EXPLORING THE IDENTITY OF AN EMBEDDED MICRO-CONSULTANT IN AN ORGANISATION CHANGE ENVIRONMENT

ANDREW JOHN HUNT

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ABSTRACT

Micro-consultants are from small independent consultancy practices; who sometimes work directly with a single client on embedded assignments. Embedded micro-consultants operate within the ambiguous and fragmented environments of their client's. Micro-consultants have to quickly make sense of their client's working environments; adapting their operations and identities within these, to ensure appropriate advice and support is provided.

When embedded, micro-consultants are usually expected to represent their client; whilst also retaining their independence. Consequently, micro-consultants can sometimes be unsure who they represent (themselves or their client) and which identity aspects they should be promoting.

Identity is the sum of, lifestyle, experiences and knowledge of an individual which is developed over time, and provides awareness and guidance for future activities. To some extent micro-consultants can choose which aspects of their identity they wish to promote or suppress. However, some groups can enforce aspects of their identity on their members which can contradict the micro-consultant's base awareness and guidelines which can lead to dilemmas and uncertainties.

This research explores the interactions, changing identities and ensuing tensions of a micro-consultant during a long term embedded assignment with a single client. The ethnographic study uses authoethnographic narrative, along with participant observation techniques and reflective practices, to provide insights on the key influences and other factors which can affect micro-consultant identities.

This thesis also provides an indication of the complexities and ambiguities faced by a micro-consultant working on an embedded assignment. The research also highlights some of the many dilemmas and uncertainties facing a micro-consultant in this environment; focussing on identity related dilemmas. These lead to a number of identity related paradoxes for the micro-consultant; including assignment success, relationships and the provision of knowledge.

There have been many corporate ethnographic studies examining different parts of organisation behaviour, including consultancy houses and organisation change environments. However, this is the first study to provide detailed insights into the world of a micro-consultant change management specialist, his operations interactions and dilemmas; providing a significant contribution to the world of management consultancy and organisation behaviour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
APM	Association of Project Managers.
BRM	Business Relationship Manager – Senior EPDO managers responsible for a regional portfolio of programmes and projects.
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems.
CfE	Centre for Excellence – Part of the EPDO parent organisation group, responsible for project management practices.
Deep Dive	A detailed review of a project within EPDO.
Dramatology	The combination of narrative, expressions and artefacts to emphasise a story.
EPDO	European Project Development Organisation – The research population in this thesis.
Gate Review	A detailed project review undertaken towards the end of each stage of the project lifecycle.
Habitas	An area of operational confidence and security within which people live; their comfort zone.
Health Check	A review of the uses of processes within a project by EPDO.
IBC	Institute of Business Consultants.
ICT	Information and Communications Technology.
IPMA	International Project Managers Association.
Liminal	Areas in which people can operate, outside of the traditional hierarchies and structures of organisations.
MCA	Management Consultants Association.
Micro-consultant	A term developed by myself to describe small consultancy practices with less than five practicing consultants.
MSP	Managing Successful Programmes– A project management methodology.
PAM	Project Assurance Manager – Ensuring appropriate practices, processes and procedures are used in a project.
PM	Project Manager.
PMO	Programme Management Office – Monitors projects, provides senior management reports and ensures good project management practices
PMP	Project Management Professional – A project management methodology.
POM	Programme Office Manager – Responsible for the PMO.
Prince2	PRojects IN Controlled Environments – A project management methodology.
Project Board	A management team which provides high level control of projects and related areas.
VP Tool	A proprietary software tool, used by EPDO for storing and managing project records and reports.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

When management consultants undertake work on behalf of their clients, they may encounter various tensions, uncertainties and dilemmas during their work. These can range from uncertainties over the future of the work to tensions in the interactions between participants and dilemmas regarding decisions or their implementation.

As their assignment progresses, some consultants may also face dilemmas over their working identity regarding which organisation they represent. Especially those working as individuals in small management consultancy practices (micro-consultants[1]) who are embedded within their client's organisation. Providing support and advice directly to the client over long periods of time; such as the eighteen month study discussed in this thesis.

[1] Micro-consultant – A term developed by myself to describe small consultancy practices with less than 5 practicing consultants. Similar to the concepts of micro-business used to describe small businesses with few employees (see for example Stokes & Wilson 2006 and BERR 2009).

This thesis examines aspects of identity facing a single micro-consultant (the author) during a client based assignment. Researching the identities presented by a micro-consultant during a long term assignment within the client's working environment

This research is significant in that it contributes to areas where there are few detailed studies: exploring small consultancies and their interactions with clients from an insider perspective, with a focus on identities. These aspects are also important for practitioner consultants because the identities presented at all stages of assignments may help to determine the relationships, activities, decisions and even the successes of assignments.

The thesis is presented using a narrative style, which allows a wide range of ethnographic based reporting options. Using an autoethnographic approach enables the author to reflect on the ethnographic journey in the first person; as well as including more general observations and reflections relating to other micro-consultants in the third person. Although the narrative is primarily based on the author's own experiences and encounters as a practitioner consultant.

1.2 Personal Background

As a programme and project management consultant I provide information, support and advice to my clients on the mechanisms used to manage change programmes, and their associated change management projects. These are used to integrate organisation changes

into the operations of my clients, their customers or partners. My consultancy work may include establishing specific change programmes and projects; improving or introducing management and control systems; reviewing aspects of projects; managing and directing projects, or managing project resources.

This work is undertaken throughout Europe with client organisations from a variety of different business sectors including ICT[2], financial services, energy and transport. My assignments usually involve working alongside various client teams, representatives and stakeholders or sub–groups within the client's organisation; such as specific departments, project teams, suppliers, partners, or even third party organisations. I usually work closely with my clients, or their representatives; often being seen as a member of the client's teams when taking on various roles, such as project manager, adviser or facilitator, often for different groups within the client organisation.

Assignments often involve improving existing best practices in programme and project management; making them more appropriate for the work of the client organisation. These practices are then used by myself and others in the management of organisation change projects. As each project has unique aspects, an element of interpretation of project management techniques and practices is required for each project. A smaller project may not need the level of detail required by a larger or more complex project. However, a complex project may need additional effort, attention or emphasis during particular stages of its life-cycle. My skills at being able to identify and implement the most appropriate levels of control and reporting, together with my abilities to effectively

[2] ICT - Information and Communications Technology

co-ordinate all elements of complex programmes and projects, are used by clients to support their in-house project teams. In order to do this effectively, I usually need to become directly involved with the client, projects or processes; often taking on some aspects of the identity of the groups I am working with.

Consultancy at this level is usually provided directly to client staff, with personal relationships often providing a key to the success of assignments; although the outcomes are usually for the collective group. The need for direct contact with the client projects during assignments also allows me to become familiar with the resources involved; effectively requiring me to take on the identity of the organisation or client group with which I am working. During these assignments I maintain close working relationships with the staff who provide experiences, intimacy, identities and insights not usually encountered when viewed from outside of the organisation. This approach allows me to understand specific problems, build solutions and make recommendations based on the client's actual problems, which strengthens my position as a consultant.

I often act as a member of the client's teams, arguing for the client's best interest; whilst occasionally being required to retain the identity of an impartial independent micro-consultant. At this level there is not much distinction between the various identities I am expected to take on and my own personal work identity. I represent the client in some agreed way, possibly as a consultant, partner, or member of staff, there is often very little difference during the assignment. However, I always try to retain an element of my personal identity and that of an independent micro-consultant.

During an assignment I often encounter various dilemmas regarding my identity; actual, assumed and that perceived by others. Sometimes when encountering a new client group, I have to ask myself ‘who do I represent, myself, my consultancy, my client, my projects, a particular client team?’ For example, in a single day, I could be expected to prepare a technical specification for one project, advise another project on team management methods and conduct an independent review of another project. Each of these groups may expect these different services separately or concurrently. Each of the groups encountered may have different expectations from me and my abilities, behaviours, ethics, identities and work approaches. Requiring me to possess or display multiple identities over a short space of time; some of which may contradict and conflict with other groups. Many of these contradictions are resolved during the course of an assignment. Some will remain unresolved, whilst additional dilemmas and uncertainties sometimes surface during the course of the assignment.

As assignments develop and change, I may need to present different aspects of my identity, to adapt to new working situations, ensure longevity and promote success. Clients may also have similar expectations regarding my identity at the start of a new assignment; as well as similarly changing expectations once the work is underway. To ensure a successful assignment, I need to adapt my identity to match the changing expectations of my client, which sometimes causes me uncertainties and dilemmas. When nearing the end of an assignment, I need to consolidate and complete my current work so

it can be handed over to others within the client organisation, which may have different expectations regarding my identity. I also need to look towards future assignments.

Many micro-consultants assignments involve a few weeks or a few months of continuous direct work for a single client; with assignments of more than a year seen as the exception. With the success of assignments sometimes being measured by their duration, an assignment of more than one year would be considered to be long term and successful; such as the 21 month EPDO assignment which is the subject of this research. Once an assignment is complete, there is no guarantee that there will be any future work; which may cause further uncertainties.

Once the work with my single client ends, I usually have no clear idea where or when my next assignment will be. Consequently, there is sometimes a reluctance to complete an assignment; especially if there is no clear end point to work towards, such as the handover of a successful project. To minimise any future uncertainty, towards the end of the assignment I need to be looking beyond the current assignment for potential future work. I also need to revive my external professional consultancy support networks and prepare the identities I wish to promote. However, if I concentrate on these aspects too much, I may place myself in conflict with the remaining elements of the current assignment. This may also be the case if I attempt to revive my personal support networks and identities too often during the course of a long term assignment.

Outside of assignments, I have developed work based support networks, including several professional organisations that encourage networking opportunities. These also provide additional knowledge, support, client referrals, professional development and work opportunities. In between major client assignments I usually take an active part in these support networks, often becoming involved with the management of the organisation. I also use them to give support and guidance to fellow consultants, as well as discussing my experiences of recent assignments. The support networks also provide opportunities to discuss identities and images, as well as to test or promote aspects of my identity which may have changed as a result of the previous assignment. However once a new assignment is obtained, my focus and identity ambitions need to change quickly to ensure I can concentrate on the success of the new assignment and ensure its longevity.

The related uncertainties concerning my consultancy work and identity prompted the need for me to investigate these areas further. Undertaking research which focussed on my identity related experiences as a consultant embedded within a large organisation whilst working on major projects and programmes on behalf of the client organisation; which resulted in the research discussed in this thesis.

Most of my assignments are typically 6-12 months duration. All of which provide opportunities to become intimately aware of an organisation and its identities, its staff and the ways they really work; which cannot be gained from an outsider perspective. These conditions are ideal for research on micro-consultants and their interactions with their clients.

This research explores some of the identity related interactions between a micro-consultant and its clients, together with their associated uncertainties and dilemmas, whilst utilising current theories to provide further illustrations and insights on these aspects. There is a body of literature which examines many of the aspects concerning identity and management consultancies, providing theories, models and frameworks to illustrate interactions and to improve understanding. This research draws upon, and in turn contributes to this body of knowledge. Aspects of the literature studied include identity and the self, group and organisation identity, management consultancy, consultancy-client interactions, organisation change and consultancy roles together with their associated dilemmas and uncertainties. These aspects are combined with the research elements to provide this thesis with unique insights into the world of micro-consultants and their identity together with key aspects of their operations and processes.

1.3 Exploring Consultant Identity

Numerous individuals and organisations consider themselves to be consultants of some form; as promoted by the name of the organisation or its marketing literature. These consultants range across industry sectors and include medical practitioners, engineers, lawyers, beauty therapists, physical trainers and management consultants. This thesis is concerned with management consultants and associated organisations which provide a variety of services directly to businesses and related organisations. There are many

definitions of management consultancy including those of Alvesson & Johansson (2001); Clark & Fincham (2002) and MCA (2009), most of which relate to the provision of services, skills and knowledge of the consultants. The definition which provides the best fit to my views and experiences of consultancy is that of the Markham (2004) who defines management consultants as:

> *….delivering specialist skills from outside the organisation. Key concepts of this definition are:*
>
> > *1) specialist skills - the assumption is that the consultant has specific skills, in demand and valued by the client organization…..*
> > *2) outside the organization – the consultant is usually from another organization.*
>
> (Markham 2004 p2)

This definition initially appears to be broad, encompassing almost any supplier of professional services. Markham acknowledges this possibility, refining these concepts and clarifying the initial definition:

> *…...the matters on which management consultants are engaged involve helping organisations define and implement their development agendas. The development agenda is not only about doing new things, but is about doing existing things better.*
>
> (Markham 2004 p2)

This clarification clearly indicates the provision of various services from independent and skilled individuals to support the development of a business environment. Many of these services are focussed on assessing and implementing developments, or changes, to the client organisation; providing future improvements. The definition also hints at some of the characteristics, functions, roles and identities of management consultants; many of which are discussed further in this thesis, particularly in Chapters 2. This definition is

used within this thesis to describe any instances of management consulting, management consultancy, management consultant, consultant, micro-consultant or similar words.

As suggested above, with most consultants or professions, the use of individual titles or initial generic categorisations, such as Accountant or Lawyer conjures up specific images in ones mind of the type of person involved and the tasks they perform. For an outsider, the term management consultant may conjure up an image, or an identity, of an experienced and skilful person who provides occasional advice, information or support to an organisation for a substantial fee (Kubr 2002). As people become acquainted with consultants their image of the consultants' identity may change. Alternative and diverse views are often held by people who have some experience of management consultants, which are often linked to the perceived successes of the consultants. If consultant involvement is considered successful, a positive view similar to Kubr (2002) is often taken. However if the consultant involvement is not considered successful, negative views of consultants can be taken; such as witch doctors generating work for themselves by dressing up unproven ideas which can not be adapted to the needs of clients (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1996). In addition, practicing consultants themselves try to promote a different view of consultants; as experts who provide vital support to ensure the success of their clients (Czerniawska & May 2004). Although every consultant will have their own variation of the image, or identity, they wish to promote, which may be based on their specialisations, skills, knowledge, expertise or relationships.

There are many kinds of consultant who usually promote their own unique identities whilst performing a variety of functions for their client during assignments. These roles, together with the skills, knowledge, experience and personality of the consultants form the basis of their working identity; whether they are working as an internal consultant (Weiss 2003), for a major consultancy house (Merron 2005) or as an independent micro-consultant (Phillips 2006).

The identity of a consultant can be considered to be a summary of the relevant knowledge and experiences of the self, together with their heritage, lifestyle and work, which are presented by the individual, often when part of a group or organisation, as indicated by Castells (2004).

> *The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations.*
> (Castells 2004 p7)

According to Castells (2004), all those encountering identity building materials are influenced by them or influence them in some way:

> *….individuals, social groups and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning according to social determinations and cultural projects, that are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework.*
> (Castells 2004 p7)

The processing, or interpretation, of these identity building materials is undertaken by consultants, and influenced by their peers, societal and work contacts. All of which forms

the unique identity of an individual micro-consultant (Webb 2006). With the individual usually choosing which elements of their identity they wish to expose or promote to others in social or work encounters (Hogg & Terry 2002).

In addition, every group whether micro-consultants, clients or stakeholders has a unique collective identity, image, culture or impression, which evolves from their interpretation of the identity building materials together with their purpose, operations and membership (Hatch & Schultz 2004). In formalised organisations, such as businesses, this identity is promulgated through the actions of the leaders, managers and workers and promoted through branding, communications, operations and processes (Doyle 2001). This organisation identity is encountered by anybody associated with the group, whether customers, suppliers, employees or other stakeholders (Clark & Chandler 1994). Consequently the identity promoted by a group can influence the identity of other groups and individuals, who can also in turn influence the identity of the promoting organisation (Webb 2006). For instance when on assignment with clients, I needed to conform to their identity requirements to help ensure the success of the assignment; however my contribution to the assignment also had some influence on the identity of the client teams with which I worked.

For independent micro-consultants, such as myself, identity is closely linked with the image and abilities of the individual (Phillips 2006), rather than focussing on the more generic abilities and practices of the larger consultancy houses (Green & Forehand 2005). Therefore micro-consultants are often marketing themselves as individuals as much as

their consultancy practice when seeking work from potential clients (Fincham 1999b). As such, the identities promoted to potential clients are those of the micro-consultant as well as the individual (Werr 1999). Generally, this linkage is implicitly accepted by clients when appointing micro-consultants, and often shapes the work undertaken; forming part of the client expectations regarding the identity of micro-consultants during the assignment (Simon & Kumar 2001).

For some assignments micro-consultants are embedded within their client's organisation; often working full time on the client premises, undertaking specific roles alongside the client staff or their representatives, sharing common identity elements. Micro-consultants can use these embedded assignments to demonstrate their specialist skills and experiences whilst providing direct support, solving problems or implementing initiatives on behalf of their client (Kumar et al 2000), whilst building relationships and integrating themselves with their clients (Simon & Kumar 2001).

