whilst attempts are made to regulate identities in the organisational context these attempts at regulation are imperfect and that is where resistance is possible.

This notion of identity resistance, and in particular active dis-identification, has also developed into a fertile area of study where research has explored the various ways in which organisational actors have dis-identified with the

organisational identities imposed upon them. This can be through various techniques such as using rhetoric to resist organisational discourses (Symon, 2005), constructing alternative collective identities to resist managerial discourses of 'the team' (Learmonth, 2009) or via the use of cynicism, irony, and humour (e.g. Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006).

These studies consider the negotiation of organisational identities, but focus on the ways in which workers dis-identify with organisationally prescribed discourses. For instance, Fleming and Spicer (2003) explore the use of cynicism in dis-identification where individuals mockingly cultivate detachment to one's work activity or the activity of the organisation whilst still performing the required activities. Meanwhile, exploring resistance during a merger of further education colleges, Brown and Humphreys (2006) highlight how the organisation as a geographical place was constructed in order to resist the changes the workers were experiencing and at times revert to nostalgic accounts of the previous incarnation of the organisations they belonged to (and their identities within that previous context). Costas and Fleming (2009) focus on the dis-identification of management consultants resulting in their exploration of how these consultants experienced self-alienation and the search for 'authenticity' in their idealised notions of self.

Whilst there has been a range of studies on the resistance of a particular identity, other studies have explored one's notion of self as a source of resistance. These studies have focused on the level of identities as a motivation to resist something else such as a teacher constructing the subject position of a caring mother to resist a new public management discourse to treat children as a cost (Thomas and Davies, 2005a). In this context, resistance is re-framed and micro and individual forms of resistance are considered rather than exclusively focusing on collective and/or overt forms of action such as strikes/boycotts. Fleming and Sewell (2002) suggest this reconceptualisation of resistance focuses at the individual and identity level where other elements outside the workplace can have influence (e.g. home life). This argument is supported by work such as Thomas and Davies (2005a) that highlights that an individual can reject and move away from

certain discourses and be more attracted to other discourses (such as family life). This therefore recognises that more than one discourse works on an individual at any one time. The focus on resistance of a particular identity or one's own construction of self as a form of resistance are inter-connected, but by focusing on the tensions and struggles of identity construction in organisational contexts, all these studies highlight not only the complexities of identity regulation but also the negotiation of identities (Thomas and Davies, 2005a; 2005b; Brown and Lewis, 2011) in this process as well as the potential for resistance.

Identity work is another element in the identity construction process that involves the framing and re-framing of identities in the negotiation of discourses circulating about the self. As the, "...ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued" (Alvesson *et al.* 2008, p.15) identity work is often aligned with individuals' desires to have a positive understanding of themselves – and project a positive identity externally (Thomas, 2009). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) encapsulate this role for identity work when they consider it as a means to 'manage continuity' in a person's sense of self whilst the normative discourses surrounding 'the self' constantly shift.

Empirical studies using the concept of identity work are varied and represent an array of theoretical heritages. Some studies are more strongly situated in the SIT approach to identities (e.g. Pratt *et al.* 2006; Chreim *et al.* 2007), whilst others take a dramaturgical stance in their appreciation of identity work (e.g. Blenkinsopp and Stalker, 2004; Beech, 2008; Watson 2008; 2009; Down and Reveley, 2009). Post-structuralist studies of identity work also proliferate (e.g. Coupland, 2001; Karreman and Alvesson, 2004; Iedema *et al.* 2004; Brown and Coupland, 2005) with management constituting a particularly fruitful area for identity work research, with examples including work done on: the exploration of middle managers' identity work when undergoing organisational change (Thomas and Linstead, 2002); the interplay of organisational discourses and individual identity work for a senior manager (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003); and the identity work of senior and middle

management engaged in leadership training (Carroll and Levy, 2008). These post-structuralist studies consider identity work as enabling individuals to negotiate discourses in the process of identity construction in a complex and nuanced manner (Brown and Lewis, 2011).

Identity regulation, identity resistance or dis-identification, and identity work constitute the central elements of post-structuralist approaches to identity construction. This section has outlined how these elements operate and research that has been conducted on these aspects of identity construction within organisational contexts. Research focusing on these features embodies the foundational principles of this ontological approach to identities where identity regulation and resistance incorporates an understanding of the role of power relations in the construction of identities and the fluid and negotiated character of identities. Similarly, the notion of identity work indicates both the active construction of identities and the ability of identity construction to react to organisationally defined discourses and subject positions. These three features to identity construction also suggest it is an on-going process requiring continual negotiation and reconstruction:

The appearance of stability in any given 'identity' is, at best, a transient accomplishment: discursive construction and re-construction emerge as a continuous process and stability appears to be either a momentary achievement or a resilient fiction. (Ybema *et al.* 2009, p.301)

However, despite post-structuralism's influence on organisational identities, criticisms have been made as to this approach's emphasis on the fluid, shifting and discursive dynamic of identities.

2.4 Critiques of post-structuralism

Whilst the post-structuralist conceptualisation of identities has gained popularity in recent years with the linguistic turn, it has still been critiqued by other perspectives and even within its own ontological domain. Some researchers such as Brubaker and Cooper (2000) consider the post-structuralist understanding of identities as too 'slippery' and that there is a

core to identities that remain fairly stable and can often become a contributory factor to decision-making in society. These researchers emphasise the politics of identities in order to make their case that the more post-structuralist understandings of identities render it too ambiguous to be used as an analytical category in politics and policy making and therefore its 'real' contribution to society is limited.

Additionally, Newton (1998) considers whether identities are as insecure and fragile as assumed by post-structural accounts. He questions whether a blanket consideration of everyone's identities as insecure constitutes a form of essentialism. For instance, he comments that the arguments made around the insecurity of identities indicate that, "...human feelings of anxiety and existential loneliness derive from this *essential* need for ontological security..." (Newton 1998, p.418). This demonstration of essentialism goes against the post-structuralist assumptions of identities as a non-essentialist concept. However, in response to this criticism, the post-structural understanding of identities highlights that there are in fact degrees of insecurity and fragility. For example, Knights and Willmott (1989; 1990) do not argue that individuals are essentially insecure, but instead consider increased ontological insecurity in current configurations of capital.

Finally, the influence of Foucauldian ideas on discourse and power/knowledge that inform post-structural thinking on identities is one of the biggest areas of criticism, especially for more 'radical structuralist' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) researchers. The criticism centres on the argument that Foucault's ideas of discourse being all-encompassing in a web of power relations in identity construction, neglects to consider resistance (e.g. Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Newton, 1998; Reed, 1998; 2000; Thompson and McHugh, 2002; Webb, 2006). Coupled with this critique concerning the under-theorisation of resistance is a questioning of the theoretical underpinnings of post-structuralist thinking concerning power, where some consider that it does not account for any differentiation of power (Thompson and McHugh, 2002). This means that it does not consider how some people or organisations in society have more substantive power than others (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005;

Clegg *et al.* 2006). Consequently, with regard to identities, these researchers would question how far discourses are the main areas of power play or whether there are more social structures (with their incumbent societal power) that also impact on identity formation.

With regard to the role of resistance, post-structuralist researchers argue that the Foucauldian-informed notion of identity construction considers resistance and power as inter-connected:

...there are no relations of power without resistances...It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies. (Gordon 1980, p.142).

Therefore, we may be able to resist dominant discourses by drawing on other discourses, but they will always exist in a power/knowledge relationship to individuals (Chan, 2000). In this regard, resistance is not considered as purely a response in opposition to power but as involving power in order to produce alternative effects of discourse (Hardy and Thomas, 2013). Accordingly, there is always the possibility of resistance as actors negotiate meaning and thus the power effects of discourse cannot be assumed as individuals are simultaneously subject to power and exercising power in its web of relations (Gordon, 1980).

Some researchers within the same ontological realm as post-structuralism contend that the significant challenge with the perspective is in answering *why* discourses hold so much power over individuals (Roberts, 2005)? In this regard, these researchers have begun to use the work of Lacan (1979)⁷ to begin to unpick the Foucauldian-inspired conundrum. These psychoanalytical accounts of identities focus on the formation of core components of 'the self' derived from childhood. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) highlight Lacan:

...theorised that a key stage in the socialisation of the infant is the acquisition of a shared system of discourse (the 'Symbolic Order'). Like Freud, Lacan attempted to account for the way the fluid and chaotic

⁷ And in some cases Butler (1990) as well although she also is influenced by the work of Lacan and Foucault.

unconscious of early infancy is reined in and subjected to the illusion of a coherent and bounded identity. In this process, which Lacan called the 'mirror' phase, the subject is able to conceive of itself as whole, but simultaneously 'othered' or alien. This imposes a comforting illusion of unity, coherence and distinctiveness." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 20-21)

These ideas have experienced a revival when coupled with post-structuralist approaches to identities (e.g. Craib, 1998; Driver, 2005; Jones and Spicer, 2005; Roberts, 2005; Vidaillet, 2007). These studies argue that the answer psychoanalysis provides is that the idea of an objectivised and coherent self that we carry with us from infancy actually constitutes a fantasy that we continually try to embody. Consequently, "...the motor for identification...is the need for the individual to gain confirmation of existence." (Thomas 2009, p.176). Thus, we succumb to the power of discourses in order to try and have a sense of a stable self. As an example, Roberts (2005) highlights how the fantasy of manager as 'someone in control' is such a key factor in how managers see themselves and thus how they operate in organisations; often placing great importance on plans, strategies and management models because they provide a sense of control in the organisational context. However, this approach has also been critiqued for its account that motivation to identity work is viewed as solely being driven by one source – that of the 'lack' arising from early development (Thomas, 2009). In this regard, identity construction appears reductionist and essentialist, where agency for the individual has been removed (because childhood is the only determining factor) and any power to resist is also not possible (Thomas, 2009).

Whilst post-structuralism may have some tensions and compromises in how it approaches identity construction, it remains a compelling theorisation that attempts to account for the complexity involved in identity construction without resorting to simplifying identities to merely identification with group categories, or only focusing on performance analogies, or in limiting the process of identification to childhood development as a root cause. The concluding section of this chapter will summarise what has been covered regarding the literature on identities in order to explicate what the post-structuralist approach to identities enables this research to focus on. Incumbent in this

discussion will also be a consideration of how the relations between structure and agency are conceived in the literature on identities.

2.5 Conclusion: why the post-structuralist approach to identities?

This chapter has focused on the wide and varied literature on identities, outlining some of the dominant perspectives on understanding the concept according to differing ontological approaches. Social identity theory considers identities as rather fixed and static entities, focusing its research on individuals' identification with group/social identities and how they can be linked to organisational performance (e.g. Haslam, 2004). Meanwhile, dramaturgical approaches emphasise the performance of identities in everyday interaction, highlighting how individuals present themselves in the organisational context (e.g. Gardner and Avolio, 1998). Finally, the chapter considered critical accounts of identities that foreground discussion of how identities can be both regulated (e.g. Karreman and Alvesson, 2009) and resisted (e.g. Costas and Fleming, 2009). This final account of identities indicates a propensity to draw on post-structuralism and thus focus on this perspective formed the remainder of the chapter.

Consequently, the rest of the chapter examined the central tenets of the post-structuralist approach to identities including the principles of discourse and power relations theorised by Foucault, notions of the inter-relations between subjectivities and subjects and component elements of identity construction namely, identity regulation, identity resistance or dis-identification, and identity work. The critiques regarding the approach highlighted that further work is being conducted with the use of psychoanalysis to explore the identity construction process, meaning the conceptualisation remains compelling to organisation studies.

In the case of this research, the post-structuralist approach to identities enables a focus on the complexities of identity construction, appreciating the potential for change and resistance, but also the attempts to fix and stabilise meaning, which can be seen in the everyday discourse around the topic. This

perspective also allows for analysis of discourse and the role it plays in identity construction, again, both as a potential way in which identities are regulated and as a means by which to negotiate meaning in the social world. In this context, discourse constitutes more than just talk and text but also, "...bodily acts, the use of artefacts and dress codes..." that should also be considered as, "...embodied symbolic expressions intrinsic to the adoption or ascription of particular identities." (Ybema *et al.* 2009, p.304). Therefore, a variety of elements can be incorporated into the research in order to understand processes of identity construction (and reconstruction). As a study seeking to explore how both the professional body and practitioners construct the PR professional and the degree to which the CIPR informs practitioners' identity construction, a post-structuralist perspective allows the research to consider the complexities of identities and the numerous artefacts, talk, text and practices that can constitute identity construction in that discursive arena.

Ultimately, as Ybema *et al.* (2009) highlight, this approach allows for a nuanced appreciation of the different facets of identity formation:

...it can offer insight into how identities are constituted and, over time, reconstituted in everyday organizational talk and texts, it may reveal how dominant organizational discourses play out in members' identifications, it can illustrate how discourses inscribe particular subject positions, or be deconstructed to demonstrate how discursive strategies may encourage or marginalize the adoption of certain meanings. (Ybema *et al.* 2009, p.303-304)

These different facets of identity construction also signal that identities are a site in which the inter-relationships between the individual and wider social structures are played out. Thus, a consideration of both the disciplinary power of discourses and the ability of individuals to negotiate those discourses by drawing on alternative discourses brings an awareness of the dialogic between agency and structure (Ybema *et al.* 2009).

As this research encompasses consideration of both the individual construction of identities and the wider occupational construction of identities, it not only moves beyond the purely organisational level of analysis which has proved to continue to proliferate studies of identities (Alvesson *et al.* 2008),

but it also eschews a purely localised focus on the process of identity construction. As Alvesson *et al.* (2008) argue:

... even as we take interest in micro-analysis of individual identity constructions *vis a vis* social relations and materials, we suggest that close readings be balanced with consideration of broader contexts and macro developments to avoid myopic pitfalls. (Alvesson *et al.* 2008, p.12)

The post-structuralist approach to identities allows for this combination of close reading and consideration of broader contexts that Alvesson *et al.* (2008) discuss, because of its focus on the dynamic between discourses and identity construction. In this context, structures are understood as dominant discourses and agency arises from the tensions experienced between competing discourses vying for dominance in a person's conceptions of self (Thomas and Davies, 2005a). Consequently, incumbent in this consideration of identities is also an understanding that identity construction is processual, with no-one element of this structure-agency divide having exclusive control over the identities but merely being an element in the dynamic process by which meaning is derived and sense is made of the social world and the individuals' place within that world. This notion of identities as 'becoming', continually forming and re-forming in order to stabilise meaning as processes of flux dominate social reality, will be returned to in Chapter 4 when the conceptual framework guiding the research is outlined. Furthermore, whilst this chapter has examined the identities literature and concluded that a post-structuralist appreciation of the concept enables the research to situate identity construction as a process that incorporates a continual dynamic between the individual and social 'structures' (discourses in this context), the next chapter focuses on this wider social context, considering the literature on professions and its understandings of the concept.

CHAPTER 3: PROFESSIONS AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

3.1 Introduction: why study professions?

This research seeks to explore what it means to be a PR professional, in particular focusing on how the professional body constructs professional subject positions and the salience of those subject positions for practitioners within the industry. The sociology of professions is concerned with the development and maintenance of professions. This research, while focusing on the changing nature of professions in the UK, draws, in part, from sociological analysis of the professions and professional change conducted in other countries in the Global North.

Focusing on a profession as constituting a specific occupational unit, the literature incorporates a spectrum of approaches as Hodgson (2005) observes:

Broadly, a distinction has been drawn between the traditional view of the profession as a *purely productive organization of experts* possessing skills and knowledge vital to society and the critical view of the profession as *the mobilization of monopoly power to secure power and influence for a privileged minority*. (Author's emphasis) (Hodgson 2005, p.52)

The functionalist view has sought to document and categorise constituent parts of an occupation that render it a profession (e.g. Greenwood, 1972) whilst the more critical approaches have focused on how these professional communities have harnessed power (e.g. Abbott, 1988). In turn, more recent interest has been on the management of professions and the development of large, global professional service firms that have begun to question the tradition of the profession as an occupational unit that can monopolise power and influence (e.g. Reed, 2007).

Thus, the central concepts in this literature are profession, professionalisation and professionalism. Reed (2007) provides his distinction between the three elements where he considers:

...professionalization (as an occupational control strategy), professionalism (as a principle of work organization and control), and professions (as occupational associations and groups). (Reed 2007, p.174)

However, the developments in focus within the sociology of professions over time means there has been a shift in the literature from a largely uncontested understanding of the concepts of profession, professionalisation and professionalism in functionalist writing to a far more unstable and ambiguous framing of these concepts due to contemporary theorising where for each idea there are several possible definitions. For the term 'profession' can constitute an occupational grouping; or a grouping that is distinct due to its social power and status; or a grouping that has certain characteristics such as a body of knowledge, a code of conduct and a licence to practice provided by a professional association. For 'professionalisation', it can be defined as an occupational movement from aspiring to established; it can be a control strategy (either structurally or discursively) used by occupations to attain social autonomy; or it can be the process by which a person becomes socialised into a profession. Equally, 'professionalism' can mean demeanour, rhetoric, morality and competence or it can be about industry position in society and individual standing amongst other professionals.

Despite the ambiguity, the concepts of profession, professionalisation and professionalism remain powerful and carry a strongly positive value. They retain analytical utility in studying organisational topics. Considered as one of the most well organised occupations (Freidson, 2001), looking at these professional units provides the researcher with a microcosm to study a range of issues such as how groups organise themselves (e.g. O'Regan, 2008), power play internally and externally in the creation and maintenance of professions (e.g. Ramirez, 2009) and group and individual identities (e.g. Pratt *et al.* 2007; Kuhn, 2009).

Profession is also a concept that has retained some element of status and prestige as Dent and Whitehead (2002) observe:

While the term 'professional' has been subject to significant cultural and social disruption and redefinition, its underpinning association with privilege, specialism, autonomy and trust has not been totally removed. It would be altogether too simplistic to suggest that professional status no longer bestows a degree of social elevation on those who wear its mantle. Recognizing this, the term 'professional' remains a much sought after label for those agencies and agents seeking wider recognition and value of their particular knowledge specialism. (Dent and Whitehead 2002, p.2-3)

As a result of its continued discursive power in legitimating occupations and workers it has also come to dominate organisational discourse as the nature of the work has evolved. For example, Evetts (2006) highlights that the current agenda for budget constraints, higher service demands and increased use of target measurement is all in the name of 'professionalising' work, which has been particularly operationalised with the introduction of New Public Management. Consequently, despite the ambiguity regarding what constitutes profession, professionalisation and professionalism (or maybe because of the ambiguity) the concepts' discursive malleability has rendered them still relevant and influential in contemporary work.

With this in mind, this chapter will outline the development of the sociology of professions, starting with the tradition of delineating certain attributes that would allow an occupation to be considered a profession, and then moving onto more structural accounts of professionalisation that have centred on the closure and control of an occupational unit to monopolise power in society, as well as considering the more recent debates concerning the potential for professions to be diminishing in power on account of the changes in the way they are managed and organised. Moving onto discursive approaches to the professions, the chapter outlines studies that have considered professionalism as an effective discourse and disciplinary mechanism in identity construction at work. This then leads into analysis of empirical studies concerning professional identities, focusing on their understanding of both professions and identities. In doing so, this chapter argues that the sociology

of professions largely focuses on profession as purely an occupational unit and a professional as a distinct worker within this unit. Thus, what is missing from this body of literature is a stronger linkage between profession, identities, and discourse in order to explore both the crafting of professions and professional identities, in order to provide a greater appreciation of how people understand themselves as professional and how organisations involved in professionalisation can influence that identity construction process.

3.2 Profession as a checklist

Initial schools of thought within the sociology of professions literature came from a functionalist perspective where scholars developed a checklist of traits or attributes that an industry had to attain in order to be considered a profession. These approaches were interested in defining what constitutes 'a profession' by taking an example and breaking it down into its component parts (e.g. Greenwood, 1972). Volti (2008) observes that research of this nature: "...resembled the work of zoologists who gained a better understanding of particular species of animals by noting and describing their key anatomical features." (Volti 2008, p.97). This checklist approach then led to some researchers characterising professions into different levels according to their autonomy or status, such as Etzioni's (1969) consideration of 'semi-professions' and Greenwood's (1972) consideration of occupations as on a continuum where at one end are the least skilled, least attractive occupations that have virtually none of his five characteristics. At the other end of the spectrum is the well-recognised and undisputed profession, which has his five characteristics to the maximum degree. Consequently, as well as seeking to define what elements made a profession, researchers also wanted to delineate between those that had all the component parts, those that were nearly achieving all these aspects and those that had none of the required elements. One example of this kind of study is Denzin and Mettlin's (1972) research on the 'incomplete' profession of pharmacy where the researchers assess the deficiencies in the occupation in achieving the status of profession.

These approaches to the sociology of professions thus provide quite prescriptive and closed definitions of what constitutes a profession. They also lead to the notion that the process of professionalisation constitutes a linear development from 'non-profession' through 'semi-profession' to 'fully fledged profession' (Elliott, 1972). Professionalisation is thus a rather simplistic development as Wilensky's natural history account of US professions highlights:

...men begin doing the work full time and stake out a jurisdiction; the early masters of the technique or adherents of the movement become concerned about standards of training and practice and set up a training school, which, if not lodged in universities at the outset, makes academic connection within two or three decades; the teachers and activists then achieve success in promoting more effective organisation, first local, then national – through either the transformation of an existing occupational association or the creation of a new one. Toward the end, legal protection of the monopoly of skill appears; at the end, a formal code of ethics is adopted. (Wilensky 1970, p.490)

Furthermore, imbued in this understanding of profession is a conceptualisation of this occupational unit as neutral and purely for moral and public good (Wilensky, 1970; Johnson, 1972; Greenwood, 1972; Goode, 1972). This understanding of the profession and professional is clearly evoked in Greenwood's (1972) assertion regarding a professional career, which he considers as, "...a *calling*, a life devoted to 'good works'. Professional work is never viewed solely as a means to an end; it is the end itself." (Greenwood 1972, p.13-14). Consequently, the manifestation of a professional occupational unit is purely for the good of the wider community and populated by workers whose only concern is to serve the public good.

As Johnson (1972) observes, these traditional studies of professions, "...are based on an assumption, that there is some essential quality or qualities which mark off the professions from other occupations and provide a basis for a distinct body of theory and variant forms of analysis." (Johnson 1972, p.10) The assumed status, legitimacy and standards of the professional unit means that these initial approaches to research in the sociology of professions sought to capture the essence of these professions. Nevertheless, different

approaches to the professions have emerged in the literature that consider the concept in a more nuanced manner in order to embrace the complexities around the occupational classification. These approaches also begin to question the neutrality of professions and in turn focus on the operation of power and institutions in the creation and maintenance of a profession.

3.3 Profession as closure and control of an occupation

As Johnson (1972) contends, the functionalist literature that sought to define the traits/attributes of 'the professions' simply considered the profession as an end-state and the occupational unit as merely functional to society. As such, he argues that this literature, "...excludes from consideration the power dimension, which in turn suggests possible variations in the institutionalised forms of the control of occupational activities." (Johnson 1972, p.37). The subsequent developments in the sociology of professions developed analyses that focused on these aspects.

One way in which a greater appreciation of power and institutional control over professions was achieved was in historical analyses of professions (Volti, 2008). As Krause (1971) maintains, a historical analysis means that the development of the profession is viewed within its social and political context rather than as a result of following a linear process of professionalisation as provided by more functionalist accounts. An example of this approach is Larson's (1977) historical analysis of the development of professions in the US context. As such, his account is more critical, looking at the social mobility of professions, recognising them as occupations attempting to advance in society for both recognition and economic rewards. This form of analysis leads Larson (1990) to define a profession as, "...a name we give to historically specific forms that establish *structural links between relatively high levels of formal education and relatively desirable positions and/or rewards in the social division of labour.*" (Author's emphasis) (Larson 1990, p.30).

The recognition of the historically specific nature of the development of professions was coupled with a greater focus on the power struggles involved

in professionalisation. This conceptual focus of professions led to the development of the notion of social closure (Parkin, 1979; Murphy, 1986). Social closure theory considers professionalisation as one process to gain closure in the labour market and enhance material rewards and status. This is achieved via a 'dual closure' of 'exclusion' – a downward force on other groups in society to gain a privileged position, and 'usurpation' – an upward force to attain a greater share of resources from elites (see Parkin, 1979). These means of achieving social closure envisaged, "...the formation of a self-regulating community...as the key to such success..." (Collins 1990, p.13). This objective was also the driving force behind establishing credentialised forms of education and training for the profession (Collins, 1979) that would bolster the closure and control of barriers to entry for a profession.

Recognition of a concept of profession as an occupation engaging in social closure in order to establish and maintain power resulted in the proliferation of more structural and institutional accounts of professionalisation. One key theorisation in this area was Abbott's (1988) 'system of professions' – an interdependent system where there are areas of work, known as 'jurisdictions', that professions attempt to take control of and power emerges from struggles over these areas. Central to this notion of profession is the work tasks involved in the occupation and their potential vulnerability to others to claim them as their jurisdiction. An established profession is one that has an exclusive jurisdictional claim over the work involved. However, the system of professions is dynamic and reforming and centres on struggles surrounding jurisdictional claims between professions and competitors and other external stakeholders such as the state.

Another key conceptualisation of professions in this context was Freidson's (2001) notion of professionalisation as the 'third logic' regarding how work can be organised and controlled. For Freidson (2001), these logics represent ideal types where the first logic is the free market and the second logic is hierarchical bureaucracy. As with Abbott (1988), the knowledge base of an occupation is fundamental to professionalisation as the third logic by which to

understand the organisation and control of work. However Freidson (2001) also retains a moral dimension to his understanding of professions, arguing that they require monopoly, credentialism and social closure so that they remain independent from the free market or state so that their public service ethos can remain.

Examples of empirical studies in this area include McKenna's (2006) assessment of the experience of management consulting which highlights the necessity for structural and institutional factors to be in place in order for professionalisation to be successful. With regards to PR, research by Pieczka (2002) has considered the jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988) of the profession, highlighting that the knowledge base of PR is vague, incorporating a mixture of experience and relationship management skills (Pieczka, 2002) and that PR practitioners' understanding of what constitutes PR is similarly ambiguous and confused.

Other empirical studies have involved historical analyses and genealogies of the accountancy and related professional service occupations. Examples include O'Regan's (2008) historical analysis of the social closure strategies of the ICAI⁸; Ramirez's (2009) analysis of ICAEW⁹ archives, to consider how the organisation contended with the divergent interests of large corporations and the small practitioner; Gammie and Kirkham's (2008) assessment for ICAS¹⁰ of the importance of the link between university education and the professional identity of accountancy; and Collins *et al.*'s (2009) analysis of the development of the actuary profession and the threats to it from accountancy, state regulation following high profile scandals, and corporate influence. All these studies highlight the profession's flexibility in dealing with diverse interests and/or the constant pressure on professions from different stakeholders that could threaten their occupational and societal status.

⁸ ICAI is the acronym for the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland.

⁹ ICAEW is the acronym for the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

¹⁰ ICAS is the acronym for Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland.

More recently, theorisation has developed as to the institutional characteristics of professions with Scott's (2008) consideration of professions as institutional agents: "...as definers, interpreters, and appliers of institutional elements. Professionals are not the only, but are – I believe – the most influential, contemporary crafters of institutions." (Scott 2008, p.223). As part of this argument Scott (2008) considers the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive dimensions of profession, highlighting how different professions emphasise these different institutional elements in order to legitimate their authority. All the empirical studies in this domain have sought to map out the trajectories of various professional units to achieve social closure and control, considering the wider structural features that may have helped or hindered in this process. Scott (2008) has then taken these accounts to a broader institutional level in order to assert professions as influential agents in processes of institutionalisation (see also Suddaby and Viale, 2011).

These more institutional and structural accounts of professions and professionalisation have moved beyond the confines of a checklist of attributes by which occupations can be assessed as to whether the title of 'profession' can be bestowed. Instead, they recognise professionalisation as a dynamic process by which occupations seek to close and control their boundaries and as such are contingent on other institutional and structural factors and the operation of power in the closure and control of a profession (Reed and Anthony, 1992). The recent debate amongst these accounts has now begun to explore the potential demise of the societal and organisational power of the profession as a result of structural and institutional pressures that threaten professions' ability to close and control the occupation.

3.4 Profession as diminishing in power

The same researchers that have examined the institutional and structural routes by which professionalisation has been pursued have also considered how the potential for the power of professions to close and control their occupational units could be on the decline (e.g. Hinings, 2005; Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2005; Reed 2007). The debate now centres on whether professions are

diminishing in their power to retain control of themselves as a result of a variety of political, economic, technological and cultural factors (Hinings, 2005; Reed, 2009). Reed (2007; 2009) highlights these structural pressures on professions including: the globalisation of professional services, political and economic deregulation and marketisation, the decline in 'institutionalised trust' (Giddens, 1991) and the dominance of the individualised and consumption-driven culture, the information and communications technology revolution, and the rise in managerialism. These elements have served to prioritise markets and networks as forms of governance, de-mystify the work jurisdictions and open them to competitors, and instil performance measurement and surveillance policy to replace peer-based autonomy (Reed 2007; 2009). Consequently, the fundamental elements by which a profession could harness power: a credentialised body of knowledge, closure and control of the occupational unit, freedom from state and market, and moral and social legitimacy, are gradually being eroded.

Much of the focus of studies in this regard has been on the rise and development of the Professional Service Firm (PSF). These organisations are symbolic of the impact of the neo-liberal demands on professions where regulative systems based on free market principles have superseded the former regulative environment that ensured independence from both the market and the state. Hinings (2005) argues that the rise of the PSF has been as a result of some of the wider cultural and structural changes (as outlined by Reed, 2007; 2009). Whilst also being as a result of these changes, Hinings (2005) also points out that PSFs are also heightening these changes, particularly in pace and in financial impact on more traditional independent professional partnerships, responding to the sophistication of clients that place increasing emphasis on cost. The rise of PSFs and their significance in the professional domain has resulted in it developing as a distinct area of research (e.g. Empson, 2001; Greenwood *et al.* 2006; Von Nordenflycht, 2010; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011)¹¹, largely focusing on the management of

¹¹ See also the work of Cass Business School's Centre for Professional Service Firms <http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/research-and-faculty/centres/cpsf>

these organisations and their organisational features as distinct from other organisational forms.

Some suggest that the structural pressures are too dominant and all encompassing, meaning the power and influence of professions is on the decline (e.g. Broadbent *et al.* 1997; Evetts, 2006; Reed, 2007; 2009; Ross, 2009). As Reed (2009) observes:

When this state-sponsored and elite-supported, political drive to confront professional power and to control professional autonomy is combined with capitalist-led corporate restructuring and technologically driven work rationalization, it seems that 'the writing is on the wall' for professionalization and professionalism as the dominant means of organizing and institutionalizing expert services. (Reed 2009, p.172)

In this scenario, at best professions will remain as an elite core with the vulnerable at the periphery. Consequently, whilst this structural and institutional focus in the sociology of the professions has sought to capture the success of these occupational units to mobilise and be powerful in society, they also raise concerns that this ability is waning.

However, others still consider the professions as robust arguing they have adapted to changes these structural pressures have created and produced new forms of professionalism reasserting themselves as a form of organising expert labour (Ackroyd, 1996; Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2005; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008). These perspectives have a wider understanding of what constitutes a profession, considering adaptation and hybridisation of free market and professional practices as indicative of the next era in the development of the professional model. This has led to a recent call for researchers to appreciate the dynamics between professions and professional organisations rather than see them as purely in opposition to one another (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Muzio *et al.* 2011; Evetts, 2011). Recent studies that have actively assessed the inter-relations between professional bodies and professional organisations have again highlighted their adaptability and commensurability rather than a wholesale abandonment of professional principles (e.g. Noordegraaf, 2011; Flood, 2011).

Another perspective on the changing fortunes and characteristics of professions has taken a more radical-structuralist approach. As Savage and Williams (2008) explain, this means conceiving of elites as either “active key agents” that “shape social change” or consider elites, “...in purely ‘instrumental ways’, i.e. as passive supports of particular structural determinants.” (Savage and Williams 2008, p.8). They also clarify that they consider professionals as one of the more visible groups of elites in society. Coupled with this consideration of profession as an occupational unit that bolsters societal structural patterns such as capitalism is work that has explored the inter-relations between professions and management working in the public sector. The primary focus of this work has been on the changes in public sector management, in terms of policy (e.g. Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2009) as well as wider cultural changes that have allowed managerialism to dominate. As Exworthy and Halford (1999) highlight, the rise of managerialism, “...has been interpreted by some as a strategic weapon with which to curb the powers of overly independent professionals...” (Exworthy and Halford 1999, p.2). This argument proceeds that professions within the public sector (such as doctors and teachers) have been gaining too much societal autonomy and influence and that progressively the state has sought to curtail their power in the public sector domain.

However, as Exworthy and Halford (1999) indicate, the rise of managerialism in the public sector whilst being felt as a definite and significant change in organisational life, has not necessarily resulted in the demise of the professions or a battle between ‘managers’ and ‘professionals’, but a negotiation of principles of professionalism and managerialism. This is supported by empirical research such as Farrell and Morris’ (2003) exploration of the effect of NPM on professional groups, discovering that, “...the impact on professionals is differentiated, mediated and not entirely negative.” (Farrell and Morris 2003, p.150). Likewise, Thomas and Hewitt’s (2011) research on Primary Care Trusts also found professionals negotiating both their professional and managerial demands, blending discourses from the two domains in order to negotiate their changing organisational

environment. Similarly, Kirkpatrick *et al.*'s (2011) study of the struggles between doctors and nurses in Denmark over the terrain of management – with both trying to lay claim to it as their jurisdiction – served to further enhance the professional positions of both.

Therefore, research in this area has also considered the diminishing power of professions but from a different starting point to those outlined at the beginning of this section. Whilst those more institutional/structural perspectives consider professions as more benign organisational units and thus have focused on social closure and the structural factors that are threatening those positions, this radical structuralist account considers professions as powerful elites that prop up the wider regime of capitalism. In this context, researchers have examined professions working in the public sector, looking at how they operate when there are other competing ideologies at work that are also changing due to an increasing emphasis on cost and efficiency in the public sector. Nevertheless, both these arguments concerning the diminishing power of professions have highlighted that the status of the profession (as a distinct organisational unit) and professionals (as people working in that unit), are subject to pressures and constraints that will either erode their distinct organising principle or will be weathered thanks to adaptation and diversification. Recognition of these pressures and examination of how professions have coped with them highlight that a more heterogeneous appreciation of the professional landscape is required (Hinings, 2005).

3.5 Profession versus knowledge work

Knowledge work and the Knowledge Intensive Firm (KIF) (Alvesson, 2004) are concepts that have been developed in order to encompass emerging forms of work that may share elements with professions but remain distinct largely due to either their power or knowledge base. Somewhere between the professional and the layperson is the knowledge worker. Coined by Alvesson (2001; 2004), KIFs constitute firms where intellectual and symbolic work is sold as knowledge-based products/services. The emphasis on symbolic work

highlights its intangibility, as it comprises ideas or concepts rather than physical entities. Other characteristics of KIFs include flexible organisational structures; fairly high levels of employee autonomy; a reliance on communication to co-ordinate members of the firm; individualised client services; and hard to evaluate results. Knowledge workers are defined as well educated, with experience, well paid and of high status; 'gold collar workers' (Alvesson, 2004). Despite these distinctions, Alvesson (2004) is aware that KIF is merely a label and as such, some companies that might meet some of the characteristics of a KIF might not meet other criteria. Nevertheless, he considers KIFs and knowledge workers as useful concepts that allow for study within a particular area of business/management.

Key to the notions of KIF and knowledge worker is the conceptualisation of knowledge. Alvesson (2004) observes that knowledge work can often be more reliant on experience than formal education and in client-centred work is as much reliant on the relationship between practitioner and client as the practitioner's knowledge. As such, the definition of knowledge in the context of a KIF is quite wide and unclear – knowledge is neither formal and abstract or situated and tangible. Alvesson (2004) furthers the argument by highlighting that a combination of an opaque definition of what constitutes knowledge in a KIF as well as the intangible nature of the work produced, characterises knowledge and knowledge work as quite ambiguous.

Consequently, a new conceptualisation of knowledge is required where: "Rather than regarding *knowledge* as something that people have, it is suggested that *knowing* is better regarded as something that they do." (Blackler 1995, p.1023). Thus, rather than focusing on formal education, the perspective shifts to consider strategies by which knowledge workers persuade clients, the wider community and even themselves as to how they have expert knowledge: "We can thus say that it is *claims of knowledge*... rather than knowledge itself that is the interesting element to study in KIFs." (Alvesson 1993, p.1012). Once knowledge is considered as socially constructed and recognised rather than as an objective entity, knowledge can be considered as playing a central role in KIFs such as creating a shared

community within that industry, providing a company profile, and obscuring any apparent ambiguity in knowledge work (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson, 2011). In turn, this emphasises the rhetorical and discursive elements that persuade others of the knowledge/expertise of a KIF.

Alvesson (2004) highlights that the ambiguity and range of opinion surrounding what constitutes a profession or what constitutes a KIF are very similar. However, he does consider that the concept of KIF and profession overlap, although the notion of a KIF is broader in definition (Alvesson, 2001). The strongest parallel between profession and KIF is in the notion that both should be understood as involving making claims to be socially recognised as such, "...and that there are ongoing struggles to reproduce and reinforce these confirmations." (Alvesson 2004, p.224). Alvesson (2004) also contends that professionalisation can help in the all-important rhetoric and image of the knowledge worker that is fundamental to claiming knowledge and expertise in this domain, however it can also be a hindrance to knowledge workers as "...the market is not always persuaded by this alone." (Alvesson 2004, p.235).

Although the notion of knowledge work has been criticised for being too general in definition and therefore potentially constituting all forms of work (e.g. Fincham, 2009), ideas such as the emphasis on rhetoric, image and performance (e.g. Alvesson, 1994; Alvesson, 2011) and claims to knowledge, as well as the ambiguity that surrounds knowledge work are evocative of the similar pressures and ambiguities that are beginning to surround professions. The emphasis on ambiguity, complexity and performance/image as identified in the knowledge work literature is also a theme in the consideration of profession as more than an occupational grouping but also as a powerful discourse.

3.6 Profession as individual disciplinary mechanism

So far, this chapter has focused on the profession as an occupational unit; either an entity that can be assessed by checking it against a list of attributes, or an organising principle that can be examined in its historical and political

context in order to gauge the structural and institutional route of professionalisation taken by an occupation to secure social closure, control and legitimacy. Outlined in this section is literature that considers professionalism as discursive and a resource (Watson, 2002) in identity construction in the workplace.

It has been argued that the sociology of professions has moved into this area of research because 'the organisation' has taken over the professional domain and as such the discourse of professionalism is used as a means to control professionals in these new organisational domains (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Evetts, 2011). Post-structuralist approaches in particular explore how the discourse of professionalism operates in the work context. One such study is Fournier's (1999) approach to the notion of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism:

The mobilisation of the discursive resources of professionalism potentially allows for control at a distance through the construction of 'appropriate' work identities and conducts. (Fournier 1999, p.281)

She argues that professionalism is thus an appealing discourse for those industries that are increasingly flexible in structure and indistinct from other areas of work and thus can serve as an explanation for the proliferation of industries claiming professional status. Fournier also argues that as well as professionalism being an appealing discourse, it too has gained popularity with other central tenets of work such as, the importance of the customer and the "... celebration of the self-actualising employee" (Fournier 1999, p.299).

To ensure their functioning as a disciplinary mechanism, professions have to highlight their legitimacy in the eyes of those they serve and this dependence on others questions the autonomy that some sociology of professions literature assumes professions achieve. As Dent and Whitehead (2002) comment: "The 'I' cannot talk with the authority of a professional, cannot give an account of itself as a professional, unless the discursive association is prior held and legitimized in the eyes of others." (Dent and Whitehead 2002, p.5).

However, Fournier does highlight that although professionalism is used as a way of controlling conduct, its interpretation is still contestable.

An application of the notion of professionalism as disciplinary mechanism is Rumens and Kerfoot's (2009) study of gay men and their construction of themselves as professional. The researchers argue that because the dominant norms of professional fall in line with heterosexual norms, sexuality and professionalism are situated as opposing dichotomies. As such, the gay men the researchers interviewed constructed themselves as professional by conducting themselves in certain ways, i.e. not in an overtly 'gay' manner such as 'camp', and by fashioning a 'professional body' largely via clothing (e.g. wearing designer suits). Meanwhile, Anderson-Gough *et al.* (1998) examined the socialisation of professionals and how this disciplined their identity construction, finding that rather than associating professionalism with an institution or specialised knowledge, trainee accountants considered being professional as centring on behaviour and conduct as identified by the firms they worked for through both formal (i.e. appraisals) and informal (i.e. peer observation) systems of socialisation.

Brown and Lewis (2011) observe that post-structuralism's notion of professional as a disciplinary mechanism, "...may serve as a useful bulwark against idealized views of [professionals] as somehow 'freer; than other categories of worker.'" (Brown and Lewis 2011, p.888). Nevertheless, their research also indicates that professionals are able to discursively negotiate disciplinary practices. Similarly, Thomas and Linstead (2002) explore the disciplinary capacity of the discourse of professionalism, highlighting how it was drawn on by middle managers in various ways and in combination with other discourses to stabilise their sense of selves and legitimate their existence, which had been disrupted by restructuring and change in their organisations. Alternatively, Kosmala and Herrbach's (2006) account of the identity work of those working in professional service firms considers a different dynamic between organisationally and professionally prescribed identities, arguing how notions of professionalism rather than being a disciplinary mechanism, were used to distance employees from the regulatory

structure of their organisation. Parker's (1997; 2000) research on organisational cultures across and between different industry sectors also indicates that professional identification can both be a sponsor of and resistor to change. In his notion that organisational cultures be viewed as 'fragmented unities' (Parker, 2000), he argues that professional identifications are one of the resources by which to articulate difference and present a distinct normative view on organisational issues and constitute part of the contested process of 'the organisation'.

The emphasis on professionalism as both a constraint and enabler of identity begins to move beyond the notion of profession as solely constituting an occupational unit or process of social closure and control, and instead begins to evaluate how discourses of professionalism can operate at the level of individual identity construction. In turn, the proceeding section explores specific empirical studies into professional identities, looking at the range of ontological positions represented in that area of research and their assumptions concerning identities and profession, as well as assessing the elements that are still absent from this area of study.

3.7 Professional identities: empirical studies

Whilst the separate literature on identities and professions has been examined, there are also empirical studies that have been conducted on the topics of both identities and professions, which is the focus of this section of the chapter. These studies highlight a variety of approaches to both identities and professions; representing positions across the spectrum, from identity as fixed and stable to identities as fluid and crafted. They are outlined here according to their ontological understanding of identities, starting with more functionalist accounts, moving through to more interpretivist accounts and then concluding with post-structuralist understandings of professional identities. The section concludes that despite the variety of professional identities studies conducted, little has been researched on the dynamic between professionalisation and identity construction.

3.7.1 Professional identities as fixed: functionalist approaches

As Chapter 2 highlighted, functionalist approaches to identity consider it as a stable and fixed entity. In the context of professional identities, studies using social identity theory (SIT) are apparent that focus on individuals' identification with certain fixed social/role identities – in this case 'the professional'.

Examples of research of this nature include Ibarra's (1999) study of junior consultants and investment bankers. Exploring socialisation into professional identities, Ibarra (1999) argues that identification with professional identities alters as individuals make the transition from junior to senior positions. He contends that junior professionals will 'try on' several professional identities as they experience life in that profession before settling into identification with a particular professional social identity:

These 'provisional selves' are temporary solutions people use to bridge the gap between their current capacities and self-conceptions and the representations they hold about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in the new role. (Ibarra 1999, p.765)

In this sense, Ibarra (1999) considers socialisation into a professional identity as involving some trial and error with different professional identities, until experience allows the junior professional to identify with an appropriate social identity as 'professional'.

Other examples of SIT approaches to professional identity are Pratt *et al.* (2006) and Chreim *et al.* (2007) who base their studies in the empirical setting of medicine and explore the relationship between professionals' interpretation and behaviour at work with their definition of their role identity. Pratt *et al.*'s (2006) research on medical residents considered their engagement in identity work when their experience of the job did not match with their notions of their professional identities. The study demonstrated that the residents either used other professional identities to bolster original identification with their role, or highlighted a now more 'enriched' version of their professional identity when moments like this occurred. Similarly, Chreim *et al.* (2007) looked at the institutional, organisational and individual influences on the development of professional role identity amongst physicians, particularly at a time of change,

in this case moving into later stages of career. They indicate that physicians' professional role identity was largely resistant to change, adapting to institutional forces in the reconstruction of their professional identity.

The role of institutional forces in role identity is also explored in Goodrick and Reay's (2010) analysis of the changing role identity of nurses and how they were legitimised in nursing textbooks. Defining professional role identity as, "...a sense of self that is associated with the enactment of a professional role..." (Goodrick and Reay 2010, p.59) the researchers argue the transition between new and old social identities of nurses was achieved by linking the changes to wider movements in the work environment and society. This new role identity of professional nurses was then legitimised through rhetoric that served to render the past as emergent in the present rather than as a distinct timeframe that differs from the contemporary nursing environment. Similarly, Empson (2004) takes a structural perspective in her assessment of how different identities proliferate the accounting profession. She argues this proliferation is down to two key factors; first, different accountancy departments, such as tax and audit consider themselves to be quite distinct from one another and second, accountants in larger global firms conceive of themselves through different discursive practices of 'professional' to accountants in small, local companies.

In contrast, Deuze (2005) uses the concept of ideology to highlight how journalists derive meaning from their work and understand themselves as professional. In this regard, ideology is not considered as a power struggle but instead, "...as a collection of values, strategies and formal codes characterizing professional journalism and shared most widely by its members." (Deuze 2005, p.445). The central tenets of this occupational ideology are journalist as having a sense of immediacy; journalist as providing a public service; journalist as objective purveyor of truth; journalist as autonomous in order to be objective; and in turn journalist as having a sense of ethics. Although Deuze (2005) questions the validity of these tenets in the current media climate, he still considers a form of occupational ideology as to

what constitutes a 'real' journalist and 'real' journalism as intrinsic to the professional identity for the discipline.

These functionalist understandings of professional identity, incorporating theorisation around SIT and role identity consider identity as a process by which people identify with certain fixed social identities, these may alter slightly over time (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Empson, 2004) or when experience does not fit in with the social identity (e.g. Pratt *et al.* 2006), but remain relatively fixed and impermeable to change (Deuze, 2005; Chreim *et al.* 2007; Goodrick and Reay, 2010). As identified in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1, this consideration of professional identity considers an essentialised identity with no account of the social dimension of identities (Whetherell and Potter, 1992) and a simplistic understanding of identification (King, 2003). Consequently, in this understanding of professional identity, there is little agency for the professional practitioner in identity formation – they simply identify with one or other social role. Another approach to professional identities that aims to capture individuals' agency and performance in identity construction is the interpretivist understanding of professional identities.

3.7.2 Professional identities as performance: interpretivist approaches

Interpretivist accounts of professional identities have sought to re-frame individuals as having more agency in identity construction and emphasise the performance of identities in the work context. With regards to professional identities, this approach considers more micro-practices in the work environment that can aid the performance of professional identities as well as recognising tensions and movements between the performances of different professional identities for individuals.

One such example is Harris' (2002) research in the legal sector that considers the emotional labour of barristers and how they characterised emotional display and/or detachment (depending on the circumstance) as an inherent part of being a professional barrister. Other studies have also explored performance of professional identities through narrative in the work

environment such as Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) who contend that narratives of personal experience are one way in which, in the case of their research, professors established themselves as professional amongst their students. The researchers outline how the narrators positioned themselves as 'expert' versus the other as 'non-expert' by depicting, "...the other as helpless and without knowledge" (Dyer and Keller-Cohen 2000, p.289) and using pronouns that distance them from others in the narrative and position them as the main protagonist. Similarly, Holmes (2005) identifies two forms of workplace narrative to construct oneself as professional. Although a distinction is made between workplace anecdotes (e.g. talk about holidays) and 'working stories' (stories that may sound anecdotal but pursue a business function), and the identity construction they pursue as a result (social versus professional identity respectively), Holmes (2005) demonstrates that both forms of storytelling are multifunctional and can aid in the construction of professional and social identities simultaneously. Similarly, Bechky's (2003) study of the use of artefacts in an engineering company emphasises the need for research into being 'a professional' to be conducted at a workplace level in order to see the realities of how these professional identities are 'played out' in organisational life.