At the start of an assignment, there may be some uncertainty regarding the role and work expected of the consultant. Indeed an initial task for micro-consultants is often to define their role and scope of work (Weiss 2001), which clarifies elements of the work required; but may also present new opportunities or concerns (Biswas & Twitchell, 2001). In turn this initial task shapes the identity which the micro-consultant is expected to present and the image they actually present, together with the expectations and perceptions of their client staff (Werr & Styhre 2003). However, there may remain some uncertainty over the role and therefore the required identity of the micro-consultant, even after the initial

scoping task has been completed (Werr & Styhre 2003). As the work develops, client's expectations of the micro-consultants roles will change, together with their identity expectations (Sturdy 1997). To reduce these uncertainties, micro-consultants need to harmonise their presented identities with the client's expectations (Fincham 1999b); which often means utilising aspects of the client's working approaches, or identity. For instance, during the early part of assignments, I usually undertake a scoping study to detail the work that needs to be completed for the client, which provides an initial indication of the expected work and role as well as the expected identity for the assignment.

During assignments, aspects of identity often appear to change. Some of the changes to identity may be actively acquired, accepted or even encouraged by the micro-consultant (Hogg & Terry 2002); being seen as having potentially positive impact (Lawler 2008). For instance, during international assignments I encounter people from different countries; with many of these encounters providing interesting insights into different cultures, ways of working and thinking, as well as learning new skills and languages. However during assignments micro-consultants may be required to make changes to their identity which may be enforced by the client (Fincham 1999a); requiring micro-consultants to move outside of their area of operational confidence and security; their comfort zone, or the habitas of Bourdieu (2000). These enforced changes may also be seen as negative by the consultant (Hogg & Terry 2002), who may actively or passively resist the changes (Stacey 2007), possibly to the detriment of the success of the assignment. For instance, during one assignment, I was required to have in-depth

knowledge of the client's financial management processes and systems, an area in which I have skills but no desires for specialisation, which resulted in resentment towards some aspects of my involvement. In many cases changes to the desired identity and habitas can cause initial tensions, concerns, uncertainties and dilemmas which need to be overcome successfully before the micro-consultant can work effectively within the new identity requirements (Tobin 1999).

There are a number of areas in which I have encountered identity related dilemmas during assignments, which have been summarised in Figure 1:

Figure 1 Areas in Which Identity Related Dilemmas Could Occur

Starting Assignments	During Assignments	Post-Assignments
Suitability of assignment.	Gaining skills and experience on assignment.	Looking for new assignments.
Preparing for new assignments.	Maintaining independence during assignment.	Promotion of consultancy.
Starting assignments with a new client.	Interactions with client staff and stakeholders.	Gaining new skills.
Initial assessments and work.	Approaches to work.	Reviewing identity building blocks
	Working level within the client organisation hierarchy.	
	Working outside of client hierarchies.	
	Concluding assignments.	

My client may also have identity expectations relating to the assignment; which if not clearly articulated may increase these areas of uncertainty, possibly to the detriment of the assignment (Simon & Kumar 2001). Consequently there is usually a need for me to harmonise identity expectations with my clients to maintain good working relationships; as indicated by Fincham (1999b). The issues encountered regarding identity may also have an impact on the requirements of my assignment, as well as other areas including interactions, working and social relationships, power and resistance, behaviours and rituals as well as trust, confidence and collective allegiances (Grint 1991). Many of these aspects become more visible during long term assignments; such as the one which is the subject of this research.

1.4 Key Research Areas

Undertaking a long term consultancy assignment provided me with appropriate conditions for this thesis which investigates micro-consultants the identity dilemmas which they encounter during assignments from a practitioner perspective. In my exploration of micro-consultants identities, many of the research encounters are at a personal level, undertaken by myself, together with contributions from a wide variety of micro-consultants and client staff working in many different positions within the organisation change environment. As such, this study needs to look beyond the traditional aspects of organisation design and behaviour structures and hierarchies imposed by the client organisation; investigating the approaches used by consultants as individuals.

However, in order to achieve this perspective, it is necessary to understand current thinking regarding individuals, organisations, structure and their identity.

Initial investigations identified a large body of literature relating to individual identity such as Ellemers et al (2000) and Webb (2006), as well as organisation identity such as Hatch & Schultz (2004) and Flynn (2005), together with literature relating to consultancies such as Alvesson & Johansson (2001), Clark & Fincham (2002) and Czerniawska & May (2004). There is also a large body of knowledge concerned with organisation change and the related project management environment, including Dow & Taylor 2008); Knutson (2001) and Turner & Simster (2000). However, there did not appear to be sufficient data on the specific areas that I was interested in – how the interactions of micro-consultants embedded with their client affects their identity. Following further investigations, I developed a research project aimed at exploring this area from a practitioner perspective, to improve my understanding of micro-consultant identities and the effects of the interactions with their clients. This study had the primary objective of exploring how the interactions of embedded micro-consultants affect their identity. The research also considers related areas, providing insights into the way consultants interact with their clients and co-workers, as well as the co-operation, negotiating, power plays and communications undertaken between sometimes disparate groups and members from an identity perspective. In order to explore these areas it was necessary to develop a number of related sub-objectives, all of which support the main research objective; these are shown in Figure 2 (overleaf):

Figure 2 Research Objective and Sub-objectives

Research Objective
To explore how embedded micro-consultants interactions with their client affects their identity.
Research Sub-objectives
To explore the ways in which roles undertaken by a micro-consultant during an assignment shape identity.
To find whether there are any indications of identity related effects from interactions between a micro-consultant and the client.
To consider how micro-consultant identities can manifest themselves during an assignment.
To highlight identity related concerns and dilemmas facing a micro-consultant during an assignment.

Exploring these objectives will help to understand the complex interactions between micro-consultants and their clients, peers and other stakeholders in the project environment, together with their effects on identity of the individual. Undertaking research during a consultancy assignment also highlighted some of the ways an individual micro-consultant works within this area; providing further insights on the objectives.

Because of the need to understand the interactions of micro-consultants and their clients from an identity perspective, there was a need to use an appropriate philosophical stance. This stance would need to enable the building and understanding of a mixture of intangible elements including knowledge, relationships, and power, which could be exhibited in many forms such as instructions, discussions, briefings, coaching and advice.

The selected philosophical stance also had to take account of my own ways of working and thinking during the assignment. Consequently this research has been undertaken from a constructivist philosophical stance (Gergen 2001); which includes with a forward looking perspective (Chia 2002). As a micro-consultant, I find adopting this perspective very appropriate. I am often given vague and imprecise directions from clients concerning future events, such as 'bring the programme back on target'; however I am also aware of the different needs of client staff and project teams. Consequently, I need to understand the events and interactions that have occurred or are occurring within a project, whilst focussing on the completion of the project. To do this I frequently need to construct mental models of relevant events and interactions; which allows me to build scenarios of possible future events. This helps me to select and implement the most appropriate solutions for my clients.

The EPDO assignment (detailed later) provided a unique opportunity to work closely with a mixture of micro-consultants and clients; as well as the opportunity to further this research. An initial concern was selection of the most appropriate methodology for the research. The research objectives and my own philosophical stance strongly influenced the choice of methods that could be used (Blaxter et al 2006). Consideration of these aspects quickly led to a decision to utilise qualitative approaches rather than quantitative ones (Radnor 2001). The fast moving dynamics of the EPDO commercial environment precluded the use of detailed interviews, focus groups and similar post event reviews, as considered by Denzin & Lincoln (2000). A number of techniques remained which would allow the interpretive exploration of events as they happened, including grounded theory

(Strauss & Corbin 1990), ethnography (Atkinson et al 2007) and action research (McNiff & Whitehead 2002). However, commercial considerations together with the speed and dynamics of the EPDO research environment prevented the formulation of concepts and testing of theories necessary for grounded theories. Whilst undertaking the research in an active commercial environment rendered the developmental aspects of action research impractical.

Following further investigations, ethnographic research was selected as the most appropriate research technique (Atkinson et al 2007); whilst participant observation gave intimate insights into the way the group worked from an insider perspective (Davies 2005). The use of reflective practice provided additional insights and consideration of the ethnographic observations (Cunliffe 2003). These aspects have been developed further in the Methodology (Chapter 5).

The research undertaken has included observations made of interactions by other micro-consultants as well as myself; providing an additional level of richness. Whilst most of the research explorations and experiences are focussed on myself as a micro-consultant, they have been discussed with other micro-consultants, who have indicated that they also encounter similar experiences and concerns. However, the reflections are based on the information obtained and include my own views, with my own biases. Whilst efforts have been made to minimise any biases; they can help to provide a richer picture of the research and its context by revealing my personal views and concerns regarding the working environment (Denzin & Lincon 2000).

1.5 Research Context

All of the research discussed in this thesis was undertaken during a long term embedded assignment for a major international energy company. The assignment itself involved developing, maintaining and improving a variety of change programmes and associated project support elements. All of which allowed directors and senior managers to improve their understanding of their project portfolios and the progress of their programmes and projects; enabling more efficient reporting and decision making.

The detailed management of the change programmes and projects, such as loyalty cards or payments systems, was the responsibility of a European Project Delivery Organisation (EPDO). The implementation of the projects was usually undertaken by specialist third party suppliers. The EPDO comprised around 45 members, with the majority of them being micro-consultants. In addition there were a number of other supporting teams involved, such as human resources, accounting and procurement, which comprised mixtures of parent company permanent staff, third parties and micro-consultants. The overall responsibility for the portfolio was retained by EPDO permanent Business Relationship Managers (BRM), senior managers and directors, working on behalf of the parent energy company. The EPDO group forms the research population for this study.

Most of the research population discussed in this thesis were directly involved within the EPDO environment. A number of distinct sub-groups were included, based on their organisation origins; as illustrated in Figure 3:

Figure 3 Key Research Groups

Group	Description
Client Staff	Permanent staff employed by the EPDO parent company who were directly involved with the project environment with roles such, as portfolio managers, relationship managers, technical specialists, business managers or project support staff.
Micro-Consultants	Embedded within the project delivery environment with roles such as programme managers, project managers, technical specialists, or project support staff.
Third Party Suppliers	Specialist organisations responsible for the detailed development, implementation and integration of project elements and solutions.

The project environment studied was concerned with the development and implementation of a portfolio of ICT and related projects for the energy company consumer outlets, which included the provision of management information, communications, stock control, payment systems, and logistics and loyalty cards. These were grouped into related programmes with distinct projects, having an overall budget of around £50 million per year. Projects were implemented in some 25,000 consumer outlets, regional offices and related data centres in around 12 European countries including Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, France, Poland and the UK on behalf of the energy company consumer operations business.

The EPDO project environment required the micro-consultants involved to continually interact with the parent organisation and their representatives. These interactions were continuously changing depending on the people and projects involved and their current status. Many of the interactions between the micro-consultants and the clients involved challenges and changes to the micro-consultants identity. Micro-consultants were often required to use the identity of the client or their representatives; whilst occasionally being encouraged to exhibit their own identities as micro-consultants. These changes to identities would sometimes be accepted by the micro-consultants; whilst occasionally appearing to cause tensions, concerns and dilemmas. These concerns and dilemmas would sometimes express themselves as tensions, uncertainty, confusion, or frustration, any of which may have lead to resistance.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Having outlined the intent of this thesis, its context and the principle area of research in the earlier part of this Chapter, it is useful to provide an overview of the structure of the remainder of the thesis; highlighting the key elements contained within each Chapter.

Chapter 1 (this Chapter) provides a summary of the thesis itself, introducing the main concepts which are discussed in more detail during later Chapters. The background to the research is also covered, together with some relevant personal information; framing the research and its context.

Chapter 2 considers the key elements of consultancies; including the roles undertaken by consultants whilst on assignment for client organisations within an organisational change environment. This provides illustrations of the complexity of the working environment and the need for multiplicity of identities.

Chapter 3 explores the interactions between micro-consultants and their clients during assignments. Highlighting some of the key identity related elements.

Chapter 4 moves from consultancy into the identity arena, whilst retaining a focus on consultancy. The components of individual identity and its development into group and organisation identity are considered. This allows the links between individual, group and organisation identity to be established, together with the potential for conflicts and dilemmas.

Chapter 5 develops my approach to the area to be researched. The philosophical and epistemological background to the research is discussed, and the research methodology introduced. The selected research methods are detailed, including the ethnographical approach. The Chapter also provides context around the EPDO group and the research investigations.

Chapter 6 presents the key practitioner findings, in the form of selected relevant practitioner experiences and related research findings.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion on the practitioner experiences, together with comparisons to the literature. A number of conclusions that can be drawn following the research are also considered.

Finally, Chapter 8 reviews all of the key aspects of this research. The review evaluates the research and the way it was undertaken, identifying key lessons learnt and discusses the contribution to knowledge, whilst also making recommendations for further research.

The various elements within this thesis cover the key aspects relating to the identity related dilemmas facing a micro-consultant during a long term embedded assignment. Initially theoretical aspects examine aspects of consultancy and their links to identity; which then allows identity to be explored in more detail, enabling the highlighting of key identity dilemmas. The research elements highlight many of the identity related dilemmas encountered during a consultancy assignment; whilst the conclusions bring together the theoretical and practitioner elements.

An essential first step is to explore relevant aspects of management consultancy. Highlighting the areas which could have a significant interface with identity and which may cause dilemmas for a practicing micro-consultant.

CHAPTER 2

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY

2.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter provided an outline of the overall intent, context and the principle area of research in this thesis, understanding identity related aspects of management consultancy. This Chapter starts the exploration by looking at the key theoretical concepts relating to management consultancy.

Initially the concepts and characterisation of small independent consultancy practices are discussed and the key term micro-consultant detailed. An indication is provided of the micro-consultants position within the field of consultancy and the types of clients served. The sometimes precarious position of micro-consultants is examined, together with some of the main dilemmas, uncertainties, concerns and conflicts they face.

The principle functions, roles and capabilities of consultants are also discussed; including the contributions from micro-consultants to the assessment, implementation and

aftermath of organisational change, which is an underlying theme of this thesis. All of these are usually undertaken within the practices of management consultants.

2.2 Micro-Consultants and Practices

Management consultants are considered to be individuals who have specific skills, experiences or knowledge of a topic, market area, or other areas of expertise (Markham 2004). They provide this advice, information and support to clients who do not wish to provide these services themselves, or are not able to do so (Biswas & Twitchell 2001). For instance, I frequently provide consultancy, as an individual consultant, to major international organisations, who employ thousands of staff and have an annual turnover of many billions of pounds sterling; and could employ staff directly to provide similar levels of advice and support. However, these organisations may not see consultancy as part of their core businesses (Simon & Kumar 2001). They may intend to engage specialist consultants only for specific short term tasks, or require a degree of detachment for assessment and implementation (Clark & Fincham 2002).

Most consultancy is provided by people working in practices which are outside of their client's organisation (Lundberg 1997); providing services from an external, or outsider, perspective, which maintains a degree of detachment from the intricacies of the client's own operations (Fincham 2002a). Reviews of the management consulting industry, such as Alvesson & Johansson (2001), Biswas & Twitchell (2001) and Kitay & Wright (2003),

indicate a wide variety of organisations undertaking consultancy related work. These range from large multinational organisations such as Accenture, IBM or PriceWaterhouse through regional and niche organisations to small partnerships and solo practitioners (Sturdy 1997), such as myself. In addition there are also varieties of hybrid consultancies that provide consultancy services almost as a sideline to the main business of the organisation. These include internal consultants, academic consultants and organisations with consultants that can only provide information and advice on their own products or service (Kitay & Wright 2003). Consequently, there are a wide variety of different types of consultancy practices providing different kinds of consultancy to most organisations at almost any hierarchy level, concerning any aspect of strategy, operations, processes or future opportunities (Weiss 2003).

The services provided by consultants are not without limits. They should be provided within the accepted legal and ethical constraints of the areas in which they are operating (Kipping & Engwall 2003). These constraints may differ depending on the types of services undertaken, the industry and its market as well as the geo-political environment (Kubr 2002). Many consultancy practices promote these values in their marketing, claiming allegiances to various professional codes of operational practices such as the Institute of Business Consultants, Code of Professional Conduct and Practice (IBC 2009). Authors including as Kitay & Wright (2003) and Macdonald (1995) suggest that consultants also work within a number of professional constraints such as the legitimacy of their operational value and its effectiveness. In addition consultants are also subject to the constraints imposed by their clients, as well as their desires and decisions (Bennett &

Smith 2004). Many practices are constrained by their own operational needs, such as specific services provision, markets, geographic regions and partnering arrangements (Biswas & Twitchell 2001). Consultants are also at the mercy of trends in management, process and technology (Fincham 1999a). Consultants are also potentially vulnerable to competition due to emerging trends, many of which have only limited barriers to entry (Sturdy 1997). However, these potential constraints and concerns do not appear to restrict the number of consultants available.

Overall the number of consultancy practices or individual management consultants is difficult to estimate, with no clear figures available. Figures from the UK Management Consultancy Association (MCA), suggest that in 2006 its 62 consultancy practice members employed around 20,000 consultants, representing around 70% of the UK consultancy market (MCA 2009). This can be extrapolated to take account of the remaining 30%; suggesting that there are over 30,000 management consultants in the UK. Another consultancy related professional organisation, the Institute of Business Consulting (IBC), has a membership of around 7,000 individual consultants (IBC 2008). Although, there may also be some overlap of membership with organisations such as the MCA. In addition, there will also be a number of independent management consultants who are not affiliated to any consultancy association; although they may be associated with other professional bodies, such as the Market Research Association, British Computer Society or Operations Research Society. Many larger organisations may also employ internal consultants, which are not included in consultant numbers. Based on the limited information available, it is likely that there are around 40,000 practicing

management consultants in the UK; less than one percent of the working population (ONS 2009). These consultants and their practices contributed a turnover of around £10 billion to the UK economy in 2006 (MCA 2009) and have significant influence on almost every organisation, at every level and within most roles.