This notion of performance of identities begins to encompass an understanding of the need to move between different identities at moments within the work environment. The social actor as shifting between different identities in order to construct oneself as professional is considered in Watson's (2002) study of the professionalisation of the human resource management (HRM) industry. Comparing the discourses used by the soon to become CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) and HRM practitioners, Watson (2002) found that the discourses used by the CIPD and the practitioner were 'forced to fit' in with the other pervading discourses of professionalism and the organisation employing the practitioner respectively. Likewise, Pritchard and Symon (2011) explore the identity work of HR practitioners that have to work in a call centre environment. They argue that because these individuals had been left, "...with less favourable 'identities' as reactive information handlers rather than proactive HR solutions providers..."

(Pritchard and Symon 2011, p.446) they had to engage in identity work in order to continue to construct themselves as professionals. The identity work involved the use of stories and reliance on teamwork to construct the work involved as “complex, irreplaceable and distinctive” (Pritchard and Symon 2011, p.447).

In contrast, Kitay and Wright (2007) draw on the notion of ambiguity in knowledge work to highlight three structural features of management consulting that result in a complex variety of rhetorical responses by consultants in interaction. The three structural features of the industry that can be problematic to the consultant are: the problem of legitimacy, the constraint of efficiency (the need for multi-tasking and maintaining the bottom line), and the problem of economic vulnerability. Each of these problems has a rhetorical response. In turn, the study highlights the importance of occupational rhetorics to contend with the uncertainties and complexities of knowledge work.

These interpretivist approaches to professional identity move from the functionalist accounts by considering identity as more fluid and multiple and involving movement between different versions of professional identities. This motion is emphasised because of this approach’s emphasis on performance of identities, whether that be through emotional display (e.g. Harris, 2002), narrative, (e.g. Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000; Holmes, 2005), artefacts (e.g. Bechky, 2003) or language (e.g. Watson, 2002). In turn, this approach understands the individual as having more agency in identity construction than is recognised in more functionalist perspectives on professional identities. However, in its emphasis on performance and agency, the role of power in identity construction is not accounted for which in turn may mean the individual is given too much agency in this approach. As the final perspective on professional identities, post-structuralist approaches attempt to give more consideration to power relations and in turn provide an understanding of identities as fluid, contested and crafted.

3.7.3 Professional identities as continually crafted: post-structuralist approaches

In the post-structuralist approach, identities are considered to be more 'fluid', constituted in discourse and located within relations of power. As such, with regards professional identities, these accounts consider the on-going contestation and crafting of professional identities, viewing identities as formed and reformed through discourses, that serve to construct certain subject positions. Studies inspired by this approach are concerned with how individuals form a sense of self from the prevailing discourses. These studies also consider that whilst there is individual agency, this agency is also constrained and therefore the focus is also on the nature of power to both enable individuals 'to be' as well as constraining the range of options of 'self' available. Therefore all the studies discussed in this section explore – with differing degrees of emphasis - the crafting and controlling of the self.

One example is Iedema *et al.*'s (2008) study of clinicians taking on managerial roles, focusing on how they adapted their 'medical' identities due to this new job position. The research demonstrates that the clinician is at the centre of three pervading, and at times incommensurable, discourses: professional, management, and "...an interpersonalizing discourse devoted to hedging and mitigating contradictions." (Iedema *et al.* 2008, p. 15) Through detailed analysis of the talk of one clinician the researchers observe that he manages to successfully encompass all three discourses without ever settling on any one of them entirely, in the process of identity construction. In a different empirical context, Cohen *et al.* (2005) concentrate on the incorporation of different discourses in identity construction, elucidating three pervading discourses of 'expertise', 'business constraints', and 'social values' in their research on the occupational identities of architects. They argue that practitioners in the wider business communities when constructing professional identities could also draw on these discourses.

Hodgson's (2005) study of project managers also highlights struggle and contention in the construction of professional identities in the context of

ambiguities in the work task. His research demonstrates that because there is not a distinct body of knowledge in project management, the notion of conducting 'professional project work' centres on the regular performance of certain tasks and conduct thus, "...enacting the project management framework, through which the individual comes to *be* the professional." (Hodgson 2005, p.59). However, he also contends that project work is inherently complex and unpredictable with change as a constant factor and as such, some ambivalence, humour and insecurity is also expressed by project managers regarding the ability to constantly be professional. Nevertheless, once established as professional, project managers could break with practice in order to deal with the unexpected but still maintain professional identities precisely because it was now the individual and not the work that was imbued with professionalism.

Other empirical studies of identity regulation in professional contexts include Korica and Molloy's (2010) research on the experiences of surgeons, considering the relationship between new technology and professional identities. They emphasise the ever-evolving nature of professional identities as underpinned by the changing demands new technologies that in turn involves notions of 'insider/outsider' identities in establishing take-up of new technology. Moreover, Grey (1994) studied trainee accountants, arguing that they developed the notion of career as a 'project of the self' that sets parameters for employees' self-management. Seeking to apply this study in the domain of PSFs, Mueller *et al.* (2011) research how female managers within PSFs make sense of career and performance, finding a 'divided self' where both performance, ambition and loyalty to the firm are voiced together with, "...distancing and disenchantment with the existing practices and reluctant acknowledgement that reality is characterized by a culture of visibility and exposure; the need to network, play politics and be playing-the-game, none of which are gender-neutral." (Mueller *et al.* 2011, p.552).

Researchers have also conceived of this struggle, contestation and regulation of identities in a more dichotomous manner and therefore have focused on discursive defence and resistance. For instance, Kuhn (2009) explored how

lawyers defended themselves against the assertion that they were merely 'corporate lackeys' due to corporate influence, the adversarial nature of the legal profession and the effects of managerialism. Discourses drawn on in defence highlighted professional and individual ethics as inoculation from corporate influences, firm practices as beneficiary to wider society (e.g. pro-bono work), and the law as a positive force. Wright (2008) also examines the use of the alternative professional identity of HRM manager as 'internal consultant' or 'business partner' as a means by which professionalisation of the industry has been resisted. His work indicates that the creation of this broader occupational identity paradoxically undermines the status of the individual as a member of a HR 'profession' as it instead serves to highlight the diversity within the discipline and actually reduces the barriers to entry and thus allows other occupational groups and managerial specialisms to rival for HR work.

This notion of resistance has also been a focus of more critical studies around professional identities – exploring how established professions have dealt with societal ideas that could undermine their traditional principles, such as looking at the discursive implementation of change management in the police force (Davies and Thomas, 2008). In the organisation studies context, the introduction of NPM has been a particular focus of study, exploring its discursive effect in a variety of sectors such as policing (Davies and Thomas, 2003), and social work and teaching (Thomas and Davies, 2005a). Similarly, Merilainen *et al.* (2004) provide a critical perspective on the gendered discourse of management consultants in the UK that consider the 'ideal' consultant within a masculine domain of working long hours and being self assertive and competitive.

These post-structuralist inspired approaches to professional identities recognise identity construction as fluid and complex, encompassing contestation between different discourses and subject positions. In turn, professional identities are continually crafted and constituted in discourse, appreciating the power relations involved in the identity construction process. This recognition of power highlights which discourses proliferate and

dominate in the struggle of identity construction (e.g. Grey, 1994; Merilainen *et al.* 2004; Cohen *et al.* 2005). Elements of individual agency are considered by appreciating the way individuals navigate these discourses (e.g. Davies and Thomas, 2003; Thomas and Davies, 2005a; Iedema *et al.* 2008; Korica and Molloy, 2010), but there is also recognition over the discursive constraints on this agency, either derived from the work context itself (e.g. Hodgson, 2005) or the wider environment (e.g. Davies and Thomas, 2008; Kuhn, 2009). In attempting to harness the complexity and dynamism of the identity construction process this approach moves beyond the essentialist confines of functionalist approaches to professional identities and also fully embraces the underpinning power relations of identity constitution and contestation in a manner not considered by interpretivist accounts (Alvesson *et al.* 2008).

3.7.4 Professional identities and professionalisation

In looking at the conceptual make-up of identities at use in these empirical studies three main approaches have been outlined: the functionalist approach, the interpretivist approach and the post-structuralist approach. Functionalist accounts consider professional identity as fixed and constituting social roles that individuals identify with, whilst interpretivist perspectives provide the individual with more agency, exploring how they perform professional identities and shift between different performances in the work environment. The post-structuralist approach to professional identities recognises them as fluid, contested and complex, constituted in discourses that are also intertwined with power relations.

These different approaches to understanding identities have resulted in different accounts of professional identities. Studies within a functionalist approach have highlighted how individuals navigate the experience of work with their social identity of the professional (e.g. Pratt *et al.* 2006; Chreim *et al.* 2007), ultimately indicating the sustainability and longevity of a professional identity, where although they may have altered over time (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Empson, 2004) many have endured and remained powerful, valued and identified with by those working in that profession (e.g. Deuze, 2005; Chreim

et al. 2007; Goodrick and Reay, 2010). Interpretivist studies of professional identities have emphasised the performance of professional identities in interviews (e.g. Harris, 2002), story-telling (e.g. Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000; Holmes, 2005) and artefacts (e.g. Bechky, 2003) and the identity work involved in order to continue to construct oneself as professional (e.g. Kitay and Wright, 2007; Pritchard and Symon, 2011). Alternatively, post-structuralist professional identities studies have examined either the discourses drawn on to construct the self as professional (e.g. Cohen *et al.* 2005; Hodgson, 2005), the use of a professional discourse in the negotiation of other discourses or subject positions (e.g. Davies and Thomas, 2003; 2008; Thomas and Davies, 2005a; Kuhn, 2009), or the regulation of identities in a professional empirical setting (e.g. Grey, 1994; Korica and Molloy's, 2010; Mueller *et al.* 2011).

However, with regards to the literature on professions, there is a lack of clarity over the use of the terms and consequently, the relationship between being a professional, the profession, and professionalisation process is under theorised: the profession is merely the backdrop context to examine identity construction. Consequently, whilst the empirical studies on professional identities have developed ontological understandings to include post-structuralist approaches that engage with more nuanced and power-sensitive understandings of identities, they have done little to delineate anything about the professionalisation context of the empirical setting, instead exploring professional identity construction in relation to organisations. Therefore, in professional identities studies, the 'identities' element has been the focus to the loss of any theorisation about 'professional'.

In doing so, what is meant by professional is often not elucidated which at times can indicate it has a fixed or essentialised quality even in more constructionist studies. This means that the notion that professional identities and professional discourses are also crafted and therefore subject to contestation, negotiation, and reconstruction, is not clearly stated or explored. Instead, the professional subject position or professional discourse is largely assumed, drawn on in identity construction but not itself interrogated in order to understand what is meant by being a professional and how that is

understood by those constructing professional identities. Consequently, there is scope in exploring the construction of professional identities, seeking to interrogate how the notion of professional is understood, rather than just focusing on the process of identity formation (and re-formation depending on the ontological approach taken). The sociology of professions literature focuses on what is meant by a profession indicating that it can be understood as either a checklist of attributes (e.g. Wilensky, 1970; Greenwood, 1972) an organising principle and powerful elite group in society (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; 1990; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001), a robust/or diminishing form of labour (Ackroyd, 1996; Reed, 2007) or a disciplinary mechanism in organisation (Fournier, 1999; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009). But how people understand themselves as professional and how organisations involved in professionalisation are able to influence that process of identity construction has not been examined in detail and therefore there is scope to research the construction of professional identities, incorporating a post-structuralist appreciation of the on-going process of identity construction whilst also considering how the notion of professional is also (re)constructed, circulated and negotiated.

3.8 A case to explore: professionalisation and identity construction

This chapter has examined the literature on professions, considering the different ways in which the concept of profession has been theorised and researched. The functionalist consideration of profession as a checklist of attributes (e.g. Greenwood, 1972) was considered too simplistic, merely appreciating professions as functional and neutral occupational units to be documented (Johnson, 1972). In contrast to this conceptualisation of profession was exploration of more structural and institutional accounts of professionalisation. These considered professions as more dynamic (e.g. Abbott, 1988), attempting to secure social closure and control of an occupational unit in order to monopolise power and ensure social and economic reward (Larson, 1977; 1990).

Whilst this perspective on professionalisation has endured it still has limitations, particularly in its emphasis on credentialised abstract knowledge as a basis for a profession. As Fincham *et al.* (2008) highlight, this understanding of profession may draw too crude a line between types of knowledge and their relationship to the professional status of an occupation and therefore a wider appreciation of knowledge needs to be incorporated in understanding expert labour. Fincham (2008) also argues that the current 'professional model' as espoused by these structural and institutional accounts of professionalisation has also meant that other forms of expert labour have not been truly appreciated (and other models and strategies have not been considered) because they do not fit the mould of profession, despite the fact that:

...not all categories of expert labour are organized professionally or even try to organize in this way. Yet the notion of a generalized professional project has meant such groups often being defined by a 'lack' of professional success – groups that have never tried this strategy may still be seen somehow as 'failed professions'." (Fincham 2008, p.1)

In turn, Fincham (2009) uses PR as an example of an occupation that expands the notion of 'profession' to 'expert labour', arguing that there are other dimensions to an occupation that might render it a profession than the traditional traits. In PR's case, Fincham (2009) considers that despite a lack of formal knowledge, the occupation's corporate power renders it a profession by different means.

These concerns may be reflective of the current debate concerning the diminishing power of the professions, which was the next focus of the chapter, highlighting how researchers have identified structural and institutional pressures that these occupations now face which is reducing their capacity to control themselves (e.g. Reed, 2007). This diminishing power thesis whilst charting the potential demise of what has been a successful organisational control strategy, may be indicative of emerging forms of expert labour that Fincham (2008; 2009) discusses. In this vein, the notion of knowledge work (Alvesson, 2004) was outlined as an example of one of these emerging forms

of work that is both threatening 'the profession' and highlighting other forms of expert labour. Therefore, the diminishing power thesis together with emergent forms of knowledge work suggest that professionalisation may remain compelling but not as a strategy by which to control and organise an occupational community. As Scarborough observes:

[Professionalism's] declining significance as an organising principle for expert work does not preclude it from continuing to evoke powerful meanings and identities for groups and individuals. The *idea* of professionalism then, if not its practice, is likely to endure as an ideological resource to be selectively invoked by managers or expert groups according to circumstances – indeed it may be even more fervently invoked as its practice wanes. (Scarborough 1996, p.25)

Ultimately, the fundamental limitation of the conceptualisation of profession as an occupation that has achieved social closure, is that it leaves the notion of profession as in the confines of the occupational unit – it is still an entity comprising certain elements (albeit ones that may shift and be subject to structural pressures) that allow it to be defined as a profession. As observed by Collins *et al.* (2009) this essentialist understanding of the professions still underlies work in this area, "...where 'the professions' – a settled and distinctive group with key attributes in common – becomes, by accident, the relevant analytical frame." (Collins *et al.* 2009, p.252). In contrast to this approach, post-structuralist understandings of professionalism were then outlined, highlighting how they recognise the power of professional discourse in identity construction and therefore how profession did not need to be an institutionalised entity to still retain power and value at the level of identities (e.g. Fournier, 1999; Parker, 1997; 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005a; 2005b; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009).

The focus on identities incumbent in the conceptualisation of profession as disciplinary mechanism led to an extended exploration of empirical studies on professional identities, examining them according to their ontological underpinnings regarding identities to include functionalist, interpretivist and post-structuralist approaches. This section of the chapter, highlighted the post-structuralist approach as providing an understanding of professional identities as fluid, contested, crafted and constituted in discourse and power

relations (e.g. Merilainen *et al.* 2004; Hodgson, 2005; Iedema *et al.* 2008). This understanding of professional identities, provided a more dynamic perspective on identity formation than was appreciated by the functionalist approach to professional identities and a more nuanced and power-sensitive account of professional identities in comparison to interpretivist approaches. Nevertheless, in assessing these empirical studies, the section also concluded that whilst more sophisticated theorisation around identities had developed, little had been considered in relation to professionalisation, where the notion of profession at use was rarely defined or considered in relation to identity construction.

As such, the chapter concluded that there was scope to add to the literature on identities by exploring professionalisation in relation to identity construction and there was potential to contribute to the literature on professions by exploring both the crafting of professional identities and the salience of constructs generated by the professional body for those practicing PR. In relation to the literature on PR, studies in this empirical context relating to professions and/or identities are limited. As Pieczka and L'Etang (2001) highlight, the bulk of the research on PR in general has focused on the US and has been dominated by the functionalist paradigm and applied research (see Pieczka (1996) and L'Etang's (2008) assessment of the history of the development of PR scholarship). Whilst this research has been influential and in turn has aided in the credentialism of PR (seen in the growth in number of PR degrees and higher education courses), it has meant that there has not been a great deal of research conducted so far in the UK context or on issues of identities and professionalisation. Whilst research into PR and its status as a profession has begun to be explored (e.g. Pieczka, 2002), there remain many other areas of research that have not been considered at this stage. Primarily of interest to this study is that identities have not been examined in any way in relation to PR as an occupational context. Similarly, a discursive perspective on identities and profession has not been considered in the parameters of the PR industry. Consequently, there is scope to add to the body of literature on PR as well as the literatures on identities and professions.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that there is a need to consider how power relations operate when professional associations attempt to fix understandings concerning 'the PR profession' and the 'PR professional' and then to consider whether these subject positions are salient to PR practitioners in their process of crafting professional identities. With this in mind, the following chapter establishes the conceptual framework for this study. As indicated in the evaluation of the identities and professions literature in these two chapters, the conceptual framework chapter highlights: how identities are understood in this research, how professions are understood in this research and how the inter-relationship between the two is conceptualised.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

With the literatures on identities and professions examined, this chapter outlines the conceptual framework for this study, highlighting the core concepts used in the study and establishing the research agenda. The chapter begins by drawing out the main features of a post-structuralist understanding of identities, as outlined in chapter 2, and highlighting how central concepts of power, discourse and identity construction are utilised in this study. To this is added the insights from discursive accounts of the profession, as outlined in chapter 3, centring on how profession and professionalisation can be understood within a post-structuralist identities framework. The chapter concludes by considering the research agenda for the study that seeks to consider the inter-relations of identities and profession in the crafting of professional identities.

4.1 Discourse and identities

As outlined in chapter 2, this research draws from post-structuralist approaches to understanding identities (Collinson, 2003; Thomas and Davies, 2005a; Brown and Lewis, 2011), that view identities as fluid, fractured, and multiple rather than static and fixed (Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema, 2008; Ybema *et al.* 2009). Viewing identities in this way means that their formation is considered a temporary achievement, rather than a 'given' (Knights and Willmott, 1989; 1990) and therefore an on-going process of construction (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Such a process, however, is not unfettered as power relations lie at the heart of identity construction.

How identities are constructed, draws attention to the fundamental role of discourse. Constituting more than just language, discourse encompasses forms of social interaction such as practices and behaviour as well as artefacts, texts and visuals. Power/knowledge operates through discourse informing how people both understand themselves and operate in the social world (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Knights and Willmott, 1999; Martin, 2001;

Clegg *et al.* 2006). As a form of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977), discourses retain power over individuals in defining the ways in which they can see themselves. Consequently, in the process of identity construction, discourse is the source from which identities are formed. Nevertheless, the ability of discourse to act as a controlling force in identity construction is negotiated due to the existence of more than one discourse, allowing for a degree of individual agency (Brown and Lewis, 2011). Therefore, identity construction is the process by which individuals aim to secure their identities through discourses. This process is encapsulated in the notion of subjectivities where discursive practices constitute 'subject positions' and individuals come to understand their subjectivity through the various subject positions that vie for their attention at specific moments in specific contexts (Davies and Thomas, 2003).

Thus, identity construction constitutes an on-going process of formation and re-formation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) as discourses attempt to both regulate as well as provide the resource from which an individual may come to know themselves. 'Identity work' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p.626), thus depicts the process by which a sense of self-continuity is managed, whilst the normative discourses surrounding the self continually shift. This process highlights the way in which discourses provide us with our sense of self and thus draws attention to the productive nature of power/knowledge. Equally, this process also draws attention to processes of resistance (e.g. Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006), to both the discourses and subject positions contained therein, emphasising the disciplinary efforts of power/knowledge (Thomas and Davies, 2005b; Brown and Lewis, 2011) as a site for on-going identity struggle.

4.2 Discourse and professions

As Chapter 3 highlighted, discursive studies of professionalism have largely focused on it as a resource in identity construction in the workplace (Fournier, 1999; Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Kosmala and Herrbach; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009). As such, these studies explore how the discourse of

professionalism operates in different work contexts, either in regulating identities (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009) or in the negotiation of other organisational discourses (e.g. Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

A discursive approach to professions therefore seeks to explore how people understand themselves as professional and how discourses of professions influence this process. In this regard, a post-structuralist approach to professions is concerned with the establishing and circulating of a professional discourse. Professionalisation constitutes the materials and practices serving to circulate and normalise particular professional discourses and subject positions for those working in the industry and beyond. The literature on knowledge work (Alvesson, 2004) relates to this understanding of professions and professionalisation as it too focuses on the discursive resources drawn on by practitioners to construct themselves as 'expert' on account of the fact that the work is intangible, has a vague knowledge base, and is hard to measure in terms of output.

Research on professional identities encompasses a variety of ontological approaches to identities from functionalist (Pratt *et al.* 2006; Chreim *et al.* 2007) to interpretivist (Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000; Bechky, 2003) and post-structuralist (e.g. Merilainen *et al.* 2004; Hodgson, 2005). In these studies a variety of understandings of profession are present and the concept is not interrogated but instead performs as an assumed backdrop by which to examine identity formation. As such, an essentialist status of profession is often implied, despite at times, a more constructionist approach to identities.

Therefore, in drawing together the two strands of literature informing this research, this study draws on a post-structuralist understanding of identities and is guided by a discursive understanding of profession. As such, the research aims to explore what it means to be a PR professional by examining the construction of professional subject positions by both the professional body and PR practitioners and the degree to which the professional body informs practitioners' identity construction and provides salient subject positions to those practicing PR. This relationship between identities and

profession is central to the conceptual framework for this study and is discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.3 Crafting professional identities

Within this post-structuralist conceptual framework, the inter-relationship between identities and profession is understood as crafted in interaction, as both subject to and subject of discourse, where discourses can act as both a resource and constraint. Consequently, both professions and identities are not one-off completed achievements but tenuously accomplished and continuously worked on. Key to an understanding of both professions and identities in this conceptual framework is the relationship between collective and individual identities. This focus emphasises a need to capture whether collective identities do (or do not) influence the individual identities – i.e. is the subject position constructed by the profession salient to individuals, recognising that neither of these elements are fixed, but both in themselves in a state of process.

Therefore, this research works with the notion of professions and identities being in a state of 'becoming' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). This 'becoming approach' considers social realities that make up the identities of things as '...transient, ephemeral and emergent...' (Chia 1995, p. 579). Within a state of continual flux, 'the profession' or 'the individual', can be viewed as *processes*. Social actors aim to stabilise and fix meaning – a form of cognitive 'freeze-frame' in the flow of social reality – nevertheless, conventions, rules and definitions continue to transform and thus 'the profession', or 'the individual' are in a state of becoming, the direction of which is influenced and effected by the circulation of various discourses.

Thus, taking a becoming approach, professions can be viewed as providing a 'discursive template' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), a particular articulation of discourses designed to steer meanings in specific ways, whether that is of objects (e.g. a professional training programme) or subjects (a professional PR practitioner). Therefore, this discursive template can attempt to fix

professional identities, however as this template is also socially constructed, it too is subject to processes of interpretation and negotiation so the profession's 'declarative power' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), cannot be assumed.

Consequently, this conceptualisation of the becoming of profession and professional draws attention to the processes that the profession may undertake in attempting to establish discursive closure around the identity of the profession and what it means to be a member of that profession. However, due to the processual nature of the social world and the contested nature of discursive realities, the ability to fix meaning cannot be assumed but needs to be considered in relation to how discourses resonate, conflict and clash with individuals, whose own understandings of self are similarly in a state of becoming: "...not just recursively and reflexively authored but always dynamic and 'in-progress', the appearance of stability being but a momentary fiction..." (Brown and Lewis 2011, p.873). Accordingly, a becoming approach to understanding the relationship between professions and identities is informed by post-structuralist understandings of profession and identities and considers the potential for one to inform the other.

4.4 Research agenda

This conceptualisation of identities and professions drives the research agenda and ultimately the questions this research aims to explore. The study considers what it means to be a PR professional, examining both the professionalisation of the UK PR industry and PR practitioners' professional identity construction. In doing so, the questions that are pursued include: how do professional association texts aspire to construct the PR profession and professional; what discursive referents inform PR practitioners' identity construction; how does the professional body inform PR professionals' identity construction? As such, this research provides an original contribution to the literatures on identities and professions by examining the inter-relations between identities, profession and knowledge work with use of a post-structuralist conceptual framework in a novel empirical setting.

In pursuing this research agenda, the study considers the construction of professional identities whilst also interrogating what is meant by professional and what role the professional body plays in practitioners' processes of identity construction. Consequently, the study moves beyond an understanding of profession as an organisational unit and instead considers how professionalisation operates at the level of identities, considering how being a professional is understood by those attempting to professionalise the industry and those that practice PR. In this increasingly heterogeneous professional landscape where the structural and institutional status of profession and professional is more fluid and ambiguous, particularly with the growth in knowledge work, how people understand themselves as professional is pertinent because at the level of identity, the discourse of professional can operate as both a disciplinary mechanism and potential resource. With the conceptual framework, research agenda and its contributions established, the following chapter will focus on the research design, assessing the linkage between the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research which have begun to be developed here, and the methodological and practical implementation of the research.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

Whilst evaluation of the literatures on identities and professions highlighted how those concepts are understood and operationalised in this study's conceptual framework, the methodological approach for this research needs to be elaborated in order to consider how the research was carried out. As Mason (2002a) highlights: "...methodological strategy is *the logic by which you go about answering your research questions.*" (Mason 2002a, p.30). This logic underpins the research and informs the theoretical approach to the study, the decisions made about the research design, method choice, application of methods, analysis of data and notions of reflexivity. As such, it is the driving force behind the research, guiding the study to formulate an approach to the research questions, which recognises all the available options and allows for a rationale as to why a specific research design has been pursued. Ultimately, methodology allows for coherence and consistency in the way in which the research questions are answered.

Consequently, this chapter will look at: how this study is ontologically and epistemologically situated, the methodological implications of that approach, the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research methods, and the mechanics of how the research study was carried out. Other important elements of the research design such as ethics, modes of analysis, notions of validity and reflexivity are also discussed. All these elements, together with the literature evaluation serve to demonstrate an understanding of the cyclical linkage between research questions, ontology, epistemology, and methodology/research design (Flick, 1998; Mason, 2002a).

5.2 Ontology and epistemology

As theories concerning what constitutes reality and knowledge, ontology and epistemology are the foundational elements of research design. In organisation studies, Burrell and Morgan (1979) developed a typography of

the different ontological and epistemological assumptions in social science research, outlining different paradigms and their, "...taken-for-granted understandings of the nature of the world and the people in it, preferred methods for discovering what is true or worth knowing, and basic moral and aesthetic judgements about appropriate conduct and quality of life." (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). This research operating with a post-structuralist conceptual framework has a specific ontological position of linguistic constructionism and epistemological position of discourse-subjective. This section details these ontological and epistemological positions, highlighting them as the primary ways in which the research is understood and designed.

5.2.1 Ontology: reality as constituted in discourse

Within Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typography of paradigms in social science research is a consideration of the degree to which a paradigm has a realist or nominalist ontology. A realist ontology considers reality as existing separate from and prior to our knowledge of it, whilst a nominalist ontology sees reality as the product of our perception and consciousness. A form of nominalist ontology is linguistic constructionism, which is the foundational understanding of reality in a post-structuralist framework. In this regard, reality exists, but it is constructed by language structures (Burr, 2003) and only understood through these language structures. These language structures are termed 'discourses', and as outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1.1 and Chapter 4, power relations operate through discourses, imposing certain ways individuals construct their own meanings about reality (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Martin, 2001; Clegg *et al.* 2006). However, linguistic constructionism also views language as a site where meaning construction can be challenged and resisted by individuals as they negotiate between discourses that attempt to assert power over them (e.g. Thomas and Davies, 2005a). Consequently, the focus in this ontological position is on examining the discursive construction of reality and the struggle and negotiation of meaning in this process, thereby considering the understanding of reality as being in an ephemeral state.

As well as conceiving of reality as linguistically constructed, this ontological position also sees reality as relational. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) explain, this relational understanding of reality considers that: “The *stuff* of the world only becomes an *object* in specific relation to a being of whom it can be such an object.” (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, p.100). This means that the relations between elements ontologically take precedence over the element itself. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) continue to explain this succinctly with the use of an example of ‘the worker’:

Two things are required for a ‘worker’ to exist: (a) a language and set of practices which makes possible unities and divisions among people, and (b) something to which such unities and divisions can be applied [...] attention should be on the relational systems which are not simply *in* the world but are a human understanding *of* the world, they are discursive or textual. The meaning of ‘worker’ is not evident and present but deferred to the sets of oppositions and junctures, the relations that make it like and unlike other things. (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, p.100-1)

Consequently, a ‘subject’ itself, like the worker in this example, does not ‘contain’ meaning, but instead it can be understood in relation to how it is constructed by others and in relation to other ‘subjects’, in this example an obvious subject would be ‘management’. Therefore, how relational systems of meaning conceive of the ‘subject’, in turn constitute the ‘subject’.

A consideration of reality as discursively constructed and relational, also incorporates an anti-essentialist understanding of reality where the notion of the social world and social actors being characterised as fixed, ‘authentic’, “...or determined by external conditions...” (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, p.5) is refuted. Consequently, ‘the real’ can never be defined, as social actors can only perceive reality through discourse (Mills, 1997). However, this does not mean that reality is denied. Instead:

...what we perceive to be significant and how we interpret objects and events and set them within systems of meaning is dependent on discursive structures. Those discursive structures are, for Foucault, what make objects and events appear to us to be real or material. (Mills 1997, p.50-51)

In the context of identities, this anti-essentialist view presumes that understandings of the self do not reside from within the individual (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) but are constituted through discourse. This ontological view serves to 'de-centre the subject' (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), highlighting that rather than constituting fixed cognitive entities that individuals carry around with them (Tajfel, 1981), identities are constrained and negotiated through existing discourses.

This appreciation of the enabling and constraining possibilities of discourses highlights that this ontological position conceives of power as processual and productive rather than a resource used 'over' social actors. As such: "[power] lacks an essence and is not measurable; it exists only in relationships and when it is expressed in action." (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p.251-2). Therefore, power circulates through discourses and produces subjects and subjectivities (Hardy and Thomas, 2013). Consequently, this ontological position seeks to examine power relations as embedded in day-to-day practices, serving to normalise certain ways of perceiving the world (Hardy and Clegg, 1996) as well as considering the effects of power, examining how discourses circulate and resonate with others to attempt to define meaning (Hardy and Thomas, 2013).

This conceptualisation of reality, as relational, anti-essentialist, and discursively constructed in the operation of power relations, leads to an appreciation of discourse and its relationship to subjectivities. In seeking to de-centre the subject, this ontological position, moves the construction of, "...perceptions, thoughts, emotions and actions to the linguistic and discursive context," (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p.195) rather than containing them within the subject. In doing so, this shift in focus sees discourse as playing a fundamental role in creating subjectivity:

By subjectivity is meant the individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions and perceptions, her self-insight and attitude to the surrounding world. Language is not an expression of subjectivity, but – it is claimed – constitutes subjectivity. (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p.195)

If power relations operating through discourse constitute subjectivities, subjectivities are therefore conceived as a process rather than fixed entities (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). As outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1.3 and Chapter 4, this process of the construction of subjectivities is another focus of this ontological position, considering how individuals attempt to secure their subjectivities as drawn on in discourse (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). In this context, identities are constituted and negotiated in discourse and are therefore never fully 'fixed' but fluid and multiple constructions (Kondo, 1990; Collinson, 2003; Thomas, 2009) that highlight the complexity and dynamicity of identity construction (Cadas-Coulthard and Iedema, 2008).

The various elements of understanding within the ontological position of linguistic constructionism are apparent in the research agenda for this study. The emphasis on the constructed nature of reality is indicated in the research's desire to explore the construction of the subject position of 'the professional' and in doing so focusing on the relationship between the discourses drawn on in the process of identity construction and the subjectivities constructed (and their negotiation). Similarly, consideration of reality as relational is intimated in the study's focus on relationships between texts to construct meaning (in the case of this study as generated by the CIPR or PR practitioners) rather than conceiving of the subject position of professional to intrinsically have meaning. An anti-essentialist understanding of reality is also suggested in the research's aim to look at the construction of professional subject positions, considering their contestation and negotiation. Finally on this note, the power relations circulating in discourses serving to construct professional subject positions, and in particular the effects of those power relations, are considered in this study by examining the salience of the professional subject position as constructed in CIPR texts for practitioners' processes of identity construction.

5.2.2 Epistemology: the inability to 'stand outside' of discourse

Within this ontological domain of linguistic constructionism that prioritises an understanding of reality as constituted through discourse, similarly, knowledge

is not conceived as a fixed objective entity that captures the reality of its topic but instead as fluid, contingent on the researcher, and also constituted in discourse. This questioning of the primacy of objective forms of scientific inquiry means a subjective epistemology considers that there is a range of ways to conduct research where numerical validity and generalisability are not the ultimate goal but instead the aim is to produce a coherent and compelling research narrative (Phillips and Di Domenico, 2009). This subjective epistemological position also recognises that the research narrative produced by one researcher does not constitute the one and only narrative or 'truth' on that topic but that there are other alternatives that would be produced by other researchers (McKee, 2003). As such, this epistemological perspective conceives of knowledge as a co-production between the researcher and researched (Hardy *et al.* 2001) and therefore the role of the researcher in knowledge creation should be recognised and considered rather than appearing to be neutralised from the process (Mason, 2002a; Cunliffe, 2003; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

In this context, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) argue that research within this epistemological position needs to consider two aspects of their research: interpretation and reflection. The notion of interpretation serves to highlight that all empirical data in the study, from the methods of collection right through to its analysis, are a result of interpretation. As such:

Consideration of the fundamental importance of interpretation means that an assumption of a simple mirroring thesis of the relationship between 'reality' or 'empirical facts' and research results (text) has to be rejected. (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, p. 9)

An awareness of the interpretation involved in research brings about the second aspect Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) discuss of reflection, which seeks to consider the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge. This means that the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher need to be outlined and considered so that the way in which material has been interpreted is clear to the research community. Similarly, the research community, research conventions and even the intellectual and

cultural traditions of society need to be considered in order to examine the 'interpretation of interpretations' by the researcher.

As well as considering the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge, this epistemological position also highlights the influence of discourse on the research process itself (Cunliffe, 2003), hence why it is termed a discourse-subjective epistemological position. In this respect, the researcher is also recognised as only able to operate within discursive structures:

Foucault is not claiming to speak from a position of 'truth' – he is aware of the fact that he himself as a subject can only speak within the limits imposed upon him by the discursive frameworks circulating at the time. That does not mean that it is not possible to be critical, but there are limits to what can be thought and, particularly, there are limits on what can be classified as 'knowable'. (Mills 1997, p.33)

This recognition of knowledge as also constituted in discourse means that even the concepts of epistemology and ontology are understood as constructs that are also constituted in discourse and hence both the researcher and the knowledge produced by the researcher, cannot 'stand outside' of these discursive processes and therefore can only attempt to deconstruct and reflect on the creation of knowledge (Johnson and Duberley, 2003).

Recognising that epistemology and ontology are also constructs used to categorise thinking on knowledge and reality means that they should also be considered as elements on a continuum rather than, "...closed systems of thought hermetically sealed off from one another..." (May 2001, p.37). As Johnson and Duberley (2000) highlight, incumbent in the notion of epistemology is a certain circularity to its argument, "...in that any theory of knowledge...presupposes knowledge of the conditions in which knowledge takes place." (Johnson and Duberley 2000, p.3). This circularity means that there is no 'square one' from which to consider our epistemological approach. Instead there are a variety of perspectives on knowledge that result in certain research approaches to organisation studies. This leads to Johnson and Duberley's (2000) conclusion that: "Perhaps the most we can hope for in

considering epistemology is to become more consciously reflexive.” (Johnson and Duberley 2000, p.4).

Cunliffe (2003) considers this element of reflection as involving a critical questioning and unsettling of the researcher’s own constructions at use in the account of the research in order to highlight how the research is situated. In turn, she suggests that a researcher engage in at least one ‘self-referential loop’ (Cunliffe 2003, p.992) by interrogating their ontological and epistemological assumptions:

This means revealing how our research is a narrative construction with its own discursive rules and conventions, and is open to scrutiny and different interpretations by readers. (Cunliffe 2003, p. 992)

This reflexive practice, which is fundamental in a discourse-subjective epistemological position, is discussed in relation to this research in section 5.8 and again in the concluding chapter of this thesis in section 10.2.

5.2.3 A critical discourse approach

This section, in appreciating the ontological and epistemological positions within a post-structuralist conceptual framework, highlights the critical discourse approach adopted in this research as a whole.¹² This means that an awareness of discourse and its power relations pervades the whole research process and therefore informs all the methods used and particularly analysis of the data collected through the range of methods deployed.

The basic principle of discourse analysis within this critical discourse approach is that, “...reality can never be reached outside discourses and so it is discourse itself that has become the object of analysis.” (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, p.21). The central focus here is to examine how language constructs the social world (McKee, 2003; Phillips and Di Domenico, 2009)

¹² The term ‘critical’ is included to highlight how the approach undertaken in this research ontologically and epistemologically differs from a more interpretive approach to discourse, where the priority here is to be sensitive to the operation of power relations (through discourse) in defining the self.

deconstructing taken-for-granted understandings in order to allow them to be examined and potentially criticised or resisted (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). Discourse analysis informed by a post-structuralist framework focuses on the competition of meaning and the text as a site of this contestation or struggle, however, no one reading of the text constitutes the truth, but equally readings of the texts are not limitless (McKee, 2003).

Due to the focus of discourse analysis on, "...the constitution, functioning and transformation of systems of discursive practice" (Howarth 2000, p.128) the cultural, historical and social contexts for these constructions and meanings are also analysed and as such, analysis can widen out from the individual level (Marshall, 1994). This appreciation of the wider contexts in the construction of discourses means that analysis cannot just focus on one text but on relations between 'bodies of texts' (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Phillips *et al.* 2004). This is because discourse is understood as having power effects (Hardy and Thomas, 2013) and as such it is not a distinct element that can be analysed in isolation:

A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving. (Mills 1997, p.17)

Consequently, the aim of the discourse analyst operating with a linguistic constructionist ontology and discourse-subjective epistemology, is to explore patterns of language and their constitute effects, involving consideration of power relations as well as contestation, struggle and resistance regarding meaning construction (Taylor, 2001). Therefore, the aim of discourse analysis is also to encourage debate and recognise the multiplicity of voices and representation in research (Howarth, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Within this basic approach to discourse, specific techniques of analysis can be difficult to delineate, as they tend to be situated on a spectrum rather than constitute distinct categories. Phillips and Hardy (2002) provide a figure depicting this spectrum of discourse according to two axes: one from constructivist to critical and the other from individual text to context. The axis

from critical to constructivist highlights the degree to which analysis focuses on power dynamics, "...as opposed to focusing more directly on the processes of social construction that constitute social reality" (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.20). Whereas, the axis from text to context centres on the degree to which analysis focuses on just the text or the wider context in which that text operates. As such, this research involves a power-sensitive and context specific approach to discourse, ultimately recognising the potential of discourse to be constitutive rather than just descriptive (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

With regards to data collection, within this ontological and epistemological framework: "...discourses may take a variety of forms, including written documents, verbal reports, artwork, spoken words, pictures, symbols, buildings, and other artifacts... (Phillips *et al.* 2004, p.636), and a variety of these forms should be considered in one study. As a result, discourse analysis of this nature incorporates some form of textual analysis combined with a structured and systematic study of collections of inter-related texts in order to appreciate the wider social context for the texts under the researcher's gaze. Together these forms of analysis "...produce insights into the social world." (Phillips and Di Domenico 2009, p.551). This means at the methodological level the researcher can distinguish between discursive (e.g. speech in interviews) and material (e.g. body, artefacts) practices in analysing discourse, whilst recognising that these material elements are also discursively constituted (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) because they are only understood through the process of construction.

5.2.4 Critiques of ontological and epistemological positions of post-structuralist framework

The ontological and epistemological positions outlined here are not without their critiques¹³. Reed (2000) in particular argues that there are five limitations to a discursive approach that could be better accommodated with a realist

¹³ See Chapter 2, section 2.4 for other discussions of critiques of a post-structuralist framework.

ontology. His first criticism is that discourse analysis' constructivism considers nothing outside of discourse, such as societal structures. However, as outlined earlier in this chapter, the consideration of reality as discursively constructed does not negate that 'the real' exists but simply that our understanding of the real can only be constructed in discourse. In this regard, societal structures are not extra-discursive entities, but can only be understood by examining how discourses construct what these 'structures' mean and the role they should play in society.

Reed's (2000) second assertion is that the nominalist ontology underpinning the approach means its conceptualisation and explanation is also multiple and unstable because it is constituted in discourse. This notion of relativism is also taken up by Conrad (2004) who highlights that due to its understanding of reality as relational, researchers adopting a discursive approach are unable to make any overarching judgements of their analyses, which can render the research useless in generating new concepts or theories. In response to this potential paralysis of relativism, Cunliffe (2003) highlights that in recognising knowledge as situated, constructed and provisional, new research practices can be stimulated which could serve to enrich the research process rather than being complacent by continually relying on traditional rituals. As such, Alvesson and Deetz (2000) contend that the critique of relativism is not of prime concern for the researcher operating in this ontological tradition, rather, "...the apparent stability of objects and the difficulty of unpacking the full range of activities that produce particular objects and sustain them." (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, p.100).

The third criticism levelled at a discursive approach by Reed (2000) is that it is deterministic because it does not account enough for individual agency due to the dominance of discourse that in turn flattens the structure/agency dualism and therefore does not deal with it sufficiently. In turn, the fourth criticism is that the approach does not consider institutional forms of power. Hardy (2004) highlights both structure and agency are elucidated in the discursive approach where agency of the text to do something, agency of the text in terms of who creates it and agency in terms of how it is 'scaled up' from the text to have an

impact, should all be considered but also how discourse 'bears down' on the agency of the text should also comprise part of the analysis. She contends that consideration of the consumption of texts in terms of how they are interpreted and the meanings they acquire should also be considered as this is where resistance could reside. Similarly, as highlighted in Chapter 2, section 2.5, the consideration of the power relations and potential constraint of discourses, as well as the resistance and negotiation of these discursive structures by individuals, serves to appreciate a dialogical relationship between structure and agency (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Grad and Martin Rojo, 2008; Ybema *et al.* 2009). With regards to power, institutional forms are considered but they are not understood as a specific resource and entity, but instead how discourse constructs institutions and their power is of primary concern under this research agenda.

The final critique from Reed (2000) centres on the perspective's reductionism that marginalises the historical, political, and cultural context of ideologies. Again, as indicated in section 5.2.3, whilst the degree of contextual consideration can vary in discursive approaches to research, incumbent in an understanding of the situated nature of reality and knowledge is its historical, political and cultural context, but the focus would be on their discursive (re)construction rather than conceiving them as fixed entities that can solely determine meaning.

Overall, the critical discourse approach is a powerful way in which to understand the social world (Howarth, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It is considered by some as a unique approach that challenges others and provides a way in which to identify new theories and concepts about societal phenomena that are, "...empirically rich and methodologically grounded..." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.47). This assessment is reached because of this approach's emphasis on the context of discourse (Marshall, 1994) and the way in which certain discourses are, "...maintained, reproduced and normalised in everyday texts and practices of interaction." (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p.46-7).

In the context of this research, this critical discourse approach is appropriate as there is a 'fit' with the post-structuralist conceptual framework and its ontological and epistemological underpinnings. As Phillips and Hardy (2002) argue, the discursive approach can examine substantive or theoretical issues such as identities and power. Additionally, they highlight that the method is appropriate in studies where 'the organisation' is conceptualised as socially constructed rather than a given entity and the ontology of becoming that is also an inspiration in this research brings this understanding of organising to the forefront. The fact that this approach can examine the meaning construction around 'being a professional PR practitioner' and the 'professionalisation of the PR industry', as well as assessing the normalising effects, makes it of particular interest to the aims of this research.

5.3 Methodology

Adopting a certain ontological and epistemological perspective has methodological implications. As Bryman (1988) explains, the most basic distinction is the different ontological and epistemological assumptions quantitative and qualitative approaches to research contain. Generally this means that, "...qualitative methods reflect views that knowledge in the social sciences is provisional, uneven, complex and contexted" (Arksey and Knight 1999, p.19) whereas quantitative approaches consider knowledge as fixed, objective, and measurable (Bryman, 1988).

Consequently, post-structuralist informed research has an 'epistemological fit' with a qualitative approach because both recognise research participants as active to some degree in the production of knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2007) and because both seek to recognise the researcher's involvement in the creation of knowledge, "...instead of excluding it as far as possible as an intervening variable." (Flick 1998, p.6). Additionally, Bryman and Bell (2007) highlight that qualitative approaches also embody an inductive relationship between theory and research where theory is generated as a result of research and the research is quite broad in nature so as not to delimit areas of interest from the outset (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Therefore, as well as an epistemological fit with a qualitative approach, the inductive nature of the qualitative approach also has a practical fit with this research's exploratory aims.

With a qualitative approach to the study in mind, the focus shifts to the overarching methodological considerations. Primarily a cross-sectional research design is used which, "...entails the collection of data on more than one case...and at a single point in time..." (Bryman 2004, p.41).

Consequently, rather than focusing research in one organisation, the study aims to engage with a range of organisations that could be relevant to the research questions. Although this form of research design is more closely tied to positivist-informed research, Bryman (2004) concedes that qualitative approaches can use a cross-sectional design in a 'looser sense' where the data is not quantified in any way and thus quantitative criteria of validity or replicability do not apply. As well as a cross-sectional design, the sampling of research participants is purposive where, "...the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions." (Bryman 2004, p.334).

A variety of research methods are used in research that is informed by post-structuralist theoretical framework: ranging from the very popular semi-structured interviews (e.g. Thomas and Davies, 2005a; Kitay and Wright, 2007; Clarke *et al.* 2009) to more narrative styles of interviewing (e.g. Merilainen *et al.* 2004), to observation of discrete events (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Karreman and Alvesson, 2009; Thomas *et al.* 2011) to in-depth ethnographies (Learmonth, 2009; Brown *et al.* 2010), not to mention, analysis of documentation and other secondary data (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). This study also encompasses this central research design of 'asking questions', 'hanging out' and 'reading texts' (Dingwall, 1997) in order to engage with a range of audiences and consider a range of theoretical concepts in relation to those audiences. As such, the research incorporates data from interviews, observation and document analysis and the next section will review these methods, evaluating the ontological and epistemological

distinctions within these methods and their strengths and weaknesses in order to rationalise the method choices made in this research design.¹⁴

5.3.1 Interviews: 'mining' for information versus co-construction of knowledge

There are a wide variety of techniques that fall under the heading 'interviews' where distinctions can be made as to their epistemological approach. As Cassell (2005) highlights:

...the interview is often treated as an epistemologically neutral device for data collection where technical expertise is the most important issue. However, the interview itself as a process means something different given the epistemological assumptions held by the researcher. (Cassell 2005, p.168)

In general, a qualitative understanding of the interview places a very different emphasis on the role of the interviewer from more positivist/quantitative forms of interviewing:

If you choose qualitative interviewing, you are highly likely to conceptualize yourself as *active and reflexive* in the process of data generation, and seek to examine this rather than aspiring to be a neutral data collector. (Mason 2002a, p.66)

Kvale (1996) summarises this distinction with the use of the analogy of the interviewer as miner versus the interviewer as traveller. In the miner (quantitative) analogy, "...knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths valuable metal." (Kvale 1996, p.3). In the traveller (qualitative) metaphor, the interviewer goes on a journey where she/he will interact with people and then return to tell a story. Kvale (1996) considers that the interaction and production of knowledge are mutually dependent and therefore the interview should be seen as an *inter view* (see also Arksey and Knight, 1999; Legard *et al.* 2003). Therefore, this research broadly aligns its approach to interviewing as qualitative, and aims to use interviews as a means by which to explore the research participants'

¹⁴ Analysis of documents is not covered in this methodology section because its analysis was informed by the critical discursive approach as outlined in section 5.2.3 and the specifics of how the documents were analysed are discussed in section 5.6 later in this chapter.

perceptions and meaning-making processes (see Silverman, 1993; King, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Miller and Glasner, 1997; Warren, 2001; Mason, 2002a).