When considering management consultancy practices, many people immediately think of the large multinational consultancy houses such as Accenture, CMGLogica, PriceWaterhouse etc., who regularly provide consultancy services to major global client organisations. However, at the other end of the scale, there are a large number of smaller consultancy practices who provide niche consultancy services to a variety of client organisations (Clinton et al 2006). Some of their clients may even include the large multinational consultancy practices; indeed my small consultancy practice has provided consultancy services to multinational consultancy houses such as Accenture and EDS.

These small consultancy practices, or micro-consultants, employ few active consultants. However, they often provide specialist services to their clients which the larger consultancy houses are not able, or unwilling, to provide. Possibly because of their perceived limited involvement or lack of specialist capabilities (Green & Forehand 2005). The services provided by micro-consultants may be very specialised, such as internet security (Gouin 2007); although, their client base could be very wide, ranging from local organisations to multinationals.

Micro-consultants can include people with different backgrounds, skills, experiences and identities (Gold & Fraser 2002), such as: consultants who have been detached from larger consultancy houses, ex-client staff who have been detached or retired early, or subject matter experts seeking to maintain their independence (Benjamin 2008). Many micro-consultancies comprise family members, or small groups of friends, who have formally establish themselves as a consultancy practice; as such there are also often overlaps between business and personal identities as well as related elements (Ram 2001).

In addition to small consultancy practices, there are also a number of other individuals who independently provide key advisory and support services to a single client, which are similar to consultancy roles. Organisations sometimes bring in freelancers to provide specific advice, support or services (Peel & Boxall 2005). Because of the specialist nature of their work, these freelancers can be categorised as micro-consultants. Many organisations undergoing major changes, mergers or establishing joint ventures need skilled resources for a short period of time, until the venture has appointed the required staff and is working appropriately. These organisations often appoint interim managers for a period, with specific roles and duties, until the changes are complete and the organisation has stabilised, or replacement permanent employees are appointed (Dowling & McVeigh 1983). Because of the specialist nature of their work, these temporary managers can also be categorised as micro-consultants.

This thesis assumes that micro-consultancies comprise individual and small consultancy practices, which contain fewer than 5 active consultants (micro-consultants); although there may also be some additional employees, such as administrators. This is consistent with the UK Government definition of micro-businesses (BERR 2009); which have less than 10 employees. Consultancies with more than this number of practicing consultants are considered to be large consultancy houses and are therefore similar to any other client organisations for the purposes of this thesis.

Whilst micro-consultants may be an abstract term for many, their effect has been to transform the lives and expectations of many leaders and organisations, and in very direct ways, especially through their influence on organisation change. Micro-consultants, and their clients, are the key group explored in this research. Specifically, the research provides observations on the identity related aspects of micro-consultants embedded with their single client in an organisation change environment; as seen by a practicing micro-consultant.

Whilst micro-consultant practices are characterised by their small number of active consultants, they often have well developed and wide ranging networks and support systems interconnected with other micro-consultants and business support services (Shaw 2006). This can allow micro-consultants to quickly seek independent advice on a diverse variety of topics, or even engage other micro-consultants who are specialists in completely different areas at short notice (Dowling & McVeigh 1983). This allows

micro-consultants to provide a level of flexibility, speed of turnaround and independence that many larger consultancy houses can not match (Weiss 2001).

However, being small, micro-consultancy practices are vulnerable to the fluctuations of the markets in which they and their clients operate (Sturdy 1997). So, if there is a downturn in the market, or a client decides to reduce consultant dependency, micro-consultants are vulnerable. They are often the first casualties to be detached from a client organisation during an economic downturn, or other difficult times (Benjamin 2008); sometimes causing uncertainties for the consultants. However, micro-consultants resilience and flexibility often allows them to move to more stable areas, or alternatives such as emerging markets (Weiss 2001), providing additional identity elements.

Many micro-consultants are pioneers of emerging markets, technologies or systems (Philips 2006), such as internet operations or quality systems. Their adaptable identities and flexibility enables them to move in time with developments, often moving from one client to another to provide the latest advice, or gain cutting edge experience (Wooldridge 1997). Because of this, many large consultancy houses temporarily engage micro-consultants to provide advice on new technology, emerging markets, or to support their implementation (Gold & Frasier 2002); whilst using the identity of the larger consultancy house. This allows the consultancy houses to be seen as having specialist consultants with up to date knowledge of emerging trends. At the same time, the consultancy houses can transfer knowledge from micro-consultants to their own consultants (Kipping & Engwall 2002). Additionally, if the consultancy house decides not to remain with the emerging

market, or the new approaches are perceived to be fashionable fads, the consultancy house can disengage any specialist micro-consultants with minimal effort (Merron 2005).

Independent micro-consultants sometimes see working with consultancy houses, or other client organisations, as opportunities to familiarise themselves with the way the organisation works. This can provide the micro-consultant with relevant new skills, experiences and identity elements; as well as gaining insight into the organisation (Dowling & McVeigh 1983). Micro-consultants may also seek the opportunity to become employed by the client organisation as a member of staff; using their previous knowledge and connections with the organisation as a springboard to help with the recruiting process (Peel & Boxall 2005). Likewise, consultancy houses and client organisations, often engage temporary staff, such as micro-consultants, with a view to recruiting them if suitable (Williams 2003); opportunities that have occasionally been presented to myself.

Consequently, the relationship between client organisations and micro-consultants can be complex, ambiguous and symbiotic; with each relying on each other to provide support, possibly in different ways. In addition client organisations sometimes see assignments as recruitment opportunities for micro-consultants and vice versa. As such, the interactions between client and micro-consultant often form a delicate partnership with each party testing, making power plays, manipulating identities and courting each other, trying to establish if there is a mutual need, or suitable role; whilst creating dilemmas, uncertainties and paradoxes for all.

2.3 Consultant Roles and Capabilities

Traditionally characterised as business advisors who primarily provided their services to a limited number of selected medium and large clients (Mckenna 1995); management consultancy has developed into a highly diverse occupation with consultants engaged in an extensive variety of tasks (Kubr 2002). Consultants have considerably broadened their traditional role, image and identity, diversifying into a multiplicity of roles such that management consultants can now be found in almost every industry and organisation, making their services available to almost every level and role within their client's organisations (Biswas & Twitchell 2001).

Over time, consultants have developed a wide range of skills; many of which focus on advising and solving problems for their clients Kubr (2002). Although, there may also be a focus on consultants promoting themselves, retaining their clients and improving fee earnings (Ashford 1998). Consequently, consultants have a variety of competencies and capabilities to offer their clients, enabling them to take on a variety of roles. Figure 4 (overleaf) indicates some of the expected consultants skills, roles and competencies identified in the literature.

Figure 4 Consultancy Skills and Competencies

Skills & Competencies	Sample Author
Instruction Manuals & Handbooks Advocate of specific views or solutions; Expert with specialist skills or knowledge; Trainer and educator; Collaborator for problem solving; Identifier of alternative solutions; Fact finder of intelligence insight and information.	Lambert (1998) Merron (2005) Philips (2006)
Traditional Academic Texts Esoteric experts, with specialist skills or knowledge; Broker of meaning, intelligence insight and information; Trader in trouble or problem solving and Agent of anxiety, to provide assurance and comfort. Prophet; Partner; Business person; Service worker. Solving problems; Setting clear objectives; Defining problems; Innovation.	Alvesson & Johansson (2001) Simon & Kumar (2001) Czarniawska (1999) Kitay & Wright (2003)
Abstract Perspectives Narratives Ambiguity Improve the language and terminology Consultants as agents Interpreters of language and operations Sensemaking Trust Tensions Resistance Learning mechanisms	Artemeva (1998) Alvesson (1993) Hatch & Schultz (2004) Fincham (2002a) Czarniawska (1999) Weick (1995) Cofta (2007) Sturdy (2004) Clegg et al (2006) Sturdy (2009)

Many recent publications such as Lytras (2008); Hargadon & Sutton (1997) and Sturdy et al (2007) indicate that consultants are primarily involved with the management of knowledge and innovation. To this end, they may: provide specialist knowledge to clients, obtain knowledge from clients, act as a broker in the exchange of knowledge, provide the systems and processes to enable exchange and storage of knowledge and acting as a catalyst to join disconnected ideas. Although, it can be considered that the

terms ‘knowledge management’ and ‘innovation’ are umbrella terms for various activities (Wilson 2002), which may not be related to the terms stated.

Many of the roles for individual consultants identified in individual texts appear to contradict, overlap or duplicate others, such as Lambert’s (1998) Collaborator for problem solving and Kitay & Wright’s (2003) Problem solving capabilities; possibly leading to confusion and uncertainty for aspiring consultants. Whilst some roles appear to have been developed for a specific purpose, such as a publication or conference, and are either not subsequently used further or may have been subsumed into other roles or categories; such as the esoteric experts of Alvesson & Johansson (2001). There also appears to be a blurring of titles, roles and categories used by different authors; such as the Collaborator for problem solving of Lambert (1998) being similar to the Problem solving capabilities defined by Kitay & Wright’s (2003) or the Trader in trouble of Alvesson & Johansson (2001). Where similar roles are found, the differences between them (if any) are often not clear.

Within the early literature, such as Lundberg (1997), it is often unclear as to whom the consultancy roles are ascribed to; possibly causing uncertainties over identities for readers. Is each role undertaken by different people, on different assignments? Is each role undertaken by the same person during a single assignment, during many assignments? Are these capabilities that consultants are expected to acquire, possess or use during the course of a single, or series of, assignments? However, more recent literature such as Merron (2005) or Philips (2006), suggests that consultants roles should

be seen as being flexible with different roles being undertaken (using different skills) during the course of a single assignment, depending on the contribution required of the consultant by the clients. This suggests that multiple skills and identities are needed by consultants. The need and ability to use different aspects of a consultant's identity to provide consultancy services may also help to determine the success and longevity of an assignment (Weiss 2001).

The different roles which a consultant may be expected to undertake during assignments can also be seen as an indicator of the identities that the consultant needs to promote, or identities that may be expected by the client. Consequently, there is a need for consultants to be flexible in their capabilities (Merron 2005), and therefore exhibit various identities. These multiple capabilities and identities are often expressed through the use of ambiguous language which can be adapted to suit the needs of the client (Clark 1995). This need for adaptability of capabilities also appears to come through in the literature, as overlaps and ambiguity in the classification of consultants (Alvesson & Johansson 2001), leading to a perceived lack of agreement regarding consultant categories, roles and capabilities.

The general lack of agreement and clarity in the literature regarding roles undertaken by consultants may be indicative of the apparent immaturity of management consultancy as a cohesive and recognised profession (Kipping et al 2001), although the provision of management consultancy in one form or another can be traced back to before the industrial revolution (Jennings 1985). In addition, professional institutes such as the

Institute of Management Consultants and MCA have been established since the 1960's; promoting best practice, guidance and governance to consultancies and their clients (McKenna 1995). The poor level of agreement regarding consultant categories and roles may also be indicative of a lack of research which examines these areas (Alvesson 1993). This thesis provides a further contribution to consultancy research, increasing our knowledge and awareness of consultants and their roles.

Another reason for there to be no clear agreement on consultant's roles may be because they are often required to operate outside of the traditional hierarchies and structures of their client organisations, the liminal space of Czarniawska & Mazza (2003) and Sturdy et al (2006). This may be necessary to ensure consultants have the ability to cross hierarchical boundaries (Balogun et al 2005) when investigating relevant parts of the client organisation, and to ensure solutions are implemented successfully in every area (Weiss 2001). In operating outside of client hierarchies, consultants are often seen as working outside of the client organisation, sometimes in apparently mysterious ways (O'Shea & Madigan 1997); which can not be easily categorised in traditional role descriptions often used by their clients (Kipping & Engwall 2003). Additionally, consultants often appear to be operating in different ways for each of their clients (Clark & Fincham 2002), which may make categorisation by outsiders difficult. Although some of the apparent differences in consultants operations may be deliberate, to disguise a lack of knowledge or to encourage the mysticism of the profession (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1997). They can also be seen as ways of forcing clients to use the approaches of the consultant, which in turn may mask the consultant's lack of knowledge about their

clients operations (Ashford 1998). All of which may cause confusion and uncertainty for clients and even consultants.

The lack of agreement regarding consultant's roles could also be indicative of the ever changing duties, activities and contributions of the profession. Many consultancies work on the leading edge of thinking regarding innovation, technology, organisation, management and leadership, which are regularly introduced to client organisations (Guowei 2007). As such, parts of the implementation may require new thinking and ways of operating on behalf of the consultants; with new role categorisations. In addition, as new systems and methods are introduced, the consultants involved may initially be identified with the new roles in an interim capacity, possibly with ambiguous or unusual role titles. With the final operating roles that are passed to the client being somewhat different to the original ones (Biswas & Twitchell, 2001). The roles may also be further adapted prior to incorporation into the clients existing role descriptions (Carnall 2007). However, some of the new approaches introduced may also be considered to be short term fads, or re-introductions of previous techniques (Craig 2005). Consequently, the 'new' approaches, methods and roles introduced by consultants may be dismissed, or subsumed into other areas, before they can be clearly categorised. In addition, some individual roles may also be absorbed into other specialist or operational roles (Robbins & Finley 2000), which are considered to be outside of the consultancy arena.

The roles undertaken by consultants are based on their skills, knowledge and abilities are building blocks for their identities (Castells 2004); if the skills or role of consultants change so will their identities. Different consultancy roles often have clear characteristics associated with them, which form part of the role identity. So, if a consultant undertakes more than one role during an assignment, the consultant can promote the identity characteristics of each of them, demonstrating multiple capabilities and multiple identities. Indeed, consultants may actively seek more than one role during an assignment, to demonstrate their flexibility, or attempting to prolong the assignment. During assignments, such as with EPDO, I have undertaken several distinct roles, such as solving problems or providing coaching and mentoring; which demonstrate the depth of my experience and my flexibility.

One of the main roles of consultants is often seen as helping the client manage major changes within the organisation. This type of organisation change usually requires significant adjustments to the working approach and systems of the client (Taffinder 1999); with consultants often promoted as being the most suitable group to complete the implementation (Kippling & Engwall 2002). Although many changes may be instigated at the suggestion of the consultants initially brought in to investigate an aspect of the organisation (O'Shea & Madigan 1997). A focus of this research concerns the identity related interactions of micro-consultants working within a dedicated organisation change environment, therefore it is appropriate to explore these aspects further.

2.4 Consultancies and Organisation Change

The introduction and implementation of change within organisations is becoming a regular and frequent part of the working routine, with periods of stability being seen as exceptions; see for example Caldwell (2003) or Millett (1999). Organisation change usually refers to significant and complicated changes to an organisation which have a direct and radical effect on many of the existing processes, hierarchies, systems, procedures and operations; which usually also effect the staff, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders (Taffinder 1999). Organisation change can be undertaken for a variety of strategic reasons, as suggested by authors such as Hayes (2006) and Carnall (2007) including: reaction to competitors, reduction of costs, improved processes or production systems, increased market share, or legislative requirements. According to authors such as Taffinder (1999) and Carnall (2007), the ideal outcome of the change is often a combination of: increased profits, reduced costs, reductions in resources, enhanced automation, introduction of new technology or processes, and improved market share, as well as changes to the identity of the organisation and its staff. These strategic changes are often brought together in designated change programmes, which may also include a variety of dedicated and interrelated projects (Benko & McFarlan 2003).

There are a variety of approaches which can be taken to preparing and implementing organisation change. These range from the radical transformations of Business Process Reengineering (Hammer & Champy 1995), to the continual incremental improvements over time, as suggested by Total Quality Management (Morfaw 2005) or Six Sigma

(Pyzdek 2003). The type of organisation change undertaken will depend on the organisation, the changes needed, the market and the people involved (Taffinder 1999). Analysis of requirements will help to ascertain whether major changes to the whole organisation will need to be made, or smaller incremental changes, within specific areas (Hayes 2006).

Within most organisations, change is implemented in parallel to the normal working processes of the organisations (Carnall 2007). This provides the opportunity for managers and staff to maintain existing levels of production and service; minimising disruptions before cutting over to the new systems (Burnes 1996). As such, separate teams of dedicated change agents are usually established which would be responsible for the introduction of changes to the main production and service streams (Hayes 2006). The change team will usually be responsible for undertaking the main elements of the organisation change projects including: governance and approvals, requirements assessments, identification of solutions, system preparations and customisation, managing expectations, communications and briefings, solution testing, training, implementation and cutover, commissioning and handover and post-project review (Venning 2007; Hayes 2006; DeWeaver & Gillespie 1997). In essence these change teams provide advice and implementation skills to help ensure the successful transition to the new ways of working by the incumbent production and service teams (Sadler 2002).

Many organisations acknowledge that their existing operations staff do not have the skills, knowledge or time to implement organisation change, without significant effects on existing productivity (Hayes 2006). In addition, staff based change management teams may not be able to breakdown internal barriers which could be a cause of poor performance or prevent change (Balogun et al 2005). Consequently, organisations often engage external management consultancies to form the majority of the change team which will prepare and implement the changes with contributions from the exiting operations staff (Johnson 1992), and independent micro-consultants such as myself.