Within, the ontological and epistemological framework of this research, the interview is also considered as a site of identity work (Alvesson, 2003). In this regard, the interview is appreciated as a specific context in which social practices take place and participants draw on discursive resources in their presentation of self within that context (Potter, 2004). Therefore, in the site of the interview both interviewee and interviewer will engage in identity work (Cassell, 2005), drawing on discourses to construct and present certain identities both in the act of questioning and in response to questioning. As Cassell (2005) highlights, identity work is heightened in the interview context for the interviewer because s/he is dependent on interviewee responses for data: "Therefore, we may actively engage in the construction of an identity that we would not necessarily choose for ourselves in any other circumstance." (Cassell 2005, p.174). In this vein, the interviewer constructs him/herself in certain ways within the context of the interview in order to elucidate responses to questions. Equally, the interviewee will engage in identity work, in order to cope with the ambiguity of the interview situation (Cassell, 2005), constructing identities that s/he thinks the interviewer's research requires.

As, "...the key research tool for those who use qualitative methods" (Cassell 2005, p.167) qualitative interviewing still encompasses a wide variety of techniques, largely distinguished by the level of structure in the line of questioning. For this research, the particular interview technique used is the semi-structured interview. As Bryman (2004) explains this form of interview uses an interview guide where the researcher has questions or specific areas of interest to follow during the interview. This interview technique can be used in both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. Within the qualitative framework, the interview guide will focus on questions that examine participants' constructions continually probing (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1991; Legard *et al.* 2003) in order to explore the interviewee's understandings of the research topic.

Despite the use of an interview guide, this type of interview also recognises manoeuvrability in the interaction. For the interviewee, this means they are given a degree of space to respond to questioning 'on their own terms'. Equally, for the interviewer, research avenues that had not been foreseen can be explored, as the interviewer can be more responsive to answers (Bryman, 2004). Consequently, as May (2001) highlights, the semi-structured interview moves into more of a dialogue with an interviewee rather than a question-answer format. However, elements of structure and standardisation still exist. For instance, although the interview schedule does not govern the interaction, "...by and large, all of the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee." (Bryman 2004, p.321). In turn, this structure allows for greater comparability across responses than less structured interview formats (May, 2001) and renders the data simpler to interpret (Flick, 1998).

In general, interviews have a range of practical strengths that make them a popular research method (Punch, 2005). As well as portable and flexible (King, 1994; Punch, 2005) interviews can also gauge a range of views (Kvale, 1996) and depth about interviewees' meaning construction (King, 1994; Arksey and Knight, 1999). Moreover, as a research technique that participants are likely to be familiar with, they may be more forthcoming to contribute to the research (King, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). With specific regard to semi-structured interviewing, the technique is capable of achieving a balance between generating rich data – often an aim of qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2007) – yet providing structure for analysis.

Despite the strengths, there are also practical limitations to be considered. In general, interviews are time consuming not only to conduct but also to transcribe and analyse (King, 1994) and can leave researchers feeling overwhelmed by the amount of 'raw data' produced (Bryman, 1989; King, 1994). Additionally, negotiating access can be complex and problematic as it is affected by a number of factors (Arksey and Knight, 1999). The success of an interview is also very reliant on the skills and personality of the interviewer

(Arksey and Knight, 1999; Legard *et al.* 2003), particularly to deal with rude or unfocused interviewees (King, 1994). Finally, whilst also a strength of interviewing, familiarity with the notion of what an interview constitutes can also prove problematic – particularly for the semi-structured technique. Many researchers have highlighted that ‘the interview’ has become a social norm (May, 2001; Fontana, 2003; Rapley, 2004). Therefore, as the semi-structured format does not break too much from social convention (such as that for job recruitment or as seen on a television chat show), answers could be formulaic or well rehearsed (what the interviewee thinks the interviewer wants to hear) or the design and implementation of the research interview may not be adequately considered by the researcher (King, 1994).

From a theoretical perspective, a particular strength of interviewing is its ability to give time and space for participant reflection on their understanding and perceptions that may not be discovered in a participant observation context (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Miller and Glasner, 1997; Arksey and Knight, 1999). Consequently: “Interviewing is a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit – to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings.” (Arksey and Knight 1999, p.32). Nevertheless, a deeper theoretical issue regarding interviews is how far they achieve their ontological and epistemological goals of gaining access to participants’ constructions of their social world (Mason, 2002a). This is because incumbent within these epistemological and ontological perspectives is a consideration of the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant and reflexivity on the researcher’s impact on knowledge creation. This leads to a debate as to whether an interview can represent a participant’s ‘external reality’ or whether an interview constitutes a site of knowledge construction that is constrained by its social, political and historical context (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Dingwall, 1997; Silverman, 1997; Blaikie, 2000; May, 2001; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Legard *et al.* 2003; Fontana and Frey, 2005). These debates are also relevant to those theorists that study identities with some reservations voiced (Alvesson *et al.* 2008) as to whether the interview constitutes a trigger for identity work in so far as an interviewer is asking interviewees to reflect on themselves which

they might not have done in day-to-day events. However, the notion that the interview is itself a construction that serves to trigger interviewees' identity work is a core way in which a linguistic constructionist ontology and a subjective-discourse epistemology would conceive of this method, therefore neither of these sets of debates highlighting the constructed nature of interviews are particularly problematic for research operating with a post-structuralist conceptual framework.

5.3.2 Observation: a more transparent account of the social world?

Observation as a method prioritises the need to consider individuals', "lived, situated practices" (Rapley 2004, p.29) and thus provide an insight into the day-to-day workings of people's lives (Silverman, 1993). Its premise as a method is to immerse the researcher in the social world of a participant in order to explore and examine it through the participants' eyes (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Whilst the immersion of the researcher and the assumed transparency of the research findings that immersion produces, are questioned (e.g. Blaikie, 2000), other epistemological traditions also consider observation as providing a valuable contribution to research.

The notion of becoming also considers close observation of organisational life as necessary in order to appreciate the 'micro-practices of organising' (Chia, 1995), with Jian's (2011) study of organisational change at a large US insurance company that involved over 500 hours of observation over a four month period, an example of this methodological approach in action. Equally, within a post-structuralist conceptual framework, as the researcher considers 'extra-individual' (Alvesson *et al.* 2008) forces at play in identity construction, an increasing number of researchers are turning to observation to see identity work 'in action'. Nevertheless, different epistemological positions encourage a different perspective on the operation of the method where an interpretive approach focuses on interaction and actions – what people do – whereas post-structuralist and processual approaches still consider the observation as a text and examine the discursive construction of what is being observed (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Observation is often considered an appropriate method when the research seeks to explore actions or processes within the social world. As Alvesson *et al.* (2008) observe with regards to identities research:

To the extent that identity is theorized as a situated organizational practice...we might question whether research interviews, conceived here as talk about and divorced from concrete activity, are sufficient to understand identity construction processes in organizations. (Alvesson *et al.* 2008, p.21)

As a result of the debate as to how far interviews constitute their own social context and construct and are therefore divorced from lived experience, this method is often compared to observation. This is because as Bryman and Bell (2007) observe, it can be argued that participant observation can explore the social environment through research participants' eyes and via such immersion, can learn the language of that social world. Its sensitivity to context also allows it to expose the taken-for-granted and retain flexibility to deal with the unexpected. Observation can therefore yield rich data and provide insights as regard implicit behaviours or practices that interviewing may not generate.

Nevertheless, like interviewing, at a practical level, observation can equally be time consuming, generate an overwhelming amount of data (Langley and Tsoukas, 2010), and present a challenge with regards to gaining access to relevant research subjects (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002). Observations can also be criticised for being too dependent on the abilities of the observer (Waddington, 1994; Langley, 2009) rather than the guiding principles of any specific methodological techniques.

At a theoretical level, some researchers question the ability of observation to provide the research participant's perspective on the social world and highlight that observation, like interviewing also cannot escape mediation of the research environment as a researcher in both contexts will construct their version of what they observed (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Blaikie, 2000). Similarly, the assumed unobtrusiveness of the method is also questioned

where it is argued that the presence of an observer may alter the operation of the social environment under study and people may feel the need to perform. This also has ethical implications as to the degree of intrusion observation could potentially cause for research participants (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Therefore, as Bryman and Bell (2007) highlight, in comparison to participant observation, interviewing still retains some advantages as it is able to look at issues that may not be easily observed, it can provide a specific focus, and is less intrusive for research participants. However, it is worth noting that there is a symbiosis between observation and interviewing (where an observer also interviews and an interviewer also observes) therefore, there is merit in the methods being used together where, "...both methods provide a richer, more complete, and more complex view of social life than either can offer on its own." (Gerson and Horowitz 2002, p.221)

5.3.3 Rationale for method choices

Ultimately, assessing both the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of these methods together with their central strengths and weaknesses enables the researcher to evaluate their method choice as appropriate for their research design. With regards to the use of semi-structured interviews, from a practical perspective, semi-structured interviewing yields enough rich data of interest but is structured enough to keep to the overarching research questions. With regard to the limitations of interviewing, practical challenges such as access are negated to a certain degree due to the fact that as a former PR practitioner, I have personal and professional contacts to pursue.

At a theoretical level, the epistemological and ontological foundations of this research understand an interview as a site of knowledge construction in interaction between researcher and participant and as such, provides a more sophisticated level of understanding appropriate to qualitative interview research (Mason, 2002b; Alvesson *et al.* 2008). However, as Thomas and Linstead (2002) acknowledge, the analysis will be my construction of my participants' constructions of their selves at a particular space and time.

Interviews are also considered an appropriate method for exploring identification as the interview can be thought of as a site of identity work (Alvesson, 2003) which forces participants to articulate discourses about who they are in relation to what they do for a living, thus also allowing them a moment to actively reflect. Whilst not constituting 'naturally occurring data' but 'researcher-instigated discourse' (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), interviews are still considered as having an important contribution to make to discourse analysis. In particular, Phillips and Hardy (2002) highlight that when the study concerns the individual, "...then interviews may be less problematic because the way in which individuals construct themselves in an interview with a researcher may be similar to how they construct themselves in other arenas of talk." (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.72)

Nevertheless, observation of discrete events was also considered an appropriate supplementary method because it adds to the 'bodies of texts' (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) that need to be considered in discourse analysis and provides a context in which to appreciate the interplay of both CIPR discourses and subject positions and PR practitioners' identity construction processes. Consequently, this method contributes to the 'thickness of description' (Geertz, 1973) and acts as a means by which to enhance the study whilst also using interviews to give voice to specific audiences (Alvesson, 2003). At a practical level, choosing discrete events to observe also negates some of the time consuming and overwhelming elements of the method, whilst potential limitations of access could also be overcome due to the researcher's professional and personal links with the industry. Overall, employing a variety of methods is a way in which the multiple elements that inform this research can be appreciated, and as Hardy (2004) comments: "...even the most dedicated discourse analyst would advocate the importance of multiple methods of enquiry to study organization and organizing." (Hardy 2004, p.422).

5.4 Ethical considerations

With the research methods established, a key consideration is the ethical implications of the research design. Benton and Craib (2001) argue that ethics pervades all social science research due to the intrinsic power inequality between the researcher and researched because the researcher claims an ability to interpret and theorise that the researched does not. Meanwhile, May (2001) contends that the consideration of research ethics is an institutional requirement for the status of academia in general where:

...research ethics is required not only to maintain public confidence and to try to protect individuals and groups from the illegitimate use of research findings, but also to ensure its status as a legitimate and worthwhile undertaking. (May 2001, p.67)

Within the realm of qualitative research, because its approaches are less rigid in implementation and recognise the interaction between researcher and participant, ethical dilemmas can be varied and endlessly debated by qualitative members of the academic community (Bulmer, 2001). Hardy *et al.* (2001) also consider the ethical implications of communities and networks on research, highlighting that disseminating results back to networks in which participants operate could have far-reaching effects on those participants. Overall, in reflecting on methodological choices and their potential impact, all researchers enter the realm of ethics at some point or other. As such, particular methods delineate how they can be conducted ethically, with the overarching objective being to protect (Johnson, 2001) those that have allowed the researcher to enter their social world.

As interviews involve direct interaction with individuals, Mason (2002a) contends that the maintenance of ethical standards is a concern at every stage of the interview process. Dingwall (1997) also considers the ethics of the interview in terms of the pressures that the social context can place on the research participant, particularly to 'produce something' because the researcher has deemed them significant in answering his/her questions. This concern can often be seen at the end of an interview when the interviewee asks 'is that ok?' or 'is that what you wanted?'

However, particular challenges are attribution and confidentiality and the supposed solution of informed consent. As an attempt to clarify the terms of attribution and confidentiality, informed consent can be problematic. In the first instance, requiring an official form of consent may be prohibitive in the interviewee recruitment process. Secondly, and more concerning is whether a researcher can really promise full informed consent to his/her research participants. For example, Mason (2002a) argues that an interviewee may provide information that concerns a third party that has not given consent. Additionally, Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) observe that the 'micro-politics' of the organisation may intervene in confidentiality so that it is extremely difficult to make all information anonymous.

Whilst observation may not be as intrusive as the one-to-one interview, the ethical demands of the research method also need to be considered. Here, issues of anonymity and confidentiality are also prominent where it can be very difficult to clarify the position of observer to everyone or to gain informed consent from all those present. Nevertheless, the researcher needs to consider permissions to observe and how they construct themselves in that research environment so as to not mislead nor misrepresent research participants (Waddington, 1994; Nason and Golding, 1998). Whilst textual analysis of documentation holds less ethical considerations than interactions with social actors, the researcher still needs to be alive to the fact that these documents can serve to represent the people that authored them and therefore should be continually reflexive as to how they are representing them in their research accounts.

With regard to this research, a form detailing what the research proposed to do and what questions it proposed to ask was approved by the Business School before the data collection phase began¹⁵. An anonymity and confidentiality form was also read and signed by all the interview

¹⁵ Please see Appendix A for a copy of the signed/stamped ethical approval forms from Cardiff Business School.

participants.¹⁶ However, for the CIPR personnel, after consulting one of the members of Cardiff Business School's ethics committee it was decided that full anonymity could not be given as they would have to be at least affiliated with the organisation in their interview transcripts (as that was the reason behind interviewing them) and therefore a slight alteration to their confidentiality and anonymity forms were made to cite them as 'a senior member of the CIPR'. As well as attributing quotes anonymously, care was taken to also keep any clients or other organisations mentioned by interviewees as anonymous in case that identified the participants in some way.

With regards the observation of events, permission was sought from the leaders of all three events for notes to be taken and the events to be observed for the purposes of the research. Equally, all contributions from practitioners were made anonymous. However, individual confidentiality and anonymity forms were not signed, partly because it was impractical to make the large numbers of practitioners in attendance each sign a form, but also because these events retained a 'publicly available' element to them which meant that there was not an expectation that these were purely private events. For instance, practitioners discussed all three events on social media platforms such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Additionally, two of the events had accompanying documentation that formed part of the events' proceedings and these were publicly available on the CIPR website (i.e. non-members could access this information). Equally, because these events took place during the time that interviews were also being conducted, I was known to the majority of participants as undertaking research in this area and informed anyone that directly engaged with me what I was doing at the event.

5.5 Conducting the research

With the theoretical underpinnings and implications of the research design outlined and evaluated, this section centres on the specifics of how the

¹⁶ Please see Appendix B for a template copy of the confidentiality and anonymity form participants had to sign.

research was conducted. In attempting to clarify for the reader the process by which the data was collected, this account of the research design also provides where possible, rationales for the choices within the research implementation phase. This section begins with what formed the predominant element of the research, interviews with the CIPR and a range of PR practitioners. The section then moves on to consider the additional observation where both CIPR personnel and PR practitioners came together, and concludes with evaluation as to how documentation comprised part of the data collection process as well.

5.5.1 Interviews: CIPR, consultants and in-house practitioners

The research consisted of 39 interviews with senior members of the CIPR (nine interviews), consultants from two agencies, Taff PR (10 interviews) and Wilkin PR¹⁷ (13 interviews), and a range of in-house PR practitioners (7 interviews). All potential interviewees were invited to participate via email, clearly stating: the institution that was sanctioning this study, what level of qualification was being studied, the research topic of interest, approximately how long it would take and the fact it would be recorded, and a promise that the information they provided would be anonymous and confidential.¹⁸ Recruitment of these interviewees was made via both personal and professional networks. Senior members of the CIPR were contacted individually, some were known through links made at PR industry events prior to the data collection phase of the research and others were contacted without any prior knowledge of the researcher. In those instances, interviewees were told that others at their level had already engaged with the research, as a means by which to persuade them to also take part. Consultants at Taff PR were contacted as a team, as this consultancy was already known through personal networks in the researcher's previous job as a PR consultant. Wilkin PR were contacted through one personal connection to that agency who acted as a gatekeeper to the other interviewees from that

¹⁷ Pseudonyms have been used for both the PR practitioners and the companies they work for to protect their anonymity.

¹⁸ Please see Appendix C for a copy of the template invitation that was sent out to potential interviewees.

organisation, circulating the invitation to participate in the study on the researcher's behalf. This gatekeeper was also given guidance as to the kind of profile of interviewees to recruit (mixture of gender, seniority, and professional membership). None of the in-house practitioners had any professional or personal connection to the researcher prior to data collection. These participants were contacted individually, where again the fact that interviews with senior CIPR members had already been conducted was used as leverage to gain their interest and persuade them to take part in the study. Overall, recruitment was successful, with regards senior members of the CIPR, only two potential participants declined to be interviewed, largely due to issues of time and resource. Similarly, within the in-house cohort, four were not interviewed, for similar timing and resource issues.

In terms of the composition of these sets of interviewees, members of the CIPR all played a senior role in the organisation and were all PR practitioners from a range of backgrounds including, consultancy, in-house and freelance practitioner. The PR consultants comprised two consultancies, one based in central London (Wilkin PR) belonging to a large international conglomerate of media companies, the other based in Wales (Taff PR) belonging to a network of offices with similar PR and marketing offerings around the UK. The in-house practitioners were all very senior in their organisations but the sectors they operated in varied greatly, ranging from government to healthcare, construction to further education. However, what connected them all was that they had been in the first successful cohort of the Chartered Practitioner assessment conducted by the CIPR in 2009.

This body of interviewees comprised a mixture of gender and age range. Similarly, a range of seniority was also reflected in the sample with all the CIPR personnel and in-house practitioners having a senior status and the consultants including a range of seniority. Geographically, the consultants were based in Wales (Taff PR) and central London (Wilkin PR), the majority of the senior members of the CIPR worked in London and the surrounding areas although some represented regional centres around the UK such as Manchester and Glasgow, whereas in-house practitioners were based all

around the UK. The interviewee sample also represented a breadth of routes into the career: some aiming to work in PR from the outset of their careers, some as former journalists that moved into PR, some that moved from marketing into PR and others that simply 'stumbled upon' PR as a career. Equally, some practitioners had PR qualifications whilst others had none. With regards to membership to the professional bodies, all the in-house practitioners were heavily affiliated with the CIPR because they were all chartered practitioners, so they all completed the annual CPD programme and some of them were also involved in some of the committees within the organisation. All of the consultants within Taff PR were all members of the CIPR (a decision that had been made at company level to make them members as standard) but there were varying levels of engagement with the organisation with some involved in the local committee, events and CPD programme and others that had membership but did nothing more with it. Within Wilkin PR, none of the interviewees were members of the CIPR but they indicated that senior people in the agency were affiliated with the Institute. However, the company had a strong relationship with the PRCA.¹⁹

This interviewee sample was appropriate for a variety of reasons. In general, interviews were conducted with a variety of organisations and practitioners rather than one case study because the focus of the research was to move away from the confines of the organisation and look at the occupational level in terms of professional identity construction. Within this overarching aim, interviews with senior members of the CIPR were fundamental to the research because these were the people that knew about the inner workings of the organisation and were influential in the future direction of the Institute and its construction of the PR profession and PR professional. Taff PR and Wilkin PR were appropriate as the consultant dimension of the research, both representing large agencies within their respective PR sectors of largely regional (Taff PR) and national/international (Wilkin PR) PR. They were both largely generalist consultancies as well, rather than specialising in certain sectors such as financial PR, technology PR or retail PR and therefore were

¹⁹ For details of each interviewee regarding these different demographic categories please see Appendix D

more directly comparable with one another. All the in-house practitioners were Chartered Practitioners as a means by which to delineate the group because in-house practitioners can be found in an array of organisations and sectors, and because the research needed some interviewees that were very closely aligned with the CIPR in order to gauge the degree to which it informed their process of identity construction.

With regard to the interview itself, an interview guide was created in conjunction with the supervisor, bearing in mind the overarching research questions for the study.²⁰ Initially, as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007) the guide had a page for what they term 'facesheet information' such as name, age, and position in the company, so that a picture of the sample (as outlined above) could be considered when analysing the interview transcripts. Legard *et al.* (2003) emphasise the need to give an interview an appropriate flow where:

In broad terms, the researcher's task is to ease the interviewee down from the everyday, social level to a deeper level at which they can together focus on a specific topic or set of topics. (Legard *et al.* 2003, p.144)

Consequently, the interview guide aimed to give this flow to the interview, starting with relatively simple questions to 'warm up' the interviewee, then beginning to explore the major themes of the research, and then signalling that the interview was coming to an end. However, as in the semi-structured interview format, the structure from interview to interview altered slightly as a particular point raised was focused on or when a question was missed out as it had already been covered in a previous question's answer.

The interview guide covered three main areas: first, a discussion around the PR role, including how the interviewee had got into PR, what family and friends had made of their career choice, definitions of what the interviewee does for a living and assessments of the skills and knowledge required to do the job. The second section comprised an exploration of the good and bad of

²⁰ Please see Appendix E for a copy of themes pursued in the interview guide.

a life in PR, considering what made interviewees feel like they'd done a good job as well as their frustrations or worries around working in PR. The interview ended with a conversation concerning the professionalism of PR and the work of its professional bodies, incorporating questions about the Chartered Practitioner assessment with those that had achieved the status. Deviations from the guide were made either if a topic had already been covered in a previous answer, or if there was a particular point of interest that wanted to be followed up, or if further clarification on something was required. Key to the interview guide was to continually probe what was said, usually by asking 'why do you think that?' As Rapley (2001) comments this is a familiar pattern where a topic is initiated by the first question and then follow up questions are used to get at the detail.

The interview guide for CIPR personnel differed slightly in that some preliminary questions were about how they got into PR and their thoughts on skills and their role and then the focus shifted exclusively to the professional body. Those sections looked at areas such as how the individual had become involved with the organisation, their thoughts on what the body does well or not, their future aspirations for the CIPR and discussion of the Chartered Practitioner scheme.

The interview guide was piloted in an MSc dissertation on this topic, allowing the researcher to reflect and refine the interview guide based on the findings from that study. Nevertheless, as Arksey and Knight (1999) highlight, continual reflection throughout the data collection phase is required in order to refine the implementation of the research design. In this context, the interview guide was reflected on and altered slightly for the different audiences that were being researched as part of the study. Similarly, choices about the sample were refined as the data collection process proceeded. For instance, as a result of the interviews with Taff PR a decision was made that the research needed to engage with a large London consultancy. This was because consultants from Taff PR kept mentioning differences between them and London-based operations, which was the catalyst for reflection on the fact that the majority of PR is conducted in London and particularly the bulk of the

large contracts. Therefore, to miss out London consultancies would be to miss out a significant section of the industry. Similarly, engagement with the PR trade press and CIPR indicated that many of the big London agencies do not engage with the likes of the CIPR, whereas Taff PR has made an overarching commitment to the Institute and thus looking at differences in professional engagement would be of interest to the central research aims.

The majority of the interviews were conducted between May and October 2011 and took place at a time, date, and location convenient to the interviewee. This meant that the majority of interviews were conducted at the interviewee's place of work. This was in order to make the interview as convenient to participate in as possible and to keep interviewees at ease in an environment they were comfortable and familiar with. Where possible notes were also made about the office environments and artefacts visible during the interview period because as May (2001) highlights, the context of the interview is also another important aspect of the data collection.

Interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two hours. Every interview was audiotaped on a digital voice recorder, as this was very small and unobtrusive for one-to-one interaction. This was considered appropriate for both theoretical and practical reasons. As Legard *et al.* (2003) contend, taping the interview 'in natural form' means the depth and nuances in what is said can be adequately analysed. At a practical level Bryman (2004) points out that audiotaping is beneficial as it allows the researcher to focus on conducting the interview rather than attempting to make notes. The recordings were then fully transcribed in order to analyse the data. However, as Mason (2002a) highlights transcribing is still a process of interpretation rather than being truly representational of the interview account. Consequently, transcription was undertaken as a matter of practicality rather than as an 'objective record' of the interviews.

5.5.2 Observation of CIPR events and analysis of CIPR documentation

Events for observation were selected by examining the future schedules of CIPR events (both at a national and Wales level) and gauging which ones would deal overtly with issues of professionalisation with a total of three events observed for the purposes of the research. As Alvesson *et al.* (2008) argue, there is a distinction to be made as to the nature of organisational practices that come under observation, with some researchers focusing on observation of organisational talk, i.e. situations where talk takes centre stage (e.g. meetings/presentations) whilst others consider less formal talk, practices and routines in everyday organisational life. This research centres on the former and considers discrete events or organisational talk. So, at the Wales level, an event on the topic of writing award entries for a CIPR awards scheme was deemed appropriate because it was engaging with notions of what constituted (professional) award-winning PR work and also because the CIPR awards schemes were one of the elements of the organisation most interviewees engaged with regardless of membership and valuation of the Institute. Similarly, the national AGM was considered significant because it reviewed the organisation's activities in the name of 'professionalisation' and served as a means to justify the work of the professional body and thus its continuing existence. The final event, a Wales focus group on the future of PR and policy for the CIPR, formed part of the research serendipitously. As a researcher known to the local CIPR committee I was invited to the event as they thought I would be a suitable participant.

All the events took place between May and July 2011. My level of participation at the events varied: at the Wales best practice award scheme event I was a member of the audience, listening to the presentations made and question and answer session that followed. Likewise, at the national AGM I was a member of the audience that listened to the various presentations and question and answer sessions. In the Wales focus group I was a participant in the event, taking part in the various exercises that formed the focus group discussions. As such, notes were made regarding all three events, notes were made during the Wales event and national AGM and due to my participation

in the Wales focus group, notes were made as soon after the event as possible. Furthermore, notes from one of the other practitioners that participated in the focus group were also included.

The observation itself centred on two main aspects: firstly, the performance of professionalism in relation to key elements such as: image, artefacts, use of space, clothing, behaviour and talk. Consideration was made as to each of these elements and the interaction between these elements in the presentation of the 'professional' at these events. Secondly, in line with Down and Reveley's (2009) contention that interviews are needed to direct observational elements of research, these events were considered in relation to what was being observed within the interviews, looking at similarities and differences across the two research streams. The interviews were well underway when these events took place and inevitably reflections on what was emerging from that strand of the research was also considered in relation to what was being observed at these events. Following each event, reports were produced based on the notes taken according to the performance elements and any factors that directly coincided or refuted any of the emergent themes from the interviews. These reports could then be analysed together with the interview transcripts and CIPR documentation.

Documents relating both to the CIPR and the wider PR industry around issues to do with the PR profession, professionalisation, and being a professional have been collected between 2008-2012 from a range of sources including: the CIPR website, the CIPR newsletter (as a former member I had remained on their mail listing), the trade newspaper *PR Week*, references from Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs and information that had been sent through to me from other PR practitioners that were aware of my research. These forms of documentation together with the events that were observed constitute the 'naturally occurring data' both Phillips and Hardy (2002) and Phillips and Di Domenico (2009) identify as important elements of discourse analysis.

The initial phase of analysis was conducted by logging all these documents into a database so that a fuller appreciation of what had been collected over

the years could be made.²¹ Documents were added to the database according to certain criteria including: date, title, and genre of the text, the author and audience of the text and the central topic of the text. This documentation was influential in constructing the interview guide and in the analysis of the events and the interviews as these documents provided information on the wider context of the PR industry in terms of what was considered newsworthy by the industry, what constituted the central challenges to the sector, and what the CIPR projected as priorities for the organisation and the PR industry in general.

Nevertheless, two forms of CIPR documentation were focused on for closer discourse analysis. One was the CIPR annual report, largely because it accompanied the national AGM that had been observed as part of the data collection phase. The other was the CIPR website because this constitutes the most publicly available portal into the organisation.

The CIPR's annual report was not only significant to the research because it allowed for analysis of the interaction between this documentation and the event that was aligned with it, but also because this document on its own highlights what the Institute considers to be important about the organisation and the PR profession and constitutes part of the framework of the organisation as it is the means by which the CIPR reports back to its members and the Privy Council (which provides the charter) on its activities.

In comparison, the CIPR website homepage was also considered a valuable resource to the study because it is public portal to the organisation and therefore made for a good comparison with the annual report, which whilst it too is publicly available, it is likely to be read only by members. As such, this public dimension to the homepage was also of interest as a succinct representation of the organisation and the profession.

²¹ See Appendix F for a copy of the database of documentation regarding professionalism and PR that have been collected from 2008-2012 (ordered according to genre of the text).

Due to the richness of the data already generated by interviews and event observation these two forms of documentation were therefore appropriate to supplement this data in a meaningful capacity rather than comprising a new component of the research with its own questions to pursue. The fact that both these texts were publicly available also meant that no permissions were required in order to analyse them.

5.6 Analysis: a discourse analysis approach

As a post-structuralist informed study, as outlined in section 5.2.3 the analysis of all the data collected was infused with an overarching theoretical impetus to consider the on-going construction and organisation of social reality through discourse (Brown and Lewis, 2011). Under this principle, this section details the specifics of analysis of the three forms of data produced in the research process: interviews, observations of events, and documentation.

After conducting the research, issues of analysis and interpretation become paramount. Wolcott (1994) considers this area of the research as the most ambiguous in terms of how a researcher goes about using the data that has been gathered. In reference to semi-structured interviewing, the modes of analysis available are also varied because of the structured comparability the technique provides with options including content analysis (Franzosi, 2004), conversation analysis (Bryman, 2004; Baker, 2001; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2007).

Analysis of interview transcripts derived from this research initially focused on thematic coding as, "...more of a preliminary task that facilitates analysis." (Potter 2004, p.615). This involves coding transcripts by attaching keywords and/or themes to different segments in order to structure the 'raw data' (May, 2001; Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) consider this form of initial coding as 'data reduction' which allows the researcher to think about the data in new ways rather than seeing it in the chronology of the interview situation. This reduction is then followed by 'data complication' where similarities, paradoxes, patterns and themes are

deciphered and related to theoretical concepts so as to generalise from the data.

In the context of this research, this process involved generating central themes in an iterative process between theory informing the research, coupled with my experiences as a practitioner, plus interaction with the practitioners during the interview process and event observation. Similarly, the array of documentation that had been gathered about the PR industry was also influential in constructing these central themes for analysis. The interview guide also played a role in the analysis of the data as it was structured according to the research questions which meant that the data gleaned from them were already stratified into certain areas that dealt more with identity construction and/or professionalisation. The guide had also been informed by my experiences as a PR consultant and again this gave the interview more direction for the kinds of accounts the research was seeking.

The process of analysis took place as follows: when points emerged on numerous occasions as the interviews were being transcribed, they were noted. These sets of reminder notes were then compiled together in one document at the end of the transcribing period. At this stage, an attempt was made to try and order these points or further classify these points so that the structure of the empirical chapters could begin to be generated. Using this document, each theme identified in the transcribing phase was then looked at in more detail. This involved going through each theme that had been noted during the transcription phase and then reading through all the transcripts to see where those themes appeared. All these sets of texts were then put together in a document for each theme. Then in order to fine-tune the themes these documents were read and then categorised by sub-themes that related to the main points derived from the original transcription period. Moreover, in the process of reading through the transcripts for the second and third times, if any additional themes (from the initial set during the transcription phase) emerged then they were noted too (as well as sub-themes). Once this process was complete, the ordering and grouping of these themes were

considered to see how they relate to one another and how they can form together to build a coherent narrative.

Once the thematic coding was complete, the focus of the analysis was on the discursive resources drawn on by interviewees to construct their responses (Marshall, 1994) to allow for further abstraction from transcripts to theory. As such, the analysis sought to deconstruct participants' talk in order to consider how it constructed professional identities and what power effects these constructions had in other domains. This enabled the findings to be related back to the research questions, ultimately considering how do these descriptive findings relate back to issues around the construction of professional identities and the role played by the professional body in this process?²²

A combination of thematic coding and discourse analysis may not sound as technically adept as the likes of content analysis, conversational analysis or grounded theory but as Kvale and Brinkman (2009) highlight:

Many analyses of interviews are conducted without following any specific analytic technique. Some go beyond reliance on a single mode of analysis to include a free mixture of methods and techniques. Other interview analyses do not apply specific analytic procedures, but rest on a general reading of the interview texts with theoretically informed interpretations. (Kvale and Brinkman 2009, p.233)

For my research, due to its exploratory and inductive nature the general coding approach as explained by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) seemed most appropriate in order to begin to make sense of the research topic area. A discursive approach to these themes was then also required due to the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research as it informs all elements of the research design and analysis.

²² See Appendix G for an illustrative chart/table taking the example of the theme of ambiguity and the various sub-themes it generated and then how those sub-themes were amalgamated in the findings narrative.

Some of the initial phases of analysis that served to 'reduce the data' in the context of event observation and analysis of documentation were highlighted in the previous section. However, once that phase was complete, more detailed analysis of the data collected was undertaken. With regards to observation of events, analysis involved looking at the notes made in relation to the interview findings to compare talk in the interview environment versus talk and performance as part of the PR collective – where did discourses differ or were there a lot of similarities? If there were differences what were they? Consequently, the interview analysis was the benchmark by which the reports from the events were analysed and findings generated. As with the observation of events, analysis of documentation was also led by the findings from the interview data to see if similar themes emerged or to see if different constructions of professional were drawn on in these texts and to what extent. Consideration was continually given to what (professional) identity resources the texts provide? What discourses are used in said resources to construct the professional and profession? Therefore, discourse analysis was the focus, assessing how the events and documentation constructed the profession and the PR professional.

Therefore, consideration of the construction of discourse infused all three methods, however, the way in which that informed the analysis of all three forms of data altered slightly depending on the data set. Nevertheless, as Howarth (2000) observes, there is not one standard way by which to conduct discourse analysis and as McKee (2003) suggests it does not necessitate analysing every single element of the text:

Rather, you need to pick out the bits of the text that, based on your knowledge of the culture within which it's circulated, appear to you to be relevant to the question you're studying. (McKee 2003, p.75)

The priority for discourse analysts according to Phillips and Di Domenico (2009) is to construct an effective narrative of the research. Whilst this gives the researcher some creative licence in approaching the data, without specific guidelines to follow, discourse analysis can be criticised for a lack of rigour.

5.6.1 A note on Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

The general critique of qualitative research being less able to distinguish the protocols of its methods has led to an increased use of CAQDAS in qualitative research because at the very least it provides a standardised practice in approaching data. Involving the use of software to code and manipulate the data, CAQDAS has become popular, especially when research needs to manage large amounts of data. Atherton and Elsmore (2007) provide an interesting dialogue between two academics regarding the pros and cons of using CAQDAS. As well as being suitable for large data sets, other advantages mentioned include: a pragmatic way of managing complex data, a clearer way to order data, good for meta-analysis and observing overarching linkages between data sets, and finally the fact that the software conveys rigour because it is a more standardised and formalised approach to the analysis than the idiosyncrasies of the researcher. These are largely practical assessments of the software programmes and are underlined by Atherton and Elsmore (2007) as therefore an appropriate *additional* approach to analysis and 'part of the toolkit' for the researcher.

Nevertheless, Atherton and Elsmore's (2007) debate on the topic also raises a lot of disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages are also practical in that using CAQDAS can remain time consuming, it does not necessarily achieve 'better' results than other forms of analysis, and the application of quantification techniques is queried as it attempts to move the data away from the qualitative realm. Other more theoretical concerns raised include a questioning of the neutrality of the software, highlighting that coding and following what the software is capable of doing can become an end in and of itself – the researcher follows the software protocols because the package can do them, not because the research questions require it. Similarly, another criticism regards the decontextualisation of data via CAQDAS:

Software-based qualitative data analysis protocols and packages, because they create their own contexts for the data, via their internal ordering and classification protocols, place extracted data in a new

context; that of the software and how it relates to the research question asked by the researcher. (Atherton and Elsmore 2007, p.68)

Within Atherton and Elsmore's (2007) dialogue on the topic, the ultimate concern with CAQDAS is how it can serve to undermine the ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative research rather than aid in the analysis. As such, it is argued that CAQDAS cannot always be applied to all qualitative research and that the researcher must always reflect on its use (or non use).

For this research, training had been received on CAQDAS in order to make an assessment of its appropriateness for the study. At a practical level, it was felt that there was not too much data produced that could not be managed through more 'manual' analysis methods. In particular, the decontextualisation of the data was a concern, whilst all forms of analysis will decontextualise to some degree, the 'manual' approach to analysis felt more immersive. Considering the ontological and epistemological positions underpinning the study, retaining as much context as possible was also considered of significant importance. Equally, there did not appear to be an epistemological fit between this research and the use of CAQDAS where mappings of keywords or hierarchies of themes were not what the research was seeking, but instead a cohesive narrative and as Atherton and Elsmore (2007) observe, these software packages are not adept at considering processes. Overall, the increased popularity of CAQDAS appears to be a response to the 'looseness' of methodological technique in qualitative research and therefore it operates as an, "...epistemological 'comfort blanket' for researchers, in that they produce an expected and defined approach to dealing with data..." (Atherton and Elsmore 2007, p.67) and thus its use is also linked to its ability to at least provide an aesthetic of validity.

5.7 Validity of research

Incumbent in the ontological and epistemological debates about knowledge creation is the notion of validity and a particular challenge for qualitative approaches to research is to justify their reliability and validity because these

approaches are often judged against quantitative principles of what research should constitute (Mason, 2002a). Consequently, common criticisms levelled at qualitative research are that it is subjective, difficult to replicate or generalise from and that there is a lack of transparency (Bryman and Bell, 2007). For interviewing, the quantitative sphere criticises qualitative approaches for interviewee subjectivity (Kvale, 1996) and a lack of 'quality control' in terms of the 'undesirable' effect the interviewer has on the interaction (Fielding and Thomas, 2001).

Bryman and Bell (2007) maintain that some qualitative researchers have thus tried to adhere to quantitative notions of reliability and validity in their research, whereas others have created alternative criteria to evaluate qualitative research. Therefore, notions such as triangulation or participant feedback have been developed as techniques to heighten the validity of qualitative research. As a research approach that seeks to use a variety of research methods within one study, triangulation as Saukko (2003) explains, aims to gauge whether the results of one method corroborates that of another. The term's historical background is from navigation and when applied to research it uses the positivist notion that by using more than one method a researcher can get to the 'truth' more accurately. Similarly, 'participant feedback' or 'member verification' (Bloor, 1997) have also been used and focus on showing, "...a correspondence between the analyst's findings and the understandings of members of the collectivity being analysed." (Bloor 1997, p.38).

However, both techniques come with their problems. For triangulation, Silverman (1993) highlights that using different research contexts to explore a topic renders the context of research invisible and therefore the notion of knowledge construction in social interaction (at the heart of qualitative research) is forgotten. For member verification, Bloor (1997) argues that what participants consider as valid findings from their perspective can be temporary and change over time. Additionally, the reasoning behind participant endorsement may be more complicated than just because it is considered a true account of that participant's perspective. Multiple methods have not been

used in this research to gain an understanding of 'the truth' by approaching it from different methodological directions but instead to consider different levels of analysis and to consider the inter-relations between bodies of texts in their constructions of the research topic. In this vein, participant feedback has also not been necessary as the transcripts and events have been considered as constructions of identities and the research topic within their own social contexts.

In recognition of the fact that quantitative notions of validity are not relevant to a qualitative study, alternative criteria to evaluate qualitative research have been created such as Bryman and Bell (2007) who suggest the central tenets of validity should rest on notions of: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Likewise, Tracy (2010) argues for eight markers of valid qualitative research to include: a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Meanwhile, in specific reference to qualitative interviewing, Kvale (1996) raises what he calls ten 'internal critiques'. These consist of the method's potential to: neglect the participant's social environment, focus on thought and experience rather than action, concentrate on talk over non-verbal communication, fail to recognise the socially situated nature of experience, and be 'alinguist', 'atheoretical' and 'arhetorical' in its approach. However, as Cassell *et al.* (2006) highlight whilst there are clearly defined criteria for validity in a positivist framework, other epistemological perspectives generate a great deal of debate about what constitutes valid research.

Ultimately, as Blaikie (2000) observes qualitative researchers are always going to have the internal debate as to whether their constructions of someone else's constructions are robust, because their epistemological and ontological assumptions highlight the contingent, ever-changing and contextual nature of knowledge creation. So in this ontological and epistemological position all techniques of validation are social constructs themselves (Bloor, 1997). Consequently, an element of pragmatism has to be applied, understanding that the research will generate some themes or

concepts that are transferable to wider contexts than the specific study but all the while treating the research account as, "...one of a number of possible representations rather than as definitive versions of social reality." (Bryman and Bell 2007, p.415). What is of importance to this research is that the research process has been followed in a logical fashion based on the overarching ontological and epistemological approaches that are guiding the study in order to provide a robust argument as to why the research has been approached in this manner and how the findings have been derived from the research process.

5.8 Reflexivity

As mentioned in section 5.2.2 recognising how ontological and epistemological assumptions can be the driving force in research brings with it a notion of reflexivity to explore and understand these assumptions at work and the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge (May, 2001; Hardy *et al.* 2001; Cunliffe, 2003; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Therefore, reflexivity can be generally defined as, "...reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes..." (Hardy *et al.* 2001, p.533). However, reflexivity comes in different forms as the notion has developed over time following the 'reflexive turn' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). In a review of the literature on reflexivity, Hardy *et al.* (2001) highlight how the concept has developed: firstly, as a notion that would allow the eradication of bias, then as a means to highlight inherent bias. In turn, literature on the topic began to critique the notion that reflexivity highlights bias, which led to the presentation of the researcher's experience as constituting reflexivity. This then resulted in literature on the topic considering criticism of the focus solely on the role of the researcher because it removed the researcher from the research environment and the other pressures on him/her. After conducting this review, Hardy *et al.* (2001) suggest that the notion of reflexivity should also include recognition of the complex research networks and communities that give certain forms of research accounts credibility.

Alternatively, Johnson and Duberley (2003) consider different forms of reflexivity to be driven by different epistemologies – arguing that as researchers cannot stand outside of their ontological and epistemological assumptions, these assumptions must also have an implication on the reflexivity pursued by researchers. Johnson and Duberley (2003) highlight three models of reflexivity: thesis, synthesis and antithesis. Thesis constitutes methodological reflexivity and is underpinned by a realist ontology and objectivist epistemology. As such, this form of reflexivity involves reflecting on the technical aspects of the implementation of the method in order to maintain an objective account of the researcher rather than considering, “...the underlying metatheoretical assumptions that justify that methodology in the first place.” (Johnson and Duberley 2003, p.1284).

Synthesis concerns epistemic reflexivity, which encompasses a realist ontology and subjective epistemology. In this context, reflexivity involves considering how the researcher as a social actor informs the process and outcomes of research as well as an understanding that their research account is only one possibility out of other interpretations. In doing so, this form of reflexivity operates, “...to negate the world as an objectively accessible social reality and denaturalize hegemonic accounts by exposing their modes of social organization and reproduction.” (Johnson and Duberley 2003, p.1289). The final model of reflexivity, antithesis centres on deconstructionism or ‘hyper-reflexivity’ as its foundational ontology is subjective, as is its epistemology. This form of reflexivity highlights that the management researcher needs to “...deconstruct their own representational practices.” (Johnson and Duberley 2003, p.1287).

Considering the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research, this study seeks to encompass some of these forms of reflexivity. For instance, as a former PR practitioner, turned researcher, the dynamic between these two roles requires reflection in terms of how it has permeated the research design. Therefore, as a former PR consultant, the dynamic between my former experiences and occupational identities are interweaved through the construction of the research project, largely in having an interest

in studying professional identities in the first place, but also in the way in which the interview guide was constructed to see if my experiences related to those of others. Furthermore, my former role as PR practitioner meant that I was considered an ‘understanding interviewer’ on account of having worked in that domain myself which gave some interviews more intimacy than a researcher with no PR background would have potentially achieved.²³ Similarly, in the vein of deconstruction, as Ybema *et al.* (2009) highlight, researchers working within a processual ontological framework need to be reflexive about presenting other people’s discursive constructions through their own discursive practices – as well as those of academic writing convention.

Nevertheless, this process of reflection does not come without its problems. As Michael (1996) argues social constructionism’s emphasis on researcher reflexivity infers that reflexivity can be achieved. Yet, if there is no meaningful reality outside of discourse how can researchers as social beings ‘stand outside’ of these constructions to reflect on their constructed nature (Johnson and Duberley, 2003)? Mauthner and Doucet (2003) also consider reflexivity as a prolonged process termed by the researchers as ‘degrees of reflexivity’ where some influences and assumptions on the research process are easy to gauge at the time of conducting the research and others do not develop until a distance from the research has been achieved. Consequently, as Johnson and Duberley (2000) conclude reflection is ‘messy’ where all that can be hoped to be achieved is a continued understanding of the complex relationship researchers have with their research.

5.9 Conclusion: the linearity and rationality of the research account

This chapter has established the research design for this study, outlining the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research, the methodological considerations of the research design and the implementation of the study. In turn, issues incumbent in academic research such as ethical

²³ Further comments on reflexivity are found in section 10.2 in the concluding chapter of the thesis following consideration of the findings and discussion chapters.

considerations, analysis, notions of validity and reflexivity, have also been considered. In doing so, a coherent account of the creation of this research has been provided, highlighting the linkages between the various research choices that have been made. However, it has to be recognised that decisions about research design are part of an iterative and on-going process. As Gerson and Horowitz (2002) highlight:

In practice, processes such as data collection and analysis are rarely distinct or sequential tasks. The actual research process typically involves facing problems 'out of order' and coping simultaneously with a variety of methodological and theoretical conundrums. (Gerson and Horowitz 2002, p.200)

As such, this chapter in following academic convention belies in its linearity of the research account, the processual and at times 'messy' nature of conducting research.

The next three chapters will detail the findings of this research design. Chapter 6 will consider the professionalisation of PR and the construction of the professional subject position in CIPR texts, Chapter 7 will examine the salience of the professional subject position as read in CIPR texts for PR practitioners' identity construction, and Chapter 8 will explore the construction of the shapeshifter in practitioners' texts.

CHAPTER 6: BECOMING A PROFESSION

The empirical chapters that follow provide the analysis of the empirical materials that have been generated from the research design outlined in the previous methodology chapter. Each findings chapter covers central themes based on my readings of the texts, which include: interview data, document analysis and observation of events.²⁴ In turn, they cover the main research questions that have driven the research that centre on identities and professionalisation. This first chapter focuses on the professional discourses circulating in texts generated by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR). In doing so, it considers the construction of the PR profession and PR professional subject position by these texts and the challenges encountered in order to provide these discursive resources. The second chapter examines the crafting and re-crafting of professional identities by practitioners, considering the salience of professional discourses read within CIPR texts in this identity construction process. As such, this chapter highlights how ambiguity also pervades practitioners' experiences of working in PR, making it a challenge to define what the work involves, what it achieves and what skills and knowledge it requires to conduct, and thus is a contingent factor in their identity construction.