As indicated previously, consultants have often been considered as agents of change, introducing new ideas, practices and concepts to organisations (Alvesson & Johansson 2001). Indeed many of the roles and categorisations of consultants referred to in the previous Section have a clear change management element. All of which provide management consultants with a number of credentials to allow them to undertake roles in change teams (Burnes 1996). If the organisation changes are not completed as originally intended, the consultants in the change team can also provide a convenient group on which to focus any subsequent blame (DeWeaver & Gillespie 1997).

By the nature of their work, change teams are transient organisations, existing only to provide the required changes. Once these changes are declared complete the change team is detached, or moved to other work (Guowei 2007). As such they may have no awareness or responsibility for any subsequent detrimental events that may occur after

the organisation change is declared complete (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1997); leaving their resolution to the incumbent operations staff, or another change team.

The use of dedicated change teams to control organisation change has been questioned by authors such as Caldwell (2003) and Stensaker & Falkenberg (2007), who suggest that this approach may be too rigid to take account of the dynamics of managing change; as well as enforcing the use of specific tools and processes which may not be appropriate. There are also concerns that insufficient account may be taken of the abilities and voices of the operations and support staff involved (Fincham 2002b). Related to this aspect are concerns that change management concentrates on more tangible elements such as technology and processes; rather than the staff elements such as their behaviours and identity (Angell 2002). It is also possible that the change teams may not have enough experience of the existing systems and processes, or the new systems they are trying to implement (Robbins & Finley 2000). Whilst experienced change teams may concentrate on improving their own change management techniques, experiences and identities rather than implementing the organisation change required (Wysicki 2002). The change teams may not be fully aware of the implications and intentions of their programme; with elements not being revealed due to ignorance (Stacey 2001) or power plays (Clegg et al 2006). Consequently, they may not be fully aware of the complete suite of products resulting from the change and their consequences for the organisation (Suchman 2000).

In an attempt to focus the change teams, organisation change work is usually packaged into distinct projects (Bennett & Smith 2004). Projects can be seen as unique packages of

work requiring finite time and resources to complete; as defined by the UK Association of Project Managers (APM 2006):

> *Projects are unique, transient endeavour undertaken to achieve a desired outcome. Projects bring about change…*
>
> (APM 2006 p2)

The preparations and implementation of projects are usually supported by a recognised project management framework which provides a variety of tools and mechanisms for control of projects, as defined by the APM (2006).

> *Project management is the process by which projects are defined, planned, monitored controlled and delivered such that the agreed benefits are realised.*
>
> *(*APM 2006 p2)

Project management frameworks usually comprise recognised best practices, techniques and systems which have been developed to ensure all aspects of change projects are implemented correctly; as well as ensuring appropriate governance and reporting (TSO 2005). These techniques are usually systematically applied through the use of established project management methodologies such as Prince2 (TSO 2005), Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMI 2008) or Managing Successful Programmes (TSO 2007). A Project or Programme Management Office (PMO) ensures that good project management practices are used to control the project (Marsh 2001) are used effectively by the project team; and may be aligned to a formal methodology (Lane 2008).

The use of dedicated project management teams will help to ensure the change management programme is implemented effectively (Turner & Simster 2000). Project participants can include all involved with the preparation and implementation of the change management programme whether they are operations staff, specialists, managers, consultants or suppliers (Wysicki 2002). In many organisations that use consultants to manage change, senior client staff have a strong presence on each Project Board, with specialist staff, consultants and suppliers also providing advice and recommendations (TSO 2005).

The use of project teams to implement formalised methodologies has its challenges. It has been suggested by authors including Standish (1995) and Frigenti & Comminos (2002) that the use of standard project management approaches adds to the bureaucracy of projects, reducing their dynamisism, whilst placing emphasis on controls at the expense of the outcome of the projects. The implementation of rigid project management techniques can sometimes mask the true objectives of the project, even forcing them to change to ensure adherence to the project management frameworks used (Nickson & Siddons 2006). This emphasis on the use of bureaucratic tools and approaches together with specialist project management teams can also suppress the voices of the staff involved with current and future operations (O'Conner 2000). This can deprive the project of potentially valuable input from the users, all of which reduce project efficiency and the probability of success (DeWeaver & Gillespie 1997).

Alternative approaches to project management have been developed which try to reduce some of these deficiencies, such as the Theory of Constraints (Goldratt 1997) and Agile Systems (Augustine 2005). All of which provide a multiplicity of differing techniques and approaches for specialist project management micro-consultants, such as myself. However this multiplicity of project management techniques may also cause dilemmas for consultants regarding their use, their association with the different project management techniques and other approaches; any of which may have an effect on their identities. However, using these approaches may also contribute to micro-consultants abilities to solve problems encountered by the projects.

During the preparation and implementation of organisation change management projects many different kinds of problems are likely to be encountered by the client organisation (Czarniawska & Sevon 1996; Venning 2007; PMI 2008). These could range from staff resistance (Tobin 1999) to power plays (Clegg et al 2006) and partnering (Lendrum 2003). In addition, problems of a more technical nature are also likely to be experienced; these can include technology (Guowei 2007), interdependencies (Carnall 2007), marketing (Smith & Wheeler 2002) and communications (Bovee & Thill 2007). Administrative problems are also likely to be encountered including project management methodologies (Nickson & Siddons 2006), authorisations (Clegg et al 2006) and processes (Fincham & Rhodes 2005).

Due to problems encountered during the course of their lifecycle, the final results of almost all strategic change projects may not be completed as originally intended; see for example Standish (1995), Dooley (1998) and Minzberg et al (1998). Some of these may be due to a significant time lag between the strategic change decision being made and the completion of the change programme (Wittington 2000). There may also be differences in interpretation of the strategic solution as it is passed to the operational elements (Minzberg et al 1998). All of which may result in different solutions being prepared and implemented to those originally envisaged. In addition, the fragmented world of managers with their (mis)interpretations of events and symbols can have a detrimental effect on projects (Johnson 1992). With project managers sometimes interpreting signals from the working environment according to their own knowledge and experiences as well as histories and paradigms, or interpretive schemes (Cummins & Staw 1995). This process of interpretation also provides some insight into management failures to notice changes in their project environment and to take timely action, which often results in project delays or overspend (Fleming & Spicer 2007; Standish 1995; NAO 2007). The interactions undertaken during the course of an organisation change project may also have an effect on the success of a project; aspects of which are discussed later in this thesis.

Inevitably, projects encountering major problems and consequently not being considered successful will have an effect on micro-consultant identity. Being associated with a failed project can be detrimental to a consultant's identity and reputation. Whilst turning around a failing project can have a positive effect on the consultant's reputation and identity. In

many cases the interactions undertaken between clients and consultants can improve the success of projects.

2.5 Summary of Key Literature

This Chapter has used some of the current academic orientated literature to provide an overview of the key elements regarding the management consultancy profession, including micro-consultants. The literature identified a number of overlapping key roles, capabilities and skills for consultants including: problem identification and resolution, providing information insight and advice, providing supplementary skills and knowledge, assessing and implementing organisational change and providing education, mentoring and coaching.

It is sometimes unclear whether these roles are undertaken by single consultants or shared between groups of consultants. Likewise, it is not clear whether each of these roles are undertaken during a single assignment or over many assignments. In a similar way, there is no clear indication as to whether these roles are linked to the identity of individual consultants. These aspects provide other identity related uncertainties for the consultant; such as which roles to promote and when. This lack of clarity may be due to the apparent immaturity of the profession, or lack of studies into the profession (Alvesson & Johansson 2003). It may also be due to the ever changing needs and capabilities of

consultants, especially those working on the leading edge of technology, processes organisation and leadership.

With the research element of this thesis being undertaken in an organisation change area, a more detailed discussion on the contribution of consultants in this area has been provided. The needs, objectives and some of the main ways of achieving change were discussed; with the differing levels of success highlighted. The contribution of consultants to change teams was considered; together with the main project management led approaches to achieving change. The difficulties of managing projects and their frequent lack of success when using accepted practices were considered; together with the implications for consultants involved. The interactions between project participants, including consultants, may have an influence on the success of both projects and consultants. These aspects are considered further in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 3

MICRO-CONSULTANT & CLIENT INTERACTIONS

3.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter provided an overview of consultants and their position in the business world, especially that of change management and the associated project control elements. In addition the key consultant roles and capabilities were considered, together with their identity associations.

This Chapter examines the key theoretical concepts relating to micro-consultants and the ways in which they interact with their clients in a change management environment. The focus is on the most significant or frequent interactions that surfaced during the practitioner elements including: relationships, knowledge provision, availability, aspects of power, influencing and negotiation, communications and language; which have been used as themes within this Chapter.

3.2 Interactions Between Micro-consultants and their Client

Authors including Suchman (2000) and Johnson (1992) see change management projects as persuasive performances and symbolic actions, which illuminate how organisations and their participants interact through communications. These communications can include conversations, discussions, meetings; together with artefacts, such as e-mails and reports. All participants in projects need to be able to interact effectively in a variety of ways to ensure the success of the projects (TSO 2005). With their often leading role in the management of projects, consultants need to be able to interact with project participants and other stakeholders.

For most micro-consultants involved in change management projects, there is need for significant levels of interaction with their clients or representatives, as well as their support networks (Clark 1995). Micro-consultants need to maintain active dialogues with their contacts to build relationships, maintain confidence, exchange information and influence them in order to find success and ensure longevity of their assignments (Dow & Taylor 2008). There are various models and theories which attempt to describe or generalise consultant-client interactions. These models include Schon's (2003) Expert Model which assesses the added value provided by consultants in the form of knowledge, skills or support; Reflective Practitioner models (Schon 2003) view the interactions as interactive exchanges between the parties involved. Other approaches, such as Critical Models, view interactions as impression management, with an associated transfer of knowledge, skills or support (Clark 1995). Whilst these models concentrate on various

aspects of the consulting processes, they can be specific and inflexible. They also sometimes appear to miss out many diverse identity related interaction mechanisms and interconnections; such as those observed during the practitioner research in the EPDO.

There are many potential ways that micro-consultants and their clients can interact during the course of an assignment. Most concentrate on ensuring the success of the assignment objectives, such as completion of a programme or project. Other interactions consider wider issues such as social aspects, career prospects and the outcomes of various reorganisations. Some of the more frequent and significant interactions concerning identity observed during the practitioner research are discussed in this Section from theoretical perspectives. Possibly the key interaction observed concerned the development and maintenance of relationships between micro-consultants, their clients and their stakeholders.

3.3 Relationships

Building and maintaining relationships can be seen as a key interaction for micro-consultants. Outside of assignments, micro-consultants need to build relationships within external support networks to provide help, advice and resources in areas that they have insufficient skills, experience or knowledge (Ford et al 2003). These support networks can be developed within the consultant's practice, or beyond through professional associations or other business groups (Fill & Fill 2004).

Relationship building can be undertaken during normal working interactions, although most is undertaken outside of the formal working environment, in the liminal space of Czarniawska & Mazza (2003). Maintaining working relationships during assignments often requires participation outside of normal working hours; or away from the client workplaces (Sturdy et al 2006). Building and maintaining relationships also takes time, which may be better spent servicing the assignment in other ways, such as completing work elements (Craig 2005).

A consultant's external support networks can help to update existing skills and knowledge, introduce new skills, ideas and techniques (Bennett & Ramsden 2007), supporting current and future identities. The networks may also be used to provide information and insights about other organisations, as well as providing sources of potential clients which may be obtained through referrals and working with associate consultants (Cross et al 2001). Consultants may also exchange ideas, identity elements and practice techniques which could be used to build relationships with clients, such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming or Emotional Intelligence (Harris 2000). Relationship building will also provide a group identity for a network of consultants and their peers, which may eventually be formalised into a support or consultancy organisation (McKenna & Maister 2002). When not on an assignment, I frequently attend meetings of my consultant networks. These allow me to signal my availability for other assignments, as well as enabling me to keep up to date with new trends and ideas and formulate identity elements.

Some networking meetings are focussed on ensuring visibility of the consultant or their outputs (Pinder & McAdam 1994), which in turn can demonstrate skills, experience, abilities and availability to undertake assignments and familiarity with potential clients and their business (Bennett & Smith 2004). All of these provide familiarity and reassurances of the abilities of the consultant (De Raffele & Hendricks 1998). These can also be reinforced through the publication of relevant reports and case studies, which are publicised during presentations (Clark 1995). Indeed, some consultancies treat the provision of presentations, briefings and conferences as an income generating business stream (Lambert 1998). In addition, more specific information may be presented directly to prospective clients in the form of dedicated discussions or briefings (Werr & Styhre 2003). However, it can take considerable time for consultancies to develop documents and presentations. There is also no guarantee that any discussions or presentations, even directly to potential clients, will lead to assignments (Sturdy 1997). It may also be that clients sometimes view the briefings information and presentations being made by consultants, as not informative, unwanted and even a waste of their time (Poulfelt & Payne 1994). Indeed, I have undertaken many discussions with potential clients to discover that the clients were probably just attempting to obtain free consultancy in the form of information and advice as part of their initial discussions; which is normally provided during assignments.

During these networking sessions, consultants may be confused by new ideas and concepts (Philips 2006). They may also become frustrated by the need to spend significant time with people who subsequently are not able to provide appropriate support or insights (Ford et al 2003). Most networking meetings take place away from the workplace, or client, which may also conflict with work and client internal relationships that are needed during assignments (Sturdy 1997).

There are suggestions that the nature of the consultant-client relationship during the early stages of an assignment is not clearly understood (Hislop 2002); although there is consensus that the relationship is symbolic (Clark 1995; Alvesson & Johansson 2001), symbiotic (Biswas & Twitchell 2001) and often ambiguous (Fincham 1999b; Werr & Styrhe 2003). In part the relationship will depend on the micro-consultant's and client's needs for each other and the circumstances that they encounter, as well as the services which are required (Clark & Fincham 2002; Biswas & Twitchell, 2001). The capabilities of the micro-consultants, their knowledge and experience will also be a significant factor (Alvesson & Johansson 2001; Sturdy 2009). Relationship building will provide opportunities for micro-consultants to discuss their experiences and knowledge, as well as to promote their identities (Cofta 2007). However, there is some concern that the changing nature of client's demands and the apparent inability of consultants to provide solutions (Ashford 1998) will lead to continual client dissatisfaction and associated deterioration of relationships (Czarniawska 1999). Although improved understanding of clients needs through relationship building, participation and practice may ease some of this dissatisfaction (Appelbaum 2004).

Whilst on assignment, micro-consultants need to quickly develop internal support networks within the client organisation and other stakeholders (Benjamin 2008). Building these relationships can promote identities, helping to provide trust, reliability and confidence in the micro-consultant, ensuring appropriate advice and support is given and received for the duration of the assignment (Ford et al 2003). Building and maintaining internal support networks takes time, and may interfere with the expected workload of the micro-consultant (Phillips 2006). Therefore a micro-consultant on a short term assignment may need to be more reliant on external support networks than when on long term assignments. Whilst long term assignments may provide time to build reliable, client based, internal networks. However, once an assignment is complete, any internal support networks and associated relationships are usually dismantled (Benjamin 2008), with the micro-consultant needing to rely on external networks for future support (Buno & Poulfelt 2009). Therefore, there is a need to balance internal and external support networks and relationships during assignments. This usually means that I concentrate on building internal support networks during an assignment, whilst reducing my involvement with external support networks.

During assignments, micro-consultants often need to build and maintain relationships with individual client staff or their representatives, to ensure the continued success of assignments (Czarniawska 1999). Relationships at the working level usually involve the micro-consultant ensuring that client staff are supportive, exchanging information and undertaking the required work when needed (Weiss 2001). For instance, during the early

part of assignments, I take time to get to know the key client staff that I will be interacting with; helping to build good relationships from the start. A good working relationship can ensure the longevity and success of an assignment, as well as providing opportunities for future work (Clark & Fincham 2002).

When starting to build relationships it is often not clear, for a while, whether the relationships are appropriate or beneficial in terms of experiences, knowledge or identity (Ford et al 2003). This may result in time wasted cultivating unproductive relationships. In an attempt to resolve this, authors such as Fill & Fill (2004), Wright (2003) and Ford et al (2003) provide guidance about how to select and grow relationships. These usually involve setting time to benefits targets; if there are no clear benefits within the selected time, the relationship is left to wither, or maintained at a low level. Effort is then concentrated on apparently more productive relationships (Ford et al 2003), or ones which have been more recently established (Wright 2003); or concentrating on other aspects of the assignment. This kind of approach is often used by people who see relationships as power plays between individuals, or the groups to which they belong (Fleming & Spicer 2007).

3.4 Perspectives on Power

Some relationships are developed as power plays, being encouraged whilst useful and terminated when not required. The perceptions of power, and its associated controls, have a significant role in the interactions of micro-consultants and their clients. It may be viewed that micro-consultants with their specialist knowledge, skills and advice gives them power over their clients, which provides an initial basis to build and control their initial identity, reputation and relationship with their client's staff (Brown 2007). However, the use of micro-consultant specialist skills may be limited by the client, though their usage, the level of staff involved, the skills allowed and client provided supporting information (Clegg et al 2006); which can also limit aspects of the micro-consultants identity and its promotion. The client also provides the assignment to the micro-consultant and has the ability to refuse to pay for the micro-consultants services; or to terminate the assignment, with consequential loss of reputation for the micro-consultant (Biswas & Twitchell 2001). Additionally, other stakeholders may also have a controlling power in the use of consultants by the client, especially in consultant-client partnering (Mol 2007); such as software solution providers only allowing accredited consultants to customise client systems. Both micro-consultants and clients sometimes see power as part of their identity, which can be used for brokering, awarding or continuing consultant assignments (Fleming & Spicer 2007). Therefore the different perceptions of power and their usages often shift between the micro-consultant, the client and even stakeholders, depending on the state of the assignment and other influencing

factors (Fincham 1999a); suggesting that there is often a delicate balance of power between micro-consultants, their clients and other stakeholders.