The notion of ambiguity is then also taken up in the final chapter that explores how ambiguity itself becomes a salient identity resource for practitioners' identity construction. This ability to be comfortable, and even champion the ambiguity, is then linked to the concept of 'PR practitioner as shapeshifter', which highlights the shapeshifter as a distinct identity for both consultant and in-house practitioners. The chapter concludes that the ambiguous and continually shifting nature of PR work means that PR practitioners' identities are continually 'becoming' – fluid, malleable and temporary in order to adapt to the various circumstances a life in PR demands. In turn, practitioners'

²⁴ Following a post-structuralist approach to discourse as outlined in the methodology chapter, this research considers interview data, documents and observations of events as texts. These empirical chapters constitute my reading of these texts and this reading is alive to the different authors and purposes of these texts.

shifting, relational, multiple and complex identities have implications for the success of the CIPR's professional project and even the notion of 'profession' all together.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the CIPR as a professional body and its developments in professionalising the PR industry. As such, it centres on the attempts to become a profession, at times following classic processes of professionalisation as outlined in Chapter 3 such as social closure and control via occupational closure and credentialism (Parkin, 1979; Collins, 1979). The empirical findings in this chapter present the attempts to draw on professional discourses and their circulation in specific meetings and through specific artefacts. Consequently, in relation to a 'becoming approach', this chapter examines the construction and circulation of a 'discursive template' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) in CIPR texts of the PR professional.

The chapter argues that the discourses read within CIPR texts construct a subject position of the 'PR professional' as someone continually engaged in development and learning which in turn is credentialised by the professional body, thus drawing on traditional notions of professionalism. This subject position is coupled with attempts by the CIPR to construct a distinct professional collective and secure legitimacy and power for the PR industry. Nevertheless, the CIPR texts also indicate problems in establishing these professional discourses that serve to undermine its ability to secure the PR profession as 'closed' and legitimate. The chapter concludes that the professionalisation of the PR industry, as constructed by texts generated by the CIPR, centres on its ability to provide discursive resources for individual identity construction and provide meaningful subject positions for PR practitioners, but the problems encountered in achieving the latter would indicate some potential challenges for realising the 'professionalising project'.

6.2 Discourses in construction of PR professional and profession

This first section highlights the discourses drawn on in CIPR texts to construct the professional PR practitioner and the PR profession. The central tenets of the literature on the sociology of professions that focus on occupational closure are that professions credentialise their occupation (Collins, 1979) in order to secure social closure and control over the industry (Larson, 1977; Parkin, 1979). This in turn legitimates the profession and allows it to play a powerful role in society (Greenwood, 1972; Larson, 1990). These elements of the traditional profession are evoked in the discursive construction of the PR profession and PR professional within CIPR texts.

This section will begin by exploring how discourses circulating in CIPR texts attempt to secure the subject position of PR practitioner as pursuing credentialised professional development. It will then discuss the discourses of closure and control that are drawn on in discussion of the PR profession, as well as discourses that intimate legitimacy and power for this professional constituency. The section concludes that the discourses drawn on in CIPR texts attempt to establish the subject position of 'PR professional' as someone who is continually engaging in professional development and can be considered credible both through commitment to the professional bodies that represent the industry and the credentials they bestow on practitioners.

6.2.1 Credentialism

CIPR texts construct professional development as a central tenet of the professional body, the profession, and the professional PR practitioner. The Institute has also capitalised on recent developments in social media to demonstrate the salience of professional development to the modern PR practitioner. Credentialising PR also comes to the fore in CIPR personnel's talk regarding the creation of the Chartered Practitioner status. This credentialism discourse circulating in CIPR texts, constructs the professional PR practitioner as someone who will continually learn and develop his/her skills.

Texts produced in interviews with senior CIPR figures continually draw on discourses around learning, development, and education when discussing what the CIPR and its members ultimately represent.²⁵ Professional development is placed centre stage in the construction of the professional body, highlighted by Fiona and Rachel when asked to explain what the CIPR does: ‘...if I had to choose two words it would be professional development’ (Fiona, senior in-house practitioner and Chartered Practitioner), ‘...everything we do is about professional development’ (Rachel, senior in-house practitioner). Kate draws on the notion of professional development as a way of demonstrating the supportive role the body can play in the lives of PR practitioners:

‘...we’re here [...] to help them develop their career, whether it’s in consultancy or in-house or working for themselves, we’re there to give them policy guidance, to keep them informed, to let them know where they should be investing their time, where they should be training and developing their different skills.’ (Kate, senior in-house practitioner)

Alternatively, Rachel draws on the notion of development and learning as a way of indicating the boundaries of the CIPR and who should be part of the organisation and who should not:

‘...you have made a decision to join for a reason. I want that reason to be professional development, otherwise don’t join. So, I would rather have fewer dedicated, stable, professional development committed members, than loads and loads of members who join just for some letters after their name and then don’t give it another second’s thought, because one, it’s a lot of effort and a lot of churn and two, I’m not sure what that does for the value of the CIPR and for the other members who are committed.’ (Rachel)

Consequently, Rachel indicates that a member of this professional body should be someone who priorities continual learning and development.

²⁵ All interviewees in this chapter comprise of senior members of the CIPR. All of them are either senior PR practitioners or have been senior PR practitioners before working for the CIPR full-time and all represent a mixture of experience. Pseudonyms have been used to protect interviewees’ anonymity, please see Appendix D for a full profile of every interviewee.

A common phrase used by the senior members of the CIPR to emphasise this commitment to professional development was the 'member journey'. Penny, a senior freelance consultant, explains the journey that she feels members should take once they have joined the CIPR:

'...what we should do is make membership contingent on doing CPD [Continuous Professional Development scheme] and then encourage those that want to really be seen as top of the profession, to do chartered.' (Penny)

Rachel highlights that this 'member journey' is a way of integrating all the services the CIPR offers according to their professional development value and in turn providing '...a bespoke, clear service that takes you through your career path' and that is tailored to each individual member to develop '...this 'my CIPR' concept so that people do feel they're getting a more bespoke service....' (Rachel). Therefore, the member journey is a way to reach out to members and make them feel important to the organisation but it's also a discursive tool by which Rachel constructs professional development and credentials as central to the membership of the organisation.

One arena in which the CIPR texts have been able to emphasise this notion of professional development is in social media. As a media channel that has had a significant impact in communications in a short space of time, CIPR texts have constructed learning and development as the focus for professional status because it is a way in which to keep up with changes in the media. The rapid developments in social media mean that in some CIPR personnel's talk, PR is constructed as quickly evolving where, '...the practitioner of today is not going to be the practitioner of tomorrow in that things are changing so dramatically.' (Stacey, senior freelance consultant and Chartered Practitioner) Against this backdrop of continual and rapid change, the CIPR is constructed as playing a central role in providing guidance, training and education to the professional PR practitioner:

'...so we've got a good foothold now in social media and we'll be looking to develop that and in terms of our training on social media to bring the profession up to speed on that, 'cos things are moving so fast and you feel that we've been left a bit behind there.' (Kate)

This major development in the consumption of media provides CIPR texts with an opportunity to highlight that being concerned with continual learning and development are central facets of being a PR professional in order to keep up-to-date with the ever-changing media landscape. In establishing educational resources to capitalise on the developments in social media, Justin highlights this as an on-going priority:

‘...I think a priority has been to develop more of a leadership position on and a viewpoint on social networks, social channels, social media and I think there’s work to be done still, but we’ve made a lot of progress in that area.’ (Justin)

As such, Justin suggests that in order to continue to construct ‘the PR professional’ as engaging in continual learning to keep up with the ever-changing media landscape, it is also necessary for the CIPR to continue to be a purveyor and leader of education and learning in the social media arena to meet the ideals of that subject position.

The centrality of the credentialism discourse is also evident in other CIPR texts such as the Institute’s annual report. Its opening page, titled ‘Who we are: our members’ views’ (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.2) features four pictured members accompanied by a comment from them as to what the CIPR means to them. The notion of professional development is prevalent with comments such as the following:

The access to CPD modules that my CIPR membership gives me has proven invaluable. It means that, alongside studying a CIPR approved qualification (BA (Hons) Public Relations), I also have access to a wide and diverse range of materials to further develop my public relations knowledge and develop me for a future career in PR (ibid)

Additionally, the need for professional development being driven by the changes in communications brought by the likes of social media is also highlighted:

The way organisations communicate with their audiences is rapidly changing and the old models of the way PR people operate are being ripped up. It’s vital to stay ahead of the curve on developments and being a member of the CIPR can help achieve this. (ibid)

Consequently, as in the interview texts with CIPR senior members, the professional PR practitioner is constructed in this annual report as someone who goes on a professional development journey for the duration of their career in order to maintain a professional status and keep up-to-date with the rapidly changing media environment.

The significance of the credentialism discourse is also clearly indicated on the CIPR website.²⁶ The homepage for the organisation positions the reader to primarily look at the links to the main elements of the website as indicated by a grey box at the top of the page next to the CIPR logo. The prioritisation of credentialism is highlighted by the fact that two of the links listed here concern 'Careers and CPD' and 'Training and Qualifications'. Likewise, the connection between professional development and PR's 'new frontier' into social media is also prominently featured on the homepage with the right hand side dedicated to social media 'click throughs' via icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest. This is accompanied by Twitter and Facebook 'feeds' provided below the social media icons as well as the ability to subscribe to the CIPR mailing list. 'The conversation' is also flagged in the grey box at the top of the homepage and serves to present a selection of content from PR blogs on relevant industry issues. The emphasis on social media in such a prominent position on the CIPR homepage highlights how important a media channel it is to the PR industry. It also assumes that the professional PR practitioner is up-to-date with these technologies and working with these social networks.

Therefore, these range of CIPR texts construct the subject position of professional PR practitioner as someone who engages in continual development and learning, supplied by the professional body and against a backdrop of rapid change in the communications field a practitioner needs to engage with on a day-to-day basis. Underpinning this notion of professional development is the discourse of credentialism to demonstrate certain levels of education and learning have been achieved.

²⁶ See cipr.co.uk for CIPR website.

6.2.1.1 *Ultimate credential: Chartered Practitioner*

As the current pinnacle of credentials within the organisation, what characteristics would a practitioner embody in order to be considered a Chartered Practitioner? Some of the senior CIPR figures interviewed had taken part in the Chartered Practitioner scheme, but all were asked to consider who would constitute a Chartered Practitioner? Discussions around these questions centred on three dominant discourses. The first, in line with the credentialism discourse, constructs a Chartered Practitioner as someone who ‘think[s] that professional development is important’ (Rachel) and thus demonstrates a high level of expertise in PR:

‘It’s a way of signalling that you’re committed to your own learning and development and from an external perspective...you’ve got the CIPR stamp of approval [...] it just gives you that added extra edge that you are part of this elite cohort of very senior practitioners in the industry, but it’s not just been gifted to you, you’ve had to earn it.’ (Fiona)

The construction here is of a PR professional that now has a credentialised status that demonstrates to others the commitment to professional development they have had on their ‘member journey’ that has not merely been bestowed on the individual for years of service but has been gained via a testing procedure.

The second discourse in these texts is that of leadership, such as the following:

‘...[Chartered Practitioners] have to be aspirational, inspirational, experienced and also may be involved in the profession and giving something back whether it’s teaching or training...’ (Kate)

‘...[Chartered Practitioners] will have made an impact within an organisation or within a business or a consultancy...they won’t be ‘doing nothing’ people; they will be ‘doing something’ people.’ (Daniel, senior freelance consultant)

Therefore, the subject position of Chartered Practitioner is not only someone who is continually learning and developing their area of expertise but is also

someone who can lead others and impart the same virtues to more junior practitioners.

The final discourse drawn on when talking about who constitutes a Chartered Practitioner, is around the reflexive practitioner. Senior members of the CIPR construct Chartered Practitioners as people who reflect on their individual practices as well as the wider development of the PR industry. For example, Stacey's comment having taken part in the scheme:

'...when you are a senior practitioner, people around you think, 'they've got it sorted' but it's really good to go through the testing process 'cos it makes you think about what you do, how you do it, what you've learnt; it gives you an opportunity to reflect on your experience [...] it gives you an opportunity to think about what we should be doing or could be doing, in a way that you don't get time to do in your day-to-day job.'
(Stacey)

Similarly, this notion of reflexivity can be seen in Scott's construction of the Chartered Practitioner:

'I would explain it as a designation of a senior practitioner who is not only senior because they've been in the business a long time, but has demonstrated that they really are at the top of their profession, and that they can grapple with some of the tough issues that sit behind the simple day-to-day decisions. So these are people with a depth to their practice and an ability to interrogate their practice...' (Scott, senior in-house practitioner and Chartered Practitioner)

Considered as the exemplar of the kind of professional the CIPR wants to recruit as members, the credential of 'Chartered Practitioner' is constructed by these senior figures within the organisation as someone who not only already has a high level of expertise but is also continually developing, learning and reflecting on their abilities, as well as someone who can lead others to embody similar principles.

CIPR texts construct the PR professional as having to develop continually and update their skills that can then be tested in order to attain a credentialised status. The discourse of credentialism circulating in this range of CIPR texts constitutes a central tenet of a profession and the bodies that represent it so that it can begin to co-ordinate and control key elements of occupational

recognition and identity (i.e. powerful and legitimate subject positions) in order to monopolise the professional domain. The discourse of closure and control will be the focus for the next section of the chapter.

6.2.2 Closure and Control

The sociology of professions literature argues that social closure and control (Parkin, 1972) is required in order to aid the social mobility of said profession; as Larson observes, "...the quest for professional status spread as a typical concern of educated middle-class occupations, promising individual advancement through collective efforts." (Larson, 1977, p.155). The discourse of closure and control featured in CIPR texts where the professional PR practitioner is constructed as someone who invests a lot of time, energy and commitment to the likes of professional bodies such as the CIPR in order to be part of that professional community. In turn, CIPR texts such as its annual report and website construct the PR professional as part of a collective where everything is focused around the needs of the membership. These attempts to construct closure and control of the professional domain, i.e. who is in and who is out of the elite group, is then explored in more detail with the use of an in-depth account of the performance of professionalism at a CIPR event.

Texts produced in interviews with senior members of the CIPR draw on the notion of individual investment when highlighting how reliant the organisation is on the '...hundreds of volunteers that do all this work for the membership, organising events, answering queries, doing the job of promoting membership...' (Selena, senior in-house practitioner) and when discussing the strengths of the organisation:

'...our volunteer cohort, 'cos nobody gets paid to do this, some of the staff get paid, but our regional chairs and the nations chairs all do this out of their commitment to the profession which is fantastic...' (Fiona)

On a similar note, Justin emphasises that for individuals to fully appreciate the value of their membership requires that they invest time and energy into the organisation:

‘...I think what’s interesting is I hear people who’ve got involved in the CIPR saying things like ‘I always wondered what the CIPR did for me and then I realised I had to do something myself and once I’d done something for myself, the CIPR did a lot of things and fulfilled a lot of the things that I was looking for.’ So I think it does require members to be active, you can’t just join and suddenly expect your life to be transformed by an annual subscription...’ (Justin)

As well as constructing the PR professional as someone committed to investing their individual resources to the running of the organisation, these senior members of the CIPR also highlighted individual investment when recognising that the current training and development schemes on offer from the organisation are dependent on PR practitioners opting to do them:

‘...so at the moment CPD is optional in the CIPR. So you don’t have to do it to stay in membership. So those who commit to do this, it’s all credit to them and I think that’s what differentiates them because they’re doing it of their own volition, they’re not being forced to do this...’ (Kate)

Therefore, by drawing on this notion of individual investment in their constructions of the PR professional, the senior members of the CIPR articulate a fundamental presumption that the professional PR practitioner will be prepared to invest time and commitment into the running of the organisation as well as into their own personal development. Therefore, being a member of the professional body is not just about that individual’s development and credibility but also how that individual contributes to the CIPR and its wider authority.

The construction of the PR professional as investing in the organisation is also evident in the CIPR’s annual report. For instance, the President’s overview, which ends with an emphasis on the people that got involved as key to the development of the CIPR and a highlight of her Presidency:

I would like to thank everyone who contributed, whether as a staff member, or by supporting the Institute through membership or partnership, or by giving time and expertise. People came together to tackle the challenges, to critique and share ideas. This was, for me, the highlight of my year as President. (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.3)

Similarly, the Chief Executive's Report constructs individual investment as an indicator of the success of the organisation:

The strength and influence of the CIPR is a result of the commitment of its members and in 2010 the Institute certainly proved to be greater than the sum of its parts. (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.4)

This emphasis on individual investment that emerges from this text constructs the CIPR as reliant on its volunteer base in order to accomplish its status as a professional body and that in turn by giving that individual investment to the organisation, members can also secure an individual professional status.

The discourse of closure and control circulating in these CIPR texts emerges in the notion of individual investment which is continually drawn on in the construction of the PR professional and suggests there are boundaries as to who is part of the profession and who is not. The professional PR practitioner will invest time, energy and resource to engage with the professional body and thus become part of that professional grouping – the unprofessional PR practitioner will not. This discourse of closure and control, serving to construct boundaries of who is in and out of the professional domain is also emphasised by the way in which the membership is constructed as an ideal of professional collectivity and unity. The importance of membership peppers written texts produced by the CIPR such as its annual report and its website homepage in particular.

Analysis of the CIPR annual report highlights that the discourse of closure and control circulating in the text constructs the report itself as a member's only forum that speaks to that specific community. This is indicated straight away with the report's title, 'our CIPR' indicating that the reader of this text is part of the organisation and part of the professional community it represents. As such I as reader, together with others in this community, have ownership of the Institute. Equally, the words professional and profession are not as prolific as others, as indicated in the following word cloud created from the contents of the annual report:

emphasise its professionalising role in this instance, it is merely implied with the use of the words 'training', 'CPD', and 'qualifications' which also indicate the importance of professional development to the construction of the PR profession by the CIPR as observed in section 6.2.1. Similarly, whilst there is a lot of text contained on the page, everything is written succinctly, usually not in full sentences and when the cursor is hovered over the words they indicate that these words form a link to another part of the website. Consequently, the homepage is more of a vehicle to get readers to other parts of the website. All these aspects of the homepage indicate that the reader is already familiar with the organisation and that the site is a resource used either by those who are already members or at least those that are aware of the CIPR. As such, the impression from the homepage is almost that of an 'intranet' resource for members rather than a public facing 'internet' site to represent PR or provide a clear idea of what PR is and the role the CIPR plays in that industry.

The language use, navigation of the site and subjects chosen to appear on that frontline portal to the organisation all again construct the PR professional as a member of collective; someone who is part of this professional constituency as represented by the CIPR. This professional PR practitioner is part of a community not only by virtue of his/her individual investment in the organisation but also because the organisation invests in them too; continually highlighting the centrality of its membership to the functioning and success of the organisation and providing this membership with specialist information and resources that will only be pertinent to this professional community.

6.2.2.1 A distinct group: the CIPR AGM

This conclusion to the section on the discourse of closure and control focuses on analysis of a CIPR event, observed as part of the data collection, which serves to neatly summarise the evocation of traditional professionalising goals as discussed so far in this chapter. The CIPR national Annual General Meeting (AGM) is an event that takes place in the Institute's headquarters at Russell Square, central London. Like other AGMs, this event serves as an opportunity for the CIPR to review what it has achieved in the past year and

by virtue of this, what will be the priorities for the organisation in the year ahead. All CIPR members are welcome to attend the event and encouraged to do so through the regular email newsletter.

A mixture of visual and verbal practices employed in this event indicated a high level of formality. Before entering the room where the event was being held, all attendees had to sign into the event and indicate their membership grade. Once in the room, the event was laid out in theatre style facing a top table of speakers with official name cards in front of them. The CIPR logo, the speaker's level of membership and title in the CIPR structure were displayed on the cards. Formal talk also prevailed, with the current President of the Institute providing a formal welcome and reading out of apologies followed by an explanation of the agenda for the rest of the event. Furthermore, items on the agenda, such as the financial reports and annual report, had to be verbally approved and second-ed. The President also declared when the meeting was officially over. The most significant factor was that everyone in attendance was a senior practitioner. In fact, a lot of the people at the AGM were too old to be employed in PR anymore, but represented the older generation of practitioners that had been involved with the CIPR's inception, before it gained chartered status.

In this context the discourse of closure and control, as exemplified by the ideals of individual investment and membership of a collective, was also drawn on at various occasions during the AGM, where every speaker ended their presentation with personal thanks to various individuals that had given up time and energy to help. Likewise, one senior practitioner ended his presentation by imploring the audience at the event to be advocates of the CIPR and encourage membership. To make his point, he commented that people always ask him why he wins so many awards and he answers 'because I enter them'. He goes on to explain that he thinks the same logic applies to the CIPR contending that when asked 'why did you become a member' his response is 'because somebody asked me'. This verbal exchange constructs the professional body as a positive force once an

individual engages with the Institute and suggests a role for members to play in encouraging other practitioners into the professional fold.

These elements of the event constructed the PR profession as a distinct and established occupational group. This community has a geographical focus in the form of the CIPR headquarters, based in a grand Georgian building overlooking a Victorian park in the centre of London. This collective was also indicated by the practice of signing in and providing membership designation. This body also has a hierarchy indicated by the event layout where senior figureheads for the organisation sat in a designated area to report on the progress made that year to the seated audience. This occupational grouping has its own form of governance and codes embodied in artefacts for the event such as the annual report and verbally performed in the approval process of these various organisational documents. This group also has a history and longevity suggested by the attendance of the older generation of PR practitioners at the event. All constructed the PR profession as an elite and established body of committed practitioners, bolstered by formal procedures and codified practices. Overall, the notion of individual investment coupled with an emphasis on membership of a professional body are part of the discourse of closure and control drawn on by CIPR texts, attempting to secure the PR profession as a distinct unit and the PR professional as an active member of that collective.

6.2.3 Legitimacy and Power

The final element of professionalisation as discussed in the sociology of professions is the creation and maintenance of 'occupational power and authority' (Reed and Anthony 1992, p.597) by virtue of closing and controlling the boundaries of the profession. The discourse of power and authority/legitimacy is drawn on in CIPR texts in their construction of the professional PR practitioner when discussion centres on issues of credibility and affirmation of best practice. In turn, they indicate that membership of the professional body bestows on the individual practitioner credibility and an affirmation that their standards of work are of a high quality.

The discourse of power and legitimacy proliferates CIPR texts, particularly when emphasising what it is that the CIPR as a professional body provides for the PR sector. For example, Stacey comments: ‘...our members survey that we did recently, the number one reason for joining the Institute is credibility.’ (Stacey). Therefore, the CIPR is considered by these senior figures within the organisation as a significant external symbol that PR professionals can use to demonstrate credibility in the social world. As Penny observes: ‘I would see the CIPR as a badge of the profession and I think that if anybody’s serious about PR, they should be members of their professional body...’ (Penny).

Senior members of the CIPR also argue that this ‘badge’ of credibility is further legitimised by the professional body’s chartered status. As Kate explains, the chartership constitutes another form of badge to the profession itself that PR practitioners can then draw on for their individual external credibility:

‘...us getting Chartered Practitioner, us getting chartered status was the third party recognition that we were now of a standing – recognition by the Privy Council and the government that we’re actually a profession.’
(Kate)

As a result, Fiona emphasises how gaining the charter gives PR parity with other disciplines: ‘...I think the achievement of chartered status just said ‘we’ve arrived along with other professions’. So that I think is a real mark of quality...’ (Fiona). So within this discursive construction, a PR professional is a credible, and thus powerful and legitimate, individual according to his/her association with the chartered professional body.

This discourse of power and legitimacy is also reflected in the CIPR’s website homepage. First impressions of the site are influenced by elements such as colour palette and organisation of information. The CIPR homepage utilises a pallid colour scheme, which predominantly consists of shades of grey and white with the only flash of colour provided by the red CIPR logo and the use of a few images as text ultimately dominates the page. Information on the homepage is organised into a series of boxes and links to other elements of

the website. These elements of the site construct the organisation as quite sombre, conservative and corporate and evoke the look of a website for other professional service firms such as lawyers and accountants and other professional bodies such as ICAEW or RICS²⁷.

This suggests that the CIPR's use of the discourse of power and legitimacy is in line with those of the traditional professions where the credible and powerful status is conveyed via an elite, conservative, business-like organisation, backed by third-party endorsement as represented by the chartered status. Credibility is the cornerstone of professional status as it legitimises the occupational unit's societal position and claims to elite standing. The CIPR texts here draw on the discourse of legitimacy and power to construct the PR professional as someone who is legitimised by virtue of his/her association with the chartered body.

Aiding in this discourse of profession as an individual's external badge of credibility, is the further affirmation awards schemes implemented by the professional body, provide for PR practitioners. Texts generated from interviews with senior CIPR members construct the awards schemes as a way in which practitioners can further legitimise their professional status as the quality of their work is assessed by other industry peers. As Kate highlights:

‘...one of the things that we do well is our awards programmes and again it's linked into raising standards, because they're highlighting campaigns where PR's made a difference and done very well...’ (Kate)

Consequently, award success as judged by a chartered professional body is also another means by which the professional PR practitioner can demonstrate credibility to others.

The importance of awards as a benchmark for credibility is also continually referred to in the CIPR's annual report. Awards as a fundamental signifier of

²⁷ Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors respectively.

professionalism is demonstrated, purely in the fact that two pages of a 17-page report were devoted to them (the only other element in the report which has the same space given to it is the 'Professional Development' section). Labelled 'Recognising Excellence' (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.11), the section focuses on those people that had achieved a status that the CIPR considers meaningful. The role the Institute feels it has in this 'recognition of excellence' is indicated in the excerpt below:

The aim of the Institute is to help each member achieve excellence in all of their professional endeavours. In 2010, those who undertook training, participated in events, passed exams, received awards, achieved chartered status and moved up to a new membership grade each took another step in the achievement of excellence (ibid)

Hence, as well as performing the role of external badge of credibility and affirmation of best practice, the text constructs awards as a way of benchmarking professional development, individual commitment, and standards.

6.2.3.1 Awards as marker of credibility: CIPR Wales event

A CIPR event that exemplifies the discourse of legitimacy and power at work is a Wales event attended as one of a series of breakfast seminars called 'Rise and Shine', that on this occasion was focusing on the topic 'How to write great entries for PRide 2011', a CIPR regional annual awards scheme. The event involved four practitioners presenting work that they had submitted (and been successful in winning) for previous PRide awards competitions.

This event was clearly constructed as a CIPR event thanks to the formal presentation of artefacts, where the environment in which the event took place was 'cut off' from the rest of the venue with the use of 'pop-up' banners with the CIPR logo emblazoned across them and a table with CIPR literature on the PRide awards for attendees to take away. Additionally, the presentation part of the event was formally started and ended by a senior representative of the CIPR in Wales and the majority of the presenters used powerpoint slides with the CIPR logo featured.

As well as suggesting an ownership of the environment, visual cues constructed this environment as one in which attendees would be encouraged to learn and share best practice. For instance, the banners surrounding the event featured the word CPD and the use of a star icon suggesting it could count as part of the formal professional development programme run by the CIPR. Together with words 'Improve' and 'Rise and Shine' (note the dual meaning of shine, part of the phrase to signal morning but also about doing well and demonstrating that to others – 'to shine') this event was constructed as a way for PR to come together as a community and share best practice and learn from one another.

The importance of receiving awards from the CIPR was also reflected in talk at this event, which centred on practitioners who had previously won awards presenting about their award winning campaigns. One speaker regarded a PRide award as a 'fantastic accolade to have'; this was re-iterated by the practitioner chairing the event who commented 'I know everyone here wants to win gold.' In fact, the importance of the award as a marker of credibility and performance outweighed the importance of sharing best practice. Although the event was titled 'how to write great entries for PRide 2011', no presenter gave advice as to how to construct the entry; instead they talked about the campaigns in detail and what they had achieved for their client or organisation. Similarly, the audience did not really question the presenters or hold them to account when invited to do so during the Q&A session. Consequently, although the visual cues around the event constructed it as part of the CPD programme, practitioners' presentations for the event indicated the event was actually an opportunity for them to demonstrate to one another their abilities in producing high quality work.

This event constructed a professional group through the use of artefacts that formed a physical boundary around the space these professional practitioners occupied. Within this arena, practitioners could demonstrate to one another their ability to be considered credible and legitimate by virtue of winning awards from the professional body. Similarly, they could then share their experiences under the auspices of learning and development to encourage

other practitioners to enter the awards and in turn achieve that same credible professional status. The good attendance at the event coupled with the fact that the CIPR thought it worth putting on suggest the importance of awards to practitioners in constructing a legitimate professional status.

Therefore, elements such as awards schemes and the charter as drawn on in a range of CIPR texts, attempt to construct the professional PR practitioner as someone of legitimate and powerful status. This professional, who by virtue of their association with the CIPR and engagement with their awards schemes can demonstrate their legitimacy not only to themselves and to industry peers, but also to the wider social world.

6.2.4 A PR professional: continually learning, committed, and credible

Texts generated from interviews with senior members of the CIPR combined with analysis of CIPR reports, website materials and observations of some of their events, highlight the CIPR as participating in the (re)production of professional discourses in their attempts to construct the PR profession and the PR professional. Whilst external credibility and legitimacy are more obvious motivators for aligning with the CIPR, these senior figures emphasise personal development, learning and individual engagement and commitment to themselves and the professional body as elements PR practitioners should strive to embody in order to be considered professional. These discourses echo traditional elements in the 'professional project' (Larson, 1977) where the aim is to monopolise and control the occupational community, and in doing so harness societal legitimacy and power. These elements of professionalisation are reflected in the discursive construction of the PR profession and PR professional provided in these CIPR texts where discourses of credentialism such as the Chartered Practitioner status dominate the professional subject position; discourses focusing on closure and control serve to secure a distinct occupational community; and discourses of legitimacy and power aim to stabilise the subject positions as valid. Despite these constructions of professional subjectivities, the same CIPR texts also

suggest problems in establishing professionalising discourses, which the next section will explore.

6.3 Problems of establishing professional discourses

Whilst the texts analysed in the first section of this chapter draw on a combination of discourses concerning credentialism, closure and control and legitimacy and power as central tenets of the professional PR practitioner subject position, they also identify challenges in trying to establish these discourses and give them sufficient meaning so that they are compelling identity resources for individuals. This section will outline the main problems as generated from a variety of CIPR texts, namely: the ambiguity of PR, relying on individuals' commitment, and problems in engaging with the world beyond the PR industry.

6.3.1 The vulnerability of closure and control

Two particular challenges to the discursive construction of the professional subject position as a member of a distinct occupational community emerge from CIPR texts. The first is the ambiguity concerning what constitutes PR and the second is the potential over-reliance on individual engagement for the CIPR's version of profession to succeed.

Abbott (1988) centred his notion of professionalisation on the ability of occupations to control certain 'jurisdictions', the most fundamental being the work itself. Whilst senior members of the CIPR draw on the discourse of credentialism in their construction of the professional and profession, they also present the work of PR as far too ambiguous and open to facilitate effective closure and control and thus this 'jurisdictional domain' is an inherent challenge for the PR professional body. The challenges of establishing professional discourses for PR when the job itself is ambiguous in definition were outlined on numerous occasions. For instance, in answer to the question, do you think PR is a profession, Selena responds: 'Again it comes back to what is PR?' (Selena). Coupled with the ambiguity of PR is

recognition of its diversity, which aids in its nebulous status. This diversity is a challenge to the professional body for the industry when it is aiming to encompass the entire PR sector under one professional organisation. Stacey observes the challenge in being an umbrella organisation for an ambiguous and diverse sector in the following comment:

‘You know the challenge we have as well...this profession has everything in it, if you’re a public affairs person, if you’re a lobbyist, if you’re an internal communicator, an external communicator, whether you’re sector, whether you’re national, whether you’re government, whether you’re commercial – we represent everybody and that’s a really difficult challenge because you have to try somehow to support all of those constituencies and that’s hard.’ (Stacey)

The implications of this ambiguity and diversity surrounding PR are explored by Kate when she talks about the organisation’s struggle to know exactly who their members might be:

‘...we still don’t know exactly what a PR practitioner is called, they’re called very many different names, so trying to describe ourselves is still quite difficult, getting the profession understood is difficult...’ (Kate)

Consequently, whilst these senior members of the CIPR engage in a construction of the PR profession and PR professional as part of a defined occupational group, they also admit that the definitional edges of this community are currently blurred because the sector they are seeking to professionalise is too ambiguous and diverse in nature.

Furthermore, the status of the CIPR as a professional body is reflected in the ambiguity and diversity the notion of PR potentially represents, as Justin indicates:

‘[The CIPR’s status] is hugely varied [...] I think some people have no interest at all in the CIPR, wouldn’t want to have any interest in the CIPR, just not interested in that kind of thing. I think for some people, a lot of sole practitioners [...] they see it as a vital part of their friend support network. So I think you can’t describe it, you know, get ten people from the PR industry to describe the CIPR and you get ten different descriptions of what it is and what it does and of its value ranging from vital to irrelevant and I think it’s ever thus and always will be.’ (Justin)

Justin suggests that because PR can cover a myriad of roles, there is in turn a myriad of opinions concerning the CIPR and the role it is or should be playing in the industry. Therefore, recognition of the ambiguity of PR brings with it a central challenge for the likes of the CIPR to establish professional discourses. Despite their construction of a professional grouping consisting of committed members, without a clear definition of what constitutes PR and who are (and who are not) PR practitioners, it is very difficult to delineate what 'professional' PR and 'professional' PR practitioners constitute. Therein the attempts to secure the professional PR practitioner as part of a distinct professional group are undermined.

Another challenge to establishing discursive closure and control of the occupation identified in talk with senior members of the CIPR was the reliance of the organisation on individuals making a commitment to the Institute so that it could provide all its services. On numerous occasions, these senior members highlighted instances where members were not always so engaged such as Daniel commenting on turnout at the council elections, '...be interesting to see what kind of turnout we get this year. Poor probably – 600-700 people vote usually. Shocking, shocking.' An observation by Fiona also inadvertently questions the level of commitment members give to the professional body despite it being a central element in the construction of the professional community. Fiona explains that the subscription to *PR Week* that comes with membership to the CIPR is an attractive prospect for practitioners:

'...we do still focus on *PR Week* being the main vehicle to get in touch with PR practitioners and because if you asked our members what do they value most about their CIPR membership, almost exclusively they say 'getting *PR Week* free' so you know we have to recognise that it's almost like the in-house magazine of the industry.' (Fiona)

However, if the majority of members consider the free copy of *PR Week* they receive as the most valued element of their CIPR membership, it would suggest that many are not committed to the professional values as constructed by the senior members of the organisation in their accounts of the profession and the PR professional. These members are not rating training courses, qualifications, learning and development, or the chance to share best

practice as the most valued aspects of membership – instead it is the trade publication for the sector that is highlighted – a publication that is independent of the CIPR and thus could be subscribed to without CIPR membership.²⁸

Even some of the senior members of the CIPR concede that they themselves have not fully committed to all the principles of professionalisation as constructed by the organisation. For instance, when discussing their involvement with the Chartered Practitioner scheme Selena comments that ‘...I think I probably will do [it] when I’ve got time, but I honestly think, at the very senior level, it’s very difficult to find time to do things like that for yourself...’ (Selena) and Penny argues, ‘...I still believe in the importance of it and I would encourage anybody to do it because I believe in it .I just don’t, that’s just not me, and I may still do it but not at the moment, just out of sheer ability to find the time.’ (Penny). So the emphasis on the credentialism discourse in the construction of the PR professional by senior members of the CIPR is nullified by them also highlighting how it competes with their other work demands and thus finding the time to commit is a challenge. This would suggest that constructing the PR professional as someone who is prepared to commit and engage with the professional body has its risks because there will be other competing demands from other areas of practitioners’ lives.

Analysis of the CIPR annual report would indicate that the challenge to gain individual commitment is also reflected in the challenge to get practitioners to engage in continual training and development. One example is a section of the report headed “Member journey” (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.6). This terminology was also used in texts produced in interviews with CIPR personnel about the journey a member should take, via professional development, all the way up to individual chartered status. However, in the report, it is used to highlight membership by grade (grade is decided by how many years of membership a practitioner has pursued). As a result, what this hides is how many of these members are actually pursuing the continuous

²⁸ The subscription to *PR Week* could also be made at a competitive rate when compared with CIPR membership fees. A year’s subscription to *PR Week* costs £155 (Haymarket, 2012), whilst full membership to the CIPR costs £210 (CIPR, 2012e).

professional development programme despite professional development being a central tenet in the construction of the professional PR practitioner.

When numbers are used to indicate levels of professional development they are not that promising with the report citing that a total of 1,200 delegates attended workshops in the year; nearly 500 members attended briefings; and 85 members attended 'Professionals' events. This is a sum total of 1,785 out of a total membership of 9,445 or 19% of the membership engaging with professional development activities. This figure could also be even less significant when considered that this tally of attendance does not account for repeat visits, i.e. one practitioner going to a workshop and a briefing and an event, or that a practitioner does not have to be a member to attend CIPR events. The report also states that "almost a tenth of members are currently registered for CPD" (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.8), this number is not reflective of the importance placed on professional development in the construction of the profession and the PR professional by senior figures at the CIPR.

The ambiguity surrounding PR and the organisation's reliance on individual commitment render the discursive construction of closure and control of a professional community vulnerable. Without a strong conceptualisation of what constitutes PR work and in turn a PR practitioner, the ability to construct those that are in the professional grouping and those that are not is much more difficult. Similarly, the reliance on individual investment to construct the professional community is precarious because there are other factors that can challenge that commitment with current indications that higher levels of individual investment are required.

These elements also have implications for the construction of a body of knowledge and in particular the discourse of credentialism, where the ambiguity surrounding PR and the precariousness of individual commitment can de-stabilise that discourse as meaningful. Although the professional PR practitioner is constructed as someone who continually learns and develop, this construction is acutely challenged by the ambiguity concerning what

constitutes PR and the knowledge required to carry out the job. Similarly, if individual investment in the profession and the practitioner is challenged, it too would suggest that investment in professional development can be equally precarious. The following section will identify one further set of challenges to the professionalising discourses that serve to undermine the discourse of legitimacy and power that was read within CIPR texts.

6.3.2 The limitations of legitimacy and power

This section explores another challenge that has curtailed the discourse of legitimacy and power circulating in CIPR texts. In particular, texts produced in interviews with senior members of the CIPR as well as documents produced by the professional body highlight the organisation's struggle to engage outside the PR industry. The structure of the organisation and its need to represent its membership combined with external competition and limited relationships with the media means engaging beyond the PR industry is an issue despite the CIPR's recognition of the important role engagement plays in constructing the professional as valued and legitimate.

Whilst the first section of this chapter highlighted discourses of legitimacy and power as central to the professional subject position, texts produced in interviews with senior members of the CIPR recognise that in order to demonstrate legitimacy, the body needs to do more to engage externally. Short 'off-the-cuff' remarks such as, 'I think unfortunately PR is not very good at doing PR for itself...' (Penny) and 'Yeah cobblers' children have the worst shoes and all that!' (Daniel) indicate awareness that the PR occupation has been slow to project its professional status to wider communities. Scott demonstrates an understanding of the implications of wider engagement for individual identity when he states that the CIPR's, '...got to get out there, it's got to tell its story...the rebuttals have to be harder, it's got to be on the front foot, it's just got to create a profile for the industry, which helps the members and allows the members to go to dinner parties and be comfortable saying, 'oh I work in the public relations industry.'" (Scott)

Despite recognising the importance of engaging in external relations, these senior figures within the CIPR also highlight both internal and external challenges to fulfilling this goal. Internal to the professional body, senior members of the CIPR highlight that the structural make-up of the organisation makes it a challenge to provide regular spokespeople for the organisation:

‘...council members, board members and ultimately the President, there’s a huge turnover so they’re not around for terribly long [...] so it’s quite difficult to promote the President of the CIPR. If you promote the permanent staff, so that would be the Chief Executive and formerly the Director General, they are not necessarily representative of the profession as a whole...So what happens is that you get kind of self appointed spokespeople who are used by the media every now and again...’ (Justin)

Another internal issue that impacts on the CIPR’s ability to engage externally is being mindful of the varied membership the body represents. Senior members of the CIPR highlight that when there have been opportunities to act as a spokesperson for the profession, they have had to contend with differing opinions from various factions of the industry they represent such as Rachel who comments:

‘I had to tread a very thin line with that interview because I couldn’t be political and say whether I was for or against it, all I could talk about was the potential impact on our membership and the way I performed that was I went to the members and said, ‘what do you think?’ and I got 30 sides of A4 to tell me what they thought. And so the words that came out of my mouth were not from my head, they were from my members.’ (Rachel)

Consequently, because the CIPR represents a multitude of sectors and constituencies/stakeholders under the banner of ‘PR’, it struggles to provide a unified voice of the profession when opportunities arise to engage externally.

There are also issues external to the professional body that have an impact on its ability to connect with the wider world. Scott draws attention to the fact that ‘...there are lots of different bodies representing PR,’ and the resultant competition between them, ‘means that PR therefore doesn’t get the voice that it should get at the top table’ such as ‘the Creative Britain forum.’ Kate emphasises the difficulty in getting even the PR trade press to cover the CIPR

arguing that, ‘...ultimately *PR Week* is about who’s moving job, who’s winning new clients, so it’s very hard to even get it into your own trade paper’ making it ‘difficult beyond your initial media, unless you can piggy-back on something that’s a national issue...’ (Kate). Staying on the topic of media engagement, Justin considers the symbiotic relationship between PR and journalism as another challenge:

‘[I] always wonder a little bit about journalists who seek to use people like Max Clifford as the voice of the PR industry ‘cos I think he’s a deliberate denigration of the industry actually [...] to be honest I think there are a lot of journalists who are quite happy to ply their trade with publicists who have no professional standards and no regard for ethics or the truth ...[but] it suits the perception of the media to describe PR people in that way I think sometimes.’ (Justin)

Consequently, Justin highlights that PR struggles to find an outlet for a more credible voice for the profession as it suits journalism to continue to denigrate the industry because of PR’s power to control journalists’ sources of information.

The CIPR’s struggle to engage with the media and compete with others for political recognition also emerges from the annual report, which provides an account to its members of what the organisation has done in that year on their behalf. The need to be proactive as a body is indicated with a section titled ‘New Ways of Engaging’ (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p. 15). As the title suggests this element of the report focuses on the new ways of engaging that the CIPR has developed in the year. However, on closer inspection all these are quite internal in scope – developments such as roundtables, CIPR TV and the website – not what they’ve done in the media, in fact media coverage is nowhere to be seen in the report. So engagement is only framed here as engaging with membership or those interested in the CIPR, not with others even within the PR community let alone outside this realm. Consequently, the level of external engagement by the organisation is still quite internal in scope.

Moreover, awareness of the need to engage more externally is reflected in the CIPR’s launch of a series of focus groups, one of which was participated in as

part of the data collection for this research. In recruiting individuals to the focus groups the CIPR issued the following statement:

The CIPR wants to examine what direction the next ten years of public relations practice in the UK and internationally might take. The practical conclusions and guidance drawn from this study will shape the CIPR's policy offer in the coming years and add content to the agenda of the CIPR's Research and Development Unit. (CIPR, 2011)

The main task during the focus group was to envisage various scenarios for the future of PR around some key factors outlined at the start of the sessions such as profitability, reputation, impact, and skill. However, as an observer and participant in the group, it quickly became clear that practitioners were struggling to construct a professional future for the PR industry. When practitioners did provide an account of the most likely scenarios for the future of PR, most were very negative. For instance, my group explored the idea that PR will keep up with changes in communications in the future, opting in the end to state that the most likely scenario would be that PR would keep up with the changes but struggle to highlight its role in proceedings. Similarly, with regards to the notion that PR be considered essential to democracy in the future, focus group participants contended that the most likely scenario would be that PR could be made the next scapegoat in a similar *News of the World* phone hacking scandal. What emerged from this talk was an industry that was not very positive about its future.

The move to provide more negative visions of the future may indicate that practitioners do not currently consider the CIPR as a central driving force in ensuring some of the changes to the industry materialise. This was also reflected in comments made by practitioners about the event itself. Whilst all welcomed the fact that the event signalled that the CIPR had realised it needed to do more at a policy level, it was also felt that the exercise essentially raised the same issues for the industry that would have been raised a few years ago and hence there was a feeling that PR was experiencing 'groundhog day':

It was interesting to take part to see what the CIPR is looking at. Although I didn't think it raised any new issues particularly –

'professionalism', public trust, the need for better PR for PR, measurement and evaluation, the impact of social media etc., are all oft-discussed topics. The interesting thing for me will be to see what action plan comes of the exercise and how the CIPR reacts. (Focus group participant)

The fact that this practitioner felt the same issues keep being discussed is indicative of some of the problems the CIPR texts are experiencing in stabilising their professional discourse.

Ultimately, CIPR texts attempt to construct the PR profession and PR professional as legitimate and powerful. However, the challenges of engaging beyond the PR industry also make the discursive construction of the profession as legitimate inherently insecure. In particular, without engaging beyond the confines of the PR industry that wider legitimacy and power is missing. A classic example of this discursive struggle to establish legitimacy and power for the occupational grouping is typified in the observations of a CIPR focus group on the future of PR and the incumbent policy mandate for the Institute. The feeling of repetitiveness that emerged from participants' talk about the event suggests the CIPR needs to do more to construct a legitimate and meaningful future direction for this occupational grouping. Without this direction and construction of an established professional future, the closure, control and legitimacy of the construction of the occupational group will continue to struggle to be secured. With this in mind, the next section explores how CIPR texts conceive of the future of the organisation and the PR profession and how those future visions are reflective of the discursive struggles the Institute is currently encountering.

6.4 Future for PR profession

This section focuses on texts produced in interviews with senior members of the CIPR that focus on their future aspirations. These members had to consider whether they could conceive of a future in which PR practitioners will have to be a member of the body in order to practice as well as the direction in which they hoped to take the Chartered Practitioner status in years to come.

Arguably, because the CIPR had gained chartered status for the organisation and then chartered status for individual members, it may be logical that the next milestone would be to move to a situation where membership would be mandatory to practice PR. However, views on this potential future path for the profession were mixed. A minority did want to close the barriers to entry for PR such as Selena who states, 'I think there should be something about you need to be registered as a practitioner.' (Selena) or Kate who observes, '...ideally yes we would like it to be that to practice you would need to be a member and then we would have everybody [...] and you'd be a lot stronger and a lot more powerful voice.' (Kate). However, the majority of senior members' talk was not for pursuing barriers to entry as a goal either because, 'that ship has sailed and I'm not sure I'd want it...' (Rachel) or by drawing on the notion of the ever-changing environment for PR to highlight that flexibility was the key in the future and this would not be achievable if barriers to entry were in place:

'... I think that because the communications profession covers such a wide area [...] if we start deciding, 'well public relations is this closed little bit' then the risk is it sort of atrophies it, it doesn't become innovative, it doesn't become flexible... If the internet were invented today and we would say 'well the internet's got nothing to do with us because [...] we're over here and we're all Chartered Practitioners,' it would be the death of the industry...so that's why I'm against closing it.' (Scott)

Fiona could not even conceive of closing the barriers to entry as she considered it so far in the future that it was not worth focusing on now: '... we're not at that stage with PR, we're at the stage of trying to justify why a couple of hundred quid is worth investing for the resources that CIPR can give you including this building.' (Fiona) Consequently, Fiona indicates that her expectations for the future are more measured, currently hoping to justify the membership fee to current and future members, rather than looking for stipulations of membership in order to practice.

As the newest development in the professionalisation project for the CIPR, the creation of a Chartered Practitioner status for individuals was drawn on in these texts as a central facet of the construction of a professional subject

position for the future and fundamental to the progress of the Institute. Daniel talks about the status as needing to be, ‘...at the forefront of what we do – I think it is the vanguard’ whilst Rachel labels the credential as, ‘...the calling card for achieving the highest level of practice in public relations...’ (Rachel). Fiona also constructs the individual chartered status as a symbol of achieving the professional subject position:

‘...part of our journey to chartered status was to have the higher grade of membership that would be earned through a qualifications route that Chartered Practitioner offers and so we have that and I think that that is one of the hallmarks of a profession...’ (Fiona)

As well as being important to the future developments of the CIPR, the interviewees also construct the Chartered Practitioner status as a means of ‘borrowing’ some of the status from other individually chartered professions which emerges most clearly in Stacey’s talk on the subject:

‘...there’s chartered marketers, there’s chartered accountants, there’s chartered surveyors, and now there’s chartered PR people, now that’s just a huge development I think in how people perceive us. In fact I was talking to a Chartered Practitioner at an event on Friday and she said that internally in her organisation, there is more respect for what she does because she’s been through this process. Because people see ‘chartered – what like a chartered accountant, or a chartered, you know – it’s a rigorous process’ so she said it’s actually helped tremendously in her own organisation....I think that people who I talk to about it are genuinely, you know like, ‘Wow! So PR people are chartered now!’ And I think that’s the thing that gets them...’(Stacey)

‘Borrowing’ some of the status from other chartered professions, gives this important development in the credentials of the profession and the future direction of the CIPR further credibility that has already been established in other professional domains such as accountancy, surveying and engineering. Whilst chartership conveys third-party endorsement from the Privy Council and state as observed by Kate in section 6.2.3, it also conveys a further level of endorsement as it suggests parity with other occupations that have also been awarded chartered status.

As an important element in the future construction of the PR profession and professional, whilst also demonstrating the potential to borrow credibility from

other individually chartered professions, the Chartered Practitioner scheme is constructed as a way in which the CIPR can achieve its future aims to create an industry where being a CIPR member will be significantly beneficial to operating in PR, compared to not being a CIPR member. For example, Stacey's comment constructs the Chartered Practitioner status as symbolic of the future goal that people with this accreditation will be preferred over those that do not:

'...we don't have a master plan that says, 'everyone must be chartered'; what we hope is that the value of the designation and the practitioners that have gone through the process will be clear that people who are working with practitioners and want to appoint practitioners will look at chartered practitioners because they believe that, they've been through a particular process that's of value.' (Stacey)

Scott also constructs the credential of Chartered Practitioner as a central facet for the future survival of the Institute:

'...one of the things I think we have to face is that we don't know where the future of membership bodies are, so we may not have members per se, but we may have Chartered Practitioners. So you know it may not be oh you sign up and you get a piece of paper but you can join as an associate or trainee, you get chartered status and then you're a full member.' (Scott)

What emerges from Scott's account is a future where professional PR practitioners will no longer join and become a member of the CIPR but will join in order to go through the learning and development process to attain the status of Chartered Practitioner.

The construction of the Chartered Practitioner scheme as a central tenet of the future PR profession parallels the current discourses drawn on to construct the PR professional where the emphasis is on credentialism, closure and control, and legitimacy and power as symbolised by the Chartered Practitioner status, which will result in a future scenario where membership of the CIPR is directly advantageous to career development. Thus, closure and control of the professional community is attempted by constructing the Chartered Practitioner status as the pinnacle of achievement. However, this future aspiration is vulnerable to the same challenges as

identified in the preceding section such as ambiguity, reliance on individual investment and lack of external engagement. This potential for caution is also indicated in the current state of the scheme, which is much smaller in its accomplishments so far – only 36 chartered practitioners exist since the creation of the status in 2008.²⁹ So in order to meet its future aspirations, the professional body will need to do more to overcome some of the discursive struggles in their construction of a meaningful professional subject position.

6.5 Professionalisation as individual identity project

This chapter has sought to detail the attempts to create and fix meanings around a notion of profession and professional and the various challenges faced in achieving this goal. The subject position of professional PR practitioner read within CIPR texts is someone who: places importance on continual learning and development; is prepared to take individual responsibility to professionalise; can be considered as credible and maintaining high standards of work as a result of his/her association with the CIPR. The Chartered Practitioner status is a way in which to further solidify this construction by providing a development route for PR practitioners to take from the beginning to the end of their careers.

However, this construction of the PR profession and professional is in a state of 'becoming' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) where attempts to secure professional subject positions have to be continually reframed and re-shaped in light of the challenges CIPR is experiencing in establishing its professional construct. Whilst the CIPR texts attempt to stabilise meaning regarding PR professional and PR profession, these meanings are only temporary and continually shift, particularly when undermined by other challenges the Institute is encountering.

²⁹ This figure is correct at the time of writing. This number constitutes a very small percentage of the total number of members of the CIPR (9,500) and estimate of total numbers working in the industry (61,600).

One of the biggest challenges emerges when considering the CIPR's construction of the future direction of the profession. The predominant aim for the organisation – the creation of a scenario in which CIPR members will be considered better practitioners compared to non-CIPR members – centres on the construction of professional PR practitioner as committed to professional development and prepared to individually invest in the profession. It assumes that individuals will be willing to commit to these professional discourses and attain this status without any support from more institutional requirements, such as a mandate to be a member to practice in PR. Therefore, if the future for the CIPR centres on its ability to establish continual learning and individual investment as central tenets of being a PR professional, then it suggests the professionalisation of the industry is going to have to focus on notions of individual identity in order to achieve its goals. This recognition of 'the individual' is indicated in the CIPR Annual Report's opening line for the section on 'Our Members' (CIPR Annual Report, 2011, p.5):

Members are the lifeblood of the Institute. Regardless of who pays for the membership fee, whether employer or individual, the decision to join the CIPR is a personal one. It represents a desire to prioritise professional development, to belong to the profession's chartered body and to help shape the future of Public Relations. (ibid)

However, in order to be of importance to the individual, the CIPR is going to have to establish resources that aid them in their construction of their professional identities and, as such, those resources are going to have to provide meaningful subject positions for practitioners and for the wider world's perception of them. Texts produced by the CIPR would suggest that there are still some challenges to achieving that goal. This would indicate that the power effects of the discourses circulating in CIPR texts are limited with regards resonating with those that practice PR.

The difficulties the CIPR has experienced in establishing its professional discourses are indicative of the fact that it is still a young organisation that has only had chartered status for six years. As such the key tenets to gaining the Royal Charter, such as training programmes and assessment procedures for qualifications have been implemented successfully and thus have been the

emphasis for the organisation. Nevertheless, what remains problematic is that these credentials are currently based on a weak delineation of the knowledge and work-task base involved in PR. The sociology of professions highlights that, in order to establish a professional status; a body of knowledge (abstract and accredited) is the base from which to start: "...the possession of scarce knowledge and skills is, indeed, the principal basis on which modern professions claim social recognition and economic rewards." (Larson, 1977, p.136). Establishing a body of knowledge allows credentials that can serve to create barriers to entering the professional occupation, this chapter demonstrates that the CIPR has established credentials but the knowledge and work-task base underpinning them remain ambiguous, which may be the reason why senior members of the CIPR are largely not in favour of a future for the profession where practitioners have to achieve certain qualifications in order to operate in the sector. This scenario is difficult to realise if the body of knowledge on which credentialism and closure of the occupation depends, remains opaque. The next chapter will focus on the work/task jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988) providing more insights from practitioners' perspective as to the ambiguity that currently pervades that domain. The chapter will also focus on the power effects of the discourses circulating in CIPR texts in their bid for professionalisation, asking to what degree these discourses are salient to PR practitioners' identity construction, and if not, what alternative professional identities are constructed.

CHAPTER 7: IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

7.1 Introduction

The first findings chapter examined the professional discourses within CIPR texts as well as the challenges encountered in establishing these discourses. With this in mind, this chapter focuses on the salience of the professional subject position as constructed in CIPR texts in PR practitioners' identity construction. As such, the core questions driving this chapter are: what discursive referents inform PR practitioners' identity construction and how does the professional body inform this process?

The sociology of professions literature argues that the work conducted by an occupation is the baseline for the professionalisation process (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Talk about PR work is therefore the starting point of this chapter. Based on analysis of the texts produced in interviews with a variety of practitioners,³⁰ ambiguity emerges as the pervading experience of working in PR where practitioners struggle to define what they do for a living, define the skill needed to operate in PR, and are acutely aware of their pejorative image. Against this ambiguous backdrop, practitioners draw on an array of discourses to construct themselves as professional. Some of the texts draw on CIPR discourses to construct their professional identities, whilst others draw on alternative discourses or distancing techniques to construct a different professional subject position. The chapter concludes that the combination of the ambiguity surrounding PR work, the problems experienced by the CIPR in establishing professional discourses, and the alternate professional identities that proliferate practitioners' talk on the subject, leaves the professional status of PR within an inner sanctum where only peers and those working directly with the PR industry consider it professional.

³⁰ Please see Appendix D for full profiles of each interviewee.

7.2 Ambiguity: the search for an identity

To provide a framework for outlining the data, this section takes inspiration from researchers such as Parker (2000) and Watson (1994) that in response to Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence* have used the motif 'in search of', in order to explore the discursive construction of PR work by practitioners. Three main areas of ambiguity are highlighted in practitioners' identity work about their job/role: the first 'PR in search of itself', focuses on PR practitioners' awareness of the difficulty in defining PR work coupled with the challenges it has encountered to prove what the work achieves. The second, 'PR in search of skill' focuses on how practitioners struggle to establish whether the job requires innate skill or the acquisition of abstract knowledge. The third section, 'PR in search of legitimacy' highlights how PR practitioners are acutely aware of their negative image and inferior status compared with other corporate professionals. The section concludes that this search exacerbates problems in establishing professional discourses whilst also indicating that practitioners are in search of vital identity resources.

7.2.1 PR in search of itself

The abiding feature of working in PR that emerged from all the texts was the difficulty experienced by PR practitioners in defining what it is they do for a living. Initial comments such as, 'I think for ages I really struggled to define it....' (May, junior consultant, Taff PR) or, 'Oh god it's really difficult!' (Lily, Mid-level consultant, Wilkin PR) were frequent, whilst others, such as senior consultant Alexander, comment on the breadth and diversity of the industry, which means it 'covers a huge spectrum of things really...' which means PR constitutes, 'just anything really isn't it?' (Alexander, Taff PR). Talk such as this suggests that PR practitioners construct PR work as inherently fluid and precarious where it can mean 'anything' and as a result means nothing when asked to provide a definition.

Despite the challenge, when practitioners attempt to secure what constitutes PR, three approaches emerge; one is to provide very specific definitions

based around what the practitioner does on a day-to-day basis such as Helen who explains, ‘... ‘I work for [client name]’ or I work for brands that they know...’ (Helen, senior consultant, Taff PR) or Joanne who focuses on her field of consumer PR where it’s all about, ‘...trying to get your brand in the eyes of consumers and get some attention from the media...’ (Joanne, junior consultant, Wilkin PR). Meanwhile, senior consultant James is adamant about providing typologies of PR:

‘Do you mean a service that is provided primarily to drive sales of a product, or do you mean something that is more around creating an idea and influencing more strategic perception?’ So I don’t think I’d ever define PR as one thing....’ (James, senior consultant, Wilkin PR)

Practitioners defining themselves by what they do unsurprisingly results in a myriad of definitions that are heavily dependent on the experiences people have had in terms of what sectors they’ve worked in, what level of seniority they have operated in, or whether they’ve been a consultant, in-house or freelance practitioner.

The second approach to constructing a definition for PR is to provide more generalised accounts of what working in PR ultimately means, where practitioners echo industry definitions. The current official CIPR definition of public relations is the following:

Public relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. (CIPR, 2012d)

The importance of reputation similarly emerges in practitioners’ talk, who feel PR simply, ‘...boils down to two words: reputation management...’ (Emily, junior consultant, Wilkin PR) or is, ‘...about protecting and enhancing the reputation of an organisation’ (Bruce, In-house) or ‘explaining the importance of reputation’ (Ben, In-house). Echoes of the CIPR official definition are very clear within Moira’s talk about what PR constitutes:

‘...well I used to love the ‘it’s about reputation – what you say, what you do, what others say about you’ and I think that’s very helpful and I still think that’s good enough actually and I like then the sort of follow up bit about you know strategic two-way communication, it’s planned and sustained, so I think that’s good enough.’ (Moir, In-house)

This approach to defining their job indicates that some of the professional discourse constructed in CIPR texts is salient to practitioners’ identity construction. In this context, the practitioners using this definition of PR demonstrate awareness of being part of a community which has some areas of commonality – despite the variety of sectors and forms of PR practitioners could be operating in – one concept that joins all those together is the end goal of managing reputation in some capacity.

A third approach to defining PR was to begin with an assumption that the imagined person the practitioner is explaining his/her job to, understands how advertising operates. As such, the practitioner aims to provide a definition of PR by highlighting where it differs from the baseline understanding of advertising. In this context, some practitioners focus their definitions on the financial implications of how space in the media is attained in PR compared to advertising such as senior consultant Anita, who explains, ‘...marketing is paid for whereas PR...you’re getting coverage for free.’ (Anita, Wilkin PR) or Adeline, who suggests, ‘...we try to get journalists to write good stuff about our clients, without having to pay them for it.’ (Adeline, senior consultant, Wilkin PR). Using this kind of benchmark to define PR, other practitioners such as Joanne, highlight how PR operates by: ‘...getting subtle messages across to consumers,’ where, ‘they’re absorbing messages without them realising it ...’ (Joanne, Wilkin PR). Mid-level consultant Lily takes up this point when she talks about how she shows the difference in influence between advertising and PR to the new intake of junior staff to the agency:

‘...if I tell you ‘I’m a great PR professional’, that’s advertising; if Isabel tells you ‘oh Lily’s a great PR professional’, that’s PR [...] it’s about someone else giving you the credentials to say that you’re a great product or a great service, so it’s about influencing people whose opinions matter...’ (Lily, Wilkin PR)

Emphasising the basic differences between advertising and PR is a rather simplistic way to define the industry that also employs a very narrow focus on PR work as only constituting relations with media channels, when there are other areas PR can operate in. Nevertheless, it is considered a salient way of ensuring understanding because it's working with the discipline of advertising that practitioners assume has a more stable definition and in turn aiming to provide some stability in defining PR by highlighting the basic tenets of where the two disciplines differ: namely in payment of media space and subtlety of message presentation. However, in taking this approach PR is not defined on its own terms and a very limited definition is presented. As such, practitioners highlight that this definition can be reserved for 'layperson' accounts of the industry, or for situations when a quick and basic understanding of PR is all that is required e.g. in social situations with family members or in conversations in contrived circumstances such as on a journey in a taxi cab.

Ultimately, these three approaches to defining what PR constitutes highlight that the job is inherently ambiguous and difficult to clearly outline, meaning that a variety of accounts of the job are instead provided with an admission by all that even these are not sufficient to encapsulate the job. In turn, practitioners find the job of explaining what they do for a living as particularly arduous. Consequently, the seemingly simple task of explaining what your job entails is a source of frustration for practitioners as they strive to articulate a definition that adequately reflects their daily-lived experiences.

In tandem with a lack of coherent definition of what the job constitutes is further ambiguity surrounding what PR work achieves. Alvesson (1993; 2011) observes that knowledge work is characterised by the fact that the results are very difficult to evaluate and this too is a central feature of practitioners' identity work regarding PR. Some practitioners present PR as intangible in terms of outcome where the work is 'invisible' or 'behind-the-scenes' (Melissa, In-house) and as a result practitioners such as Adeline can feel like they're simply 'throwing things into the ether' (Adeline, Wilkin PR). Others talk about how the output is also dependent on other parties and thus is very precarious and out of the control of the practitioner. One clear example of this is

practitioners' talk regarding media coverage of PR materials. Junior consultant Rose expresses exasperation with clients that assume press releases will gain media coverage: '...you just want to explain to them 'well I'm not the Editor of this paper and I can't just make them put this in'...' (Rose, Taff PR). Similarly, junior consultant Joanne provides a detailed account of how a lot of work and energy does not necessarily equate to media coverage:

'So last week we were selling in our [client] news story, I had a senior journalist at *The Express* emailing me all day about it [...] it was definitely going to go in and the next day it just didn't appear. And stuff like that is such a pain 'cos you know you've spent so much effort on it and it's very frustrating but you can't do anything about it, all you can do the next day is follow up the journalist and ask why, and she said she didn't know so! [laughs]' (Joanne, Wilkin PR)

Talk such as this highlights how the success or failure of PR work is contingent on other people who may often not have the same aims as the PR practitioner. This power imbalance is particularly felt in PR's relationship with journalism where PR is attempting to influence the news agenda.

This intangibility and lack of control is put into sharp relief when PR practitioners attempt to quantify the outcomes of their work. Current insecurity centres on the void left behind by the widespread discrediting and abandonment of a measurement and evaluation tool used in PR called the Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE). Derived from the times when PR largely meant dealing with newspapers, AVE is a formula that calculates how much it would cost to buy the editorial space achieved in the news article if it was priced at that newspaper's advertising rate. Whilst this is being increasingly discredited as a measurement tool (because media outlets have proliferated beyond print and because the measurement says nothing about the impact, tone or messages in said newspaper article), no other widely adopted industry standard metrics have come along to fill the gap as yet.

As a result of this situation, practitioners highlight the growing need for some form of metric to evaluate PR's impact as the 'on-going biggest challenge within the industry....' (Richard, junior consultant, Wilkin PR), where the 'so what?' factor' presides and questions like 'who read that and what's the

impact of that?' (Lily, Wilkin PR) are the ones that matter. Consequently, practitioners are feeling the pressure to demonstrate, in a format that is meaningful to those outside of the industry, what PR achieves, but without a standardised metric that goal is very difficult to operationalise, and practitioners are only too aware of the power of 'the number' for clients or employers because the '...the bean counters love it, they absolutely do...' (Minny, In-house). The importance of numbers to the client also emerges from Natalie's discussion of her experiences with AVE:

'...when [client]'s new head of communications arrived he was like 'ok we did this campaign, can you put an AVE number on it, because I need to justify it in front of my boss that I'm not wasting him money' because effectively in a trading company, PR is just a cost, it's not value creating, or if they don't see a number, they don't consider it value creating.' (Natalie, mid-level consultant, Wilkin PR)

Moreover, the pressure felt by practitioners to provide statistical proof of impact is exacerbated by the fact that related disciplines such as advertising and marketing have been more adept in this capacity. Practitioners commented on how rational, scientific, and importantly statistical/financial discourses are prevalent in these similar disciplines leaving PR behind. As mid-level consultant Chloe explains:

'...if [a client] did another piece of marketing activity they could say, 'right we want X number to sign up to our newsletter by sending out this e-bulletin' ...Whereas with PR we can say that it's had an impact but we can't say how it has...' (Chloe, Taff PR)

Within this context, PR practitioners feel they are perceived by clients or other members of the organisation they work for, or even other media agencies as 'poorer relations' to the other communications disciplines such as marketing and advertising. As a practitioner with both in-house and consultancy experience, Ruby's account of her interactions with other disciplines highlights how this perception of PR as 'lesser' than others has an implication for the attention that is paid to PR as well as the financial investment:

'...seeing it as a bit of an afterthought, you know, the junior marketing manager gets to manage it 'cos 'it's just PR' and 'it's pointless', 'it's just something we gotta put budget behind'. And in-house as well, to get budgets to do something you'd have to go and make a business case

to the marketing department to get money from them to allow you to implement a project and they just couldn't get past, 'well how's it going to increase sales?' [...] '...if you can't show me how many sales you're gonna deliver against that activity I can't give you the money'. And so that used to really, really be a constant source of frustration.' (Ruby, senior consultant, Taff PR)

The financial implication of PR being seen as the subordinate discipline to the other areas of communications has had other effects on practitioners such as consultant Lily, who explains how the term 'PR' has been eradicated all together in some client relationships she is involved in an attempt to nullify any preconceptions that PR does not deserve some investment:

'...so we've stopped calling ourselves PR and we call ourselves, we do 'initiative amplification work' for [client], because when they give us the budget and they think 'oh 120 grand for PR that's an awful lot of money' [...] so yes we've had to defend ourselves and actually say 'we're not really PR, we are PR, but we're doing PR plus' and so we kind of changed the words that we use to describe what we did just to get internal buy-in.' (Lily, Wilkin PR)

Therefore, the lack of standard metrics to prove what PR achieves has far-reaching implications in three main areas: firstly, it heightens the pressure for practitioners to justify what exactly they achieve; secondly, it results in practitioners considering their external status to be perceived as lower than other communications disciplines; and thirdly, it means some practitioners have to redefine notions of PR, to ensure that the words 'public relations' are no longer mentioned. The awareness of PR's standing with other disciplines may be felt more acutely by consultants because they will work with, or in competition against, other advertising agencies, so the battle between the disciplines comes to the fore. In contrast, as senior in-house practitioners were interviewed, they may cover a wider array of communications disciplines in their role so the differences between them may not be experienced so acutely for them.

The lack of demonstrable proof not only has an impact on practitioners' working lives but also on how they construct their own sense of worth. In-house practitioner Moira provides a vivid account of how the inability to

provide PR metrics can leave practitioners questioning what demonstrable role they play in an organisation:

‘And I remember someone saying to me, at the height of all this coverage, someone saying ‘do you know I’ve noticed the [organisation Moira works for] has been in the news quite a bit recently, I wonder if that’s just a coincidence?’ [laughs] ‘Agggh!’ And this was just a small organisation and we were really transparent with everything we did, we consulted on everything, and this person wasn’t stupid. I was thinking ‘oh right I may as well go home because they’ve got no idea this was planned effort that we’re now seeing the results of, just no idea’.’
(Moira, In-house)

Members of her own organisation had not recognised her input in generating media coverage despite communications within the company on the topic; leaving Moira questioning how she demonstrates the value she brings to her employer. This insecurity concerning the personal value of PR work was presented by some practitioners as an almost crisis of faith as to whether PR achieves anything at all. Senior consultant Adam provided one particularly prophetic summation of this experience:

‘I always remember one of my meetings with an actuarial firm where I walked in and this...terrifying guy said to me, ‘to be honest, before you go through this presentation, I basically want you just to tell me how you’re gonna get me a 2 plus million pound deal – I don’t really want to hear another word from you if it doesn’t specifically address that point’...and that’s the most extreme example but I often quote that when we talk about measurement because I think that does make people nervous in a macro sense of how do we really justify this? And then sometimes more deeply does this really work? ‘Cos if you haven’t measured your product in an outcome way, you’ve just measured outputs...so you get these bits of coverage but suddenly you sort of realise that you’re religiously relying on faith, that this does anything and sometimes I get a crisis of faith, I suddenly think ‘is this completely pointless?’ which at some level I can live with, but it’s ten years of my life...so you think ‘Jesus!’” (Adam, Wilkin PR)

As one of the few practitioners to articulate the problems of metrics in such an emphatic manner, Adam suggests that the difficulty concerning establishing a metric may be an indication of deeper problems with PR and whether it can ever demonstrate value or impact. Whilst Adam’s might be a more extreme account, all the texts constructed measurement and evaluation as one of the biggest frustrations and worries of practitioners’ daily working lives, which is

something being felt more acutely on account of the current economic downturn.

Overall, ambiguity pervades practitioners' identity work concerning the basic tenets of their jobs. Work is where practitioners struggle to provide salient definitions of what they do for a living or prove the financial impact of their work via standardised metrics. A key facet of an occupational identity is 'what does the occupation do?' This is also the cornerstone from which an occupational group can seek to professionalise. Without any established discourses surrounding what constitute PR work and its value, practitioners are left in search of 'non-work' discursive resources that could enable them to construct their professional identities.

7.2.2 PR in search of skill

Incumbent with an occupation that struggles to define what it is and what it achieves is an occupation that has a veritable 'pick and mix' bag of personality traits and abilities as requirements to do the job. Common skill sets mentioned by practitioners revolve, rather unsurprisingly, around communications, with the ultimate skill considered as writing. It is deemed the 'number one' skill by junior consultant Emily, whilst in-house practitioner Ben is, '... always pleased when I've got somebody working for me that I know I can trust to write something really well...'. The skill's necessity is also neatly summed up in Russell's dictum: 'If you can write you can do PR.' (Russell, In-house).

Nevertheless, other skills were also considered important that do not centre on communications directly, such as creativity, in order to, '...imagine things and come up with good ideas...' (Janet, In-house) as well as in, '...being able to define what the problem is in a creative way.' (Adeline, Wilkin PR). On a similar note, 'strategic thinking' was emphasised, particularly by those in more senior positions, such as the in-house practitioners, and explained as the need to be able to look ahead: 'It is about anticipating who you need to speak to or get to, or deal with, in order to have a relatively smooth path towards

what you're trying to do.' (Melissa, In-house). Meanwhile, other practitioners highlighted a need, 'to understand people...' (Richard, Wilkin PR) and have a, '...natural curiosity about people, the way things work and the world' (Adeline, Wilkin PR) in order to harness relationships, as fundamental to success as a PR practitioner. Therefore, the core skill base for PR work as constructed in these texts is focused on abilities to communicate in various forms and approach tasks in an innovative fashion.

Although practitioners could easily articulate the skills or personality traits required to be a good PR practitioner, the notion that the demands of a life in PR required a formal body of abstract knowledge to be acquired and utilised was debated. Some practitioners indicated that PR centres on innate skill and just 'having' certain abilities such as Russell's comment: 'If you can't write, I can't teach you...' (Russell, In-house). Alternatively, senior consultant Elizabeth talks about PR skill as something to 'pick up' rather than be formally educated in:

'...I don't actually think PR's something difficult to pick up and learn if you've got the right sort of temperament and ability to pick stuff up then I think anyone can do it.' (Elizabeth, Wilkin PR)

In comparison, others highlighted a level of abstraction in 'professional' skill sets, often with reference to a PR qualification. For example, in reference to a postgraduate qualification undertaken, Ben talks about an intellectual base for the course:

'I really felt quite enthusiastic that it was the right level of recognition...that there was this intellectual substance stuff...that it wasn't just like doing a correspondence course or self learning or something, it was actually something quite solid...' (Ben, In-house)

Meanwhile senior consultant Sam presents the case for 'professional' knowledge as necessary, but in the wider field of business rather than PR:

'I think a business education is really important [...] most of the difficult issues I think that clients tend to face, tend to have a business or financial component attached to them – they've sourced supplies from the wrong area, or financially they're not doing well, or they've just bought a company – so not understanding the operational and

technical elements of some issues which can come out can be quite a road block I think for some people, especially as you get more senior in your career and you might be working with director level people in organisations...' (Sam, Wilkin PR)

Consequently, the ambiguity surrounding what PR constitutes and what it achieves, begets further ambiguity as to what a PR practitioner needs to know in order to do the job – do they need abstract PR qualifications or is it down to innate skill and learning on the job? As one senior manager, Spencer, neatly sums it up: '...I don't know whether its people who are naturally good at PR go into PR or you go into PR and become more like PR people.' (Spencer, Taff PR). If what constitutes PR and what PR achieves is a struggle to define, it is no surprise that the skill base to work in PR is similarly nebulous.

This questioning of the knowledge base of PR practitioners is brought into focus in texts regarding the challenges of dealing with new media channels. Practitioners were feeling the impact of the mainstream take up of social media on their working lives, such as mid-level consultant Louise who talks about how it's 'changing the shape of the industry' and 'moving faster' meaning practitioners are needing to 'keep up' with this pace of social media's progression. In-house practitioner Minny is similarly unequivocal about the effect of social media on the skill set of the modern PR practitioner:

'I...think the world has changed; everybody can be a communicator, and they couldn't even five years ago, but now everybody can [...] and that changes the rules a little bit.' (Minny, In-house)

Most practitioners signalled they had embraced the need to keep up with change such as Helen when she talks about the conversations she's currently having with clients to encourage them to move into digital communications:

'...we need to look at online, I know it's nice for you to have a big sexy cutting that you can put in your book in the reception but this is gonna meet your objectives a lot better...' (Helen, Taff PR)

Practitioners also demonstrated an awareness that this new medium was going to have wider ramifications for how practitioners worked and how they conceived of themselves. One example is an account from Minny of the rather dramatic consequences of not developing social media skills:

'... [practitioners] forget that they can alienate themselves very quickly in the modern marketplace by saying things as a colleague who shall remain nameless said when I did a pitch on International Social Media... 'oh a load of rubbish this social media stuff, flash in a pan, give me a good piece in the FT any day', he's an ex-journalist, he's now an ex-head of PR at [organisation] after 25 years – gone, three days notice.' (Minny, In-house)

Similarly, Bruce by drawing on constructs of the 'older' and 'younger' practitioner highlights that the developments in social media have created a distinction between those that have embraced the new technology and those that have not:

'I feel I sit in, not necessarily on my own, but in a bit of a niche and that niche being that you have a lot of older practitioners who are very much 'right well we write the press release, we talk to journalists, we get the news in the newspaper' and then there's younger practitioners which is 'we send out a tweet and we write a little message'. I think I'm in a bit of an enviable position in that I know both and so I think that's where you want to be [...] I feel that I am in the position where I have that background, that training, that experience, qualifications, but then also that younger side of things to see what's coming up. And that's where the profession is going to need to be at and neither of the other role models is really going to suit in the future.' (Bruce, In-house)

Against this discursive backdrop of an ever-changing industry, moving at a faster pace and requiring development of new skills and knowledge for the practitioner, is a battle between PR and other communications disciplines to claim social media as their territory of expertise. Elizabeth talks about the challenges her colleagues have experienced in this context:

'I think there's some sort of understanding with some of our clients that [social media] should be done by specialist community managers in a digital place and it's like, actually that's a huge part of what we do, we have a digital team here who do community management....'
(Elizabeth, Wilkin PR)

The rise of social media and the increasing pressure to move with the changes is putting more emphasis on reflexivity for the PR industry in terms of what it's here to do and how it should do it. In turn, for the identities of PR practitioners, the ambiguity continues because the foundations of what constitutes PR and how PR work is conducted is felt to be continually shifting

to meet these new technological and cultural developments. PR has to continually respond to these shifts whilst also battling other similar disciplines to be considered 'the expert' in these new terrains.

Ultimately, the ambiguity surrounding PR work renders practitioners also in search of skill where ambiguity pervades again. Another central building block of a profession is the establishment of a body of abstract knowledge (Abbott, 1988), usually certified and accredited (Johnson, 1972). What emerges from these texts is that PR's weakness is in identifying abstract skill sets that need to be learned by all PR practitioners in order to operate in the industry. Nevertheless, PR's strength lies in the 'mystique' of people either having the innate ability to do the job or not, which centres on the fact that, as its name suggests, one's ability to build relationships with a variety of people is at the root to success in the job. The new 'expert territory' of social media is where these strengths and weaknesses are currently being played out; where the ambiguity surrounding the skill set of PR means that the occupation can 'move in' on this new media channel and claim it as their own area of 'mystical' expertise, but equally, it can be seen as another area in which no abstract 'professional' knowledge is required to be considered said 'expert'.

7.2.3 PR in search of a positive image and credible status

The ambiguity surrounding what PR constitutes, what it achieves and the skill sets required to do the job, threaten the credibility and legitimacy of its professional status, a further risk to this position is practitioners' accounts of PR's pejorative image. Practitioners were all too aware of the fact that they had a negative general image, often citing the likes of Alistair Campbell or Max Clifford as major representatives of the industry:

'....so many bad people have been in the public eye who are in PR...like Max Clifford, I know everyone holds him up but I think he's horrendous and that's what people think of when they think of PR...'
(Helen, Taff PR)

'I think one of the frustrating things...is this constant thing we keep coming across that people think you're a spin doctor and...they think

that you're just there as some mini version of Alistair Campbell or something like that, it's just nonsense.' (Ben, In-house)

When it came to the reputation of PR, practitioners constructed a clear dichotomy of 'spin' versus 'fluff' with regards how they were perceived by the wider world. The leitmotiv of 'the spin doctor' runs throughout the texts:

'I do still think there's this view of PR that it is about spin and it is about only telling the truth when it suits...' (Harriet, mid-level consultant, Taff PR)

'...one of my boyfriends used to ring me up...I used to pick up the phone and say 'Good Morning Communications' and he'd say 'you mean Corporate Lies'.' (Minnie, In-house)

'...quite often when I've joined an organisation people have said 'so you're here to lie for us then?'...' (Russell, In-house)

As well as spin, the image of 'fluff' and 'froth' also pepper practitioners' accounts of how others see them:

'...a lot of them [friends] are just like 'ok yeah PR - what parties, going out is that what it's all about?'' (Rose, Taff PR)

'...what really annoys me is when you say to somebody who's really not clued up, 'I'm in PR' and they think you stand outside a bar giving out flyers, because that's what PR's are in Ibiza and places. And it's like 'really?!' (Ruby, Taff PR)

These constructions of PR as spin or fluff leaves practitioners in a paradox where they are struggling to conceive of what they do whilst those outside the PR industry have very clear (and pejorative) notions of what being a PR practitioner means.

As well as this wider perception of PR in general, practitioners present themselves as aware that they're not considered as credible as other professions, particularly similarly corporate ones such as law and accountancy. Consultant Lily draws on this comparison between PR and other professional services when discussing frustrations with clients:

'I often feel that as PR consultants we're not respected or treated the same as maybe a consultant in other industries, so professional services or lawyers [...] in the sense that your clients often think they

can get things for free and they don't realise that we're on the clock, where they think we're at their beck and call 24/7, and we are of course, client service is really important, but at the same time we don't just service one client, we're an agency, we service a number of clients and just the fact that they think they can get what they want, when they want, even if they haven't paid for it really makes me annoyed.' (Lily, Wilkin PR)

In-house practitioner Moira draws on a particular situation at work that also serves to emphasise how her professional standing was considered in relation to others:

'...when I first joined the [organisation name], they wouldn't pay for professional membership because PR wasn't a profession was it? And they only paid for lawyers and I ended up having to put a business case that we were a profession too and by the end of it they paid for me [...] so I did turn them round over time. But at the beginning it was 'don't be daft – you're not a lawyer – we're not paying for anything'.' (Moira, In-house)

These texts demonstrate that PR practitioners feel they are not treated in an equal fashion to other professional service disciplines and are therefore not considered as legitimate as others that provide similar business services. Therefore, together with a general pejorative image, this is a similarly negative account of PR's standing amongst other corporate services. Whilst this perception may not be as extreme as 'spin' and 'fluff', it is not as legitimate as 'law' or 'accounting'.

In sum, the ambiguity of PR, the inability to prove its value and the vagueness concerning its knowledge base present challenges to the construction of the occupation as 'professional' and this is further problematised by PR's pejorative image. It may be that this pejorative image has been able to be established because practitioners have struggled to construct and secure notions of what PR constitutes, what it achieves and what skill it requires that could serve to counter this current negative construction that practitioners perceive so acutely in their accounts of their working lives.

7.3 In search of an identity...

Overall, ambiguity is the overarching feature of PR: it is difficult to define, a struggle to measure and evaluate its impact, a challenge to distinguish innate skill from abstract knowledge in order to do the job, and a problem to provide any counter image from the pejorative reputations of 'spin' or 'fluff'. Ambiguity is nothing new to the sociology of professions where Alvesson (2001; 2004; 2011) considers it a key facet of his definition of knowledge work and can be seen in the main elements of the job such as its knowledge base, function it performs and evaluation of results (Alvesson, 1993; 2001; 2011). However, in this context, the ambiguity surrounding PR has two major implications, firstly in establishing the construction of the occupation as a profession and secondly in practitioners ability to secure professional identities. For the first implication, the pervading ambiguity in PR means that some of the foundational elements from which the CIPR constructs its membership as a profession are missing. The texts from interviews with practitioners indicate it is a struggle to construct what PR constitutes, what it achieves, and its knowledge base. These are fundamental baselines from which the CIPR seeks to construct the profession as closed and distinct (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). In particular, as outlined in Chapter 6 one of the pervading discourses circulating in CIPR texts is that of credentialism, this in turn relies on some form of delineation as to what is being credentialised. Consequently, the current opacity surrounding these aspects of PR work challenges the stability of this credentialism discourse in attempting to fix meaning as to what constitutes the PR profession and professional. Likewise, another predominant discourse emerging from CIPR texts concerned closure and control. Again, without clarity as to what PR work constitutes, the ability of this discourse to stabilise the meaning of profession and professional is limited. An additional battle is then to construct an alternative image to counter the pejorative version that currently proliferates.

For the second implication, these central tenets of the occupation could also be significant identity resources for practitioners to draw on in the process of identity construction. As a result of their slipperiness, the discursive anchor of

'PR work' is lacking. The following sections of this chapter will look at the various ways practitioners attempt to secure their professional identities, examining those texts that champion the professional body in their identity construction and those that draw on alternative professional discourses in the process of identity construction.

7.4 Identification with professional discourses: champions of the profession

This section examines the texts generated in interviews with practitioners that draw on the same discourses as those read in CIPR texts in their construction of the PR professional. These texts represent two main types of PR practitioner: the Chartered Practitioner and the early career practitioner. In level of seniority, these are at opposite ends of the spectrum with Chartered Practitioners needing to be senior within the organisations they work in and demonstrate certain levels of experience and insight in order to be accredited with the status. Meanwhile, the early career practitioners are just starting out but have grown up in an industry where the CIPR has always existed and has been more active. Nevertheless, these two types of practitioner draw on similar discourses to those circulating in CIPR texts to construct their individual professional identities. The section concludes by exploring other CIPR discourses that suggested salience with practitioners beyond the chartered practitioner or early career practitioner categories.

7.4.1 The Chartered Practitioner

Although a recent introduction by the CIPR, this status is constructed in texts produced by the professional body as the pinnacle of achievement and an indication that this person is an expert and leader in their field who is continually reflecting and learning. The texts produced in interviews with practitioners that had this status constructed the chartered designation as an identity resource in three main ways: as a marker to distinguish the individual from others; as a form of recognition that these practitioners were particularly skilled at what they do; and as a way in which to attain an equal status with

other similarly chartered or established professions such as surveyor, accountant, lawyer or doctor. However, these Chartered Practitioners were also quick to concede that there are still some teething problems with the scheme, which means its success as an identity resource is limited.

One way in which Chartered Practitioners talked about their status was as, '...a definite distinguishing mark.' (Bruce, In-house) that '...distinguishes me from a lot of people and obviously...gives me particular skills that people want to draw on...' (Ben, In-house). Consequently, in these texts, practitioners draw on their chartered status as a way in which to signal difference and superiority over other practitioners and thus stand out from peers. Incumbent with this discussion of chartership as a distinguishing feature was also the idea that in order to achieve this status the practitioner had undergone and survived a rigorous testing procedure. As Bruce contends in his explanation of attaining chartership as constituting a career highlight:

'...it was bloody difficult, the final interview was, I normally quite like interviews, I thrive off that type of slightly aggressive environment, *that* pushed me to my limit and I came out and I needed a drink...' (Bruce, In-house)

So in line with the construction of the Chartered Practitioner in CIPR texts as expert and leader in his/her field, these texts suggest Chartered Practitioners draw on the accreditation as a way in which to distinguish themselves as better from others in their industry.

Another way in which practitioners draw on the chartered status they have achieved is to highlight that this attainment marks the fact that they have been recognised by others as particularly skilled at what they do. In this respect, Russell emphasises how chartered status provided personal confirmation that what he had been doing in PR was recognised by his professional body as the correct way to do things:

'It's a validation and particularly now that I'm chartered, it's a validation of what I do. Some people say to me 'well you know this stuff cos you're paid to do it.' No it's not [...] And that was my main reason for going for chartered status was validation, actually have I just been

telling people stuff that I thought was kind of nice for years or was it true – has it been assessed?’ (Russell, In-house)

Meanwhile, Minny highlights how the external validation and recognition of the likes of chartered status in turn provides her with more credibility in her own organisation when dealing with people that may be sceptical of the value of PR:

‘...what I’ve found is that the letters [behind her name from professional bodies], I use on external emails, I don’t use them internally unless someone’s being arsey [...] or when I start a job I’m quite open and say ‘would it help you if I sent you a copy of my CV?’ ‘Cos they do this fishing thing and they’re not quite sure, particularly if they’ve not had somebody particularly very good before and what I’ve found is that they tend to think ‘oh actually yeah she, you know they’ve won this, they’ve won that’...’ (Minny, In-house)

Therefore, like the construction of the Chartered Practitioner in CIPR texts, the Chartered Practitioner status is drawn on by these individuals as both personal recognition and confirmation that they are good at what they do as well as a credible external marker or proof of their expertise.

The final way in which these texts drew on the chartered status was as a means by which to construct themselves as now of equal standing with other similarly chartered or established professionals such as surveyors, accountants, lawyers or doctors. Russell succinctly puts this when he contends: ‘I’m happy to say to a doctor or a lawyer or a chartered accountant ‘I am a Chartered Practitioner; I’m like you’...’ (Russell, In-house). Janet also highlights the value of chartered status as a way of constructing herself as equal to other professional identities she worked with in her organisation:

‘The reason I did my chartership was to prove to people I was just as qualified as them, so that was a bit of ‘I’m as good as you’ get recognition [...] I was very pleased when I got it and it was definitely on the bottom of my signature at [company name] ‘cos everybody had the equivalent on their signature there and I wanted to be treated as the same as them really.’ (Janet, In-house)

It is important to bear in mind that some of these individuals have operated in professional bodies or institutes for other industries and as such a professional status as validated by an external body or association is

something they will be very familiar with, and therefore may be more amenable to, than other practitioners. However, this has not been the case with all those interviewed. Consequently, in the case of Chartered Practitioner, the construction of this identity by CIPR texts as a credible leader in the field and the pinnacle of achievement within the professional body has been similarly constructed by practitioners as an identity resource in the construction of their professional identities.

Despite the fact that these Chartered Practitioners draw on the status as a valuable identity resource, they also indicate some remaining issues with the scheme that limits this identity's potential. Firstly, Chartered Practitioners emphasised that there is still a small number of practitioners that have the chartered status:

'...I don't know anybody else that I work with, or know in my network hardly, not anyone in my network I don't think is qualified.' (Janet, In-house)

'I would like them [the CIPR] to have more chartered members because if it ends up being just 27 people forever it ain't going anywhere.' (Russell, In-house)

Secondly, despite the construction of the status as providing personal satisfaction and an identity bolster, practitioners were also concerned that the designation had not achieved much external recognition. The 'marketplace' value of chartership had not yet been established. This is reflected in Melissa's assessment, as she indicates the limited value of chartered status when talking about its lack of recognition amongst the organisation she works for:

'I don't think my boss even knows I've got Chartered Practitioner and even if she did she probably wouldn't really think much of it.' (Melissa, In-house)

Bruce is particularly passionate when talking about this issue, identifying that, whilst there is personal value to the status, wider recognition needs to be generated by the CIPR soon:

'But I think the whole point was we were the pioneers who set this out, then at some point in future X it then becomes the gold standard. Well hopefully that will still happen, it's just a shame that in the last two years no progress, none has been made to get to point X. And that doesn't mean we're not gonna do it, but it's just a shame that after two years, having done the first stage, got the charter, got some people interested, got them to pay their money, got them chartered, that was it. And it's sort of like 'right we're done there'...I still have the same sense of pride and challenge that I did when I did that, that hasn't diminished, I just feel that the recognition for doing it and the industry worth is not yet there.' (Bruce, In-house)

Consequently, whilst these texts draw on the chartered status in the process of professional identity construction, without constructing the meaning of chartered status to the wider community the identity of Chartered Practitioner has limited value as an identity resource.

7.4.2 The early career practitioners

Another type of practitioner that drew on similar discourses to the CIPR in the construction of their professional identities was the early career PR practitioner. The discourse that came to prominence in these texts concerned credentialism, suggesting these practitioners understood this to be a core facet of the professional subject position. In addition, these texts, when talking about entrance into the industry, constructed PR as a discipline to aim for rather than something to 'fall into' which was a continual theme in more experienced practitioners' accounts of their careers. Within this context, these early career practitioners are also more positive about the current ambiguity surrounding the role, suggesting that it is merely a generational problem and thus these practitioners consider PR an aspirational career choice.

Senior members of the CIPR drew on the discourse of credentialism as central to the construction of the professional PR practitioner. Texts produced in interviews with early career PR practitioners indicate that this could also be an appealing discourse to this sector of the industry and particularly those that are members of the CIPR. As a journalist that has recently entered the PR industry, Chloe talks about her desire to have a PR qualification:

'I think I would like to get some sort of formal qualification, and because I have gone down it through the journalism route and it really paid off, and really helped my day-to-day experience, I think if I could equate that with some sort of PR qualification then yes I would like to do that...'
(Chloe, Taff PR)

Similarly, as someone that has previously completed a PR qualification, Harriet demonstrates that as a result of this experience she is still amenable to pursuing further qualifications in the future:

'Yeah I have thought about that recently because we did a training course where one of the other course participants, she did an online diploma, which I think was the equivalent of the postgrad that I've done and we were talking about whether it's worth doing it. So that got me thinking, 'oh I wonder whether it would be worth doing another qualification?' [...] I know it's not necessarily a requirement, it's not a legal requirement to do those courses but I think it would be nice to do one, to go up a step I guess...'
(Harriet, Taff PR)

Those practitioners that have done PR qualifications draw on them in the process of identity construction and in particular to demonstrate that they have skill and knowledge that others might not possess. Junior consultant Rose, highlights the confidence a qualification in PR gave her when entering the industry:

'I was like 'right I want to go to uni and I want to do something that can get me a job at the end of it' and I think public relations is quite specific so it's quite targeted and quite niche so it's quite nice that I had the chance to just completely study that...I think it was important for me to just get to grips with the PR world and the background information, I think without that and going into this job now I would just be completely thrown into the deep end.'
(Rose, Taff PR)

Therefore, the discourse of credentialism, which peppered CIPR texts in their construction of the professional subject position, is also a salient discourse to early career practitioners who have entered the industry at a time when the CIPR has featured more heavily and where the notion of a qualification in PR has proliferated much more. However, it should be noted that only the early career practitioners that are members of the professional body drew on this discourse in the identity construction process.

The impact of an active professional body on the construction of the profession for the early career cohort of practitioners is also apparent when these texts discuss how they entered PR as a career. Whilst accounts from the more experienced practitioners are littered with references to ‘falling into’ PR or getting into the industry ‘by accident’, early career practitioners present themselves as aiming to go into PR from the outset such as Rose:

‘Well a friend of my Mum’s, she used to do in-house PR and I found that quite interesting... So then I looked into courses at University and then got onto a Public and Media Relations course and really enjoyed it and since then I thought ‘ok I definitely want to do PR – it’s really interesting’...’ (Rose, Taff PR)

Whilst the likes of Rose and Harriet and Emily talk about aiming for PR as a career from an early stage as a result of qualifications in the discipline, other practitioners that did not pursue a PR degree also talked about actively pursuing PR and communications as a prospective job. As Elizabeth explains, this meant she, ‘...basically just did some research, came across PR and PR agencies, did a couple of internships and then got a job off the back of one of those...’ (Elizabeth, Wilkin PR), whilst Helen took a similar approach where she, ‘...met with the careers counsellor and did one of those little careers interviews where they match together your interests...’ (Helen, Taff PR). These accounts suggest that as the professionalisation project for PR has infiltrated degree courses, more people have started out on a career path to PR. Notably, a variety of CIPR members and non-members presented their career path as very definitely aimed towards PR, which would suggest the professional body is helping to change awareness and appreciation of the PR sector even if it cannot always persuade those new practitioners to then become members of the organisation at this stage. Consequently, the construction of PR as a distinct career path in these texts may also be indicative of a growing presence of PR where if people are more aware of the industry’s existence, they are also more aware of it as a potential career opportunity.

These early career practitioners also constructed PR as growing in presence in their talk regarding the ambiguity of PR as merely generational. This comes

to the fore when practitioners talk about family and friends' reactions to a job in PR. Many of these texts indicate a lack of understanding may be a generational phenomenon where younger family members or friends are more familiar with PR and therefore understand the practitioner's work role. Some texts emphasise how it is older members of the family that particularly struggle to comprehend PR such as Melanie's grandmother who refers to the work as 'HR' and despite frequent explanations to the contrary, '...it seems like she's got it and it seems like she does know and she just doesn't, you find out later...' (Melanie, very junior consultant, Wilkin PR). Alternatively Moira talks about her elderly aunty who once stated, '...well I really don't know what you do and I don't think it's worth doing...' (Moira, In-house). Other texts make more direct comparisons between older and younger generations and their comprehension of PR:

'I think it's more like my Mum's age... they might not understand it...I've never had someone my age ask me 'what is PR?' Maybe once or twice but not consistently 'tell me what you do on a day-to-day basis?'" (Anita, Wilkin PR)

'...if I was talking to an older person like my husband's grandparents for example, and I've tried to explain to them what I do, it's very difficult because they're not familiar with how things work and social media [...] But with peers it's easier I guess to describe.' (Louise, Taff PR)

Meanwhile consultant Lily asserts that by virtue of understanding PR better, the younger generation consider it as a more aspirational career:

'...all my cousins of my age and my friends completely get what I do and you know actually find it really interesting and always get jealous at times like 'oh you know your job sounds so amazing', whereas yeah if I compare that to my uncles, aunts, parents even grandparents, I think the level of understanding kind of dilutes, they're just not sure what it actually is...' (Lily, Wilkin PR)

The implications of these accounts of family and friends' perceptions of PR are both positive and negative for the construction of the professional subject position. There is the suggestion from these texts that a change in understanding is on the horizon. Whilst the older generation may struggle to conceive of what a job in PR constitutes, as the industry continues to grow and more of the younger generation populate jobs in these media industries,

there is in turn a growing understanding of the principles of PR. But this change is generational and therefore slow to establish. Nevertheless, drawing on the credentialism discourse combined with indications that PR is a credible career choice and is increasingly understood and considered aspirational by a younger generation would indicate that the professional subject position as constructed by the CIPR texts are meaningful to those early practitioners. What is equally compelling is that some of these early career practitioners have constructed the PR profession in this manner even though they may not be members of the CIPR, or may not be active members of the organisation, indicating there are opportunities for the professional body to provide more meaningful identity resources in the future.