The types of power exercised by individuals and the way they are used contribute to the identity of the micro-consultants and the groups with which they are associated (Clegg 1989); such that some people chose to promote power related aspects of their identity (Brewer & Hewstone 2003). This approach can also be extended into the identity of an organisation, which may choose to promote its power characteristics and perspectives over other identity attributes (Hardy 1995).

There are many perspectives on power its use and influences; these include Clegg (1989); Hardy (1995); Law (1986) and Mangham (1984). Perhaps the most appropriate perspectives include those that consider of Foucault's network of power concepts (Foucault & Faubion 1994) and Clegg's circuits of power analytical model (Jermier et al 1994), which was influenced by Foucault's concepts. From these perspectives, power is often viewed as legitimate when exercised by managers to pursue collective organisational goals. But is viewed as political or dysfunctional when used by others to challenge the organisational goals and/or promote the self-interest of specific groups, client staff or consultants (Clegg, 1989). Hardy (1995) identifies a number of power perspectives concerned with imposing control in different ways and areas. Many of these power perspectives have been developed from, or influenced by, authors such as Mangham (1984); Pettigrew (1985) and Foucault & Faubion (1994). Some of the principle power perspectives are illustrated in Figure 5 (overleaf).

Figure 5 Power Perspectives

Power Perspective	Description
Resource power (Hardy 1995)	Concerned with overt decision-making. Power is enacted through the use of resources, such as funds, information or credibility.
Power of process (Hardy 1995)	Concerned with procedures, systems and protocols. For example by controlling the agendas for meetings, micro-consultants and subordinates can be effectively prevented from participating in some meetings or discussions and therefore influencing the decision-making.
Power of meaning (Petigrew 1985)	Involving the use of symbols, rituals, language and co-option to shape perceptions, cognitions and preferences. Sometimes seen as a process of symbol construction and usage, which is deigned to legitimize one's own actions and de-legitimatise those of opponents.
Symbolic power (Hardy 1985)	Involves an unobtrusive ability to define reality for oneself and for others, such as providing a vision for client staff or micro-consultants.
Dramaturgical power (Mangham 1984)	Illuminates the management of meaning insofar as the individuals involved are conceived to be performers or actors on a stage. Presenting a (different) character to various audiences, inviting them to believe in the reality of the setting, props, cues and so on.

Many of these power perspectives are used during interactions between micro-consultants and their clients, often been seen as power plays to support particular stances or actions. Within any organisation, there may be different interpretations of objectives or market fluctuations or service requests which may cause contradictions for different parts of the organisation, and uncertainties for change management projects, as seen in Section 2.4. These often compete with each other and vie for power and visibility; which can result in

tensions and conflicts between the staff involved (Clegg et al 2006). Micro-consultants may be introduced as arbitrators in these conflicts providing an independent view intended to focus the groups on the most appropriate work and to channel power more appropriately (Tobin 1999). In these cases, delicate interactions and diplomacy may be required to resolve the problems, and ensure power plays are to the mutual satisfaction of the groups involved, as well as to ensure the reputation of the consultants and the success of the assignment (Brown 2007). However, if the power plays are unsuccessful, or considered dysfunctional, any micro-consultants involved can become the focus of blame; with subsequent detriment to their reputation and identity, at least for that assignment.

Groups or individuals may also make dysfunctional power plays to advance their own interests, which may not be for the common good. Micro-consultants may also be used by the different groups as instruments to support the group aims (Hardy 1995). When involved in these dysfunctional political power plays between parts of the client organisation micro-consultants are usually encouraged to side with their employing client manager, helping to ensure the success of their power play (Klein 1999). If the power play is not successful, the micro-consultants can be blamed by all groups, usually with detrimental effects on the successes of assignments (Fleming & Spicer 2007).

A micro-consultant's own practice may also use power plays to negotiate, support, or delay, the availability of their consultants on assignments (Clegg et al 2006). Micro-consultants may also be involved with power plays aimed at furthering the aims of their

consultancy to ensure the success or longevity of assignments (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1997). For instance, when nearing the end of an assignment, I have occasionally made power plays which involved negotiating extensions to assignments, ensuring the longevity of the assignment and the completion of additional project objectives.

3.5 Negotiation and Influencing

Authors including Dawson (2001) and Harris (1983) consider negotiation between two or more groups, to be essentially a power battle between the parties; with negotiations used as exchanges of power. Negotiations involve discussions between parties, each of which is attempting to make the best deal for those that they represent (Raiffa et al 2007). Some of these aspects have been studied and modelled as games theories by authors such as von Neumann & Morgenstern (1947). Ideally negotiations should result in a satisfactory compromise for all parties, a ‘win – win’ situation (Lank 2006). Power plays often bias negotiations, with one party determined to achieve their target positions at any cost, which ultimately may be detrimental to all parties and other stakeholders (Dawson 2001). The economic laws of supply and demand can also bias the outcome to the advantage of one party (Ronco & Ronco 2005); for example micro-consultants with specialist skills in short supply may negotiate better deals, than those with relatively common skills.

Micro-consultants need to be able to negotiate the best deals for new assignments; as well as during assignments (Biswas & Twitchell 2001), forming an element of their identity and its promotion. Some consultants promote their negotiation skills, knowledge and experiences as part of their experience and identity (Kubr 2002); negotiating on behalf of their clients within limits set by them (Simon & Kumar 2001). Negotiations also take place in the project environment, involving gaining agreements from project teams on various aspects including: priorities, options and deadlines (PMI 2008). For instance, I often need to negotiate with different project teams to ensure interdependencies between projects are aligned, often influencing the commitment of resources, services, time or budgets.

Influencing can be considered to be a more subtle aspect of negotiations, providing selected information and guidance which indirectly steers other parties towards the intended targets for agreement (Huczynski 2004); although it can also be part of power plays (Hardy 1985). Elements of influencing are also modelled within game theories (von Neumann & Morgenstern 1947). In many cases, the other parties may believe they have reached agreement and understanding themselves, and may not be aware of any influence (Lendrum 2003).

As part of their advisory role, consultants frequently influence their clients; providing appropriate information and advice to allow the client to make a decision (Poufelt & Payne 1994). Clients can also be influenced by consultants for their own benefit (Ashford 1998), such as engaging more consultants. Likewise, clients can influence consultants,

encouraging them to undertake difficult work, or work that is outside of their habitas (Clark 1995), in turn influencing their identity. Influencing also takes place within the project environment, often involving persuading project teams to complete work or administration when needed (TSO 2005). I frequently use my influencing skills to persuade client teams and suppliers to undertake project related tasks, influencing them to accept changes to their routines, or ensuring their availability.

3.6 Availability, Visibility, Embedding

The continued availability of appropriate micro-consultants and client staff during assignments is important (Kubr 2002). If a micro-consultant is not able to respond quickly and appropriately to client requests, attend meetings or provide information, there may be a loss of confidence in the ability of the consultant and uncertainty over their identity and purpose (Bumo & Poulfelt 2009); leading to deteriorations in the relationships with detrimental effects on the assignment (Biswas & Twitchell 2001). Likewise, if client staff are not available to the micro-consultant when needed, or are not able to provide the micro-consultant with requested information, the relationship may deteriorate (Ford et al 2003). Limiting the availability or exposure of a consultant to the client’s staff also limits the availability of their skills, knowledge and identity (Poulfelt & Payne 1994).

The availability of clients and consultants, or their associated information, is sometimes used in dysfunctional power plays between micro-consultants and clients (Hardy 1995). This sometimes occurs when secretaries, or executive assistants, delay or prevent access by consultants to senior managers, disrupting or delaying the micro-consultant's work. However, if a micro-consultant is seen to be available to client staff regularly, such as during an embedded assignment, it provides opportunities to justify the existence of the micro-consultant, as well as to promote their identity and skills (Buono & Poulfelt 2009).

Availability is most prominent when micro-consultants are embedded with their clients; dedicating much of their time to a single client and their staff or representatives. Embedding can take many forms, at its simplest it can be seen as a symbiotic dependence by one group upon another for products or services over a number of iterations (Maurice & Sorge 1999). For example a marketing department may use specialist micro-consultant project managers working alongside the marketing team to ensure the successful launch of products (Smith & Fletcher 2004).

Embedded consultants often spend most of their working time on the client's site, dedicating themselves to the needs of the client (Gold & Fraser 2002); possibly for several months or even years at a time. Embedding also provides opportunities for micro-consultants to build relationships and internal support networks with the client staff, or representatives, as well as regularly promoting their own skills, knowledge, experiences and identity (Ford et al 2003). In turn, embedding effectively provides client staff with instant and constant access to the services of micro-consultants and their support

networks which also share the client's identity (Buono & Poulfelt 2009). As such the consultant may be seen as another member of staff, with the perceived identity of a member of the client's staff (Dearlove & Clutterbuck 1998). For instance, during assignments I am regularly embedded with clients, for months at a time, providing my project management skills directly to client representatives, and am sometimes considered to be part of the client's team. Although the client may enforce separation when appropriate, through rules or other means of differentiation (Alvesson & Willmott 2002).

If consultants are embedded in the client organisation for a long time, they risk losing their independence and therefore part of their identity; especially the elements associated directly with their consultancy practice (Ford et al 2003), such as external support networks. Although it may be possible to develop significant internal, client related, support networks which may replace many of the lost elements (De Raffele & Hendricks 1998). It is also possible for consultants to become too embedded in their client's organisation, seeing themselves primarily as a member of the client's team (Buono & Poulfelt 2009). In turn, this will influence their identity, together with related experiences and perspectives. It may also be difficult for embedded consultants to maintain their relative position within their own consultancy practice (Phillips 2006). This could result in difficulties at the end of a long term assignment, forcing the consultants to re-introduce themselves to colleagues and potential clients. As such, they may also have to re-build their working relationships outside of their embedded client assignments, whether within their consultancy practice, or external to it (Brown 2007). Following long term embedded

assignments; I usually have to re-invent myself to potential clients; communicating my skills and availability directly, or through my support networks.

3.7 Communications & Language

Another important interaction between client and consultant is that of communication. Communication is a complex process of relating – a network of patterned responses that provide the context for an individual action across space and over time (Stacey 2001). There is a need for all parties to provide constant and open dialog to pass requests, seek advice, exchange information, transfer knowledge, report progress and understand processes (Dutton 1996). All of which can help to maintain relationships, in turn ensuring the success of any assignment, whilst promoting the identities of the consultants and clients. Communication is not always about talking face to face; technology, such as e-mail, social networks, video conferencing or texting, can be exploited to regularly provide messages and discussions, in a way which reflects the identity of the user (Bovee & Thill 2007).

It may be tempting for micro-consultants to develop their own style and preferences for communications. Especially if there are special protocols and templates required for some transactions such as legal precedents, progress reports or engineering calculations (Artemeva 1998); which may also be used to mask the uncertainty of consultants (Ashford 1998). However, communications techniques and protocols which are

appropriate to the client or their representatives and their operations should also be considered; otherwise communications barriers could be established (Stacey 2001). Although these communications barriers can sometimes be mediated by participants making appropriate references to relevant protocols symbols and artefacts. These communications symbols and artefacts represent reflections of the patterns of routines and power relations in the process of organizing projects and work (Stacey 2001). Thus communications protocols and preferences are a primary method of signalling allegiances and identity by an individual or group (Dutton 1996). As well as promoting and reinforcing the common identity, which can be enhanced by visual aspects (Bovee & Thill 2007) such as uniforms. Consequently, poor communications can be an indicator of deteriorating allegiances or relationships between the consultant and the client (Appelbaum 2004). Communications are often used as a tool in dysfunctional power plays, with one party deliberately limiting the provision of communications, or information, to the other (Klein 1999); or using inappropriate and incorrect language in their communications.

Linked to communications is the correct use of language between the micro-consultant and client. Micro-consultants need to be able to express themselves using phrases and contexts which are familiar to their contacts; to show awareness and establish common understanding (Lambert 1998). Language can be used by micro-consultants as narrative (Stacey 2001), forming persuasive performances to promote their identities and to convince clients of their capabilities and usefulness (Fincham 2002a; Werr 2000). The

use of language also illuminates how power operates through communications (Johnson 1992).

Consultants need to use language which is familiar and appropriate to their clients, using their symbols and narrative styles where possible to show allegiance, provide identity reassurance and help with understanding (Werr 1999). Whilst international assignments may highlight language differences between regions or countries (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1989); there can be significant differences in the use of language between industry sectors, such as between the ICT, legal and operations elements, see for example Gouin (2007) and Dow & Taylor (2008). Independent micro-consultants, such as myself, are sometimes used to help 'interpret' organisational change requirements from the client to the change teams and vice versa; ensuring that all parties understand what is required and its implications (Artemeva 1998). Therefore the language used by individuals, or groups, can become a defining element of the promoted identity and culture (Flynn 2005).

Language in the form of narrative, story telling and rhetoric, plays an important part in the culture of individuals and organisations (Mead & Morris 1934). Culture can be considered to be the heritage and lifestyle of individuals or organisations (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1989) in this way, the culture of individuals can be synonymous with their identity (Lewis 2000). Likewise, culture is also a significant part of organisations, comprising their heritage, rituals, traditions and working practices (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000). Culture can therefore be considered as an integral part of organisation identity (Lewis 2000 and Smith 2001); which is discussed later.

Consultants must be able to understand and interact successfully within the culture identity and working practices of their client's organisations (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000). This will help them to understand the client's perspective; allowing the consultant to provide appropriate support and advice, resolve problems and implement solutions for their clients and build successful relationships (Smith 2001). Whilst embedded with a client, I am expected to work and behave in a similar way to the client staff, using appropriate language and communications mechanisms; if I do not there may be unnecessary tensions and my relationships with client staff may degrade. Paradoxically, at times it may also be necessary to remain distant from the client culture, to obtain additional information, provide a wider view on the problems and consider alternative solutions that the client may not be aware of (Weick 1995). As a consultant, I sometimes have to work outside the culture and traditions of an organisation in order to bring different parts of the organisation together, especially when implementing changes which will cross client boundaries (Balogun et al 2005). This often involves building relationships to gain mutual respect and trust from the different groups to ensure successful interactions (Ford et al 2003). This sometimes necessitates my acting as pivotal points in the dynamic interactions between networks of clients, micro-consultants, suppliers, customers and other stakeholders.

3.8 Networks & Complexity

The dynamic and shifting nature of the social and working interactions between clients and consultants can be explored by various perspectives, including actor-network theory (Law 1986). Actor-network theory is also increasingly used to explain social relationships and connectivity between people and organizations (Law & Hassard 1999), which can include consultant-client interactions. Actors, or agents, are seen as the nodes of a network each with a set of attributes, or identity; whilst relationships are seen as the connectors of a network, allowing actors to interact with each other for a common purpose (Latour 2005). Consequently, networking between actors can be seen as the key to successful relationships, with power a focal element which can make or break the connections (Anderson 1999).

Actor-network theory also examines the 'power of the system', in the form of networks, as well as the role of actors in reproducing and transforming these networks (Lewin 1999). Agents use their power to control networks, ensuring actors use appropriate networks to fulfil their wishes (Seidl & Mohe 2007). In turn actors may become agents by delegating some of their actions to other actors (Clegg 1989). Actors and agents can therefore be seen as affects of networks, hence the importance attributed to the context of action and power (Law 1986). Actors interests exist as *'temporarily stabilized outcomes of previous processes of enrolment'* (Callon & Law 1982 p622) and are often changed through the interventions of other actors. Knowledge (and therefore power) is a key

factor, in the strength of the connections between each node and the connections each node has with other actors (Latour 2005).

Actor network theory is particularly concerned with ‘translation’, the methods by which these outcomes, either intentionally or otherwise, are achieved (Clegg 1989). However, different logical approaches and perspectives (Czarniawska 2001) from project participants, micro-consultants and clients can result in failure to transfer meaning and understanding and ineffectual linkages (Stacey 2001), together with inappropriate use of power. Aspects of actor network theory have also been modelled mathematically using elements of systems thinking, operational research, web theories and network studies (Newman et al 2006); which can also link into theories such as complex adaptive systems.

There are many different types of interactions that micro-consultants need to balance when dealing with clients and other consultants. Some of these interactions can be illustrated by the use of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theories and frameworks developed to model aspects of organisation and social interactions (Anderson 1999). Most traditional organisation theories build their results on the assumption that there are few variables and that responses will take an average path (Lewin 1999). CAS theories allow for the provision of non average responses and the possibilities of multiple variables, with unknown influence (McKelvey 1999). Many CAS models, use agent based theories and frameworks (often developed from Actor Network Theories), to model the different variables and their outcomes (Battram 1998). These models can be

compared with living organisms or other dynamic systems to illustrate their adaptability; as well as to remove them from relatively static cause and effect traditional models (Manson 2001).