7.4.3 Other compelling professional discourses

Whilst texts from both the Chartered Practitioners and early career practitioners constructed their professional identities by drawing on the same discourses as the CIPR texts, these constructions emerged largely from those texts provided by practitioners that are members of the professional body. Those practitioners that are not members of the Institute or do not consider themselves to be active members, still suggested that some other CIPR practices were meaningful or had the potential to be meaningful in their identity construction as a 'PR professional'.

An external badge of recognition that was favoured by both consultant and in-house practitioners, and by those that were closely aligned with the professional bodies, as well as those that were not, was the awards these organisations bestowed on the PR industry. Texts constructed these awards as a means by which to gain internal recognition within the industry and a resource to draw on in external validation of PR work. This means that the professional body awards are a powerful tool by which individuals could be constructed as professional not only by the industry but by those outside the world of PR.

Many practitioners commented on the fact that awards schemes organised by the professional bodies were valuable in providing industry recognition and peer validation: 'I think it's great having the PRide awards 'cos it's nice to get recognition in your own community...' (Louise, Taff PR). The importance of this peer validation is further emphasised in practitioners' accounts of how much time and energy is devoted to pursuing awards with May commenting that the thought at the back of the mind is always, '...oh yeah let's make sure that we do really well on this account because we can enter an award in it...' (May, Taff PR) whilst Richard argues that Wilkin PR, '...proactively invest a lot of time in preparing for awards and stuff like that....' (Richard, Wilkin PR).

However, industry recognition and peer validation were not the only benefits of the professional body awards schemes; the external recognition and validation these awards demonstrated were also presented as important to practitioners. For consultants, the awards were considered as a useful tool in demonstrating professionalism and expertise:

'I think if you can put, you're PRide award winners for this or that, I think that helps [...] because that does kinda give you an edge if you're up against agencies who haven't won awards and things.' (Ruby, Taff PR)

In-house practitioners highlight the value of winning industry awards within their own organisation. Moira provides a vivid account of the value of such awards when she talks about the change in how her PR team were perceived by the rest of the organisation as a result of the award win:

'...it was great to win the CIPR North West award and I think [...] the thing was it was such a difficult organisation and everything that I'd done had been so hard won that to have that recognition of 'do you know what – I'm flipping good and my department is flipping good and here is a glass award to tell you I'm quite good really, now please take me a bit more seriously'...So yeah that was really nice for all kinds of reasons really, it just felt kind of like a real justification of everything at that time.' (Moira, In-house)

Consequently, whilst also being an industry validation of skill and best practice, these awards are also constructed as external badges of professionalism and expertise that have value either to clients in a

consultancy context, or to the wider organisation for in-house practitioners. Nevertheless, a lot of the value of the awards schemes is in constructing the organisation (either the consultancy or the in-house PR team/department) as professional rather than necessarily drawn on by individual practitioners to construct their professional identities. However, involvement in awards schemes was often cited as an arena in which even the dis-engaged members of professional associations made a collective and individual commitment.

The final area in which there may be opportunities for the likes of the CIPR to become stronger identity resources for PR practitioners is if these professional bodies do more to be 'the voice of the PR profession' and to 'sell' their discursive construction of the PR professional to wider society. Practitioners continually presented an appetite for the professional bodies to represent PR, particularly in the media sphere such as senior consultant Kim who comments: '...it would be lovely to see the Chairman of the CIPR being interviewed on a PR issue rather than wheeling Max [Clifford] out in front of his house on GMTV or Daybreak or whatever.' (Kim, Taff PR). Others highlight that so far; the body has been too inward facing and therefore needs to tackle the external reputation of PR as well. Adeline mentions this when talking about her impressions of professional associations:

'I find them really introverted [...] I don't have any problem explaining to ourselves what we all do really well but I think there needs to be a bit more solidarity in actually showing people outside of the industry what the industry's about...[and] have a greater profile, almost a bigger vision, a better mission statement and just be out there more thinking about 'what can I do to elevate the industry?' rather than 'what dinner can I put on and charge 100 pounds a ticket for so we can keep our subscription going?' (Adeline, Wilkin PR)

Without this more external focus, in-house practitioner Bruce predicts a gloomy future for the professional bodies:

'...it's almost evolve or die, in the sense of yeah you can look inward all you like but until you start changing those perceptions and changing your offering, the actual base underlying number of members, financial situation isn't going to change, you've got to get more members in [...]

Until that changes, you can look in your navel as much as you like, nothing's going anywhere.' (Bruce, In-house)

These observations concerning the ability of professional bodies to engage with the world beyond the PR industry, leads some practitioners to highlight the irony that what PR as a profession is currently lacking is some PR in order to construct it as such to the wider world:

'...yeah PR-ing ourselves I think we don't do a good enough job of it, trying to counter, and de-bunk some of those myths that are out there, I think we just let them ride like 'well fine we'll live with it'. (Lily, Wilkin PR)

'...you've got to do it haven't you hell! They've got to treat themselves like I'm treating this organisation and looking at 'well where do we want to be business wise and how do I boost our reputation so that we're the place of choice' [...] it's a bit like plumber's house has leaky taps isn't it?' (Moir, In-house)

Whilst CIPR texts indicate that the body recognises there is more to be done to engage with wider society and aid in the external reputation of the PR profession, they do concede they have not been as proactive in this domain. Talking to frontline PR practitioners highlights that there is a real demand for the professional bodies to begin to turn their focus more externally and attempt to capitalise on PR's skills and utilise them for the benefit of the PR profession itself. As with the use of awards as a badge of professionalism and expertise, emphasising PR as a profession to the wider world may only render the professional bodies as a valuable identity resource at the organisational level. However, practitioners indicate that by attempting to construct meaningful discourses around PR to more external audiences, individual practitioners may then engage more with the professional bodies and in turn consider them a more fundamental source of identity construction.

7.4.4 Champions of the profession: credible, developing, award winning

Overall, this section has explored where and how the discourses drawn on in texts generated by the CIPR to construct 'the professional PR practitioner', have also been drawn on by frontline workers in their identity construction. Both Chartered Practitioners and early career practitioners (particularly CIPR

members) demonstrate that they too draw on the same discourses as the CIPR texts to construct themselves as professional. Nevertheless, in the case of the Chartered Practitioner more needs to be done to establish these discourses to the communities beyond the PR industry in order for this identity to be truly meaningful. In the case of the early career practitioners, whilst indications are that professional development is a salient discourse, it is only for those that are CIPR members. Other CIPR practices also suggest they are compelling in practitioners' identity construction process, namely, awards schemes as representative of best practice and an appetite for the body to do more to represent the industry to the wider world. These observations indicate that the construction of the professional PR practitioner by CIPR texts as credible, continually learning and award winning are also salient for practitioners' identity construction as professional. However, their salience is at varying degrees with some indications that more could be done by the CIPR to provide more meaningful professional discourses. Within this context, the concluding section of this chapter will look at how other practitioners construct alternative professional identities.

7.5 Dis-identification with professional discourses: alternative identities

Whilst some practitioners draw on CIPR discourses to construct their professional identities, dis-identification (Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Symon, 2005; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006; Brown and Humphreys, 2006; Learmonth, 2009; Costas and Fleming, 2009) was also apparent where the use of alternative discourses such as 'experience' and 'networks' emerge from the texts to counter the CIPR's subject position of the professional PR practitioner. In turn, these practitioners also construct engagement with the professional body as something that is the responsibility of the organisation they work for and the senior management that represent said employer. In doing so, they devolve their responsibility to engage with the CIPR to someone else. For the CIPR, the concern is that more practitioners that were interviewed drew on these discourses than those that championed the discourses read in CIPR texts.

7.5.1 Experience versus profession

In the process of identity construction, a primary discourse drawn on by practitioners was that of experience, particularly as a counter to the traditional notion of a professional as having distinct qualifications. Consultant Louise evokes this when she considers whether she would like to attain a PR qualification:

'I've thought about doing the diploma, but I've been put off by the fact that people say that it takes up every weekend 'cos I think it's far more down to experience than having somebody rubberstamp you to say that you've got a diploma. If you are achieving all of those things in your working life, why do you then have to write an essay about it to say that you've done it; you've done it you know.' (Louise, Taff PR)

Similarly, Helen, who has already attained a PR qualification in her early career, now places more emphasis on experience:

'Cos at the beginning it was really important to me, I wanted to say I'd done the CIPR diploma in public relations [...] whereas yeah not so much now maybe because, I've done it and working for so long, that's what clients tend to ask you is how long you've done something rather than you know what qualifications have you got?' (Helen, Taff PR)

Therefore texts such as these construct professionalism as embodied by the CIPR as merely a 'rubberstamp' for work being done, and thus place greater emphasis on gaining experience over gaining qualifications because qualifications are constructed here as a diversion from doing the work.

When asked what it means to be a PR professional, texts also frequently draw on the discourse of experience as the central facet in their constructs:

'I think yeah it's about experience; it's about media knowledge at its core that would make someone a professional to me more than anything else. They could even have not gone to university but if they've worked in PR for you know eight years or ten years and really know the media inside out then that to me is a professional...' (Anita, Wilkin PR)

'I think having worked in PR for six years I would feel confident that most people would see me as a PR professional and equally I see people who've worked in the industry for ten, fifteen years or my senior

managers as being even more qualified. I think it's the experience that gives you that qualification...yeah I don't really feel like it's an industry that currently needs or has a requirement that you've had formal training...' (Elizabeth, Wilkin PR)

Therefore, these texts privilege the years spent in PR over any formal training and qualification as a way in which to construct a professional subject position. Unlike the CIPR texts, the 'professional PR practitioner' in these texts is someone who has worked in the industry for many years rather than someone seeking to continually learn and develop through a structured CPD programme. Experience as a fundamental way in which to construct oneself as professional, particularly proliferates the talk of more senior practitioners, where unsurprisingly those in the earlier stages of their career are more amenable to development, learning and credentials in the construction of their professional identities as they do not yet have this necessary experience.

In this vein, when discussing the badges of professionalism that coincide with membership of the likes of the CIPR, consultant Louise goes so far as to consider them meaningless in comparison to having experience:

'I think we can use MCIPR after our name, but I never would. I saw somebody with it on their business card the other day and I just thought, 'god! I can't believe you've got that on your business cards'! [...] we all got the letter, you pay the fee and you get to use the letters, it's not like PhD, that represents work that you've done, you've earned that, whereas this is like yeah we've got a letter so you can now put MCIPR after your name [...] But yeah I found that funny that she put it on her business cards, it's like 'you're not fooling me love!' (laughs) I'm an MCIPR as well!' (Louise, Taff PR)

In turn, senior consultant Ruby constructs using the resources provided by professional associations as an identity bolster as indicative of insecurity rather than legitimacy:

'...I know I'm good at my job and I know what I can do a [...] I've got the letters after my name, but I don't feel the need to use them and I don't feel the need to have that industry backing always in people's faces to prove to people that I can do my job well. And in my experience I've found, it's people who can't do their jobs properly that feel the need to keep plugging it.' (Ruby, Taff PR)

Consequently, whilst the discourses circulating in CIPR texts concern credentialism, closure and control, and legitimacy and power to construct the professional subject position, those on the frontline of PR practice draw on the discourse of experience to construct alternate professional identities.

7.5.2 Networks versus profession

The other discourse drawn on by PR practitioners in attempting to construct a professional identity is by highlighting the networks of people practitioners can gain access to, even at junior levels, and thus the reflected status that gives them, i.e. if they are a trusted advisor to a President of a large company then that indicates they are professional. When discussing what they particularly like about working in PR, both Lily and Isabel as still fairly junior level consultants, highlight the access to powerful networks they both have as gratifying:

‘I love the fact that we can work with big blue chip clients and have access to their CEO or International President, I think god who am I and who are they? And I find it quite humbling that they will come to you for advice [...] on a normal job, a normal day, you wouldn't access these people whereas you've got their email address – I think that's quite powerful.’ (Lily, Wilkin PR)

‘...we're really fortunate in that one of my big clients is [name] and we'll have direct contact with the CEO of [client name] and the International President of [client name] and they're such massive global organisations that actually to go and sit next to them and have a meeting with them and be talking to them directly is actually really nice...’ (Isabel, Wilkin PR)

In a similar respect, in-house practitioners highlight that not only do they, and more junior members of their teams, have access to the senior level management in their organisations but how increasingly they too are in a position on that senior level management team:

‘...as you get more senior, you end up in the seat of power and knowing quite a lot about what goes on, so whilst you're not running the company you can have a very strong influence [...] it's a bit of a power behind the throne thing, it's quite nice, but obviously that doesn't come until you're higher up but I think as a junior PR person, sometimes you are dealing with very senior people who trust you

implicitly, 'did I do alright?' when you've taken them to an interview you know, I think that's quite nice.' (Janet, In-house)

'I think certainly increasingly you see that the head of PR or head of communications is on the management team or reporting to the chief executive, whereas in the past they were reporting into marketing or HR or wherever, so that's noticeable.' (Melissa, In-house)

The reflected glory of this access to networks provides practitioners with another discursive resource to construct their professional identities that counter the subject position of the PR professional constructed in CIPR texts. Consequently, these practitioner texts construct their professional status via association with senior networks rather than association with the professional body. The implication being that practitioners do not need to be a member of a professional association, following qualifications and committing to official codes of conduct when a senior manager of a global company employs them and trusts their advice. What emerges from these texts is that the CIPR's potential to be an external badge of credibility is less meaningful to identity construction when compared to the discursive potential of their association with powerful people.

7.5.3 Organisational responsibility to professional association

As well as providing alternative discourses to those constructed by traditional notions of profession, PR practitioners also devolve their individual responsibility to be associated with professional bodies. When asked if membership to professional associations is important or what kind of benefit is derived from membership, practitioners framed their response around the needs of the company rather than their individual requirements. Consultant Lily refers to Wilkin PR as, 'a big player in the industry' and as such if they were not associated with the professional body, 'it would look weird' (Lily, Wilkin PR) and similarly Harriet observes that because Taff PR is a, 'really long established agency' no engagement with the CIPR, 'would be very odd.' (Harriet, Taff PR). In her response to the question 'so do you think the membership is important to have?' senior consultant Kim identifies the

organisational value of the professional associations but highlights that it does not have much personal value:

‘I would want to say yes but I know you’re next question’s going to be why and I don’t really know! I suppose it does add some sort of professionalism to it, it’s just nice to be able to say, to put it on creds [credentials sent to clients when pitching for business] and to talk to people and say ‘yeah we are members of an accredited professional body...But in terms of an individual what I get out of it, I don’t use it as I should ...’ (Kim, Taff PR)

So the fact that the organisation is aligned with the professional associations is considered as important despite the fact that as individuals these practitioners do not construct the membership as valuable. Consequently, practitioners understand themselves as professional by virtue of the fact that the organisation the practitioner belongs to is considered established and professional. As senior consultant Elizabeth observes:

‘...for me it’s more about working in somewhere that’s respected within that industry, within the PR profession [...] that’s what’s more important to me than me going off and doing a short course and getting some sort of PR qualification.’ (Elizabeth, Wilkin PR)

Therefore, what emerges from these texts is that the responsibility to be associated with professional bodies is devolved to the organisation and the individual practitioner gains a default professional status because s/he works for said organisation.

Due to the fact that the responsibility to engage with professional associations is devolved to the organisation, these texts also suggest that as long as senior members of staff such as directors, MDs and Presidents, demonstrate commitment to the professional bodies, other individuals within the organisation will be considered professional by association. In Taff PR, Kim considers engagement with the CIPR:

‘...as Spencer’s thing, it’s like because he was so involved in it and so high up in it then it was as if we’re ticking that box, Taff PR has got our representation at the CIPR, Spencer is Taff PR for the CIPR...’ (Kim, Taff PR)

This observation from Kim about the senior figures within Taff PR is also reflected in how said senior figures construct their role in the professional status on the company. As an MD at Taff PR, Spencer has been heavily involved with the CIPR from an early stage. He frames this engagement as part of his managerial responsibilities: 'I see a role for me as one of the heads of one of the biggest agencies, I do feel there's a degree of duty and responsibility to pursue those kind of professionalising opportunities that arise...' (Spencer, Taff PR).

Meanwhile within Wilkin PR, practitioners assert the agency's professionalism by highlighting senior management's association with the professional bodies. However, once their individual involvement is questioned very little commitment is demonstrated in response. Consultants Joanne and Natalie observe the disconnection between senior commitment to professional bodies and the rest of the organisation's commitment:

'...I think it [membership to professional bodies] is something that's really important at Wilkin PR but probably more at a senior level than a little old account executive like me, but yeah.' (Joanne, Wilkin PR)

'Yeah I think they're very heavily involved, they don't encourage us to join but I know that all the senior people regularly go to the events and seminars and training and sometimes they send around notes you know 'there is this training or whatever presentation going on, would you like to come?' and all that stuff but we're not encouraged to join [professional associations]...' (Natalie, Wilkin PR)

Within this context, senior management are constructed as a representative of the organisation as a whole; therefore, as long as they're individually committed to the professional bodies for PR, then, other practitioners can also construct themselves as professional by being part of a company that has senior managers that operate in this way.

It is worth noting that the notion of the organisation taking responsibility to professionalise is particularly strong in Wilkin PR because a lot of the training and development is handled in-house with practitioners mentioning elements such as 'Wilkin University', regular lunchtime in-house training, a two week 'camp' staff can apply to go on, a global intranet resource and a career

exchange programme to name but a few. With those in place, it is not surprising that individual practitioners construct themselves as professional by virtue of the fact they are employed by said organisation rather than seeking further credibility from external sources such as the professional bodies.

Despite this, the fact that practitioners devolve their responsibility to be associated with the professional bodies to the organisation they work for highlights that the discourse of closure and control read in CIPR texts is not a salient discourse in practitioners' professional identity construction. Instead, the texts produced in interviews with practitioners construct themselves as professional because the organisations they belong to have external alignment with the professional body. Consequently, the subject position of professional PR practitioner as someone that makes an individual commitment to a professional body in order to be considered professional is not reflected in these texts.

7.6 Profession: inside versus outside

This chapter began by examining PR practitioners' construction of PR work, discovering that ambiguity pervades with practitioners struggling to secure what PR constitutes, what it achieves, and the knowledge base it requires. As a core baseline from which to construct a professional community (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001) this ambiguity presents a challenge, which is further compounded by practitioners' experiences of also being perceived as either spin-doctor or frivolous. With this context established, the rest of the chapter sought to explore how practitioners attempt to secure professional identities and in turn how salient the discourses circulating in CIPR texts were in this process of identity construction. Whilst some practitioners draw on the same discourses as the CIPR texts in the construction of their professional identities and champion the ideals of credentialism, others, who are in the majority, construct their professional identities by drawing on discourses of experience and networks. In turn, the need to associate with professional bodies is framed by these texts as something necessary for the company but not something that requires individual commitment.

The combination of the ambiguity surrounding PR work, the problems identified by CIPR texts in establishing professional discourses and the alternate professional discourses draw on in practitioners' identity construction result in a situation where PR's professional status exists in an inner sanctum, where those within the PR industry consider PR as professional, whilst those outside the PR sector would not consider it as professional. As such, practitioners talk about PR's professional status in terms of 'inside' versus 'outside' such as May's comments on whether PR could be considered a profession: 'I think from an outsider's point of view, people maybe don't think that it is, [...] But I think from the inside it's very professional...' (May, Taff PR). Similarly, Ruby states: '...as PR people we would say PR is a profession, but to outsiders they wouldn't necessarily see PR as a profession...' (Ruby, Taff PR).

Similarly, these texts assert that it's not just PR practitioners that are in this inner sanctum but also those that work with PR practitioners. What emerges is a construction of 'the professional' as a status recognised by those that work with PR professionals but not recognised outside of that context such as Janet who observes:

'I think when someone's worked with you and seen the difference you can make, they have huge respect for your professionalism and your skills and how you can make a difference, but you can't influence everybody in that way so there's always the unwashed masses out there that just don't get it...' (Janet, In-house)

Chloe provides an in-depth account of the difference in perception when working with the inner sanctum compared to being outside that realm:

'[client company name] they've had a new MD, he was deputy and he's come up to MD in the last couple of years. When he was deputy he just used to think PR was a load of rubbish, why did they have a PR agency, complete waste of time, whereas since he's become MD and he's seen what we do and had more exposure to it, he's been sort of advocating us to all the directors in the company...' (Chloe, Taff PR)

The PR professional as constructed in these texts leaves the professional status of PR as only having meaning for those that operate in PR, or have

direct dealings with PR. As a result there is a struggle to construct a meaningful professional subject position beyond that inner circle. In doing so, the majority of practitioners' professional identity construction is very inward facing.

Overall, CIPR texts construct a professional subject position by drawing on discourses that centre on credentialism, closure and control, and power and legitimacy. Whilst some practitioners find these discourses salient in their construction of their professional identities, the majority draw on alternative discourses and devolve responsibility to engage with the CIPR to the organisation they work for. Consequently, the discursive template of 'the PR professional' within CIPR texts is not considered meaningful for individual practitioners' identity construction. However, there may be areas where the CIPR can be of use in the future, particularly as practitioners' construction of the professional PR is particularly inward facing and thus creates an 'us' (PR practitioners and the people they work with) versus 'them' (everyone else) dichotomy. There is an opportunity to aid in the external demonstration of professionalism and the construction of discourses around PR as profession that could be meaningful to those outside this inner sanctum that both the CIPR and practitioners have currently constructed. Therefore, whilst the power effects circulating in discourses drawn on in CIPR texts have been limited with regards being salient to practitioners' construction of the professional, there are opportunities to potentially intensify the power effects (Hardy and Thomas, 2013) of professional discourses in CIPR texts in the future.

Nevertheless, a complex picture remains, ambiguity pervades PR work and this coupled with other problems the CIPR has experienced as an organisation has resulted in the construction of a variety of professional identities drawing on a diverse set of discourses. Therefore, both CIPR and practitioner texts suggest an established subject position of 'PR professional' is in a state of becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), never achieving (an albeit temporary) stable state but continually in flux. The third chapter focuses on this complexity, fluidity and multiplicity of identities by returning to the

ambiguity surrounding PR work in order to examine its relationship to practitioners' tendencies to construct themselves as shapeshifters.

CHAPTER 8: BEING A SHAPESHIFTER

8.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have explored the CIPR's professional project, considering how professional association texts aspire to construct the PR profession and professional and have examined the degree to which the discursive template constructed in CIPR texts informs frontline PR practitioners' identity construction processes. Practitioners' talk indicates that whilst some draw on the subject position constructed in CIPR texts, other practitioners adopt alternative professional identities. Part of the findings regarding practitioners' constructions of their professional identities was an account of how practitioners' texts focused on the ambiguity of their job. This ambiguity is returned to in this chapter on account of its prevalence in practitioners' identity work and because these texts indicate it is celebrated rather than agonised over as a central facet of these complex, multiple, and fluid occupational identities. The salience of ambiguity as an identity resource is then explored in relation to the construction of the PR practitioner as 'shapeshifter', a distinct identity that proliferates practitioner texts in their construction of the PR professional. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of this professional identity for the CIPR's professionalisation project and the power effects (Hardy and Thomas, 2013) of its construction of the PR professional.

8.2 Return to (celebrate) ambiguity

Alvesson (1993) saw the inherent ambiguity of knowledge work as "...one of the most significant and interesting aspects of KIFs that make them worthy being studied as a particular category." (Alvesson 1993, p.1007). In this context he cites the central ambiguities surrounding knowledge work as: its knowledge base, what knowledge workers do, and the results of their work. PR practitioners' talk would suggest that PR has similar areas of ambiguity surrounding its central functions, as discussed in Chapter 7. Nevertheless,

Karreman (2011) argues that the ambiguity surrounding knowledge work need not to be considered a negative element but in fact a required aspect of the job as it allows knowledge workers to exert a status of 'expert' over their task/work domain. Practitioners' texts also indicate that they are not necessarily insecure, uncomfortable or struggling with this ambiguity but in fact, at times, celebrate the opacity and diversity of the job. One way in which this celebration of ambiguity is articulated in the texts is when many practitioners cite the broad range of variety in the job as one of the main sources of enjoyment. The other way this is expressed is when practitioners refer to adaptability and flexibility as central skill sets in order to operate successfully in PR.

The varied nature of PR work was identified by most practitioners as something they loved about the job and was particularly mentioned when asked about motivations to work or what they liked about the role. Prizing the variety of the job was cited by most practitioners regardless of seniority or whether the practitioner operated as a consultant or in-house, such as May who comments:

'The breadth of topics that you have to write about or talk about is mad, which I suppose just makes it exciting...It's just really mixed, there's always something different to do or to try and I love that about the job – I really do.' (May Taff PR)

or senior in-house practitioner Melissa:

'...the variety, the range of opportunities, I just really enjoyed it. There's never a dull moment in PR – no! That's sometimes a little stressful, but it's never boring, so that I think was the main attraction.' (Melissa, In-house)

Others, such as Alexander, talk about the spontaneity of the job as 'the beauty of public relations' and as a personal driving force where, '...you rarely get two days the same, and you're faced with a different challenge to which you can apply your skills on a daily basis so I think that's motivational.' (Alexander, Taff PR). This feeling of not always knowing what the day may bring is also celebrated by Natalie who comments: 'Well you come into the office and you just never know what you're going to do so I guess it's this sort

of expectation of something exciting...interesting and unpredictable happening!' (Natalie, Wilkin PR). Constructing the job as dynamic, spontaneous, exciting and varied indicates that practitioners' identity work concerning their role situates the ambiguity of the job – a factor that can drive the variety, spontaneity and dynamism of the work – as a positive element of working in PR rather than something that prompts struggle or anxiety.

Similarly, when discussing the skill sets required to be a PR practitioner, most practitioners' texts highlighted adaptability and flexibility in different situations and social contexts as a central facet, such as Lily who explains this is about, '...knowing when to adapt your style, it's not always appropriate to be corporate or to be too relaxed and having that ability to flex that I think's really important.' (Lily, Wilkin PR). Isabel also talks about the need to 'have a really adaptable personality' as important in order to deal with the 'different situations' and 'many different types of people' in the working environment. When Alexander is reflecting on the skills he brings to the PR role, he too emphasises the need to adapt in the context of fitting in with the client in order to build a relationship between the two:

'It's like when you walk into someone's office and see a picture on the wall, 'is that your family – I've got two kids as well' kind of thing, it's that mirroring thing, or they've got their football club on the wall. It's just trying to find those conversational keys and almost go off piste a little bit, we're not just there for a business meeting what we're about is relationships in PR and I think I've probably been reasonable at doing that.' (Alexander, Taff PR)

Other practitioners talk about the skill in being adaptable and demonstrating flexibility in relation to dealing with the different intellectual materials PR practitioners encounter as part of their working lives. May argues that a practitioner has to, '...be brave enough to take on a topic that you might know absolutely nothing about'. Meanwhile, senior consultant Spencer identifies, 'intellectual flexibility' as a core skill he looks for in new recruits:

'I talk to students about the fact that I personally will look as far back as A-levels in terms of what people have done, because a good spread of A-levels or even GCSE's kinda shows somebody who's got wide interests and can cope with different varying subjects and will therefore

be quite good at dealing with, you know, hotels, lawyers, government agencies, all within the space of 15 minutes and 3 phone calls kind of thing.' (Spencer, Taff PR)

The ambiguity of the job means that PR practitioners are able to enjoy a role that provides variety, dynamism and excitement. In turn, this dynamic and varied context requires practitioners to be flexible and continually adapt to the myriad of situations they find themselves in. Again, this skill of flexibility and adaptability is celebrated in practitioners' texts rather than being constructed as a challenge or problem – it is a skill that signals a practitioner as good at his/her job.

Ambiguity is usually discussed as either necessary for the functioning of knowledge work (e.g. Alvesson 2001; 2004; 2011) or as a potential source for identity struggle (e.g. Collinson, 2003). Practitioners' identity work indicates that this is not the case for PR. Instead, the ambiguity of PR is constructed as a seemingly inevitable function of the job that brings with it many positive benefits such as a varied and exciting working environment where practitioners can flex their skills in dealing with an array of work circumstances. However, as Alvesson (2001) contends, elements such as image, rhetoric and social relations become paramount as, "...substitutes for the ambiguities..." (Alvesson 2001, p.870) of knowledge work and this too emerges from practitioners' texts regarding the PR role, which place importance on these facets in their construction of the 'shapeshifter' identity, which will be the focus of the next section.

8.3 PR practitioner as 'shapeshifter'

'I can be whoever you want me to be baby I'm in PR, that's what we do!' (Minnie, In-house)

This section uses the concept of the PR practitioner as 'shapeshifter' to highlight that practitioners' construct an identity as inherently malleable, flexible and ever-changing in order to meet the demands of the job.

Traditionally, the shapeshifter is someone who can seamlessly morph into different identities often in order to go unnoticed and blend into the

environment. Popular culture references would be Agent Smith in *the Matrix* franchise, Terminator T-1000 in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, and Mystique from *the X-Men* Marvel Comic franchise. Similarly, shapeshifting proliferates folklore and mythology from around the globe, including Welsh mythology in the *Mabinogion*. In the context of academia, research by Barry *et al.* (2006) highlights academics as engaging in the act of shapeshifting, moving between different identities such as, 'the stressed professor', 'the managerial advocate' and 'the resolute researcher' in response to managerial reforms. In the empirical setting of PR, rather than seeking to disguise oneself for potentially 'evil' ends 'the shapeshifter' is a distinct identity in and of itself; someone who shifts between different identities in order to cope with the myriad of tasks and audiences they have to build relationships with. This section will examine the identity of shapeshifter and the differences in how it is constructed in consultant and in-house practitioner texts and for what purposes.

8.3.1 Consultants as shapeshifter

Clients are the central facet to understanding consultants' identity construction with practitioners drawing on the client as the definer of the self. If the client is the definer of the self, as the client shifts and changes so too must practitioners' identities in order to continue to 'fit in' with the client, maintain a relationship with them, and remain as 'the expert' in said relationship. As a result, consultants are conscious of the need to be a shapeshifter in order to be relevant and trusted by their clients.

The linkage between consultants' identities and their clients has been discussed by researchers that focus on management consulting such as Fincham *et al.* (2008) who use Elsbach's (2009) work on toy car designers to highlight the 'relational' nature of consulting work, "...that is not particularly opaque to the client, and that deals often with powerful client groups." (Fincham *et al.* 2008, p.1157). Styhre (2011) emphasises how, in this relational context, client feedback is a fundamental base from which consultants can construct themselves as professional. This is also observed in Alvesson's notion of knowledge work where: "The belief and expectations

of the client are a necessary, indeed a crucial component for success.” (Alvesson 1993, p.1006). This idea that responses from clients are a key component for positive identity construction also emerges from PR consultants’ talk regarding their job.

Consultants’ identification with the client is indicated in their assertions that the client defines whether a good job has been performed or not. When asked what makes them feel like they’ve done a job well, consultants unequivocally cite client praise as the key definer such as Richard who considers it ‘the only benchmark PR has’ (Richard, Wilkin PR) or Harriet who sees it as ‘the ultimate tick in the box’ (Harriet, Taff PR). Senior consultant Ruby also regards positive client feedback as an important accolade:

‘...I have had a few instances where clients have come back and said, ‘do you know what, I was really pleased with all that coverage you generated round that – thank you’ and it’s like ‘oh my God!’ (laughs) ‘really, let me just print that email off and put it on the noticeboard’.’ (Ruby, Taff PR)

Very few consultants consider a job well done as defined on their own terms; the client’s perception of them and the job is the significant deciding factor. Consequently, consultants construct their identities as successful PR practitioners by how they are perceived and defined by their clients.

Another indicator of consultants’ identification with the client is when the topic of ethics and ethical dilemmas are discussed. When talking about any potential contentious clients or tasks most practitioners do not demonstrate much angst or struggle. On account of identifying with their clients, consultants construct ethical dilemmas as the responsibility of the client because the consultant is merely a conduit for them. As Chloe explains when asked whether she feels the need to rationalise actions she might be asked to take on behalf of a client:

‘...so I’ll just do it and I don’t reflect. I don’t think of it as, ‘it’s come from me’ I still think of it as, ‘it’s come from them’, even though I wrote it and put the words in their mouth I still don’t see it as me.’” (Chloe, Taff PR)

Alternatively, Harriet talks about the intellectual challenge representing a controversial client may mean that the work can be 'exciting' because '...it's opening up a whole issues management side of things that you wouldn't get if you were working with a property developer in the same way I suppose.'
(Harriet, Taff PR).

Others, such as James and Joanne highlight that it is part of the job to disconnect personal views from clients' views and thus the practitioner does not feel the ethical demands:

'Well it's like any job that's fundamentally sales driven, you might have to promote a product that you think's shit or I work for people I wouldn't want to spend time with socially...'
(James, Wilkin PR)

'I think you have to be very open-minded about things and about the fact that you'll be working with brands you don't necessarily like...'
(Joanne, Wilkin PR)

So whilst the client defines a job well done, they also define the ethical parameters of the job. By constructing themselves as the conduit or mouthpiece for the clients or by observing a disconnect between personal values and client values, the consultants' texts highlight that their identity construction is very closely aligned to their relationship with clients.

The construction of client as definer of self in turn raises the notion of PR consultant as shapeshifter where consultants' texts demonstrate awareness of the need to be someone adept at continually shifting between different identities. As a consultant, a PR practitioner will have to work with a variety of clients that may operate in very different sectors and may encompass a variety of personnel from very different backgrounds (and with very different perceptions of PR and its role/value). If the client's perception of the PR practitioner is a key identification resource, consultants' ability to switch between these different audiences and fit in and adapt to these audiences is another fundamental way in which these practitioners derive their identity as successful. As such, consultants present themselves as a shapeshifter, someone needing to construct him/herself differently in different social situations and relationships.

One context in which consultants construct themselves as needing to be a shapeshifter is in direct relationships with clients. In this regard both Kim and Helen make reference to the need to have acting skills to perform this identity-shifting task:

‘...if these [clients] were down the pub you’d never speak to them whereas they’re your best friends and everything they say is so hysterical. And so you’re sort of like an actor really when you’re in a client meeting...’ (Kim, Taff PR)

‘...it is almost like being an actress sometimes because you’ll go into a meeting, the most deadly boring meeting of all time, and you have to look enthusiastic and interested [...] I do switch a little bit with how I am between different clients because some are more serious than others and some are more relaxed...’ (Helen, Taff PR)

Alternatively, other consultants will talk through the different ways they operate with different clients, such as Louise and May:

‘I’ve got a real mixed bag of clients, some of whom I get on very well with on a personal level, so I can get on the phone and have a real laugh with them and we can just chat like friends almost, and then you’ve got clients who you have to be a lot more formal with [...] it’s the same with going to see clients that if they dress casually, then you dress casually, so you kind of take the lead from them, whereas if they’re suited and booted then you tend to dress more formally for them...’ (Louise, Taff PR)

‘...I would never pick up the phone to say the marketing guys at [client name] the same I would to a partner at [client name], just because it wouldn’t be appropriate, they don’t know me well enough, even if they did know me well enough, they probably wouldn’t speak to me like that.’ (May, Taff PR)

Consultants’ talk highlights a need to be a shapeshifter in order to mirror their clients’ identities. In doing so, positive client perception, which is a significant identity resource for consultants, is maintained as the consultant is considered as ‘fitting in’ and therefore understanding the client, its communications tasks and thus how best to achieve them.

The other context in which practitioners draw on the shapeshifter identity is in relationships with the media. In this environment the consultant is the

representative and conduit for the client and therefore will need to be a shapeshifter between the different client identities they represent. Rose and Emily highlight that they are conscious of needing to embody the organisations they represent when talking to the media:

‘...you’ve gotta talk about everything you know about this company, as if you know it from back to front [...] you’ve gotta be someone completely different when you liaise with the media ...’ (Rose, Taff PR)

‘I have to represent corporations, I am the point of contact and if somebody calls me about [company name] I have to embody [company name] or I’m gonna ruin any sort of relationship with whoever I’m on the phone with and possibly their opinion of [company name].’ (Emily, Wilkin PR)

As well as articulating a need to be a shapeshifter between the different clients consultants represent to the media, practitioners also recognise a need to be a shapeshifter in order to adapt to the different media audiences they are liaising with and attempting to persuade to engage with their clients. In this regard, Anita constructs this need to be a shapeshifter as to present ‘the more polished version of yourself’ where the consultant will, ‘...have to at least sound like you believe in the story that you’re selling-in...’ (Anita, Wilkin PR). Meanwhile, Spencer constructs this shapeshifter as requiring the capacity to ‘switch on’ when talking about relationships with the media:

‘If you’ve got a journalist on the phone then you are very much playing a role and you are both engaged in a game that both sides know the rules of and are being very careful in the way in which you are presenting yourself and representing others...’ (Spencer, Taff PR)

Consequently, by virtue of a ‘relational’ identity with their clients where positive perception of them is a powerful identity resource, PR consultants’ texts highlight the shapeshifter identity in order to maintain relationships with clients and the media (to whom they represent clients) and in turn successfully complete their communications tasks.

Symbolic of this shapeshifter identity is the construction of identities in the office environments in which all interviews with consultants took place. The shift in identities came into sharp relief in the offices of Wilkin PR. As a much

larger agency than Taff PR, different PR consultants were on different floors according to the sector they worked in – one was known as ‘corporate’ the other as ‘brand’. The identities of these floors were distinct from one another on account of the artefacts displayed in the two floors and in particular in the main meeting room on both floors where the majority of interviews took place.

On the corporate floor, the main meeting room was sombre, using earthy green tones in the office furniture and carpeting. Around the room, boards of newspaper coverage the consultancy had achieved for clients were displayed. Meanwhile on the brand floor, the central meeting room was more quirky and dynamic where more pictures, images and pieces of media coverage were displayed all over the walls. Also, some walls were painted red and the meeting room furniture was very distinctive. In an almost ‘Alice in Wonderland’ style, the chairs and tables in the meeting room were particularly oversized where unusually shaped chairs in red, pink and orange sat around a large glass desk with intricate fret work as the legs.

The differences in look between the two floors are also a manifestation of the shapeshifter when dealing with different sectors. In order to be accepted by corporate clients, the main meeting room on the corporate floor needs to be more reflective of their environments, hence the more conservative meeting space. However, because the brand teams worked with well known high street consumer goods they had to display artefacts that constructed the agency and its consultants as dynamic and creative, indicated by the bold colour choices and unusual (and slightly comical) meeting room furniture. As a visitor to the office, I was acutely aware of the different performances of identities between the two floors in the construction of the office space and the artefacts within them.

In sum, clients are central to the business model for consultancies and, in turn, they also play a central role in identification, where consultants define themselves and their success in terms of how clients perceive them and their ability to engage and mirror the identities those clients occupy. As such, the shapeshifter becomes a central feature in the process of identity construction

where consultants construct themselves as needing to be someone who is continually crafting and recrafting different identities in order to adapt to the identities of their clients and the audiences that matter to them in order to build relationships, gain trust and thus consider themselves as a professional or expert. Adam neatly surmises this shapeshifter identity as:

‘...the ability to be chameleonic in terms of organisations...it’s the ability to walk into [client company name] and talk the language they talk, very visual, pictures, ambitious, passion and then also be able to walk into...a financial organisation, dress up in a suit, be very serious, talk in technical language, work with introverts to tease out the thing they’re doing. And I think that ability to go into a million different companies and probably be a slightly different person in each one; get them, get their business and get the culture and work with it accordingly; I think that’s really important.’ (Adam, Wilkin PR)

Therefore, whilst popular culture references to shapeshifting may emphasise the ability to morph into a myriad of environments as a means to ‘blend in’ and commit duplicitous acts, the PR consultant is a shapeshifter between different identities in order to ‘fit in’ with a variety of environments and in turn be trusted and ultimately able to construct a professional, successful and expert subject position.

8.3.2 In-house practitioners as shapeshifter

‘...you’re the one looking outside the organisation, not in...’ (Melissa, In-house)

It is important to note that whilst all the in-house practitioners interviewed are Chartered Practitioners and therefore draw on the professional discourses as generated in CIPR texts (see chapter 7, section 7.4), they also construct themselves as a shapeshifter. For in-house practitioners, the difference in work environment when compared with consultants, results in an alternate manifestation of the shapeshifter identity. Firstly, in-house practitioners’ texts construct their identity as beyond PR, often citing that they in fact fulfil a ‘communications’ role or that their occupational identity is defined by the sector in which they operate, for example, ‘I work in the construction sector’. This widening of the parameters of their occupational identities highlights how the organisation is a key feature in their construction of themselves. However,

despite identifying with the organisation, because they are PR practitioners, within this context, these texts also construct the practitioners as needing to be a shapeshifter between 'organisational' and 'external-facing' identities. Due to this continual demand to shift between organisational identities and external-facing identities, there is always an element of the 'arbiter' or 'outsider' to the in-house practitioner's identity construction.

Despite the fact that all the in-house practitioners interviewed had gained Chartered PR Practitioner status, many of them constructed their occupational identities beyond the realms of PR. One way in which they did this was to highlight that they are often identified as occupying a wider communications role rather than just PR, such as Minny who prefers the term 'communications' or 'integrated communications' or Melissa who uses 'Head of Communications'. Similarly, Moira talks through the various job titles she has had in her career:

'...I've been a corporate affairs person, I've been a communications and external relations person, I'm now policy and communication, I seem to have favoured job titles that don't fit on business cards with very long words, and PR is not a term I actually use ...' (Moira, In-house)

These texts are indicative of the fact that these practitioners were all very senior in the organisations they worked for and therefore they manage teams that may occupy a variety of communications tasks. Additionally, some accounts indicated that the shift beyond PR was a means by which to negate the ambiguity and negative image that public relations embodies as discussed in Chapter 7.

As well as shifting their occupational identities beyond PR to communications, in-house practitioners also draw on the sector they work in, in the process of identity construction, such as Ben who observes that his job is viewed more, '...as a job in local government rather than a job in PR...' (Ben, In-house) or Janet who considers that she does 'define with the sector' because she feels a responsibility to truly understand the company she works for in order to do its public relations. This widening of the definition of their PR role to either

communications and/or the sector their organisation operates in, highlights how in-house practitioners draw on the organisation they work for as a significant identity resource. Unlike, PR consultants who belong to a community of fellow PR consultants and therefore identify heavily with PR, the community in-house practitioners identify with is the organisation that employs them. However, it is the need to identify with the organisation as well as the wider audiences that have an impact on that organisation that also results in these practitioners being a shapeshifter.

Whilst drawing on the organisation in the process of identity construction, in-house practitioners still recognise their PR duty to look after that organisation's reputation and thus they also have to construct public or 'external-facing' identities. These external facing identities involve awareness that they are the representatives of their organisation to the wider world as well as the main conduits to reflect the wider world's perceptions of the organisation back to it. Texts produced in interviews with in-house practitioners demonstrate this notion of being a shapeshifter between organisational identities and external-facing identities when the subject position of 'external arbiter' is drawn on in identity work. This is reflected in Moira's observation that she is often described as the 'conscience of her organisation' as well as Melissa's comment that, '...you're the one looking outside the organisation, not in...' (Melissa, In-house). As external arbiter, not only is the practitioner the face and representative of the organisation to the wider world but s/he is also a mirror by which the perceptions of the wider world can be reflected back into the organisation. For example, Bruce and Melissa explain the dynamic of belonging to an organisation but also being aware that they have to represent that organisation to others outside that environment:

'...you can't just turn up and someone says 'right the company's in crisis what do you think?' 'I'm not in the mood', you can't do that. Whereas sometimes in work you probably could [...] In your role as a corporate spokesman, well that's front page news, 'we spoke to this corporate spokesman, they told us to piss off, they weren't in the mood, why bother?' So I guess that is a peculiarity for PR...' (Bruce, In-house)

‘...you always need to be a bit of a showman, always positive, always looking a certain way, I think you are the public face of the organisation, more so than almost anybody else...’ (Melissa, In-house)

Other texts emphasise the need to be the feedback loop into organisations, letting them know how the wider world perceives them, which in turn may inform how the organisation behaves in the future:

‘...you have to be able to be devil’s advocate and you have to be able to have the balls frankly to go and present to the board on internal comms or engagement and let them listen to soundbites that you’ve got about what people think and feel about the organisation and sometimes those things are really not what they want to hear.’ (Minnie, In-house)

‘...just the other day I had a conversation with somebody here explaining why it mattered that internal communications was built into a project plan on pay review and I’m thinking ‘I haven’t done this for a while but here I am explaining to someone that if you don’t explain to staff the project won’t be very smooth.’ (Moir, In-house)

In-house practitioners therefore construct themselves as a shapeshifter, operating both in and outside their organisations; embodying the organisation and operating within the organisation in order to communicate for them, but in doing so also being the external representative of the organisation and refracting perception of the organisation back to itself so that it can continue to communicate in a meaningful manner to the outside audiences that matter to them.

Due to the fact that in-house practitioners present themselves as a shapeshifter between organisational and external-facing identities by the nature of their work, they also construct themselves as an ‘outsider’ within their organisation. This idea of the in-house practitioner as ‘outsider’ is articulated in texts that concern the practitioner’s perception of their status within the organisation they work for. Both Janet and Bruce observe that they’re not really understood and therefore valued in their organisations. When discussing whether she has to regularly define PR in her organisation Janet responds that the organisation does not really pay much attention, ‘oh those people in comms yeah I don’t know what they do but, does it matter it’s nothing to do with me’ (Janet, In-house). Bruce feels that his organisation

thinks, ‘...I write things, talk to journalists, then journalists write things that I’ve talked about and then it appears in papers and then everyone goes ‘great’ (Bruce, In-house). Meanwhile, Russell considers his perception as outsider depends on his bosses’ opinions on the value of PR:

‘...if you’ve got a boss who values what you do if done well, happiness. If you’ve got a boss, and I’ve had this twice, who actually thinks the whole thing’s a waste of time, then you’re not gonna be happy.’
(Russell, In-house)

Therefore, because they have to be a shapeshifter between external as well as organisational identities, coupled with the ambiguity surrounding what PR constitutes and what it achieves, despite being *in-house* practitioners, these interviewees construct themselves as simultaneously outsiders within their own organisations.

The other way in which these practitioners construct themselves as an ‘outsider’ is by depicting themselves as often a lone voice in ‘battle’ with their own organisation over communications issues. Melissa explains that because the PR role is to look after the organisation’s relationships with the wider world, the organisation can assume that the PR practitioner can control everything that happens outside of the organisation and therefore when it becomes apparent that s/he cannot, negative tension can result:

‘...obviously you’re always exposed, you’re very exposed in what you do because it’s public facing and so, the good is good, but clearly it’s just as easy to get some negative publicity and you get blamed for almost anything, even though it’s got nothing to do with the PR department, as soon as there’s a negative story, they all come running into you to say ‘what the hell have you done?’ (Melissa, In-house)

Ben focuses his struggles on the need to try and ‘...police things like corporate branding and corporate identity and all that’ and how he is in a constant battle to make fellow organisational actors understand that *all* communications from the organisation should be overseen by him to ensure amongst other things, consistency. Minny constructs herself as ‘outsider’ in highlighting that she is often not supplied with enough information from her own organisation in order

to communicate it to other audiences on the organisation's behalf. This situation can result in 'battle':

'I'm never adversarial but I will fight the corner in terms of getting people to understand that they need to give me everything and not just edited highlights or a bit of a minute that says, 'communications to take forward' [...] and you're like what was the discussion? What's the context? What is the paper that this refers to?...' (Minny, In-house)

In a similar vein, Moira provides an anecdote to demonstrate the need to win people over within her organisation in order to complete her communications aims:

'I had to do a lot of public consultation work, and the nuclear people were very 'oh we're scientists, trust us' and 'why on Earth would I want a PR person to do anything, I can do it all' and 'we don't need to talk to the public about this' and so I really did have to use all my powers of persuasion, to demonstrate that we could add some value.' (Moira, In-house)

These tensions or 'battles' between the in-house practitioner and his or her own organisation serve to create this identity of the practitioner as 'outsider'; the solitary voice of reason trying to make their own organisations understand how it is perceived by the wider world and in turn how it should be communicating with these outer audiences. As such, this construction as 'outsider' is also linked to the role as external arbiter where being the feedback loop to the organisation might leave the PR practitioner in an unpopular position.

Consequently, whilst consultants may need to be a shapeshifter in order to cope with the variety of clients and media audiences they deal with on a daily basis, in-house practitioners are shapeshifters between internal organisational-based identities and external public-facing identities that require them to be simultaneously part of the organisation and stand outside of it, resulting in them being a loner within their own organisation at times. Nevertheless, while the construction of the shapeshifter identity may differ between the types of PR practitioner, it still features in identity work by both types of practitioner and therefore the construction of PR practitioner as shapeshifter is prevalent in all areas of PR. Where the difference lies is in the

purpose of the shapeshifter identity; whilst consultants will be a shapeshifter in order to fit in with the varied stakeholders they have to engage with, and thus construct themselves as professional/expert, in-house practitioners have to be a shapeshifter between organisational and external-facing identities which often means they do not fit into either environment and as a result construct themselves as arbiter/outsider.

8.4 Ambiguity and the shapeshifter

Overall, this chapter has used the concept of the shapeshifter to highlight the fluid, malleable and ever-changing identities practitioners have to construct in order to do the job. In turn, the section identifies differences in how texts from consultant practitioners and texts from in-house practitioners construct the shapeshifter identity and for what purposes. For consultants, the client occupies an important position with regards identity construction and as such consultants' talk emphasises the need to be a shapeshifter in order to fit in with the array of clients they work for and thus be considered trusted. In turn, being a shapeshifter allows consultants to construct themselves as professional/successful/expert. For in-house practitioners, identity construction centres on the relationship between the organisation and the wider audiences that matter to said organisation. Whilst practitioners construct themselves as part of the organisation they work for, they also recognise a need to be the shapeshifter in order to complete the communications tasks between the organisation and external stakeholders. This shapeshifter identity means that in-house practitioners often construct themselves as arbiter or outsider.

With regards to the ambiguity that surrounds PR, this identity of the shapeshifter may also account for why practitioners' texts do not demonstrate any struggle or problem with the opacity of PR. In fact, ambiguity results in the construction of the shapeshifter identity and allows practitioners' identities to remain malleable, flexible and continually shifting. The inability to pin down what PR constitutes what it achieves and what skill it requires enables practitioners to operate successfully, being a shapeshifter in order to meet the

myriad of client or organisational needs they may come across in their daily working lives. This may account for why practitioners' identity work does not demonstrate any struggle or insecurity with the ambiguity that surrounds them and in fact at times celebrates the benefits the ambiguity can bring to the role.

In this context, the PR practitioner constructs the shapeshifter as an attempt to secure a subject position of successful, professional, 'expert' or 'arbiter'. Writers such as Bauman (2000; 2007) and Sennett (2006) would suggest that these practitioners are therefore indicative of the knowledge worker in the contemporary workplace. This new 'idealized self' (Sennett, 2006) that continually shifts and re-invents to cope with the changing environment also starts to question the role of 'the profession' and how that concept may need to also adapt in the modern work landscape. Chapter 6 highlighted that CIPR texts constructed the subject position of 'PR professional' as someone committed to and engaged with continuous development. However, PR practitioners' professional identity construction as shapeshifter prioritises innate ability, relationship management and performance. In turn, the limited power effects of the discursive template in CIPR texts, where the majority of practitioners demonstrated that it was not salient in their processes of identity construction, suggests that rather than evoking traditional principles of professionalism, re-framing what is meant by professionalism in this fluid and ambiguous industry may prove to be more appealing to individual PR practitioners' identities. The next chapter will explore these findings regarding identity construction and professionalisation in more depth by relating them back to the academic literature on professions and identities as outlined in the literature evaluation, in order to gauge what this empirical investigation contributes to knowledge of professions, knowledge work, and identities.

CHAPTER 9: PROFESSIONALISING IDENTITIES

This research sought to explore what it means to be a professional, which so far has been studied either in relation to the structural creation and maintenance of a distinct occupational unit or as an assumed context in which to examine processes of identity construction. This study's discursive framework explored what it means to be a professional in terms of how both the professional body and practitioners constructed a professional subject position. In turn, the focus has been on the on-going construction, contestation and attempted closure of a professional body within a wider web of power relations, and its relationship and resonance with those practicing PR. In doing so, the research explores the PR professionalisation project (Chapter 6) focusing on how the CIPR as the predominant professional body, constructs its notion of 'the profession' and 'the PR professional'. It also considers PR practitioners' professional identities, (Chapters 7 and 8) looking at how they are constructed, with Chapter 7 focusing on what role the current professionalisation of the industry plays in that identity construction process and Chapter 8 examining the construction of the professional PR practitioner as shapeshifter.

In light of these findings, this chapter considers the contributions this study has made to the literatures on identities, sociology of the professions and knowledge work. The chapter begins by revisiting the conceptual framework for the study in order to assess how it has influenced the research and its analysis and how its focus on the relationship between identities and professions has contributed to the literatures on these topics. In turn, the chapter proceeds to consider four emergent themes from the findings and what they contribute in theorising about professionalising identities.

9.1 Post-structuralist approach: the conceptual framework

This research has approached the study of professionalisation and identities with a post-structuralist conceptual framework that emphasises fluidity,

process and the 'becoming' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) of these entities. This conceptual framework has influenced the research primarily with regards to the questions it chose to pursue, focusing on the construction of professional subject positions in texts generated with the professional body and PR practitioners, and in turn the salience of the professional body's subject position to practitioners' identity construction processes. In turn, the conceptual framework also influenced the analysis of the research data, considering the 'hows' of professionalisation and identities in terms of: how the professional and profession were constituted in discourse, how those constructions were negotiated with other discourses concerning the profession and professional, and how discourses and subject positions generated in the process of professionalisation circulated and resonated with PR practitioners.

In using this conceptual framework this study has contributed to the literature on identities, and particularly research on professional identities, by focusing on the construction of the professional subject position by the professional body and how that informs practitioners' identity construction. Previous studies of professional identities have either assumed a singular professional status or have not delineated what is meant by professional and how the concept is being operationalised, often considering it as a backdrop in which to consider identity construction (see discussion in Chapter 3, section 3.7.4). Meanwhile, this study has sought to interrogate the construction of the 'professional' by two dominant parties in the professionalisation of the UK PR industry. This emphasis on the construction of professional identities was particularly appropriate to this empirical setting as Chapter 6 highlights that the CIPR conceived of professionalisation as an identity project. Without the bolster of structural/institutional elements such as statute to decree that practitioners *have* to be a CIPR member in order to practice, the professional body can be seen to be seeking to appeal to practitioners' identities in order to convince them individually to join the CIPR. Consequently, the ability of the professional body to construct meaningful and salient subject positions becomes a fundamental element of the professionalisation project and thus

exploring the salience of the CIPR's subject position for PR practitioners becomes particularly relevant.

The other significant contribution of the conceptual framework is in relation to the sociology of professions where structural and institutional accounts of professions currently proliferate research in this area. The literature on the sociology of professions has provided detailed analyses of institutional formations of professions to monopolise power in society (e.g. Parkin, 1979; Murphy, 1986; Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1990; Freidson, 2001), conceiving of 'the profession' as a distinct occupational unit and 'the professional' as a distinct form of worker according to his/her adherence to the structural and institutional procedures of the profession. However, this focus does not allow for an appreciation of how people understand themselves as a professional, and how the professional body is able to influence that process of identity construction.

The post-structuralist understanding underpinning this research emphasises motion and fluidity and therefore analysis does not centre on assessing 'the profession' as an organising principle for occupations, particularly as it would consider the formation of this occupational unit as temporary and continually shifting. Instead, this approach assesses the construction of a profession beyond its structural power base, examining its discursive capabilities particularly in the process of identity construction. Consequently, the research does not focus on whether or not the PR occupation constitutes a professional unit but on the salience of the professional body and the professionalisation process as an identity resource. In this context, how the professional body and professionalisation informs identity construction can highlight the salience of the notion of 'profession' regardless of its structural composition. Therefore, in this conceptual approach professionalisation constitutes the material and discursive practices serving to circulate and normalise particular professional discourses and subject positions for those working in the industry and beyond. In turn, this research provides a nuanced account of professionalisation where some, namely Chartered Practitioners and early career members of the organisation at times draw on the 'discursive template' (Tsoukas and Chia,

2002) engineered by the CIPR in their on-going formation of professional identities. However, for others, the CIPR's discursive template is negotiated and contested with the use of alternate discourses that focus on experience, networks and individualism. As such, the CIPR's ability to provide a salient subject position by which practitioners draw (and redraw) on in their on-going narratives of self is limited. The alternate discourses drawn on in the dis-identification with the CIPR's subject position, together with the construction of the shapeshifter identity by practitioners suggests the need for a wide range of discursive resources from which to construct professional identities, of which the CIPR might be one for some practitioners.

This conceptual framework, taking inspiration from 'becoming' approaches (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), emphasises the construction of professional identities as continually being engineered and re-engineered in the flux of social reality. This is particularly appropriate in capturing this dynamic and ambiguous knowledge work occupation. It proves to be a salient way to explicate the identity construction of PR practitioners because this post-structuralist conceptual framework uses the fluid, emergent and constructed nature of identities as a baseline to then understand how these have become considered as discrete and stable. This is appropriate to the context of PR, where the endemic ambiguity and continual flux are also the baseline from which to understand the occupation, the professionalisation project, and the identities that are constructed in this environment.

Overall, the post-structuralist conceptual framework used in this research allows for the exploration of the construction of professional identities, recognising their fluid and contingent nature and seeking to examine how they are constituted and continually negotiated in discourse as enactments of power relations. This framing of the research, allows the study to consider the complexities and ever-shifting nature of identities whilst also being mindful of the attempts made to stabilise and control meaning regarding what constitutes 'the PR professional'.

9.2 Emergent themes and contributions: identities, ambiguity, power effects of discourse and the re-framing of profession

This following section will focus on four emergent themes from the findings and the contributions they make in understanding the professionalising process and construction of professional identities. The first theme concerns the identity construction of shapeshifter, exploring the salience of this professional identity. This theme highlights the centrality of ambiguity, which becomes the second theme, examining the benefits it brings to individual identity construction as well as the challenges it poses for the professional body. This nuanced appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of ambiguity also raises the issue of the salience of the CIPR's subject position to practitioners' professional identity construction. Therefore the third theme discussed is that of the power effects of the CIPR's discourse, considering how they have (or have not) been 'scaled up' (Hardy and Thomas, 2013). Discussion of this resonance of the CIPR discourses and the current progress made in PR's professionalisation project then informs the fourth theme, which considers the future of the professions and how they may be re-framed to remain salient as an identity resource.

9.2.1 Fluid identity construction: 'the shapeshifter'

Chapter 8 focused on the PR practitioner as shapeshifter, where practitioners presented themselves as adept in the constant re-crafting of identities, summed up by in-house practitioner Minny's comment, 'I can be whoever you want me to be baby I'm in PR, that's what we do!' This is underpinned by a narrative of the PR professional as the merchant of many guises in order to be considered as 'expert' as observed by PR consultant Spencer who comments, 'If you've got a journalist on the phone then you are very much playing a role and you are both engaged in a game that both sides know the rules of and are being very careful in the way in which you are presenting yourself and representing others...' This research highlights this relational

shapeshifter identity, constructed and reconstructed in interaction, as a strong and enduring identity claim rather than a problematic work identity.

Alvesson (2011) contends that the ambiguity of knowledge work can leave knowledge workers' identities as 'fragmented and vulnerable' (Alvesson 2011, p.1651) and as such researchers should focus on how knowledge workers construct and reconstruct their identities to counter this potential for existential insecurity. This research demonstrates that in the context of PR, the construction of the shapeshifter is one such mode of identity work. In Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) conceptualisation of identity regulation, the key element is the inter-relationship between self-identity, identity regulation and identity work. The researchers theorise that identity work is needed to constantly adapt and maintain self-identity, which is often precarious. As such, Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) notion of identity work considers the way in which individuals 'manage continuity' in their sense of self whilst the normative discourses surrounding 'the self' constantly shift. In the context of this research, the identity of shapeshifter – someone who constantly adapts their performance of identities in a changing and ambiguous work environment – is an identity by which practitioners' maintain continuity and stabilise their identities. Therein lies a certain irony that practitioners maintain continuity by constructing an identity that centres on the manipulation of different fluid identities. In turn, this process of identity construction indicates an almost 'meta-fluidity', where not only is the process of identity construction fluid, shifting and constituted in discourse but the subject position constructed in this process is of someone who can manoeuvre between the fluidity in constructing different identities in different interactional settings.

This identity of the shapeshifter also differs from other notions of identity shifting or switching that have so far been referred to in research in similar areas of knowledge work, such as management consulting. Robertson and Swan's (2003) study of cultural and identity control in this empirical setting highlighted how individuals switched between both 'expert' and 'consultant' identities when required. Similarly, Starbuck (1992) and Alvesson (1993; 2011) have highlighted the importance of performance and the construction of

narrative in the legitimisation of management consultants. Berglund and Werr (2000) argue this involves switching between a mixture of rhetorical devices in order to enable consultants to be considered knowledgeable and thus legitimate by clients. Finally, Styhre (2011) observed consultants shifting between roles of 'expert' and 'speaking partner', particularly if the consultant had little knowledge of a subject and thus argued that consultants' identities constituted, "...a patchwork of roles and positions" (Styhre 2011, p.108) that they move between when interacting with clients. What links all these studies is a conceptualisation of a consultant as shifting between different distinct identities, whether that be 'expert' and 'consultant' or 'expert' and 'speaking partner', whereas what emerges from this research is a distinct identity 'a shapeshifter' who can morph into different identities when needed. As such, this research highlights a particular distinction with regards to the manoeuvring between identities which has so far not been apparent in identity research within knowledge work, and particularly consulting, contexts.

Consequently, the finding regarding the endurance of 'the shapeshifter' in PR practitioners' professional identity construction contributes to both research on identities and research on knowledge work. With regards to identities, this research highlights the paradox that the continual re-crafting of identity as a central facet of success in these work contexts is also a means by which to stabilise a sense of self despite the fact this identity centres on the ability to shift and adapt identity performance. With regards to research on knowledge work, the PR professional subject position of 'shapeshifter' is distinct from the consultant switching between a number of set identities such as 'expert' and 'speaking partner' that currently proliferates work on this topic. The construction of this identity is by virtue of the ambiguity that pervades PR that in turn requires the practitioner to be someone that is comfortable in adapting to different circumstances. The central role played by ambiguity, both in professional identity construction and in the professionalising process is therefore the next emergent theme.

9.2.2 Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a feature of all three empirical chapters, highlighting its centrality in understanding both the professionalisation project of the CIPR and the construction of professional identities. Whilst Chapters 6 and 7 indicated that ambiguity made it hard to professionalise the industry according to work-based tasks and knowledge and left practitioners frustrated with the definitional status for what they do on a day-to-day basis, Chapter 8 demonstrated how PR practitioners also 'live with ambiguity'. In the context of identities, ambiguity results in the construction of the shapeshifter subject position that proliferates both consultant and in-house practitioners' talk. The construction of the shapeshifter as a way of living with ambiguity may help to explain why practitioners' identity work creates little angst or struggle concerning the ambiguity that lies at the heart of the job and in fact celebrates the benefits the opacity of the work can bring such as a varied and exciting job.

Ambiguity may be apparent in all areas of work and certainly a post-structuralist conceptual framework emphasises the fluidity, ambiguity and insecurity of social reality in general. However, a predominant feature of knowledge work is ambiguity (e.g. Alvesson, 1993; 2001; 2004; 2011), and therefore in this area of research an understanding of the ambiguity of the work involved and the role it plays is a particular focus. In this context, the ability to be comfortable with ambiguity is also observed by Robertson and Swan (2003) in their research on management consulting, which highlights that ambiguity may not be a cause for concern for these knowledge workers:

...ambiguity, uncertainty, and indeterminacy may be the 'natural' state of affairs...Knowledge workers may come to live with, and possibly even value, ambiguity. For example, the 'real' experts are seen as those who remain unfazed by ambiguity, who thrive on indeterminacy and who embrace uncertainty. (Robertson and Swan 2003, p.838)

Embracing uncertainty is also a notion echoed by Sennett (2006) and Bauman (2000; 2007) who argue that the new global marketplace and neo-

liberal ethos is marked by heightened insecurity, uncertainty, fragmentation, and ambiguity. In this context the modern worker is, "...required to 'continually reengineer, reinvent themselves', 'to constantly learn new skills, changing his or her 'knowledge base'." (Sennett 2006, p.44) As such, focus is on the ability to adapt and co-operate in the myriad of shifting circumstances the worker will experience (Bauman, 2000; Sennett, 2006). Consequently, the worker identity being valued in this contemporary work environment is one of a stylised, independent, individualised project of the self. PR practitioners' comfort with ambiguity, as evidenced in their prizing of the varied and dynamic work it offers and the skills of flexibility and adaptability it requires coupled with the shapeshifter identity, is reflective of this type of worker Sennett (2006) and Bauman (2000) outline. In subscribing to a relational identity that prioritises what others think (whether that be a client for consultants or organisational and extra-organisational audiences for in-house practitioners), practitioners need to be comfortable with the ambiguity and lack of control that also brings as what others think cannot always be known, controlled and are subject to change and influence from others.

As well as being comfortable with ambiguity, this research suggests that ambiguity can also be a strength in identity construction. Primarily, it allows for the shapeshifter identity to remain as enduring and is a celebrated element of the job in practitioners' talk about their motivations to work in the industry. Moreover, Chapter 7 indicates that the ambiguity also bestows an element of mystique and exclusivity in practitioners' professional identity construction. Whilst practitioners struggle to articulate to others what they do for a living there is an 'in-crowd' understanding of the job. There is also an exclusivity and mystique surrounding the 'magic' of having the ability to do PR or not, due to the ambiguous nature of PR work. This contributes to the 'inner sanctum' of PR's professional status as mentioned in Chapter 7 section 7.6, where PR practitioners consider themselves as professional whilst also recognising that others outside the industry would not feel the same.

The ability to retain mystique is highlighted in Keenoy's (1999) use of the analogy of the hologram when observing the ambiguity of HRM where HRM

as hologram is, "...a fluid, multi-faceted and intrinsically ambiguous phenomenon." (Keenoy 1999, p.1-2). In this hologram guise, HRM can take on a multitude of identities and forms and in turn generate mystique around the occupation and a similar distinction can be made for PR. Moreover, PR's 'hologramatic' quality is a particular strength for practitioners' professional identity construction in the contemporary knowledge work environment that often requires this fluidity and flexibility (Alvesson, 2004). The benefits of this ambiguity and mystique is also indicated in research on management consulting, an arena in which codification of knowledge has intensified (see Suddaby and Greenwood, 2001), where Morris (2001) notes that this codification can threaten consultants' ability to establish themselves as experts. Consequently, rather than being a source of insecurity or struggle, ambiguity in the context of individual identity construction poses many benefits.

Nevertheless, this research also demonstrates that there needs to be more of a distinction as to how ambiguity operates at different levels of identity construction. Literature on knowledge work considers ambiguity as inherent to the job (Alvesson, 1993; 2001; 2004; 2011) and as a central function where it allows knowledge workers to perform as 'expert' (Alvesson, 2001; 2004; Karreman, 2011). In the context of this research, Chapter 8 demonstrates that the ambiguity surrounding PR work functions at the level of individual identity to the extent that it allows for the construction of the shapeshifter. It also functions in identity construction where practitioners consider it as an inevitable element of working life that is in fact celebrated for the variety of work it provides and the flexibility in skill sets it demands rather than agonised or struggled over in the identity construction process. However, at the level of identity construction by the professional body, the ambiguity poses a challenge in constructing PR as professional, particularly when following a credentialised route to professional status. Therefore, on the topic of knowledge work, this research indicates that the interplay of ambiguity and identity needs to be considered in a more nuanced fashion, where ambiguity does not necessarily *de facto* allow for the status of expert to be constructed.

Consequently, in assessing the theme of ambiguity and how it operates in identity construction, both for the individual PR practitioner and the professional body for the industry, there are two significant contributions the research makes to both the literature on knowledge work and identities. Firstly, the focus in Chapter 8 on the celebration of ambiguity and construction of the shapeshifter has demonstrated there is merit in continuing to explore the way in which contemporary knowledge workers such as PR practitioners and management consultants navigate the ambiguity of their working lives. Secondly, the research demonstrates that a more considered understanding of the role of ambiguity in knowledge work needs to be appreciated, examining how it operates at different identity levels where in PR, ambiguity serves as a necessary function in practitioners' identity construction, but can also serve to be a challenge in the construction of professional subject positions by the professional body. The key problem in this regard is constructing these professional subject positions as meaningful to both PR practitioners and an audience beyond the PR sector, and this is the next theme under consideration.

9.2.3 Resonance of professional identities: power effects of discourse

Chapter 7 explained how there was a degree of salience for the CIPR professional subject position amongst Chartered Practitioners and early career members of the professional body (see section 7.4), where both emphasised, in particular, personal development as a central facet in being a PR professional. Nevertheless, many other PR practitioners drew on alternate discourses in constructing their professional identities as outlined in section 7.5. In particular, drawing on experience and networks as indicators of their professional standing. In turn, whilst the CIPR pursues professionalisation as an individual endeavour, practitioners largely considered professionalisation as something their employer is required to engage with. The combination of discourses of experience and networks and the devolvement of professionalisation to the employer, emphasises that these practitioners construct access to status and credibility as being individually earned,

connecting with wider neo-liberalist discourses of individualism and enterprise that proliferate the contemporary workplace.

The chapter concluded that the variance in the construction of professional identities by practitioners, coupled with the ambiguity surrounding the work and the problems the CIPR has so far encountered in its professionalisation project results in PR's professional status residing in an inner sanctum, where those working in the industry consider it professional, but recognise that those outside the sector do not (see section 7.6). This inner sanctum was demonstrated in practitioners' talk in section 7.2.3, highlighting that their public pejorative image coupled with their lack of credibility when compared to other corporate professionals is a particular frustration. It is also indicated when practitioners express the need for the CIPR to do more to engage in a PR campaign to raise the profile of its own industry. For example, consultant Adeline who observes:

...I think there needs to be a bit more solidarity in actually showing people outside of the industry what the industry's about...[and] have a greater profile, almost a bigger vision, a better mission statement and just be out there more thinking about 'what can I do to elevate the industry?' rather than 'what dinner can I put on and charge 100 pounds a ticket for so we can keep our subscription going?' (Adeline, Wilkin PR)

This need for wider recognition is also not lost on senior CIPR members such as Scott who argues that the Institute has, '...just got to create a profile for the industry, which helps the members and allows the members to go to dinner parties and be comfortable saying, 'oh I work in the public relations industry.'" In this context, even those practitioners that did draw on the CIPR's professional subject position in their identity construction also had misgivings around the sustainability of this subject position. In particular, in section 7.4.1 when the Chartered Practitioners expressed disappointment that their status had little 'market value' outside the PR industry.

The limited salience of the CIPR subject position and the resulting inner sanctum for PR's professional status indicates that the discourses generated by the CIPR are having limited power effects. In their application of a

Foucauldian understanding of power relations to the ontology of becoming, Hardy and Thomas (2013) argue that power relations are embedded in discourses and identities and enacted in various elements such as talk, artefacts and bodies which are involved in the production of meaning in local interactions. Power relations are also engaged when meanings are 'scaled up' from local production and interaction to have widespread distribution amongst others, in this empirical context from the professional body to practitioners and the wider world. In this regard, some discourses are able to gain strength and resonate with prevailing contexts and others are not. As such, the power effects of discourse (i.e. their ability to be scaled up and diffused beyond local interaction in specific contexts) cannot be assumed, but material and discursive practices engaged in by multiple actors over time can serve to normalise and diffuse them and therefore extend their reach (Hardy and Thomas, 2013).

In this regard, the CIPR can be considered as attempting to circulate a 'discursive template' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) of the professional practitioner as someone continually developing and learning according to CIPR credentials. However, this is failing to resonate with all PR practitioners interviewed for this research and beyond the PR industry. For practitioners, other discourses such as networks, experience and the individual and even the overarching discourse of neo-liberalism are generating greater power effects, resonating with practitioners as they construct themselves as the shapeshifter. Equally, as identified by both practitioners and senior members of the CIPR, this discursive template has certainly not diffused beyond the borders of the PR industry.

Hardy and Thomas (2013) have considered the power effects of discourse in the constitution of strategic change, demonstrating that as power effects intensify, objects and subjects are produced that serve to reinforce the discourse. In this way, discourse defines what is normal and therefore delineates certain ways of thinking, talking and acting whilst diminishing other possibilities. However, when the power effects of discourse are not intensified, the opposite happens whereby the meaning of objects and subjects are open

to greater contestation allowing greater opportunities for alternative discourses to resonate, which can then be drawn on to resist the original discourse. In the case of the CIPR, the discursive template does not appear to have prevailed with insufficient take up in practices and has not constituted the PR professional, providing the definitional parameters of what is and what is not a professional PR practitioner. Instead, what it means to be a PR professional is contested with some practitioners drawing on alternate discourses of experience and networks and even those drawing on CIPR subject positions conceding that its value beyond the PR community is limited. Also indicative of the limited power effects of the CIPR's discourse is that all the Chartered Practitioners who did draw on CIPR discourses in their construction of professional identities (i.e. all the in-house interviewees) were also constructing themselves as the shapeshifter, thus also drawing on alternate discourses of enterprise, networking and the individual, weakening the power effects of the CIPR's discourse to solely define 'the PR professional' and rule out other subject positions and meanings.

As such, this research contributes to the discursive analysis of professions and other organisations as it provides insights into how discourses might gain their appeal through connecting with other salient discourses in contemporary society. The CIPR's attempt to create a professional discourse for PR is only partly successful since it fails to connect with current discourses of enterprise, individualism and self-endeavour evident in the practitioners' talk around experience, networking, and the shapeshifter which link with the overarching discourse of neo-liberalism that currently dominates contemporary society. The CIPR's limited success in enabling their professional subject position to resonate both with PR practitioners and beyond the PR industry is indicative of some of the current problems facing the future development of 'the professions' and discussion of this theme is the final element of this chapter.

9.2.4 Changing notion of the profession

Analysis of the professionalisation of the UK PR industry in Chapter 6 found that the CIPR's approach was evocative of the traditional 'professional project'

(Larson, 1977) which serves to credentialise the occupation and then use it as a way to monopolise control and create boundaries around the professional community, and in turn harness societal legitimacy and power for the 'in' group. The range of CIPR texts analysed constructed the subject position of the PR practitioner as someone who seeks to develop continually and learn through the professional body's credentialised resources and against a backdrop of rapid change in the communications field. Professional credentials bolster this professional development discourse; demonstrating levels of education and learning have to be achieved when operating as a PR professional. In this context, the ultimate credential is the recently created Chartered Practitioner status.

Despite this putative construction of the PR profession and PR professional, the research also found that the CIPR was experiencing a number of challenges in establishing its professional discourse and the associated subject position, these included the ambiguity of the work which made credentialism difficult, the challenges in engaging with the world beyond PR, and the dependency of the CIPR on the voluntary commitment of its members. Furthermore, as observed in Chapter 7, the CIPR's construction of the 'PR professional' is not always a compelling identity resource for practitioners to draw on when constructing professional identities. This is succinctly conveyed in consultant Louise's comment: 'I think we can use MCIPR after our name, but I never would. I saw somebody with it on their business card the other day and I just thought, 'god! I can't believe you've got that on your business cards!'' As such, alternative discourses that centre on experience, networks and the individual, proliferate practitioners' identity work with the responsibility to engage with professional bodies like the CIPR devolved to their employer. The challenges faced by the CIPR in constructing a salient subject position that resonates with PR practitioners' ongoing narratives of self, highlights a current mis-match between the discursive construction of a professional via the professionalisation processes engaged in by the CIPR, and the understandings and identification processes of PR practitioners.

The CIPR centres its construction of the 'PR professional' subject position on professional development: a practitioner that continually engages in developing their knowledge. In turn, it echoes traditional notions of the professional as someone with credentials to demonstrate regular learning and development. Meanwhile, some practitioners construct their professional identities as contingent on their level of experience and the networks they engage with in order to do their job. Consequently, the CIPR's drive to pursue professionalisation through continual development and learning does not contribute significantly to this alternative professional identity. Credentials demonstrating abilities in writing, communication skills, design and such like are not valued as much as experience 'on the job' or exposure to networks of influential people that will act upon the practitioner's advice. Therefore, credentials may serve as a bonus to the practitioner but are not fundamental to their construction as a professional. Instead their relationships, their networks, their years of experience are vital to that construct and of course to what degree these elements can be learnt (and therefore credentialised) is ambiguous. Equally, even those that construct their identities in line with the CIPR's subject position such as the chartered practitioners, highlight that without that subject position resonating beyond the PR sector it also has a limited significance as a professional identity. Consequently, without the credentials meaning something beyond the PR industry, they too are not paramount to practitioners' identity construction.

This current mismatch between the construction of professional subject positions by the CIPR and frontline PR practitioners could be reflective of the tensions between attempted closure of the PR profession via credentialism (qualifications) and closure based on the work domain (tasks conducted in the job on a daily basis) that means that only a certain degree of professionalisation may ever be achieved in the PR sector. Both senior members of the CIPR in Chapter 6, section 6.3.1 and frontline PR practitioners in Chapter 7, sections 7.2.1-7.2.3 indicate that whilst credentialism may be progressing, without being able to define what PR constitutes, what it achieves, and the skills/knowledge it requires, its ability to close and control the professional constituency alone is limited. The fact that

social closure and control through credentialism have progressed further than work closure and control may be symptomatic of the needs of the charter, where to gain chartered status the CIPR had to demonstrate it had suitable professional development programmes in place. However, the extensive commentary from both CIPR personnel and PR practitioners on the ambiguity surrounding PR work may also account for why the CIPR has placed so much emphasis on social closure and mobility through credentialism. As the knowledge base and work/task 'jurisdictional domain' (Abbott, 1988) for PR is so wide-ranging, diverse, ambiguous and open-ended, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve effective closure and control at the work/task level. Therefore, without securing this work-based jurisdiction, the CIPR may have no choice but to try and professionalise PR through credentialism. The problem with this for the CIPR is that by only pursuing one strand of professionalisation, they will only ever be able to achieve a very limited and inherently weak professional status – a so-called 'professional-lite'³¹.

Professional-lite may be a characteristic of knowledge work that seeks to professionalise, where the inherent ambiguity (Alvesson, 1993; 2011) that surrounds the tasks involved in knowledge work may mean that professional-lite is all that these forms of work can hope to achieve. Some of these issues are reflected in similar disciplines such as HRM. This sector is an appropriate comparator with PR as it has embarked on a similar process of professionalisation, achieving chartered status and becoming the CIPD³² in 2000 and being approved to bestow individual chartered status for members in 2002 (CIPD, 2012). Watson (2002) has examined the professionalisation of the personnel industry by the CIPD, comparing frontline practitioner's talk with talk from a spokesperson for the professional association. He observes that traditional elements of professional discourse, such as professional development, morality, and social standing are mixed with contemporary managerial discourses highlighting how members 'add value' in the

³¹ The term 'professional-lite' is used here rather than semi-professional to highlight how this status applies to knowledge workers where the ambiguity surrounding the job means they cannot be put in the same bracket as semi-professionals teachers and nurses (Etzioni, 1969) and instead have a much more fluid and fragmented status, tied to a neo-liberal discourse of the entrepreneurial self.

³² CIPD stands for Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

performance of their work where value to society and value to corporate interests are synonymous. This 'discursive ingenuity' in turn allows the spokesperson to, "...argue a case that will advance the interests of members of that occupation and help them each make their occupational membership a 'positive' element of their individual identities." (Watson 2002, p.107). Nevertheless, he also highlights that both the HRM practitioner and professional association spokesperson have to perform discursive twists and turns in order to make the professional discourses fit their purposes. This results in him concluding that despite the fact there is potential for professional discourses to feature as an identity resource there are also challenges to contend with:

A professional identity carries the promise of high social status and generous rewards warranted by the socially admirable service that the professional worker provides through putting into action the expert knowledge that they alone possess. The problem, however, is that a managerial occupation like human resource management does not readily fit with many aspects of the full professional discourse that such an identity depends upon. (Watson 2002, p.114)

Therefore, as in PR, HRM is struggling to assert salient subject positions for professional identity construction and is grappling with the ambiguity of the work domain that could serve to undermine the professionalisation process.

Whilst the mismatch between subject positions constructed by the CIPR and identification by PR practitioners could be reflective of the difficulties in professionalising ambiguous knowledge work, it also relates to the wider debate in the sociology of professions literature regarding the changing nature, salience and power relations base of professionalism. The argument here is that a variety of political, economic, technological and cultural factors have impacted on the professions' ability to retain control of themselves (Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2003; 2006; Reed, 2007). These changes in the external environment have begun to question the future longevity of the professions, with alternative visions of the future posited. Whilst some consider the professions as robust occupational units that have adapted to changes in the work environment (e.g. Ackroyd, 1996; Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2005; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008), others suggest that the power and influence

of professions is on the decline (e.g. Broadbent *et al.* 1997; Evetts, 2003; 2006; Reed, 2007; 2009; Ross, 2009). PR's professional-lite status serves as an example of this more fluid and ambiguous construction of profession that does not achieve total social closure and control. In this context, PR has experienced the pressures that have been exerted on other more established professions forcibly without the benefit of establishing a professionalised status before the onslaught of the likes of managerialism, deregulation and globalisation which means that rather than experiencing diminished power, professional-lite constitutes the pinnacle of what can now be achieved.

An example of PR operating in a manner that the more established professions are now under pressure to also adopt is in Chapter 8, section 8.3.1 where texts generated in the research point to a strong emphasis on relational identities where, "...individuals perceive their identities in relation to specific others and suggests that individuals' self-evaluations are based on how well they fulfil their interpersonal roles with these specific others." (Elsbach 2009, p.1048). In particular, for consultant practitioners a strongly salient source of identity constitution was the client. As such, PR practitioners' identities are dependent and derived from clients' expectations. The established professions have always prioritised peer-based or internal recognition as the primary source of their identities as professionals (e.g. Grey, 1994) but the sociology of professions literature argues that this is changing too, where more external pressures from globalisation, the state, and new technology have been put on established professions to be more 'client friendly' or 'consumer oriented' (Evetts, 2006). Consequently, this relational form of identity construction that proliferates PR is an example of these more consumer rather than peer oriented professional identities.

As well as being an example of this professional-lite that some researchers consider to be the status most professions and occupations can now hope to achieve in the contemporary work environment, the traditional professional discourse of closure and credentialism of an abstract body of knowledge, coupled with a morality to operate for the public benefit may also be one that is increasingly anachronistic in contemporary organisations. Practitioners'

reaction to the CIPR's professionalisation as detailed in Chapter 7, section 7.5 and Chapter 8, demonstrate that a new concept of profession is emerging that is less codified and credentialised and more about performance, relationships and context sensitivity. This notion of an emergence of a new form of profession is reflected in Fincham's (2009) argument to expand the concept of 'profession' to 'expert labour', highlighting that there are other dimensions to an occupation that might render it a profession other than the traditional traits such as codified work/task domain and a credentialised body of knowledge. In PR's case, Fincham (2009) considers that despite a lack of formal knowledge, the occupation's corporate power still renders it a profession. Consequently, professions can be re-defined where:

Rather than say 'you have to have a formal knowledge base to be a profession', the alternative is to say 'you need a lot going for you if you don't have a formal knowledge base'. (Fincham 2009, p.10)

This comment relates to the discourses of experience and powerful networks that some of the PR practitioners were drawing on to construct their professional identities. This blending of traditional principles of the profession with the competing demands of the contemporary work environment is also noted in Watson's comment (2003a):

There appears to be something of an ongoing process of redefining professionalism by members of occupations who see advantages in the honour of possessing the professional label, but who, at the same time, want to be part of a world from which those who originally developed that label wished to keep a certain distance. (Watson 2003a, p.104)

Consequently, whilst 'the profession' as an occupational organising or structuring principle may no longer be emulated (whether or not it is sought by said occupation), the notion of a newly defined profession based on a combination of traditional and non-traditional principles could remain salient as a professional subject position in the contemporary work environment. This does not necessarily mean that the chartered element of the CIPR needs to be abandoned, but perhaps complemented by discourses around experience, networks, relationship management and adaptability that also chimes with wider discourses around the individual and entrepreneurial self that are

circulating in the neo-liberalist economy. This re-framing of the 21st century profession and professional could thus become more salient to practitioners' professional identity construction. Where the CIPR is beginning to make connections between networks, relationships and enterprise, and learning and development is in social media. This new media, which has rapidly brought new ways of communicating, allows the CIPR to demonstrate that learning and gaining its credentials can aid practitioners in building networks and relationships online and help them in an area where perhaps they have no previous experience because the online social platforms are so new.

This discussion of the implications of the mismatch between the current professionalising process and its salience in professional identity construction contributes to both the literatures on knowledge work and the sociology of professions. Firstly, the mismatch demonstrates the tensions knowledge work occupations encounter in uniting traditional principles of the profession, such as credentialism and continuous professional development, when working in an ambiguous and shifting contemporary work domain that prioritises experience, relationships and rhetoric (Alvesson, 2004). Secondly, the mismatch is reflective of the wider developments in the changing nature and salience of established professional discourses and subject positions, adding to the literature on new notions of profession by arguing that wider contemporary discourses surrounding enterprise, the individual and neo-liberalism are salient to the 21st century professional.

9.3 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the main elements of the study to assess what this research contributes to various literatures it has drawn on in the research design phase: namely, the sociology of professions, knowledge work and knowledge workers, and identities. In using a post-structuralist framework this study has considered PR's professionalisation and professional identity as multiple, fluid, constituted in discourse embedded in power relations and ultimately in a process of becoming. Whilst these understandings are prevalent in the literature on identities this study's interrogation of what is

meant by professional and how the professional body and practitioners construct and negotiate professional subject positions, this research contributes to this literature by placing the notion of 'professional' centre stage, rather than assuming its conceptualisation. A post-structuralist informed study of professionalisation has also contributed to the sociology of professions by focusing on how people understand themselves as professional and how professionalisation can inform that process.

Regarding the emergent themes from the findings, the research has developed the identity of the shapeshifter, a process by which to stabilise practitioners' professional identities by constructing a subject position of someone who can shift between identities. Its formation as a distinct identity indicates that it is worth exploring further whether this identity is also constructed in other areas of knowledge work. This is because so far, research in this area has considered shifting as moving between distinct identities rather than it constituting an identity in and of itself.

The central role of ambiguity was also an emergent theme from the research, highlighting how it resulted in the construction of the shapeshifter identity and how it also functioned in individual identity construction by giving a sense of exclusivity. Therefore, this research demonstrates there is value in continuing to explore the benefits of ambiguity in identity construction particularly in research on knowledge work that focuses on ambiguity as a concept. Additionally, consideration of the variety of actors within a knowledge work occupation, in this case the professional body and the PR practitioner, also produced a nuanced appreciation of how ambiguity functions in the construction of the expert, at times aiding and at times challenging this process. Consequently, there is scope for more studies to explore the functioning of ambiguity in knowledge work, particularly moving beyond one knowledge work organisation as the focus of the research.

In considering ambiguity and the strengths and weaknesses it presents for identity construction at different levels, the resonance of professional discourses and their power effects were also considered. This study provides

an example of the limited power effects of the CIPR's discourse, where practitioners contested the professional subject position created by the Institute by drawing on other discourses in their identity construction processes. However, the research also indicates how in appealing to wider discourses in contemporary society such as neo-liberalist discourses of enterprise and the individual, the power effects of the CIPR's discourse could gain in strength.

Finally, this research's focus on the professionalisation of PR and how that informed practitioners' professional identity construction provided an example of the challenges and complexities in professionalising knowledge work according to some of the traditional professional principles such as credentialism. In turn, this study also tapped into the debate within the sociology of professions literature regarding the diminishing power of professions as an organising principle, again providing an example of the 'professional-lite' that is pursued in the midst of growing changes in the contemporary workplace. In line with this observation, this research also argues for consideration of a new form of profession and professional, taking into account the 'discursive ingenuity' (Watson, 2002) needed to incorporate neo-liberal discourses with traditional discourses of integrity, morality and credentialism, in the construction of the modern professional. With the construction of the shapeshifter in mind, this study also considers how if credentialism is pursued in the professionalisation of knowledge work, the credentials need to have power effects beyond the knowledge work industry. In the case of PR, this is because at the heart of the shapeshifter identity is relationships with others and how they conceive of you as an expert, therefore what the credential means to you as an individual is of limited value in this context.

The final chapter will take the opportunity to reflect on the whole research process, highlighting the central features of the research and examining the research design, as well as providing more practical recommendations, and considering the future research opportunities based on what has emerged in this study.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter to the thesis provides an opportunity for reflection, not only on the research aims and contributions but also the research process itself considering; what could have been done differently, my role in the design and construction of the research, and assessment of the potential limitations of the study. Recommendations for practice from the research will also be outlined, as well as an account of what the CIPR has achieved since the time of data collection. This is followed by an exploration of the future avenues this research could pursue. These reflections ultimately highlight the value of researching the construction of professional identities.

10.1 A study of professionalisation and professional identities

This research aimed to explore what it means to be a professional by focusing on the construction of a professional subject position in texts generated by PR's professional body and by PR practitioners. It also considered how the professional body informed practitioners' identity construction, examining the salience of the CIPR's construction of the PR profession and professional for PR practitioners' processes of identity construction. In pursuing this research aim, the study drew on two predominant areas of literature: namely identities and professions. Informed by post-structuralism, the research worked with a discursive approach to identities, considering them as fluid and constituted in discourse, and therefore focusing on them as continually crafted.

With regards to the conceptualisation of profession, the research sought to bring a new perspective to the literature by considering the profession as an identity resource in the construction of professional identities. This would differ from the approaches that currently proliferate that focus either on the structural and institutional creation (and demise) of professional units (e.g. Freidson, 2001; Empson, 2001; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; McKenna, 2006; Muzio *et al.* 2011) or the formation of professional identities in an

assumed professional context (e.g. Grey, 1994; Iedema *et al.* 2008; Korica and Molloy, 2010).

These theoretical inspirations situated the study with an understanding of profession and identities as in a state of becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), continually striving to temporarily fix and stabilise meanings against an undercurrent of social reality as in continual flux. Consequently, this study was informed by literatures with different theoretical substrata, but brought together with a post-structuralist informed conceptual framework.

With this in mind, the study has made the following contributions. Firstly, it has contributed to the literature on identities by considering the salience of the professional subject position as constructed in CIPR texts in PR practitioners' processes of identity construction. So far, other professional identities studies have either not elucidated how professional is understood and therefore often assumed it has a singular identity. Secondly, the research has contributed to the sociology of professions by applying a discursive lens to the topic, thereby examining how people understand themselves as professional and how organisations involved in professionalisation are able to influence that process. Thirdly, in relation to specific themes that emerged from the findings, the study has highlighted the importance of the shapeshifter identity in the negotiation of ambiguity in PR work, as well as providing a more nuanced appreciation of how ambiguity operates in identity construction for individuals and the professional body, suggesting it is not purely functional. Finally, the study also demonstrated that the problems experienced by the CIPR in providing salient subject positions for practitioners' professional identity construction were indicative of wider issues in the professions, either as an exemplar of the difficulty in professionalising knowledge work or more deeply as symbolic of a new era of professionalism where closure and credentialism are no longer the only professional principles to pursue.

10.2 Reflections on the research

Using Johnson and Duberley's (2003) model of different approaches to reflexivity, this section reflects on the research in three ways: methodological reflexivity, evaluating the appropriateness of the research design and considering what could have been done differently; epistemic reflexivity, examining my role as researcher in the research process; and 'hyper-reflexivity', in considering how the research account has been constructed.

10.2.1 Methodological reflection

Whilst a robust account of the choices made in the research design has been provided in the methodology chapter to demonstrate that the research design was appropriate to the research aims, there are ways in which the study could be improved. For instance, in the choice of interviewees, in particular the in-house participants were a very specific type in terms of professional affiliation and seniority, whereas the consultant interviewees were a more wide-ranging group. More junior, as well as non-professionally affiliated in-house practitioners could have been approached to widen the scope of the interviews and allow more exploration of any similarities and differences regarding professional identity construction across the different working environments.

Equally, a more longitudinal study would have been advantageous in order to appreciate the process of identity construction in more depth rather than within a specific timeframe. This form of research would have allowed for a more nuanced account of the dynamic between the CIPR and PR practitioners, not only considering the salience of professional subject positions in CIPR texts for practitioners, but also how practitioners' identity construction potentially informed the CIPR's formation of the professional subject position. PR is a rapidly changing industry with significant alterations to the profession in particular occurring between the end of the data collection period and the present – as will be outlined later in this chapter – a longitudinal approach could have captured some of these changes rather than

isolating accounts into one timeframe. Nevertheless, the timing and resource demands of the research meant that longitudinal study was not possible. However, the range of methods used in order to generate 'bodies of texts' (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) for analysis has given the research depth and allowed for an appreciation of identity construction at different levels (individual and occupational) and in an overarching industry context.

10.2.2 Epistemic reflection

My position as PR practitioner turned researcher placed a greater emphasis on reflexivity during the research process. It has brought with it an awareness of how it has informed the research design, both in wanting to study the topic area in general and more specifically in the framing of research questions. It has also been a factor in the way the research has been implemented. For example, in terms of the interview setting, as many of the practitioners involved in the research were known to me through personal or professional networks the tone of the interview and relationship between interviewer and interviewee were more relaxed than they may have been with a researcher without a PR background. Likewise, there was a greater mutual understanding between researcher and participant because this interviewer had occupied the world participants were reflecting on. Consequently, the level of identity work in action in the interview setting may have been less in this context than for a researcher that was not familiar with the inside workings of the PR industry. Some interviewees commented that the reflection required in the interview setting was an interesting process for them to go through and that it did make them reassess their working lives, thankfully in a positive way. Similarly, I was not considered an 'outsider' when observing specific professional events by virtue of my previous occupation as a PR practitioner. In fact, it allowed me to cross that potential boundary and also become a participant in the CIPR focus group setting as discussed in Chapter 6.

Inevitably, in continually reflecting on the research and my role in the knowledge creation, this research has also made me assess the construction

of my professional identities as a former PR practitioner – reflecting on what elements of the texts tallied with my experiences. Potentially as a result of conducting this research, this reflection has led me to conclude that my growing detachment from the job was as a result of me not identifying with the shapeshifter construction and aspiring to a more traditional professional status. As a PR consultant largely working on corporate accounts, I worked with a lot of traditional professions such as law and accountancy as well as professional service firms and professional associations. As a result, I was aware of how my professional subject position differed from theirs in my working relationships with these occupations and the necessary performance required to ‘fit in’ with these sectors. This made me uncomfortable with the lack of definition surrounding PR and the widely pejorative image of the occupation and the necessity to rely on your ability to be a shapeshifter and build relationships with people in order to function successfully.

10.2.3 ‘Hyper’ reflection

My position as former practitioner turned researcher has also placed emphasis on reflection as to the construction of this research account. For example, as I knew some of the research participants, I was acutely aware of how I was representing them in this research account. I was very aware of the ethical implications of using people’s accounts of themselves to construct my own research narrative. This meant that I wanted to provide an account that not only incorporated individual’s identity work but situated those constructions within the wider industry so that a more holistic interpretation of the construction of the profession and professional could be considered.

Comments from practitioners regarding the opportunity for reflection the interview allowed, coupled with my continuing relationships with some of the interviewees, where inevitably themes from the research have been discussed following the data collection phase, has also made me assess whether the act of researching PR also adds to the professional discourse and knowledge work rhetoric and even identity work resources for the CIPR and for practitioners. This is because by conducting this research, backed by

the ESRC and Cardiff Business School I have highlighted that PR is legitimate enough for study. The fact that I was asked to participate in the focus group on the future of PR has already begun to situate me as a legitimate researcher and commentator on the industry and thus a symbol of the more professional status PR is pursuing.