Utilising this type of model and associated theories allows for the possibility of constructing many different outcomes even when similar variables and responses are used; which can reflect the different reactions encountered by micro-consultants even in essentially similar situations (Bryne 1998). CAS approaches could therefore be used to model the different types of interactions and their outcomes between micro-consultants and their clients including relationship building; communications and language; negotiating and influencing; and power plays.

The interactions and influences between networks of micro-consultants and their clients play an essential part in the success of any assignment with the only real measures of success being the continued involvement of the consultant by the client, which can be measured by the length of the assignment. Consultants need to position their identities within this incomplete and fragmentary complexity of interactions taking account of the needs of the client regarding contacts and communications. If any of these interactions are consistently preformed badly, or are neglected, there can be a loss of confidence in the abilities of the consultants, which in turn can reduce the success of the assignment with the possibility of subsequent loss of reputation for the consultants, with its resultant uncertainties and dilemmas.

3.9 Interaction Dilemmas and Uncertainties

The interactions involved with participating in any business means encountering uncertainties, dilemmas and associated risks (Weick 1995). Large organisations may have some levels of certainty that can come from a long term stable client base, extending over various market sectors (Clegg et al 1996). So if there is a downturn in a few sectors other sectors may remain buoyant, balancing out some of the market uncertainty. Micro-consultants may not have such a wide client base, which could result in uncertainties regarding future clients if there is a downturn in the markets in which they operate (Stokes & Wilson 2006). However micro-consultancies may be more flexible than larger organisations, being able to move quickly from one sector to another; although uncertainties may remain regarding obtaining future work (Hatten 2008).

In many ways micro-consultants behave in similar ways to any other micro-business (Hatten 2008); with similar interactions, dilemmas and uncertainties. These can include cash flow, market penetration, product differentiation, resource mix etc. (Stokes & Wilson 2006). However, micro-consultants also have additional dilemmas and uncertainties which other micro-businesses seldom encounter. These aspects are discussed further in this Section.

Micro-consultants also encounter many of the same interactions, dilemmas and uncertainties of larger consultancy houses (Sturdy 1997; Green & Forehand 2005). However, because of their size and limited resources, many of these dilemmas and uncertainties need to be resolved in different ways to the larger consultancy houses (Merron 2005); often by individual consultants whilst undertaking assignments. Additionally, micro-consultants seldom have the practice based support networks established by larger consultancy houses; which may include dedicated teams responsible for recruitment, training, marketing etc. (Weiss 2003).

Micro-consultants not working on an assignment often have minimal or no income generating work, yet money is needed by the practice to fund marketing and networking campaigns (Bond 1997), as well as the normal running costs of the business. Inevitably, the lack of income will also have an impact on the micro-consultants family and social life (Ram 2001); especially if it is prolonged, or the micro-consultant is the main wage earner. Indeed, when I have difficulties finding assignments, I sometimes need to reduce personal expenditure. Because of this potential lack of income, many micro-consultants try to establish additional income generation mechanisms which require minimal effort (Phillips 2006); such as renting out a portfolio of properties, maintaining high income savings accounts, or buying and selling shares. Some micro-consultants may also be tempted to find more stable work based on their skills and experience, such as a permanent role within a client organisation (Clinton et al 2006). Prolonged lack of income can also prompt micro-consultants to seek temporary work in other areas, which

may not be related to their skills or areas of expertise, but can be stopped quickly when an appropriate assignment is obtained (Benjamin 2008).

For micro-consultants, there are always some uncertainties about obtaining new assignments (Frade & Darmon 2005). Many uncertainties concern whether the micro-consultant has appropriate skills, knowledge and experiences or whether the identities promoted are appropriate for the prospective client organisation (Appelbaum 2004). Other uncertainties concern the types of assignment available and the length of time taken for some specialist consultants to obtain new assignments (Dearlove & Clutterbuck 1998). It can sometimes take me several months to obtain a suitable assignment, during this time I pursue various ways of obtaining work, and review my skills base; obtaining additional skills and knowledge as appropriate. In some respects these dilemmas and uncertainties are similar to those of other specialists who need to change organisations, or wish to pursue a new career (Frade & Damon 2005).

Once new assignments are obtained, there may be some uncertainties regarding the length of proposed assignments and whether it will be compatible with the micro-consultants desired experiences and future identities (Rohdewalt 2008). Before commencing new assignments, I assess their possibilities to ensure they are appropriate and compatible with my requirements; a process which has led to the rejection of assignments.

Many of the assignments undertaken by micro-consultants have a high degree of uncertainty built in, especially those involved with innovation, emerging markets or preparing and implementing new techniques; such as those involved with organisation change (Hayes 2006). Human factors and dynamics are important elements for micro-consultants involved with undertaking the changes of habitas often required by this kind of work (Czarniawsk & Sevon 1996). These also provide potential for resistance and conflict within the assignment and its attendant uncertainties and dilemmas for the staff and micro-consultants involved (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007). Micro-consultants are sometimes engaged to manage the resolution these dilemmas and conflicts (Huffington & Armstrong 2004); however their use can also increase the tensions within the organisation (Fincham 1999b). In turn, this can create additional identity conflicts and uncertainty for the micro-consultants and staff (Poulfelt & Payne 1994). I regularly work in the organisation change environment; experiencing these uncertainties and dilemmas directly when working on embedded assignments.

For some embedded micro-consultants there are uncertainties regarding the hierarchical level to which they are assigned, and therefore their relative level of seniority in the client organisation. To a certain extent their level may be dictated by the seniority of their supervising client manager (Kubr 2002); although not all assignments have a clear client manager. If the micro-consultant is assigned at too low a level, they can become frustrated when they need to contact more senior managers, which may hinder or delay their work (Brown & Hesketh 2004); indeed, I frequently become frustrated by lack of direct access to senior managers who need to endorse project resources, documents and

expenditure. Likewise, if micro-consultants are placed at a level too high for their abilities, they may not fully understand the wider aspects of their work and become too engrossed in the familiarity of detail at the expense of other work (Robbins & Finley 2000).

For micro-consultants, building and maintaining relationships are usually undertaken in similar ways to those of any individuals developing and continuing work and social relationships. There are dilemmas regarding the amount of time to take and the impact on the work required (Tonge 2003). There are uncertainties over whether relationships are being developed with the right type of people (De Raffele & Hendricks 1998). There may also be some concerns regarding the timing of the relationship building activities, the type of activities undertaken and their location (Harris 2000) and whether it effects their assignments or projects.

Many micro-consultants try to provide detached and independent views and ideas to their clients (Kubr 2002). This may include giving advice on problems, requirements, implementation aspects solutions or future activities (Bond 1997). However, the client may already be considering a preferred idea or solution and is really looking for support for their own ideas (Clark 1995); or see the advice provided as too radical (Sturdy 2009). Micro-consultants also face dilemmas if the client's preferred ideas appear to be inappropriate due to the techniques, technology, processes used or market related aspects (Merron 2005). Do they support the ideas, possibly compromising their independent and

detached view, or do they recommend more appropriate ideas, with a possible deterioration of relationships and shortening of the assignment?

Micro-consultants are also susceptible to the whims of their clients; a change of strategic direction, a power play or operational decision, may have a tremendous impact on a micro-consultant (Werr 1999), perhaps even resulting in early termination of an assignment. Strategic decisions by clients, such as not to continue part of their business operations, can have a significant negative impact on micro-consultants providing specialist services and support in those areas (Sturdy 1997). This is particularly the case where the micro-consultants are embedded with their clients, providing services and support almost full time. Building good relationships with the client can also help to provide early warning of such decisions (Ford et al 2003). Even if early warning of a change in client direction is provided, micro-consultants still have many dilemmas (Poulfelt & Payne 1994). Do they continue with the work until told to stop? Do they try to ensure the work continues until the end of their assignment? Do they try to find other work with their client? Do they look for work beyond their client? Any of these approaches could also cause further disruption to the existing assignment. Such decisions can also have a negative impact on the micro-consultants identities and even reputation; such as the possibility of being associated with a failed project (Brown 2007).

Being associated with a failed project provides additional uncertainties for a micro-consultant; especially regarding identity reputation and obtaining further assignments (Brown 2007). However, being involved with a successful project can encourage clients

to engage the micro-consultant on other projects, extending the assignment and facing the challenges of new projects (Knutson 2001), which has often happened to myself. There are also various uncertainties encountered when undertaking projects (Chong & Brown 1999). These range from the selection of the most appropriate control methods to technological uncertainties, as well as budgetary problems and resource issues; which are well catalogued in the literature including Turner & Simster (2000); Sommer & Loch (2004) and Nickson & Siddons (2006). Inevitably, all projects will finish (PMI 2008), whether through cancellation or completion (successful or otherwise). The completion of a project can lead to uncertainty of tenure for micro-consultants assignments. Micro-consultants working exclusively for a single project usually complete their assignment around the time the projects finishes (Goodman 2008). This leaves them to face the uncertainties of future assignments.

These tensions, dilemmas and uncertainties will provide additional experiences to add to the overall identity of a micro-consultant. Some are also likely to have a direct impact on the identity of micro-consultants, such as association with failing projects. Any of which can cause identity related dilemmas and concerns, which are explored in the following Chapter.

3.10 Summary of Key Literature

This Chapter has used some of the current academic orientated literature to provide an overview of the key elements regarding management consultants and their interactions with clients. Many types of interaction were discussed including relationships, power, influencing, communications and support networks. Their uses for micro-consultants were highlighted, together with problems that can occur when used inappropriately. It has also been shown that each of the interactions discussed will probably have an effect on the identity of consultants involved, which may also cause uncertainties.

These aspects have allowed many of the concerns, contradictions and dilemmas facing micro-consultants to be surfaced, including identity related ones. Many of these uncertainties are a result of the micro-consultants desires to work independently within a small practice, outside the illusionary comfort of larger organisations; although they often work for much larger clients. In addition, micro-consultants often work at the cutting edge of their specialisation, frequently involved with changing the way their clients work; moving staff out of their habitas. This sometimes leads to fragile, transient, relationships with their clients, often with fragmentary, paradoxical and ambiguous interactions.

As considered in the introduction to this thesis; during the course of many assignments, such as with EPDO, I have sometimes become uncertain about which aspects of my identity I need to use, or promote, when with my clients. With my work frequently involving different client groups, I often appear to need to use multiple identities in short

spaces of time during assignments. Sometimes I feel that my identity as an independent consultant is being altered inappropriately or suppressed by the operations of my client. All of which has made me question my own identity and that expected of me. Consequently, there has been a need to explore what is meant by identity as a practicing micro-consultant and how it is affected by my interactions with others. This aspect is considered in more detail in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 4

IDENTITY – THE SELF AND THE ORGANISATION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 explored various aspects of consultancy including roles and capabilities; whilst Chapter 3 considered the interactions of micro-consultants and their clients. Many of these aspects were shown to have some influence on the identity of micro-consultants. This Chapter focuses on the key elements of identity whilst exploring the influences of micro-consultants work on their identity; together with the resulting concerns.

The position of micro-consultant identity is explored; including how it evolves from the experiences and skills of the individual consultants, which in turn shapes the identity of the micro-consultant, whilst also being influenced by the client and the market and other factors.

Initially, identity and the self are considered in detail. Showing how identity evolves and develops based on the individual's upbringing, lifestyle, experiences and skills; all of which help to determine micro-consultant identity.

The Chapter then considers elements of the identity of groups of people, which includes organisations such as clients that provide micro-consultants with assignments. The ways individuals promote and influence group identity and vice versa are explored. The influences of organisation elements on individual and group identity are also considered including their potential for conflicts and dilemmas.

The concepts of multiple identities are also explored, together with the potential for identity related dilemmas and conflicts. However, it is appropriate to start by exploring aspects of identity and the self.

4.2 Identity and the Self

This exploration of identity starts by looking at aspects which make up the identity of the self or individuals, including micro-consultants. Every individual is different in some ways, such as lifestyle, morals, culture, social interactions, and education, so identity will be unique to everyone (Lindzey & Aronson 1985). The experiences of an individual's life, ascribed or achieved, provide them with the key components for constructing their own identity (Castells 2004). Each encounter, ascribed or achieved, provides skills, knowledge and experiences, the building blocks which makes us what we are. Giving us with a unique identity (Ellemers et al 2000), the 'who I am', the sense of being an individual, with our own special skills and experiences (Woodward 2002). As

experiences change over time, identity can also change, being developed further as encounters are made or renewed (Rohdewalt 2008). A relatively stable identity may be refined over time, as people develop their own habitas (Bourdieu 2000). However, in some cases identity can change radically as revolutionary new encounters are made (Woodward 2002), which sometimes happens when micro-consultants work on assignments and form a new habitas.

This shaping of the individual self through our interactions with other people as well as associated events and locations continues throughout our life (Giddens 1991); with positive, negative and neutral experiences. As we grow older we start to achieve encounters, interactions and relationships of our own, shaping our own identity. Previous encounters will continue to influence our identity, sometimes providing an element of predetermination regarding what we are able to achieve (Eysenck 1998). Thus my own upbringing in South Wales as part of a large family, with its positive approaches to education, work and religion, undoubtedly influenced my career choices; which resulted in my becoming a micro-consultant, and will continue to do so. However, these influences may also prevent me from achieving elements and encounters due to lack of awareness of other opportunities.

Ascriptions and experiences from the past can influence the choices we are able to make, providing micro-consultants with some predetermined preferences (Hogg & Terry 2002), such as selecting a consultancy assignment in a preferred location. They also prevent us from accepting or investigating others, such as not considering assignments in a location

where we have had bad experiences. Any of these may limit a future identity, or shape another (Rohdewalt 2008), providing opportunities to accept or reject future assignments. Choices for future identities may also influence the micro-consultants current identities; as they begin to recall previous encounters, and anticipate or prepare for the next encounters (Brewer & Hewstone 2003), such as new assignments. All of which helps to form the single unique identity of the individual.

In this way the skills, experience and knowledge of micro-consultants can be seen to be aspects of their working identity (Hogg & Terry 2002); with separate skill sets and capabilities being promoted as individual identities. In turn, this provides flexibility to micro-consultants, enabling them to adapt to the needs of assignments and client expectations (Simon & Kumar 2001). Likewise, the working identity of micro-consultants can be seen as their working habitas and influenced by the habitas' of others. In this way, the habitas, working identity and capabilities of micro-consultants can be seen as interchangeable. New assignments and their associated interactions can be seen as enhancing micro-consultant identity elements, reinforcing their habitas and providing future opportunities.

Micro-consultants can also choose to breakdown their overall identity into numerous separate identities (Lindzey & Aronson 1985), like the skins of an onion or the fragments in a kaleidoscopic picture. Thus, I see my working identity as a project management consultant, at different times I may also see my identity as a student, or a coach. Promoting and presenting these identities when required; occasionally exhibiting

different identities at almost the same time. Therefore micro-consultants, such as myself, are continually developing, promoting or implementing a multitude of slightly different identities (Archer 2000); often for short periods of time, at short notice in different work environment. Some of these identities have more prominence than others, forming a primary identity (Lawler 2008); which is often promoted in specific environments, such as work, or leisure. The primary identity may also need to co-exist with other existing identities, which take secondary positions (Brewer & Hewstone 2003), such as talking about consultancy assignments whilst networking.

The promotion of many different types of identity in different environments or habitas', sometimes at short notice, may lead to confusion for micro-consultants (Brewer & Hewstone 2003). The micro-consultants may be uncertain of the identity to promote in any given circumstance, or whether to continue a specific identity into an unrelated environment. This in turn may cause dilemmas for other members of the group confusing their behaviour and identity expectations (George 1990). Which may be more prominent when the expected identity is a mask which hides many aspects of the individuals own identity (Clark 1995), such as when I am making formal presentations to clients.

Only the individual micro-consultant knows the true extent of their own identity, as such the micro-consultant can choose how much, or how little, they wish to expose to others, and therefore what elements of their identity they wish to share (Ellemers et al 2000). Inevitably the identity aspects that a micro-consultant promotes to others are elements of their own self-view, which may be different from others views of the micro-consultant

(Woodward 2002). However, as discussed later, many groups also have expectations regarding the identities presented by individual members of the group; this may help to refine, or limit, the identity a micro-consultant chooses to present when belonging to specific groups (Thatcher & Zhu 2006).

Postmodern authors such as Archer (2000) and Castells (2004) are uncertain whether there is any singularity of identity. They suggest that identity is a fluid multiplicity which can be interpreted in different ways depending on situations and perspectives; as such it cannot be isolated. However, occasionally flashes of specific identities can be observed in certain well defined situations such as group membership, for example 'Consultants' or 'Civil Servants'. Others, such as Swann et al (2004) consider that when categorising identities, they frequently become so general and multi-interpretable as to be almost meaningless. However, there is a need for individual micro-consultants to understand and build their own identities and associations, to help justify their lifestyle and habitas (Bourdeau 2000). Castells (2004) suggests three primary forms of identity building which can be used by micro-consultants at various points in their lives:

> *1. Legitimizing Identity: This term refers to the power of institutions, nation states, and associated political and religious ideologies to regulate and dominate us. We become legitimate in social terms by following the dominant cultural codes of our society. These apparatus produce the civil society, but in so doing come to inform our very sense of self.*
>
> *2. Resistance Identity: Describes the process of collective action, or social movements in society which aim to challenge and transform political or other social agendas. Such collective resistance can be based around any sense of alienation or opposition to the status quo and might arise, for example, from ethnic, religious, sexual, gender, class or cultural identities. In other words, any collective but minority identity which might feel threatened and marginalised by wider society.*

> *3. Project Identity: This arises for the individual when they experience the direct effects of social transformation as a change in their own subjectivity and sense of reality. The collective may be the power force for change but it is made up of individuals, therefore the project of the collective becomes, in effect, a project of identity work for the individual.*
>
> (Castells 2004 p8)

Identity building approaches, such as those of Castells (2004) can help to give a sense of worth to micro-consultants, justifying their sense of self and the legitimacy of their stance in today's post-modern society (Stacey 2001). Using these types of building blocks can also help micro-consultants to resist identity changes enforced by others, such as clients, at least to themselves. I often find an identity building approach useful when on a difficult assignment; helping me to understand the client staff and their concerns regarding change and identity, as well as my own position.

In contrast to the post-modern views, authors such as Ridderstrale & Nordstrom (2000) suggest that identity at an individual level is closely associated with the concepts of individual lifestyles and is therefore so tangible that it can be clearly segmented; even associated with and influenced by material elements. Identity therefore can be considered as a tangible product of our ever changing lives. As such these material elements can be considered to be marketable commodities that encourage people to associate their perceived identities with a particular brand. Indeed authors including Kleine (2000) and Schroeder & Salzer-Morling (2006) closely link branding with lifestyles and therefore identity, even for relatively common commodities such as clothing or portable computers. This suggests that these elements can be used to support individual micro-consultants identity and therefore the identity perceptions of others. Different commodities and

brands can therefore be used to promote different identity elements (Willmott 2003). The marketing of brands can also indulge fantasy identities, helping to create identity illusions through association with marketing brands (Webb 2006); such as purchasing an expensive car may give the illusion of being a successful or dynamic micro-consultant.

The tangible and non-tangible elements of a micro-consultant's identity, together with their surroundings and supporting actors provide a level of routine, familiarity and security to the individual, forming a unique habitas (Bourdieu 1992). A comfort zone, within which the individual can participate in their work and social life with an acceptable level of personal safety; such as the micro-consultant's practice. Indeed, a person can have many different types of habitas, depending on their lifestyle, skills sets, work and social life, each providing a different type of familiarity, safety, identity and comfort, which may be distinct or overlap with others (Bourdieu 2000), such as a consultancy practice or a long term assignment. These habitas' also provide the familiar structures and routines within which we prefer to operate our lives (Giddens 1991); with perceived risks discouraging moves outside the habitas (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007). I find the concept of multiple habitas appropriate for my approach to consultancy work. On a long term assignment, I usually develop a habitas within the working environment of my client. This is formed in part by the client's way of operating, the actions of people I interact with, as well as my own skills. This habitas provides me with elements of stability and security when working in the dynamic world of change management.

Through their involvement in change management projects, micro-consultants are frequently involved with changing the habitas of people in organisations (Carnall 2007). Inevitably, these changes, uncertainties, paradoxes and the associated interactions will have an effect on the micro-consultant's own habitas (Harris & Ogboma 2007); challenging or changing their own identity in some way as they gain new knowledge and awareness of others.

When micro-consultants move outside of their habitas, such as being involved with a radical change management programme, there is often an initial element of uncertainty and insecurity associated with the anticipated changes; leading to the possibility of increased perception of personal risk as the changes take place (Bourdieu 1992). This may be heightened if the changes are perceived as controversial, or are resisted by the staff involved (Postmes & Jetten 2006). In extreme cases, the tensions involved with a controversial change programme may prevent the micro-consultants involved forming a habitas (Coulson-Thomas 1997). This can make individual micro-consultants feel uncomfortable leading to stress and anxiety (Fleming & Spicer 2007).

During controversial assignments, micro-consultants can sometimes rely on the stability of previously established and tested identity elements, such as experiences, skills and lifestyle (Giddens 1991). Providing localised comfort zones in the midst of a challenging change environment. All of which can provide a micro-consultant with the knowledge, resilience, and flexibility, that is sometimes needed to continue this type of assignment. In addition, stability can be provided through the foundations of identity building

(Castells 2004), external support networks (Phillips 2006) and from others with similar experiences (Grint 1991). Many of these may overlap within controversial assignments; providing an element of identity, comfort and security, even when it is not possible to form a complete habitas. I often use these aspects to provide reassurance during difficult assignments.

The resulting work based uncertainties may also spill over into other habitas' causing additional uncertainties in these areas (Fine 2006), which are visible to other individuals in these habitas' as changes of character or behaviour and may need to be justified further (Rohdewalt 2008). For example, a person who is de-motivated by negative changes in their working habitas may retain that de-motivation in parts of their social habitas.

Elements of individual micro-consultant's identities may be presented to other individuals and groups on different occasions, emphasising aspects that are relevant to the group and suppressing others (Webb 2006). The identity elements micro-consultants chose to present are often determined by their subjective importance and situational relevance (Hogg & Terry 2002). Thus I may present different identities to different groups, even though there may be common group members (Archer 2000); such as consultants I encounter in networking groups being involved with similar assignments. These multiple identities can be presented to any group at any time, sometimes during short spaces of time. They also may conflict with each other, causing tension, dilemmas and conflicts (Fine 2006), for me and the groups I am associated with.

Micro-consultants, such as myself, are continually interpreting their own lives and others they encounter, formally and informally during social and business interactions as well as indirectly from media presentations and interpretation of events (Capozza & Brown 2000). Inevitably this frequent interpretation of identity results in changing perceptions and promotion of individual identities within the group (Webb 2006).

Most micro-consultants also seek assurances from others they encounter that the identity elements they are promoting are recognised and appear to be appropriate (Swann et al 2004). This can be achieved by feedback from others allowing self verification of the identities promoted (Burke & Stets 1999), and reviewing identity building blocks (Castells 2004). These reviews provide opportunities to justify, or change, the promoted identity in any future encounters. For example, identity related discussions at micro-consultant networking group meetings may be used to gain feedback on new skills or other identity elements.

4.3 Group Identity

Individual micro-consultants can also be associated with other people in some form of communal activity. This association may be through indirect methods (Hogg & Terry 2002) such as observations of presentation participants, where people are grouped by reactions, interests or location. The communal activity can also be a formally designated group of individuals (Thatcher & Zhu 2006), such as a consultancy practice or project

team. These different associations may be voluntary where the individual micro-consultant chooses to join the group, such as attending a networking group, or ascribed, where the individual micro-consultant is required to become part of a group (Hogg & Terry 2002), such as joining a project team. During these associations the micro-consultant can be identified as a member of the group or even several groups, separately or together (Capozza & Brown 2000), i.e. the micro-consultant networking with potential clients.

Groups are usually characterised by their apparent informality, with few visible rules (Brewer & Hewstone 2003) but having some common objectives, behaviours and identity elements, such as participating in discussions or watching presentations. Casual group encounters can also become more organised, such as the formation of micro-consultants networking groups. As the needs and size of the groups increase, they can become more formal with additional rules and distinct characteristics, creating a longer lasting and more unique identity, an organisation (Hogg & Terry 2002); as discussed later.

Associations with groups can be indicated by individual micro-consultants themselves through discussions or other tangible methods (Woodward 2002), for example membership cards or specific types of clothing. Membership of some groups may be unknown to those outside the group, having few outwardly tangible manifestations (Brewer & Hewstone 2003), such as some micro-consultants networking groups. Groups may also be mainly products of association or thinking, such as theoretical stances or ethical approaches; primarily revealing themselves during discussions or decisions (Clark

1994), such as preferring a certain project management methodology. Some groups remain unknown to outsiders due to ignorance or a lack of interest (Swann et al 2004); whilst others are kept secret from outsiders to ensure anonymity for legal or other purposes (Hatch & Schultz 2004).

The individual micro-consultant may also take positive actions to be associated with the identities of specific groups (Brewer & Hewstone 2003); legitimising some identities or resisting others (Castells 2004), for example micro-consultants wearing similar shirts or different ties. In some cases, the members of the group can temporarily merge their individual identities becoming a single entity, such as during a sales presentation; although the members will always revert to their own individual identities after the event (Woodward 2002). At times group identity and behaviour expectations may be imposed upon the individual, such as being introduced as ‘saviour consultants’. This identity association may be acceptable if perceived as correct by the micro-consultants it is imposed upon. However if the identity is considered incorrect there may be resistance to the identity which may manifest itself as denial of association (Castells 2004); such as my rebuttal when being incorrectly introduced as a financial specialist.

A micro-consultant may become a member of many groups, or even sub-groups, each with their own identities, all of which can contribute to the individual’s own identity, a concept initially proposed by Mead & Morris (1934) and developed further by more modern authors such as Read (2001); Rohdewalt (2008) and Webb (2002). As micro-consultants become part of a group, they also become associated with the group identity

(Rohdewalt 2008); a form of symbiosis. If they are members of a number of groups, they may be expected to take on the identities of all their groups. Many of these may be separated spatially or temporality – such as a micro-consultants networking meeting on Tuesday evening followed by a client meeting on Wednesday morning – causing little conflict or confusion of identity. Occasionally, the identity characteristics of some groups may prevent them from joining certain groups (Read 2001), such as software consultants specialising in specific systems. Sometimes the different groups associated with an individual overlap, providing contradictions or paradoxes, and possibly causing confusion of identity (Hogg & Terry 2002) – what to wear for a client meeting followed by a social event? Whilst it may be possible to resolve some group identity conflicts with logical segmentation; some paradoxes may still occur within the same segment (Read 2001), such as those faced by myself during social events with both clients and suppliers. Other identity dilemmas will persist until specifically resolved; or removed by a change of habitas, such as the end of an assignment.

A micro-consultant may also choose to become a member of a lifestyle, or work group which also influences their other habitas' (Clark & Chandler 1994); such as belonging to an orthodox religion, which may conflict with their membership of other groups. This may result in significant enforced overlaps of habitas', especially when an individual becomes dedicated to being associated with the identity of a significant group, such as members of religious groups not wishing to work on holy days. Micro-consultants usually resolve these conflicts and confusions of identity by prioritising one group and its identity over others, at least temporarily (Webb 2006), if this is not possible, some form

of identity crisis is usually encountered, which may persist as an apparent paradox or contradiction until the causes of the identity conflicts are resolved or removed (Flynn 2005).

When micro-consultants join a group, they can also interact with the other members in many different ways. This may be achieved remotely, such as joining a professional association, where literature and information produced by the group is considered by the individual who may react in some way (Tajfel & Robinson 1996). It may also be achieved indirectly, through the way members of the group dress; their rituals, or reactions to each other, such as when attending group presentations (Woodward 2002). Interactions may also be undertaken interactively, but indirectly, through e-mail, letters, reports and social networking websites (Bovee & Thill 2007). However, possibly the most influential is through direct contact, with the individual micro-consultant meeting and talking with other members of the group, exchanging views and ideas. During these meetings identity related dilemmas and uncertainties can be established, highlighted or resolved.

The identities promoted by an individual micro-consultant within a group may be an instinctive reaction, or a considered response to a given situation, which is based on the lifestyle and heritage of the person (Ellemers et al 2000). The identities presented can also be crafted by the micro-consultant into a specific image, appearance, reaction, response or behaviour which is promoted by the individual for specific circumstances (Whetten & Godfrey 1998), such as a social or work group. In extremis, the complete

image may be similar to that of an actor on a stage, with every response and action carefully stage managed by the individual (Clark 1995). Many people attempt to manage the image presented to groups in some way, monitoring and reacting to the responses of others which in turn enables the construction of future images for different, circumstances (Roberts 2005). This is often noticeable when I make change management presentations to senior client representatives; my appearance, movements and reactions are often carefully crafted (like the presentations themselves), aimed at making an impression on my clients (Clark 1995) and others associated with the group.

In many cases, the reason for micro-consultant involvement with the group will be to change it; in some way helping the group to achieve new objectives (Hayes 2006). Inevitably, this will involve changing the habitas and identity of the group and individuals concerned, which may incur resistance and conflict (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007), some of which may be focused on the micro-consultant involved with the change. Encountering resistance and conflict whilst changing the habitas of a group may also challenge the identity of micro-consultants, making them more aware of their own habitas' and identity, or become confused and uncertain if they are not well established.

Being aware of the identities of the groups with which a person is associated also helps the individual to develop their own identity (Webb 2006). With the individual identity continually evolving, as new encounters are made or reinforced, there may be identity uncertainties relating to particular groups (Read 2001); such as should I become associated with the identity of a particular micro-consultants networking group.

Uncertainty relating to group identity may result in paradoxes or uncertainty for the individual (George 1990); unclear group objectives may result in individuals questioning their need for involvement. These identity dilemmas can sometimes be resolved through an internal decision making process, possibly based on previous experiences and knowledge. Some conflicts and identity dilemmas can be discussed with others, such as members of the group, to help their resolution (Read 2001). Other uncertainties may remain unresolved as paradoxes, causing confusion and indecision, which may lead to tension and insecurity of their other habitas' (Bourdieu 2000), such as societal tensions being reflected in the work or organisation environment.

4.4 Organisations and Identity

Organisation identity is the unique blend of objectives, processes and operations relating to a number of individuals, structured to achieve a common purpose, whilst being clearly differentiated from other similar groups (Melewar & Jenkins 2002). The organisation can be, simple, with a specific purpose and with a short lifespan such as a micro-consultants networking event; or it may be extremely formal with specific purposes and an indefinite lifespan (Clark & Chandler 1994); such as a government department or agency. Any individual wishing to become a member will usually be required to participate in aspects of the identity of the organisation, during the time they are associated with it (Alvesson & Wilmott 2002); such as members of a micro-consultant networking group providing support to others.

Membership of the organisation may be casual and provided to any individual who subscribes to the ideals and objectives of the organisation (Clark & Chandler 1994), or is considered to be part of the organisation by others. Membership may be limited to those with certain criteria which may be ascribed, such as gender, race or culture (Woodward 2002). Membership may also need to be achieved through selection (Green & Forehand 2005), such as joining a micro-consultancy practice following tests and interviews. Individuals may interact with a wide variety of different organisations, some of which may appear to overlap or contradict the others, which has the potential to cause conflicts, dilemmas and uncertainty for individuals.

The identity of many organisations is closely associated with the aspirations, objectives, structures, hierarchies, governance, marketing and people involved (Melewar & Jenkins 2002). The identity is also influenced by the suppliers, the market and the regulatory framework that the organisation operates in (Illia & Lurati 2006). The interactions, relationships and power plays within and outside of the organisation also provide experiences help to develop the identity of individuals and sub-groups (Whetten & Godfrey 1998), as well as contributing to the internal and external identity of the organisation (Hatch & Schultz 2004).

In larger organisations, a number of formal sub-organisations (or formalised sub-groups) may be established to help legitimise elements of the organisation identity (Castells 2004), such as divisions, departments or specific teams (Cummins & Staw 1981). Each of

these sub-organisations may also develop their own sub-identities related to the main organisation identity (Tajfel & Robinson 1996), such as the Accounts Department identity, or the rituals of Project Delta. These sub-identities can provide localised reinforcing of the overall identity whilst differentiating themselves from parts of the organisation (Smith 2001). Informal groups may also develop within the organisation, officially or unofficially, which cross traditional boundaries and even take on their own sub-identities (Rohdewalt 2008); such as the smoking group or the keep fit group. These informal groups can provide an element of common, or project, identity for participants (Castells 2004); allowing them to come to terms with the organisation in their own way (Ellemers et al 2000). Some of these informal groups may also provide an element of resistance identity for participants, especially for minorities which may feel threatened by the organisation (Castells 2004). All of which provide multiple organisation identities which can cause conflict, tension and confusion between different parts of the organisation and the individuals working there as employees, partners or micro-consultants (Grint 1991).

Organisations often use aspects of their identity, such as communications, processes, guidelines and uniforms to impose control on the employees and associates (Alvesson & Wilmott 2002) to legitimise their identities (Castells 2004). These encourage common organisation identity perspectives on a number of aspects inside and outside of the organisation itself (Shultz et al 1997). These aspects can be reinforced or resisted when describing the organisation elements to external acquaintances who are not involved with the organisation, such as during social and other occasions (Wilmott 2003). These aspects

are examined in some detail within the organisation development literature by authors including Clegg et al (1996), Fincham & Rhodes (2005) or Martin (2000).

Each organisation will have specific characteristics associated with it such as objectives, hierarchy, uniforms, training, or branding (Smith & Wheeler 2002), which will help to form an identity for that organisation. These characteristics are often systematically developed for each organisation to differentiate themselves from other similar organisations; especially if they are in close competition with each other (Hatch & Schultz 2004). The branding or identity that an organisation adopts allows individuals or other organisations to differentiate themselves, or their products and services, from similar ones (Smith 2001), such as micro-consultant practices. This external identity is usually more than just the brand itself, it is the complete image that the organisation wishes to promote including advertising, goods and services provided, communications, responses to incidents and all forms of contact from the organisation, direct or indirect (Schultz et al 1997). Organisations utilise as many opportunities as possible to promote their identity or brand, such as advertising, uniforms, sponsorship, logos and slogans, continually keeping them in the mind of external stakeholders to maintain awareness for sales, promotion or other purposes (Goffee & Jones 2003). The use of a good brand identity or product can make the organisation memorable long after the product is consumed (Smith & Wheeler 2002). Brand loyalty also reinforces customer associations with the supplier organisation (Shultz et al 1997) and helps to develop good relationships; such as encouraging referrals for micro-consultants. In a similar way, a poor customer

experience can taint the organisation and its future products, alienating customers who disassociate themselves from the identity of the organisation (Smith & Wheeler 2002).