Lastly, as a study informed by post-structuralism this research has focused on the discourses circulating in texts generated by the CIPR and PR practitioners, seeking to examine the construction of professional identities. However, mindful of academic convention (Chia, 1999) and limits with regard the contents (and size) of the thesis has also brought with it a reflection on the ability of the researcher to encompass adequately the context as well as text in such discourse analysis, as some forms of contextual analysis around the wider issues circulating in the PR industry have been downplayed in order to present a cohesive research narrative that met institutional regulations as to length and content of the thesis.

10.2.4 Limitations

As well as looking back on the research process in general, reflexivity also allows the researcher to consider the overall strengths and limitations of the research. A key strength for this research is the use of a post-structuralist framework to examine the inter-relations of identities and professions which have not previously been considered, particularly how being a professional is understood and the role of the professional body in that identity construction process. As such, the research has also opened up further research paths and has begun to explore an industry that has not come under the academic gaze to any large extent. This study has also been robust in operation of the research process from beginning to end; highlighting the linkage between research aims, knowledge in the academic arena, ontological and epistemological considerations of research and its methodological implications, as well as coherence between these elements in assessing what has emerged from the research.

Nevertheless, as with all research, there are limitations as to what one study can achieve. In this regard, a challenge for this research was to capture the salience of CIPR subject positions for in-house practitioners because only Chartered Practitioners were interviewed. Therefore, by design, they were more inclined to draw on the CIPR in their identity construction process. There could be more distinctions between the salience of the subject position constructed in CIPR texts for in-house practitioners' identity construction compared to consultant practitioners. For instance, whilst the shapeshifter identity allowed consultants to construct themselves as expert, the in-house practitioners indicated that the shapeshifter sometimes left them as an 'outsider' in their own organisation. In this context, the CIPR's discourses and subject positions could act as a bolster to negotiate these 'outsider' identities.

Moreover, considering the post-structuralist conceptual framework, because of the study's emphasis on professional identity construction – rather than the construction of professional identities within one organisation – some of the more detailed appreciation of the 'micro-practices of organising' (Chia, 1995) may have been sacrificed. Whilst discrete 'professional' events were observed where elements of 'organisational talk' could be analysed (Alvesson *et al.* 2008), consideration of some of the more routine practices where potentially negotiation of different discourses and subject positions could also have been observed would have been beneficial to the research. For example, observing council meetings or specific committee meetings of the CIPR where the negotiation and debate around what the PR profession and PR professional constitutes and the role the CIPR plays in that process could have been appreciated at the micro level.

These limitations do not render the study too problematic but instead indicate ways in which it could have been further enhanced with the benefit of reflection and hindsight. As observed in the methodology chapter, research and particularly qualitative research, is an iterative process that can also be influenced by factors outside of the researcher's control (e.g. access to participants) and therefore an element of pragmatism has to be used. However, the necessity of reflection does at least allow for some awareness

as to where those limitations apply and the severity of the impact of those limitations to the overall research aims.

10.3 Implications for practice

By focusing on the construction of professional identities in texts by the CIPR and PR practitioners, this research indicates that the professional body needs to adapt its approach to professionalisation, particularly if the goal is to persuade the individual to become engaged with the organisation, which in turn is reliant on the individual's identification with the subject positions texts generated by the professional body construct. However, some practitioners' texts, in particular Chartered Practitioners', demonstrate that the current professional subject positions do have a degree of salience for their identity construction. Consequently, a recommendation for the CIPR to alter its professional project does not necessarily mean the current subject positions need to be abandoned, but maybe they can be complemented with discourses that highlight that managing relationships and adapting to different contexts also constitute a professional subject position and therefore work to PR's strengths rather than making PR fit in with traditional professional ideals.

Developments within the professional association indicate that a variety of directions are currently being followed. The CIPR is still pursuing professional development as its core offering, with the organisation announcing that new members will have to sign up to their CPD programme to gain membership ('CIPR ditches 'broken' entry rules', *PR Week*, 18 November 2012). Invoking a more disciplinary feature of the organisation, the CIPR has also recently announced that from December 2012, the organisation will provide a 'Public Relations Register' of all its members on its website, highlighting its aim to be more transparent and to showcase those individuals who have made a commitment to self-regulation (CIPR, 2012f). These would suggest that the discourses of credentialism, closure and control, and power and legitimacy operating in CIPR texts in this study, are still providing the definitional parameters in the construction of the PR profession and professional.

However, the CIPR has also had a lot of success in demonstrating its value in providing guidance on PR and social media. For example, since the data collection period, the CIPR's social media panel has developed a book called '*Share This: The Social Media Handbook for PR*'. Written by 24 PR practitioners that are involved with the professional association, the book provides guidance on all aspects of social media for PR practitioners. The book went on general sale in July 2012, selling over 2000 copies and becoming the CIPR's best selling book and an Amazon.co.uk best-seller in marketing and PR and selling to America through Amazon.com. Plans are already underway to release a second book in 2013 called '*Share This Too*'. This venture has been successful for the CIPR in raising the profile of the organisation beyond its members and it has highlighted the CIPR as an organisation to lead thoughts and guidance on how practitioners engage with the new media that are rapidly infiltrating the communications market. Also, in producing a book, the CIPR is achieving this within a format that also bestows the writers and the Institute with credibility – something tangible and marketable has been produced. The question now is if the CIPR can reproduce this initiative in other areas of PR.

What this development shows is how in a still relatively new domain of social media, the discourse of credentialism has resonated with others, indicated by the amount of interest in the book (and the second edition to come). However, what it also indicates is that combining credentialism with discourses of experience and networks – for instance learning from a book that is made up of other practitioners' experiences in social media – is proving to be particularly successful in beginning to circulate and resonate a professional subject position with those beyond the PR industry, as this was not a resource for CIPR members only. The developments of the CIPR in social media also suggest the extent to which the PR professionals in the study are creating the professional body as well as being created by it, as it was PR professionals that were the driving force behind the creation of the book, both as an idea for the CIPR to pursue and in its contents.

Another important development in the professional field has been developments between the CIPR and the other PR professional association, the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA). The PRCA, as its name would suggest is an association that is joined at company level rather than at individual level. It started by only allowing consultancies to join and then extended their membership criteria to include in-house PR departments. However, towards the end of the data collection phase, the PRCA announced that individuals would be able to join the association ('PRCA squares up to CIPR', *PR Week*, 07 October 2011). This meant that the PRCA was competing directly with the CIPR, and the Institute expressed its concerns regarding this development in the trade publication *PR Week* (CIPR slams PRCA 'copycats' 07 October 2011). This development has left some practitioners contending that the two bodies should merge, highlighting that the two could complement one another, the CIPR having the third party endorsement of the charter and with that, a strong training and accreditation programme, and the PRCA being more active with regards policy and PR campaigns for the industry ('Heavyweights attack PRCA plan', *PR Week*, 14 October 2011). Whilst both organisations have refuted that any such merger will take place ('Trade bodies open to co-operation despite differences', *PR Week*, 14 October 2011), these developments highlight practitioners' appetite for a professional body that not only provides training and accreditation but one that can legitimise the industry and provide a stronger policy direction.

These developments link back to this research in two ways. Firstly, the CIPR's aim to pursue professionalisation as an individual identity project is now in competition with a rival professional organisation, which could make the circulation and resonance of the professional discourse and subject position in CIPR texts even more challenging. Secondly, the desire from practitioners for the two organisations to merge, are indicative of practitioners' comments in this study regarding the need for the CIPR to engage in a PR campaign for PR's reputation in order to move PR's professional status beyond the current inner sanctum it resides in. In the context of a merger between the CIPR and the PRCA it is suggested that the PRCA could begin to fulfil that function.

10.4 Future research opportunities

Reflecting on the research process also highlights further research opportunities that could be pursued in future. In terms of identities, this research has considered the extent to which subject positions in CIPR texts inform practitioners' processes of identity construction. However, it has not examined the extent to which PR practitioners are creating the professional body as well as being created by it. Within a post-structuralist conceptual framework, professional identity construction would not be considered as a purely one-way process between the professional body and practitioner and would suggest that the interactions and constructions of practitioners could in turn have power effects on the discourses and subject positions constructed in CIPR texts. Whilst section 10.3 provides some indications of the CIPR's responses to how practitioners' construct themselves as professional, this has not been examined in any depth and would be valuable in order to gain a fuller account of professional identity construction in this empirical context.

With regards to the literature on professions, further exploration of what it means to be a professional could be conducted in other occupations. This research demonstrates that there is currently a mis-match between the constructions of the professional in CIPR texts in comparison to the professional subject position read in practitioner texts. A similar comparison could be considered for more established professions such as law and accountancy, exploring firstly, whether the professional associations construct 'the professional' according to traditional discourses of credentialism and closure and secondly, the degree to which the construct in professional association texts is salient to those in practice. With the debate regarding the diminishing power of the professions (e.g. Evetts, 2006; Reed, 2007; Ackroyd, 1996; Kirkpatrick *et al.* 2005) and the rise of the professional service firm (e.g. Hinings, 2005) in mind, literature on this topic and the research findings in this study would suggest that the professional subject position has had to adapt to the changing work environment and demands on the modern professional. Whilst the adaptations professions have had to make in order to cope with the changing work landscape have been researched (e.g. Faulconbridge and

Muzio, 2008; Noordegraaf, 2011; Flood, 2011) little has been done to explore how professionals understand themselves as such and therefore research of this nature could be a valuable addition.

In relation to the empirical context of PR, with the recent developments in the industry in mind, similar research as conducted here with the CIPR could now be conducted with the PRCA. Now that it allows individual practitioners to join, its constructions of the PR profession and PR professional would also be appropriate for study and could be a good comparator with the CIPR. Additionally, in considering the limitations of this research, a study that explored any distinctions in identity construction between consultant and in-house PR practitioners would also be an avenue to pursue, as this research indicated that there were some differences in the construction of the PR practitioner as shapeshifter. Therefore, there may also be more differences in the salience of subject positions in CIPR texts between consultant and in-house practitioners.

As well as exploring more identity questions within the realm of PR, research comparing PR with other sectors could also be fruitful. For instance, as this research has indicated, there are some comparisons between PR and management consulting in the construction of professional identities. Research has been conducted on the influence of the firm in management consultancy's professionalisation (Muzio *et al.* 2011) but this has not been explored in relation to PR and indications from this research regarding Wilkin PR and its extensive in-house professional training (see Chapter 7, section, 7.5.3) would suggest that exploring the influence of the firm on the construction of professional identities would also be a valuable research aim.

10.5 Conclusion

Overall, this research has added to the literatures on the sociology of the professions, knowledge work and identities by looking at the relationship between professionalisation and identity construction. In doing so it has highlighted the ambiguous, complex and shifting nature of professional

identities in PR, and the similarities and differences between how the professional body and frontline practitioners conceive of 'the PR professional'. The research demonstrates that PR practitioners construct their professional identities as 'shapeshifter', highlighting the importance of the malleability and adaptability of the PR practitioner as a measure of their success and professionalism. Meanwhile, the industry's professional association prioritises development and continual learning as the benchmark of the professional, without engaging with notions of relationship building and performativity that practitioners prioritise in their identity construction processes.

Without a mandate to licence the practice of PR according to membership, the salience of the CIPR's subject positions to PR practitioners is of paramount importance to the future survival of the organisation as it is one of the main ways to appeal to practitioners to join, yet this research indicates that for now, the Institute is not as influential as it would like to be. Nevertheless, this does not mean there is not a role for the CIPR to play. In fact, this research demonstrates, the professional body for PR could play a vital part in legitimating the industry and the people that work in it. With the PRCA moving in on the CIPR's 'turf' and the economic climate putting more pressure on membership fees, it remains to be seen what direction the organisation takes in the future to continue to appeal to PR practitioners.

Finally, studying professionalisation and professional identities within a post-structuralist conceptual framework has been of particular value because not only has the attempted and on-going creation of a profession been explored but also the construction, contestation and negotiation of professional identities by two fundamental stakeholders in the process. Whilst previous studies have examined the regulation of identities in a professional context (e.g. Grey, 1994; Korica and Molloy's, 2010; Mueller *et al.* 2011) or the use of a professional discourse as either a disciplinary mechanism (e.g. Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009) or a facet in the negotiation of other discourses and subject positions (e.g. Thomas and Linstead, 2002), this research has interrogated the notion of 'professional' considering how that is constructed and understood by both practitioners and the professional body. Similarly, whilst

professions studies have considered the structural and institutional formation of a profession as an occupational unit (e.g. Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001; McKenna, 2006; Scott, 2008), this research has considered how professionals understand themselves as such and the role the professional body can play in that process. In doing so, this research has not only contributed to the literatures on identities and professions but has also indicated that in using a post-structuralist framework, the relationship between the two can also be considered, providing further contributions and research opportunities for both research on identities and professions.

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APPENDIX A: APPROVED ETHICS FORM

No. 15

CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM: PHD THESIS RESEARCH

(For guidance on how to complete this form, please see <http://www.cf.ac.uk/carbs/research/ethics.html>)

For Office Use:	Ref	Meeting
<p>Does your research involve human participants? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If you have answered 'No' to this question you do not need to complete the rest of this form, otherwise please proceed to the next question</p> <p>Does your research have any involvement with the NHS? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If you have answered Yes to this question, then your project should firstly be submitted to the NHS National Research Ethics Service. Online applications are available on http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applicants/ . It could be that you may have to deal directly with the NHS Ethics Service and bypass the Business School's Research Ethics Committee.</p> <p>Name of Student: Cara Reed</p> <p>Student Number: 000943693</p> <p>Section: HRM section, CARBS</p> <p>Email: reedcj1@cardiff.ac.uk or carareed@btinternet.com</p> <p>Names of Supervisors: Professor Robyn Thomas Professor Annette Davies Dr Andrea Whittle</p> <p>Supervisors' Email Addresses: thomasr4@cardiff.ac.uk daviesa4@cardiff.ac.uk whittlea@cardiff.ac.uk</p> <p>Title of Thesis: Becoming a Profession: A Study of Occupational Identity in Public Relations</p> <p>Start and Estimated End Date of Research: Start: October 2009 End: October 2012</p> <p>Please indicate any sources of funding for this research: ESRC studentship</p>		

APPLICATION APPROVED
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

1. Describe the Methodology to be applied in the research

Semi-structured interviews with professional associations for the PR industry (e.g. Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), Government Communication Network (GCN)).

Semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners (both in-house and consultants) from across the UK. Some interviews may be repeated (i.e. initial interviews conducted in the first year of the research to gauge research context and explore certain ideas, then interviews with same people [as well as additional participants] repeated in the second year of the research, perhaps pursuing only certain dominant themes or different themes that have arisen in the intervening period between the interviews).

Focus groups with PR practitioners (both in-house and consultants) from across the UK. This will explore particular themes from the interviews in more detail so will probably be conducted towards the end of the second year of research.

Accompanying these methods will be textual analysis of documentation from the professional associations e.g. website materials, press releases, media appearances, and marketing/promotional literature.

2. Describe the participant sample who will be contacted for this Research Project. You need to consider the number of participants, their age, gender, recruitment methods and exclusion/inclusion criteria

Semi-structured Interviews with Professional Associations:

- Number of participants: Approximately 20
- Age range: All adult – all senior PR practitioners
- Gender: Mixture of male and female
- Recruitment methods: some are known through personal networks (as I am a former PR practitioner), some will be introduced by other interviewees (snowball sampling), and others will be contacted directly by email or telephone to explain the research aims and invite them to take part
- Exclusion/inclusion criteria: Research will be particularly interested in talking to figureheads that ‘speak’ for the profession such as the Chairman of the PRCA or the President of the CIPR as well as talking to those responsible for credentialising the profession (e.g. those that manage the chartered practitioner scheme for the CIPR)

Semi-structured Interviews with PR practitioners:

- Number of participants: Approximately 50
- Age range: All adult so range from 18-65yrs
- Gender: Mixture of male and female
- Recruitment methods: some are known through personal networks, some introduced through key gatekeepers, some through recommendations of other interviewees (snowball sampling)
- Exclusion/inclusion criteria: Key will be to get a range of in-house practitioners and consultants, a range of age groups, a range of gender, some with and some without professional body affiliation, and a range of geographical location (i.e. attempt to talk to practitioners in the major areas for the PR industry such as Manchester, Cardiff, Edinburgh or Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds and London)

Focus groups with PR practitioners:

- Number of participants: Approximately 25
- Age range: All adult so range from 18-65
- Gender: Mixture of male and female
- Recruitment methods: will have been asked at the interview whether they would be willing to take part in a future focus group
- Exclusion/inclusion criteria: All participants will have already been interviewed and groups may be formed according to factors such as seniority in industry, whether in-house or consultant, or geographical location, depending on what themes emerge from the interviews (i.e. any patterns of certain themes from certain demographic groups at interview stage that can be explored in more depth in a focus group)

3. Describe the consent and participant information arrangements you will make, as well as the methods of debriefing. If you are conducting interviews, you must attach a copy of the consent form you will be using.

Researcher envisages initial approach to research participants will be made via email. This email will clarify: who I am, what qualification I am studying for, and what research topic I am studying. The participants’ role in the research will then be explained where the following will be detailed: the fact that I want to interview them, that the time, date and location of the interview will be somewhere of convenience to them, a statement of approximately how long the interview will last, that the interview will be recorded for the purposes of capturing research data, that participating in the research is entirely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time, and that all data used from the interview will be detailed anonymously and not traced back to the participant. This approach may also need to be followed up with phone calls detailing the same information.

Once a participant has agreed to take part in the research they will be sent a consent form together with an explanation that this form confirms the arrangement that has been made between researcher and participant. Only those that have signed the consent form will be interviewed for the purposes of the research.

All those that participate in the research will also be informed that they can be sent an executive summary of the findings if they are interested in the outcomes. Also, by having repeated interviews and focus group sessions, participants will have a chance to reflect on their participation and have another opportunity to talk through those reflections with other participants, and the researcher.

With regard to the interviewees from PR professional associations, it may be difficult to render some data anonymous – particularly as there is one dominant professional association in the form of the CIPR. As the aim of the research is to talk

to figureheads of the associations that will be used to speaking 'on-the-record', the suggestion is to explain to them that information where possible will be used anonymously but where that is not possible, the researcher will come back to the interviewee to discuss material that the researcher wants to use as attributed.

4. Please make a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the research and how you intend to deal with them throughout the duration of the project

One potential issue is that research participants may not want some of their views on the PR industry to be attributed to them as it may affect their future career prospects. This is why the consent form will be paramount and why the researcher will be clear from the outset as to what this research is exploring and what will be done with the data after the interview (i.e. the participant will remain anonymous unless s/he specifies otherwise or in the case of the professional associations that if material needs to be attributed, the researcher will return to the interview to agree attribution to materials).

PLEASE NOTE that you should include a copy of your questionnaire: Copies of the suggested interview guides for the PR professional associations and PR practitioners are included. The topics covered in the focus groups will be of a similar nature to those covered in the interviews.

NB: Copies of your signed and approved Research Ethics Application Form together with accompanying documentation must be bound into your Dissertation or Thesis.

5. Please complete the following in relation to your research:

		Yes	No	n/a
(a)	Will you describe the main details of the research process to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	If you are using a questionnaire, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(f)	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g)	Will you offer to send participants findings from the research (e.g. copies of publications arising from the research)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE NOTE:

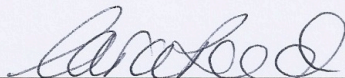
If you have ticked No to any of 5(a) to 5(g), please give an explanation on a separate sheet.

(Note: N/A = not applicable)

There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of Cardiff Business School Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

Two copies of this form (and attachments) should be submitted to Ms Lainey Clayton, Room F09, Cardiff Business School.

Signed



Print Name

CARA REED

Date

09/03/10

APPENDIX B: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY FORMS FOR INTERVIEWEES

FOR PR PRACTITIONERS:

CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL

RESEARCH ETHICS

Consent Form - Anonymous data

I understand that my participation in this project will involve being interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. I understand that I will be interviewed on my attitudes towards public relations as a profession and my role and experiences as a PR practitioner.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I have second thoughts about participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Professor Robyn Thomas at ThomasR4@cardiff.ac.uk.

I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially and securely, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for up to 1 year and will then be anonymised, deleted or destroyed. I understand that if I withdraw my consent I can ask for the information I have provided to be anonymised/deleted/destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

I also understand that at the end of the study I may request some additional information and feedback about the purpose and results of the study by applying to the University

I, _____ (NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Cara Reed, ReedCJ1@cardiff.ac.uk, PhD student of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Professor Robyn Thomas.

Signed:

Date:

FOR SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE CIPR:

CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL

RESEARCH ETHICS

Consent Form - Anonymous data

I understand that my participation in this project will involve being interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. I understand that I will be interviewed on my attitudes towards public relations as a profession and my role and experiences as a PR practitioner. I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I have second thoughts about my participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Professor Robyn Thomas at ThomasR4@cardiff.ac.uk.

I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially and securely, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. I understand that material will be attributed to 'a senior member of the CIPR' but if an occasion arises where material requires full attribution I understand that the researcher will contact me to discuss the relevant material and whether attribution can be made. The information will be retained for up to 1 year and will then be anonymised, deleted or destroyed. I understand that if I withdraw my consent I can ask for the information I have provided to be anonymised/deleted/destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

I also understand that at the end of the study I may request some additional information and feedback about the purpose and results of the study by applying to the University.

I, _____ (NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Cara Reed, ReedCJ1@cardiff.ac.uk, PhD student of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Professor Robyn Thomas.

Signed:

Date:

APPENDIX C: AN EXAMPLE OF AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE SENT TO INTERVIEWEES

(This example was sent to the in-house practitioners)

My name is Cara Reed and I am currently studying for a PhD at Cardiff Business School (Cardiff University) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

My research involves interviews with a range of PR practitioners, including Chartered Practitioners, as well as senior members of the CIPR – which is why I am getting in contact with you to see if you would be willing to help.

As a former PR practitioner and CIPR member, I am researching issues of occupational identity in the PR industry and in particular I am looking at the professionalisation of PR and how that relates to practitioners' day-to-day experiences.

If you'd be willing to take part, I would like to interview you at some point in **[insert month]** at a time, date and location convenient to you. The interview will last no more than an hour and will be recorded for the purposes of capturing the research data.

The plan would be to talk about your day-to-day experiences as a PR practitioner, covering aspects such as: your background and how you got into PR, what your job entails, and the good and bad sides of the job. Then the interview would cover discussion of what it means to be professional and your thoughts on the work of the CIPR.

Consequently, there's no need for any preparation before the interview - it's ultimately just your thoughts and feelings on what you do for a living. Most people that have done the interviews already have actually enjoyed having an hour to reflect.

If you are happy to participate let me know what date, time and location works for you. Alternatively, if you have any further questions about the research, please don't hesitate to contact me; all my details are at the end of this email.

If it is of any use other CIPR members that have already participated have also assured me that an interview with me can contribute to your CPD submissions!

If you are interested in taking part I would very much appreciate the time to talk with you – I look forward to hearing from you.

**APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT PROFILES
(in the order they appear in empirical chapters 6-8)**

SENIOR CIPR MEMBERS		
All members (some fellows) and all senior within the CIPR		
Name		Profile
Fiona		Previous experience all in-house Senior in-house practitioner Chartered Practitioner
Rachel		Previous experience mixture of consultancy and in-house Now senior in-house practitioner
Kate		Previous experience all in-house Now senior manager
Penny		Previous experience as consultant and in-house practitioner Now senior freelance consultant
Daniel		Previous experience mixture of in-house (local government) and technology consultancy Now senior freelance consultant Attempted Chartered Practitioner
Stacey		Previous experience all in consultancy – sold own consultancy Now senior freelance consultant Chartered Practitioner
Justin		Previous experience all in consultancy Now MD of consultancy
Scott		Previous experience as journalist and in-house (government) Now senior in-house practitioner Chartered Practitioner
Selena		Previous experience all in-house and former civil servant Now senior in-house practitioner
CONSULTANT PRACTITIONERS		
From two companies one based in Wales, one based in central London, mixture of members and non-members and mixture of seniority		
Name	Company	Profile
May	Taff PR	Junior PR consultant (title: Account Executive) Has been in PR for just over 2 years Member of the CIPR Attends CIPR events and training
Alexander	Taff PR	Very senior consultant (title: MD of PR network) Has been in PR for 18 years Member of the CIPR Very little direct involvement with CIPR although he instituted that all practitioners at Taff PR be

		members of CIPR as standard
Helen	Taff PR	Senior level consultant (title: Account Director) Has been in PR for 8 years Member of the CIPR At beginning of career was heavily involved with CIPR (achieved a CIPR Advanced Diploma) but since has little involvement with CIPR apart from awards submissions and occasional training courses
Rose	Taff PR	Junior PR consultant (title: Account Executive) Has been in PR for less than a year Member of the CIPR Has a PR undergraduate degree Attends CIPR events and training
Chloe	Taff PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Account Manager) Has been in PR for 3 years Member of the CIPR Previously a journalist for 3 years Member of the local CIPR committee, on the CIPR CPD programme, organised the local awards scheme and involved with CIPR Wales training and events
Ruby	Taff PR	Senior level consultant (title: Account Director) Has been in PR for 19 years Only practitioner from Taff PR to have worked in London before returning to Wales Member of the CIPR Has no involvement with CIPR apart from awards submissions
Spencer	Taff PR	Very senior consultant (title: MD of Taff PR) Has been in PR for 15 years Fellow of the CIPR Heavily involved with CIPR – has been chair of local committee and follows CPD programme and at time of interview had applied to be a Chartered Practitioner
Harriet	Taff PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Account Manager) Has been in PR for 5 years Member of the CIPR Has a PR postgraduate qualification Attends some CIPR events and training
Louise	Taff PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Account Manager) Has been in PR for 5 years Member of the CIPR Attends some CIPR events
Kim	Taff PR	Senior level consultant (title: Account Director) Has been in PR for 13 years Member of the CIPR Has little involvement with CIPR apart from awards submissions and occasional training courses

Lily	Wilkin PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Senior Account Manager) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 6 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
Joanne	Wilkin PR	Junior consultant (title: Account Executive) Works in consumer section Has been in PR for 2 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
James	Wilkin PR	Very senior consultant (title: Associate Director) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 10 years Former investment banker Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – has attended the odd PRCA event
Emily	Wilkin PR	Very junior consultant (title: Account Co-ordinator) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 1 and a half years Has a PR undergraduate degree from US Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement – used to have individual membership to US professional association when a student
Anita	Wilkin PR	Senior consultant (title: Account Director) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 5 and a half years Spent a lot of time as a freelance consultant Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
Adeline	Wilkin PR	Senior consultant (title: Account Director) Works in consumer section Has been in PR for 7 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – has attended the odd PRCA event
Richard	Wilkin PR	Junior consultant (title: Senior Account Executive) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 7 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
Natalie	Wilkin PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Senior Account Manager) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 4 years

		Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
Adam	Wilkin PR	Senior consultant (title: Account Director) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 8 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement
Elizabeth	Wilkin PR	Senior consultant (title: Account Director) Works in consumer section Has been in PR for 6 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – has attended some PRCA events
Sam	Wilkin PR	Very senior consultant (title: Practice Group Director) Works in consumer section Has been in PR for 10 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement but has individual Chartered Institute of Marketing membership
Melanie	Wilkin PR	Very junior consultant (title: Account Co-ordinator) Works in consumer section Has been in PR for 1 year Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – has attended a few PRCA events
Isabel	Wilkin PR	Mid-level consultant (title: Account Manager) Works in corporate section Has been in PR for 4 years Not a CIPR member Wilkin PR member of PRCA – no individual involvement

IN-HOUSE PR PRACTITIONERS

All hold senior posts in a variety of sectors in public and private sector

Name		Profile
Bruce		Has been in PR for 14 years Member of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner
Ben		Has been in PR for 28 years Has a postgraduate PR qualification Fellow of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner
Moira		Has been in PR for 23 years Fellow of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner
Melissa		Has been in PR for 20 years Has a postgraduate PR qualification Fellow of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner

Minny		Has been in PR for 23 years Member of numerous other associations such as Chartered Institute of Marketing, Chartered Management Institute, and Institute of Directors Fellow of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner
Russell		Has been in PR for 23 years Member of CIPR - Chartered Practitioner
Janet		Has been in PR for 30 years Member of CIPR – Chartered Practitioner

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PR PRACTITIONERS

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview – I know from personal experience how busy you are so I appreciate your time to discuss my research.

As I explained, I am a former PR consultant but I am now pursuing a PhD. With this research, I am interested in looking at the day-to-day experiences of PR practitioners and how the role of professional associations such as the CIPR impact on these experiences.

As explained before this interview is completely confidential so no comments will be traced back to the individual. The interview is recorded to allow me to concentrate on the discussion rather than make notes. Are you OK with this? The questions are intentionally open-ended so don't worry about giving me the right answer. Also, a lot of the questions require a bit of reflection so don't feel pushed for time, particularly as it is being recorded – take as much time as you need.

Basic information:

Name: _____
(not to be disclosed in transcripts and analysis just for any future communication)

Age: _____

Job title: _____

Previous jobs/professional background:

(i.e. solely in-house or consultant or mixture)

Member of any professional associations – if so what ones?

GUIDE:

Background:

- How did you get into PR?
- What attracted you to PR as a career? What keeps you in PR?
- How did others close to you react to your career choice?

Job/role:

- How would you define PR? How do you explain what you do?
- What would you say are the main skills needed to be a PR practitioner? What does a good PR practitioner look like?
- What do you think distinguishes you from other practitioners?

Feelings/Experiences:

Good:

- What makes you feel like you've done a good job?
- What motivates you?

Bad:

- What do you find as the most irritating aspects of your job?
- What parts of your job make you anxious/worried?
- Do you encounter ethical issues/dilemmas/conflicts in your work?
- Is it easy to resist demands that are made on you? Do you have examples of when this happened and how you reacted?

Professionalism:

- What does the term professional and profession mean to you?
- Do you think the PR industry is professional?
- How do you think others view the professionalism of PR practitioners/PR industry?

Professional Associations:

- Can you tell me why you joined the CIPR?
- How does your organisation consider your membership of the CIPR?
- What role does the CIPR play in your professional life?
- What status do you think the CIPR has amongst the PR community?
- What more could the CIPR do to help your day-to-day working life?

For those with Chartered Practitioner (CP) status:

- What made you decide to go for CP status? How did you feel about the process?
- After going through the assessment process what kind of PR practitioner would be likely to get CP status? What qualities/skills is the scheme looking for?
- In what contexts have you talked about your CP status since securing it?

Do you have any questions or further comments concerning this research? (*Make sure crib sheet completed and consent form signed before leaving*)

APPENDIX F: DATABASE OF DOCUMENTATION ON PR AND PROFESSION (ORDERED ACCORDING TO GENRE OF TEXT)

Date	Title	Genre	Author	Audience	CPR or Industry	Themes/Comments
26.11.12	CPR members get more	Advert: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	CPR or Industry	Advertisement to join CPR
01.11.11	Chartered Professional Go Further	Advert: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR/Industry	Advertisement to join CPR
09.03.10	PR election expected in UK	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR/Industry	PRCA election expected in UK
26.11.12	CPR set jobs CPR debate	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	Industry	PRCA sets jobs for CPR debate
30.09.11	Toryban joins CPR debate	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Toryban joins CPR debate
08.04.11	The CPR government affairs group	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	The CPR government affairs group
06.11.11	URI launches CPR course	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	URI launches CPR course
25.02.11	Lobby register set for launch	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Lobby register set for launch
25.02.11	CPR government affairs group	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR government affairs group
24.09.10	Garnon start on £100k list	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Garnon start on £100k list
21.01.11	The CPR	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	The CPR
23.10.09	PR bodies integrate	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	PR bodies integrate
12.06.09	Bosser pulled on degrees	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Bosser pulled on degrees
05.06.09	Are you a professional truth-teller or a 'lied' guy?	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Are you a professional truth-teller or a 'lied' guy?
15.07.11	Will NetW do more benefit PR?	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Will NetW do more benefit PR?
23.10.09	Derbyshire scoops five awards	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Derbyshire scoops five awards
25.11.12	Industry Steeled for bleak winter	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Industry Steeled for bleak winter
25.11.12	Results of CPR vote	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Results of CPR vote
18.11.12	CPR catches 'broken' entry rules	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR catches 'broken' entry rules
07.10.11	PRCA squares up to CPR	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	PRCA squares up to CPR
30.09.11	CPR claims PRCA 'copycats'	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR claims PRCA 'copycats'
13.11.09	Council newspapers backed by the CPR	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Council newspapers backed by the CPR
02.03.12	Move to stiffen ethics guidelines	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Move to stiffen ethics guidelines
17.02.12	Trust in PR comes under scrutiny	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Trust in PR comes under scrutiny
13.11.09	CPR on defensive as Myfrea urges change	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR on defensive as Myfrea urges change
04.12.09	Myfrea wins CPR vote	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Myfrea wins CPR vote
06.11.09	CPR seeks to calm concerns over looming financial loss	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR seeks to calm concerns over looming financial loss
05.02.10	PR bill of rights' hits buffers	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	PR bill of rights' hits buffers
23.10.09	CPR issues youth plans	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR issues youth plans
09.12.11	PRCA to quit Bell Pothinger?	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	PRCA to quit Bell Pothinger?
26.02.10	Lobbyists face CPR expulsion	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Lobbyists face CPR expulsion
05.02.10	Spear' hits industry reputation	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Spear' hits industry reputation
14.10.11	Headwinds attack PRCA plan	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Headwinds attack PRCA plan
22.07.11	CPR reviews lobbying code	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR reviews lobbying code
20.04.12	CPR calls for WILF action	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR calls for WILF action
25.05.12	CPR critical of minister	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR critical of minister
11.05.12	CPR attacks The Observer over 'sweeping article'	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR attacks The Observer over 'sweeping article'
29.06.12	CPR bars WILF editing	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR bars WILF editing
28.09.12	Zetter meets the with PRCA	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Zetter meets the with PRCA
02.11.12	PR struggles for board voice	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	PR struggles for board voice
02.11.12	Wider remit for PR professionals	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Wider remit for PR professionals
15.11.12	CPR to list all members	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR to list all members
16.11.12	Commis unit struggles for voice	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Commis unit struggles for voice
23.11.12	CPR candidates must withdraw	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR candidates must withdraw
23.11.12	CPR awards	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR awards
06.10.11	The CPR and PRCA should merge	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	The CPR and PRCA should merge
13.05.10	CPR defends PR industry Ethics	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	CPR defends PR industry Ethics
27.05.10	Fake PR Public Relations Twitter account a viral hit	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Fake PR Public Relations Twitter account a viral hit
34.05.11	Communicating Academic Research - does social media have a role?	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Communicating Academic Research - does social media have a role?
09.09.11	10 Signs you work in PR	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	10 Signs you work in PR
01.03.11	Conversation: Defining PR ethically	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Conversation: Defining PR ethically
16.01.12	How are PR people depicted in the media?	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	How are PR people depicted in the media?
12.09.10	Is it worth PRs joining a trade organisation	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	Is it worth PRs joining a trade organisation
06.09.10	In conversation with Paul Myfrea, BBC's Head of Press and Media Commis	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	In conversation with Paul Myfrea, BBC's Head of Press and Media Commis
29.09.10	In conversation with Robert Phillips, CEO of Eusebian UK	Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	In conversation with Robert Phillips, CEO of Eusebian UK
20.10.10		Article: PR Week	PRCA	PR practitioners	CPR	

26.10.10	The CPR Presidents Debate	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
10.11.10	In conversation with Richard Miles, CEO of Hill Knowlton	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
01.12.10	In conversation with Barry Leggetter, Exec Director of AMEC	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
19.01.11	In conversation with Elizabeth France and Keith Johnson	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
02.02.11	PR and the Big Society with Claire Carter and Jane Wilson	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
09.03.11	In conversation with Neil Chapman, founder of Alpha Voice Comms	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
11.04.11	CPR TV special with Emily Dent and Corinne Bensen	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
04.05.11	CPR TV Election and Referendum special	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
02.05.11	Diversity of the PR profession	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
13.07.11	Standards in Journalism	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
03.08.11	Olympic Special	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
14.09.11	Crisis and Reputation Management	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
06.10.11	Public Affairs double bill	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
07.11.11	The Presidential Debate	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
08.12.11	The Future of broadcast media and PR	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
22.02.12	NLA Copyright Tribunal interim ruling and what it means for PR	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
14.03.12	Mobile trends, tools and practices	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	CPR TV - see website
14.10.11	Flack	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PRCA accepting individuals
10.06.11	Flack	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Discusses survey on who is most recognised from PR amongst 18-24 y olds
15.07.11	Flack	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Relationship between Journalism and PR
25.11.11	The search for a fresh definition of PR	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	His reflections on PRSA definition campaign
09.12.11	Business must tackle anti-corporate narrative	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Ethics of PR if going to help in highlighting corporations aren't evil
15.07.11	The shape of the PR industry today	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Announcing PR Week and PRCA census
22.07.11	Shifting power ebb demands PR rethink	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Impact of leading scandal
06.04.12	Today's PR is rarely spin and manipulation	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Commentary on former book revelation that PR for PR is needed
11.05.12	Confidence is vital for PR professionals	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
15.06.12	Comboys damage our reputation	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
29.06.12	The power shift to new 'owned' media	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
12.10.12	Strong journalism is crucial to good comms	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
28.09.12	FTSE firms should have comms on board	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
05.10.12	A move towards the holy grail of integration	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
16.11.12	BBC has become a laughing stock	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
16.11.12	BBC pays price for cutting comms team	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
16.11.12	New boss must be a media front man	CPR TV	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	PR practitioners
01.01.09	Application details	CP documents	CPR	CP members	CPR	Application as stage 1 of CP process
01.12.09	Congratulations and thank you	CP documents	CPR	CP members	CPR	Materials to promote CP status once it's been achieved
01.08.09	Public Relations Practice Must Continuously Learn to Become a Profession	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.08.09	An analysis of the role of quantification in public relations evaluation	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.08.09	Communication micro-strategies within the NHS	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.08.09	What does it take to be a global communications professional?	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.08.09	The Future Practitioner	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.08.09	Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose for public relations?	CP Paper	CP	PR practitioners	CPR	Paper for stage 2 of CP assessment
01.02.10	PR 2010 Wailes focus group	Event	CPR	PR practitioners	CPR	Event to discuss future of PR to help in policy for CPR
27.07.12	How to write the great entries for PRide 2011	Event	CPR	PR practitioners	CPR	Event for CPR Wailes on sharing best practice for awards
12.05.11	Introducing the Futures 5	Event	CPR	PR practitioners	CPR	Event for annual AGM
30.06.11	Doing more with less: round table evaluation	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Five communications trends for PR's to be aware of
24.09.10	PR Trifles: Whats the best mix?	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Debate on measurement and evaluation of PR
15.07.11	The other side of the divide	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	The various types of PR practitioners
25.11.12	CPR PRide Awards 2011 North East and Yorks and Lincs	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Looks at impact of more journalists moving into PR
18.11.12	CPR PRide Awards 2011 East Engla and Home Counties South	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
02.12.11	CPR PRide Awards 2011 Thames and Chiltern and North West	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
09.12.11	CPR PRide Awards 2011 Midlands and Northern Ireland	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
21.10.11	Scott show true spirit	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
28.10.11	The best of the West	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
11.11.11	The only way is Wisser	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR Excellence Awards
10.06.11	Fair wind amid the fall for cruise ship	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
05.11.11	Wonders of the West	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
04.12.09	Campaign Champions	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
06.11.09	No Place like home	Feature: PR Week	CPR	PR practitioners	Industry	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme

13.11.09	Scores in the West	PR Week	Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
23.10.09	Wonders of Wales	PR Week	Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Highlights of CPR regional awards scheme
20.03.12	Top 5 PR Picks	PR Week	Kate Magee and John Owens	PR practitioners	Industry	Feature on top campaigns picked by top 100 PR practitioners
13.01.12	The PR Week Best Places to Work Survey 2011	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Could use as background material
11.11.11	What's in store for 2012?	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Could use as background material
08.04.11	Not the usual suspects	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Feature on top PR professionals under 29
08.04.11	A place for PR?	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Discussion role CPR can play now product placement allowed on TV
12.08.11	Five key skills for the future	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Skills needed to be a future practitioner
08.07.11	Life after AVEA: The value debate rumbles on	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Future of measurement and evaluation
02.03.12	Who owns social media?	PR Week	Joe Leaper	PR practitioners	Industry	Debate on importance of degrees to PR
25.02.11	Who owns social media?	PR Week	Joe Leaper	PR practitioners	Industry	Debate on importance of degrees to PR
11.03.11	In-house or agency: which role suits you?	PR Week	Jenny Cornish	PR practitioners	Industry	Could use as background material
06.04.12	Five ways to break the barriers	PR Week	Elizabeth Peers	PR practitioners	Industry	Feature on diversity of PR profession and what can be done to help situation
12.02.10	Should you promote these products	PR Week	Cathy Wallace	PR practitioners	Industry	Discusses ethics of working for controversial brands
05.06.09	The pros and cons of a degree in PR	PR Week	Cathy Wallace	PR practitioners	Industry	Debate about PR degrees
30.09.11	Location, location, location	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Looks at ability to do PR outside of London: could be used for background to G5
02.09.11	How much are you being paid?	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Could use as background material; findings from PR census
21.10.11	How PR roles are changing	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Could use as background material; findings from PR census
15.10.11	In search of the truth	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Book on trust and journalism and PR
14.09.11	Five trends for 2011	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Communication trends for the year
15.07.11	How the industry looks today	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	PR Weekly/PSCA census
12.06.09	PR arrives at Cannes	PR Week	Arun Sudharam	PR practitioners	Industry	PR accepted at prestigious awards ceremony in Cannes
02.12.11	Global Agency Report 2011	PR Week	Alex Blyth	PR practitioners	Industry	Use for background info on Kantarum only
23.03.12	Broadcast Yourself: Should Brands Become Media Owners?	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Impact of social media on PR
04.05.12	10 years in PR	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Good for background, looks at fortunes and trends in top 150 consultancies over decade
06.07.12	The struggle to measure up	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Report on latest measurement conference and how there's still a long way to go
12.10.12	Is PR getting closer to the boardroom?	PR Week	Alec Mattison	PR practitioners	Industry	Interview and feature on how PR is gradually reaching higher echelons of management
28.09.12	What our students need to know	PR Week	Matt Rumble	PR practitioners	Industry	Interviews and feature with PR tutors on what PR students now need to know
05.10.12	View from the top	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Report on a conference looking at the key issues facing PR such as social media
02.11.12	The Best Places to Work survey 2012	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Features the companies that topped the survey as best PR places to work
01.11.12	What media really think of PR agencies	PR Week	Clare Murphy	PR practitioners	Industry	Results of survey into the PR agencies' journalists rate
01.10.09	Tackling the big issues	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Event looking at issues for PR the relations with journalism, economic climate and BBC
05.11.11	Same song with new tunes	PR Week	Jenny Hulme	PR practitioners	CPR/Industry	Changes in PR
16.12.11	The CPR's new vocalist	PR Week	Peter Hay	PR practitioners	CPR	Profile of new CEO Jane Wilson
13.11.09	Woman on a double mission	PR Week	Mart Carroll	PR practitioners	CPR	Profile of President Sally Sykes
20.02.09	Dealing with disaster	PR Week	Geenna O'Reilly	PR practitioners	CPR	Interview with President Paul Wyrea
14.01.11	I want to lead the industry!	PR Week	David Woods	PR practitioners	Industry	Profile of PSCA president
05.02.10	The first lady of the PSCA	PR Week	Cathy Wallace	PR practitioners	Industry	Interview with Mick Davies author of Fiat Earth News
21.01.11	Here's the news - Earth is still flat	PR Week	Cathy Bussey	PR practitioners	Industry	Interview with Yvonne Farnis inspiration behind Ab Fab
19.10.12	The godfather of PR	PR Week	Kate Magee	PR practitioners	Industry	Interview with journalist Gavin Eder and his views on PR and journalism
18.11.12	The art of great storytelling	PR Week	Jane Wilson	PR practitioners	CPR	New membership structure in CPR
25.11.12	CPR modernises membership structure to benefit PR professionals	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Feedback on CPR announcement to change membership structure
02.12.11	Did CPR membership renew go far enough?	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Responses to PSCA definition campaign
14.10.11	Does the role of PR need to be redefined?	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PSCA accepting individuals
16.03.12	Is CPR and PSCA split damaging profession?	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Responses to PSCA definition campaign
12.06.09	Was the PSCA fight to respect PSCA definition?	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Debate about PR degrees
24.09.10	PR degrees are what to industry credibility	PR Week	Various practitioners	PR practitioners	Industry	Reflection on journalists moving into PR
24.09.10	Client-finding skills are key to PR success	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Comment on what constitutes PR
24.09.10	Don't confuse media relations with true PR	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PSCA accepting individuals
21.10.11	Having one trade body removes the need for competition	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PSCA accepting individuals
21.10.11	The CPR should focus on improving its own offering	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PSCA accepting individuals
28.10.11	The CPR should embrace a bit of healthy competition	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Reaction from PR community and CPR to PSCA accepting individuals
16.03.12	Trying to define PR is pointless and an exercise in self-promotion	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Response to PSCA definition campaign
19.02.10	There is no room for lying at the CPR	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	CPR	Concerning code of conduct for CPR
26.02.10	The solution lies in specialisation	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Reflections on whether PR is a profession or not
26.02.10	Honesty really is the best policy	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Reflections on honesty in PR
15.07.11	The PR industry also needs to be aware of self-regulation	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Impact of NCFV closure on PR
05.02.10	It's tough, but vital, to evaluate PR success	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Measurement and evaluation
05.02.10	Look at both sides of PR/Journalism divide	PR Week	PR Week Journalist	PR practitioners	Industry	Response to campaign to cut PR spam
02.12.11	CPR underpins commitment to members with revised criteria	PR Week	Jane Wilson	PR practitioners	Industry	Response to changes to membership structure
09.12.11	A new label will not stop us being PR professionals	PR Week	Grant Thomas	PR practitioners	Industry	Response to PSCA definition campaign

09.11.13	It makes sense for the CPR and PRCA to work together more	Letter: PR Week	PR practitioner	PR practitioners	CPR/Industry	Comment on Zetter's plans for CPR and PRCA (in agreement with plans)
09.11.13	Zetter's leadership needs to be decisive - and wise	Letter: PR Week	PR practitioner	PR practitioners	CPR/Industry	Letter supporting Zetter's plans for CPR presidency
23.11.12	CPR apologises for presidential election being invalidated	Management Today	Matthew Gawthorpe Sally Sylee/CPR	General Ux audience	CPR	Letter from CPR CEO apologising for invalidation of President-elect election
01.05.11	What's in a good name?	Newsletter	Aine Wilson	CPR members	Industry	The rise of PR
11.01.12	CPR President New Year Message	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Priorities for CPR in 2012
15.11.10	Update from the CPR CEO	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	First announcement from CEO since in post
21.12.12	PR 2021: report now online	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Future priorities for PR and CPR policy
13.01.10	Changes to the CPR Code of Conduct	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Updated code of conduct is first story
24.02.10	Getting Started in PR	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Story on new starters in industry
07.04.10	UK's Professional Lobbyists Commit to Independent Regulation	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Story on lobbyists coming under regulation
21.04.10	CPR Social Media Panel Launches	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Story on what CPR is doing on social media
19.05.10	The CPR's New Front Door...	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Story on new website and CPD featured
02.06.10	CPR Excellence Awards Winners	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Also features news on CP status and AVE
30.06.10	PR Procurement: 360	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Also features news on CP status
14.07.10	CPR TV on its way	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Launch of CPR TV
25.08.10	The CPR appoints former Gcap Media plc. Connors Director as CEO	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	CEO announced
08.09.10	Invest in your personal development	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Another guide/resource announced
22.09.10	PR profession launches media spamming charter backed by NUJ	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Updates on senior figures in CPR
06.10.10	CPR Elections	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Top award declines from CPR
01.12.10	Excellence Awards 2011	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	Story for new starters
15.12.10	The CPR is to launch a mentoring scheme for its PR practitioners	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	High profile people CPR have honoured
26.01.11	Medals of distinction	Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	
09.02.11		Newsletter		CPR members	CPR	

**APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPT
(JOURNEY OF THEME TO RESEARCH NARRATIVE)**