Many organisations extend the branding used externally inside the organisation (Deal & Kennedy 2000) with internal documents, notice boards and other communications including the organisation logo and key branding messages (Goffee & Jones 2003). This helps to reinforce the internal identity of the organisation, whilst acting as reminders of the objectives and key messages of the organisation (Alvesson & Willmott 2002); as well as legitimising its identity amongst the staff (Castells 2004). The internal identity of an organisation is more than just internally promoted marketing; it includes the structures and hierarchies of the organisation and the way the different groups, or teams, work together, both official and unofficial (Clark & Chandler 1994). The identity of the organisation also includes the attitude to work of the staff together with the morals and ethics to which they work (Hatch & Schultz 2004), as well as the work undertaken itself and the associated processes (Rohdewalt 2008). In many older organisations, traditions are developed over the years that help to reinforce the identity (Hatch & Schultz 2004). Many younger organisations encourage rituals to reinforce the identity of the organisation (Deal & Kennedy 2000). These aspects of organisation identity are usually imposed on new staff and other direct participants such as micro-consultants, suppliers and partners (Smith 2001).

The identity of a specific organisation may also be imposed upon other organisations, such as clients imposing their identity on micro-consultants (Lendrum 2003). This is common for suppliers of direct services such as call centres or help desks, embedded micro-consultants, and other services which are outsourced to specialist suppliers (Illia & Lurati 2006). A common organisation identity may also be imposed upon partners, within joint ventures, including micro-consultants, with the common identity combining elements of the partners as well as the overall objectives of the venture (Segil et al 2003). All participants in the joint venture would be required to adopt the common identity regardless of their originating organisation. However, some rivalry may still remain, regarding their organisation origins, which may cause confusion for other participants (Lank 2006).

Individual members of staff together with partners and suppliers, such as micro-consultants, are usually encouraged to relate to the organisation ascribed identities (Tajfel & Robinson 1996). This helps to promote the organisation itself whilst reinforcing the common identity, encouraging co-operation and team spirit (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). For example when discussing client projects with third party suppliers, sometimes I emphasise the relationship with my client and its identity association. Individuals can also include elements of an organisational identity as part of their own identity (Woodward 2002). This usually comprise parts of the organisational identity to which they can relate and use whilst working or discussing their work (Ellemers et al 2000). For example, when on assignment, it could sometimes be advantageous for me to emphasise my

representation as a client worker rather than a micro-consultant, allowing me access or privileges that I could not expect as an individual micro-consultant.

In some cases an organisation identity may be imposed on individuals, such as being assigned to a new team following reorganisation, or a micro-consultant embedded within an organisation. Initially, this may cause conflict with the individuals existing perceived organisation identities, causing resistance which may manifest itself in denial of the identity associated with the new team (Castells 2004), or retained allegiance to a previous identity (Kets de Vries & Miller 1996). As the individual becomes more integrated with the new team, and the new habitas becomes more familiar, resistance may reduce (Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007); although areas of uncertainty may remain.

4.5 Micro-Consultants Identity and Uncertainties

As has been indicated, micro-consultants can be expected to take on a variety of identities, especially when embedded within a client organisation. These can include; those identities that are: required by the client organisation, needed as an independent consultant, presented as a co-worker and colleague, as well as the personal identities of the micro-consultant. Many of these can operate separately, partitioned by time or geography. However, some of these multiple identities can cause conflicts and uncertainty, especially if they need to be presented simultaneously, in close proximity to each other, or with overlapping groups.

Micro-consultants also face many of the contradictions and ambiguities discussed previously in Section 3.9, including those concerning: maintaining and building relationships, power plays, hierarchies and authorities, availability and visibility, as well as trust and confidence. Each of these can also provide identity related uncertainties and dilemmas for micro-consultants, individually or in combination.

Micro-consultants will face many of the identity encounters discussed in the previous Sections of this Chapter. These can include the selection and presentation of personal identities during group or organisation interactions, as well as the promotion of working identities to clients, peers and colleagues. As indicated the micro-consultants own identities will also be influenced by other individuals encountered during interactions. Consequently, micro-consultants will also encounter many of the dilemmas, uncertainties, conflicts and confusions relating to identities that others face. However, micro-consultants also face a number of identity related encounters which can be considered unique to them; these are discussed further in this Section.

Many micro-consultants face dilemmas regarding the legitimisation of identity for their own consultancy practice when on assignment, trying to prevent it being subsumed into that of their clients by others (Webb 2006). In some cases, this may lead to identity resistance (Castells 2004), where micro-consultants forcibly promote their own preferred identities to prevent them being subsumed. However, this self promotion may lead the

micro-consultants into conflict with the client (Fleming & Spicer 2007); possibly resulting in a premature end to the assignment.

Micro-consultants involved with organisation change face dilemmas regarding the legitimacy of actions and decisions made on behalf of clients. Micro-consultants can be involved with change projects which cost millions of pounds and affect thousands of staff customers and suppliers (Czarniawska & Sevon 1996); see for example the micro-consultants involvement within the EPDO change programmes discussed later in this thesis. In this environment a wrong decision, or incorrect advice, could have significant adverse effects on a micro-consultant's reputation and identity (Angell 2002). Micro-consultants need to be sure that their decisions, recommendations and advice are appropriate. A significant wrong decision may damage their reputation for the current assignment, and possibly future assignments (Brown 2007).

Whilst on assignments micro-consultants need to balance the promotion of their own consultancy practices, and associated identities, with their client's requirements (Bond 1997). For instance, they may need to balance the need to provide constant and dedicated advice to a single client with the need to maintain external support networks. This can sometimes cause frustrations and dilemmas when micro-consultants believe that they are not able to promote or manage their own consultancy practice effectively (Peel & Boxall 2005). This aspect often becomes important towards the end of an embedded assignment, when micro-consultants may be looking towards the next one (Phillips 2006). An inability for micro-consultants to be able to effectively promote themselves for future

opportunities at this time may lead to frustrations and resentment towards the current client (Buono & Poulfelt 2009), which may endanger their reputation.

Many micro-consultants are concerned with their reputation, or other peoples view of them (Phillips 2006; Angell 2002). A good reputation can ensure successful future assignments, whilst a poor reputation can prevent the offer of work (Brown 2007). Consequently micro-consultants try to ensure they have the necessary skills, experience and knowledge that is required for their work (Sturdy et al 2009). All of these help to ensure the success of an assignment, and provide assurances of a good reputation.

Micro-consultants do not have the identity assurances which can come from large consultancy houses. If there are problems during assignments, consultants from consultancy houses can often rely on the safety and security of their practice to provide support and assurance (Green & Forehand 2005). Micro-consultants often have to overcome assignment problems alone. Following assignments, consultants can return to their consultancy house for a while, updating their skills and gaining further assignments through in-house marketing teams (Haas Edersheim 2006). Whereas following assignments micro-consultants stop earning fees, whilst having to undertake their own training and marketing. All of which can cause uncertainty for micro-consultants, especially if they are away from assignments for long periods.

In between assignments, micro-consultants may face conflicts of identity whilst preparing for new assignments. If they have been on a long term assignment, their identity may be closely linked to their previous client, which may cause difficulties with potential future clients; in similar ways to long term client employees looking for work outside of their organisation (Peel & Boxall 2005). Micro-consultants may need to prepare identities, gain new skills or re-invent themselves to avoid close association with previous clients (Inkson et al 2001).

Socially, it may be difficult for micro-consultants to select appropriate organisational identities (Ellmers 2000). There may be uncertainties of representation between their own practice identity and that of their clients (Webb 2006). Such as when discussing work at a social grouping; should the consultant present identities relating to the client organisation or their micro-consultancy practice?

It would therefore appear that there are many identity related dilemmas and uncertainties facing micro-consultants during, and between, assignments. These sometimes appear to be contradictory, providing paradoxes which may be difficult to resolve during an assignment.

4.6 Summary of Key Literature

With this thesis focussing on identity, the key elements have been discussed including aspects of individual, group and organisation identity. The ways in which they intermingle and influence each other were considered; which also highlighted some of the contradictions and dilemmas, many of which are faced by micro-consultants.

The identity of individual micro-consultants has been seen to be constructed by the self based on its awareness and encounters with its world (Lawler 2008). The experiences of a micro-consultant's life, ascribed or achieved, provide them with the key components for constructing their own identity (Castells 2004). Each encounter, ascribed or achieved, provides, skills, knowledge and experiences which make micro-consultants what they are; providing them with a unique identity (Ellemers et al 2000). As micro-consultants progress through their lives their identities will change with new encounters, preferences and expectations (Lindzey & Aronson 1985).

Only individual micro-consultants know the true extent of their own identity. Consequently, to a certain extent, they can choose how much, or how little, of their unique identity they wish to expose to others (Ellemers et al 2000). Inevitably, the identity aspects that a micro-consultant exposes, or promotes to others are elements of their own self-view (Woodward 2002).

The tangible and non-tangible elements of a micro-consultants identity, together with their surroundings and supporting actors help to form a unique habitas (Bourdieu 1992) of the micro-consultant. Within this habitas the individual micro-consultant can work with an acceptable level of personal safety and comfort. A micro-consultant can have many habitas', each of which provides an appropriate level of familiarity, for the situation, be it work or social (Bourdieu 2000).

For some micro-consultants, when working across client teams, the need to use many different types of identity in different situations, sometimes at short notice which may lead to tensions, dilemmas and confusion (Brewer & Hewstone 2003). The micro-consultants may be uncertain of the identity to promote in any given circumstance, or whether it is possible to continue a specific identity into an unrelated environment. This in turn may cause similar types of confusion for other group participants (George 1990).

During most assignments, micro-consultant's own identities will also be influenced by other individuals encountered during meetings and discussions s. Consequently, micro-consultants will also encounter many of the dilemmas, uncertainties, conflicts and confusions relating to identities that others face.

Whilst on assignment, many micro-consultants encounter tensions and conflict regarding the legitimisation of identity of their own consultancy practice and the need to preventing it being subsumed into that of their clients (Castells 2004). This can sometimes cause frustrations and dilemmas when micro-consultants believe that they are not able to

promote or manage their own consultancy practice effectively (Benjamin 2008). In some cases, this may lead to identity resistance (Castells 2004). However, too much self promotion may lead the micro-consultants into conflict with their client (Fleming & Spicer 2007). Consequently there is a need to balance the promotion of micro-consultants own consultancy practices, and associated identities, with their client's requirements (Bond 1997).

The need to balance micro-consultant and client identity needs often becomes important towards the end of an embedded assignment, when micro-consultants may be looking towards the next one (Phillips 2006). Once the assignment is complete, micro-consultants may face conflicts of identity whilst preparing for new assignments. These may involve reflecting on their previous identities and anticipating future identity needs (Inkson et al 2001).

All of which suggests that the work undertaken by micro-consultants during embedded assignments has a significant effect on identity, during the whole of their assignments and beyond. With the literature indicating the possibility of significant effects on micro-consultant identity, it was considered appropriate to develop a research programme to explore these aspects from a practitioner perspective. Initially the original research objective and associated sub-objectives, as shown previously in Figure 1, were reviewed as a consequence of the literature findings. It was found that whilst these research objectives were enlightened by the literature, there was still a need to explore them further from a practitioner perspective.

In order to guide the practitioner research and ensure the focus is maintained on the overall research objective, a series of research questions were formulated from the research sub-objectives. These research questions are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Research Questions

Research Objective
To explore how embedded micro-consultants interactions with their client affects their identity.
Research Questions
In what ways do the roles undertaken by a micro-consultant during an assignment shape its identity?
What effects do the interactions between a micro-consultant and its clients have on identity?
How can micro-consultant identities manifest themselves during an assignment?
What kind of identity related concerns and dilemmas face a micro-consultant during an assignment?

In addition, it was also necessary to develop an appropriate methodology which would allow the research objective and the associated research questions to be explored in the practitioner environment. The methodology would also need to take account of my own working approaches and philosophical stances. These aspects are discussed in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The literature considered in previous Chapters highlighted the possibility of significant effects on micro-consultant identity during embedded assignments. Consequently there was a need to explore these aspects from a practitioner perspective. This Chapter discusses the methodology and approaches to the research; together with related theoretical aspects, such as the philosophical stances taken.

The reasoning behind the selected constructivist ontological perspective and the related interpretive stances are discussed. How these perspectives fit with the research and its aims is also considered.

The selected ethnographic research approach is explored, together with the different types of ethnography. How the ethnographic approach fits with the practitioner research and its objectives is also considered. The position of the researcher in the research and its environment is also discussed.

The practical aspects of the research and its environment are developed further; together with some of the main limitations to this research. Initially it is appropriate to consider the philosophical stances which underpin most of this research.

5.2 Ontological Stance

There are various ontological perspectives that can be considered appropriate for this type of research. Many are based on the assumed existence of elements of society as tangible or intangible forms (Delanty & Strydom 2003); with ontology being used as a perspective with which to view them. Of the different ontological perspectives, the constructivist approach most closely reflects my own way of thinking.

Constructivists seek to understand contextualised meaning, the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions as experienced and construed by actors in a given context (Gergen 2001). This assumes that the social world does not exist, but the full emotional, linguistic, symbolic, interactive, political dimensions of the social world, and their meaningfulness or lack thereof, are constructed by human actors, or may become constructed (Holstein & Gubrium 2008). These constructions are influenced by historical, geo-political, lifestyle cultural practices and identities, together with the intentions of the actors doing the constructing. These constructions are multiple, contingent and contextual (Gergen 2001). Constructivism recognises that different people create different meanings

out of the same situations, depending on their individual circumstances and their perceptions of the social context (Kukla 2000). These views of events can also change every time they are reviewed; as new perspectives are gained, or more recent information influences them. Constructivism therefore accepts that actors such as clients and micro-consultants may have different views of every encounter, which may also be reflected in the identities of the actors involved (Franklin & Nurius 1997).

The methods of constructivism emphasise the ability to solve real life problems, working in co-operative groups, or projects, rather than as individuals (McKenna & Maister 2002), which is a regular activity for micro-consultants. The focus is on projects that enable the required solutions to problems, rather than on instructional sequences that require learning of certain content skills (Cicmil & Marshal 2005). For example, in constructivist models a programme manager arranges for required resources and acts as a guide to project managers while they set their own goals and solve the problems of the projects. Constructivists study the world from the point of view of interacting individuals intercommunicating with each other (Holstein & Gubrium 2008). With communications skills being significant attributes of micro-consultants as well as constructivists (Bovee & Thill 2007). The appropriate use of language and labels are important from the outset of any consultancy assignment (Sadler 2002).

There are a number of challenges and concerns regarding constructivism. The constructive approach implies that all interactions are built afresh every time. With even repeated encounters re-constructed by the actors involved every time, which may be

inappropriate for a relatively simple and often repeated interaction (Fleetwood 2005); such as the greeting of a familiar stranger. Consequently, constructivism is prone to exaggerating and extrapolating the consequences of basic interactions (Fleetwood 2005); trying to justify complex constructions for automatic reactions, such as simple courtesies. With each person interpreting, and reinterpreting an interaction differently over time, there may be no consensus of interactions, their meanings and significance (Chia 1996). Some interactions involve formalised pre-set procedural elements, such as auditing, limiting the need for actors to construct each interaction (Fleetwood 2005). Indeed there may be a need to breakdown some of these formalised interactions to understand them more clearly, reinterpreting them through de-construction (Derrida 1976).

Many constructivists concentrate on the views and interpretations of past events, or those concerned with current operations (Delanty 1997). There are also a number of perspectives which allow examination of interactions as they are being constructed, or could be constructed, rather than their completed form (Chia 2002). These 'becoming' ontological perspectives also provide visibility to the fundamentals of a project environment, which is focussed on how the products of projects are prepared and constructed, rather than the operations for which the product could be used. With this research being undertaken within a forward looking project management environment, it is appropriate that a 'becoming' ontological stance is used.

The perspective of a '*becoming' ontology enables the possibility of activity over substance, and novelty over continuity.* (Chia 2002 p866); by looking towards anticipated

changes; understanding how they could be undertaken, and considering the possibilities of new approaches once completed. The becoming approach also emphasises the role of language, the nature of communications, power and relationships, together with the emergent properties of organisational arrangements as outcomes of disparate and ambiguous political practices (Cicimil & Hodgson 2006). Organisations, and projects, should not be understood as 'stabilized objects' but as heterogeneous, transient and becoming (Chia 2002) interactions that govern the joint actions of members in an otherwise chaotic, ambiguous and unpredictable reality. Projects can be seen as the emergent property of many individuals interacting together through complex responsive processes of relating, centred around the role of language that is simultaneously used for conversation (Stacey 2001) and reinforcing.

The possibility of long-term unpredictability and micro-diversity in projects appears to run counter to the conventions of 'ordering' (attempting to regulate patterns of behaviour through structural interventions) in the pursuit of project goals (Cicimil & Marshall 2005); with successful project completions controlled through established project management practices (Knutson 2001). Consequently it is sometimes necessary to rethink the possibility of predetermined success criteria for projects, in the traditional sense of controlling interconnected project activities to achieve the desired end, in advance of them happening (Fleetwood 2005). This rethinking accepts the concepts of complexity and allows adaptive governance mechanisms to be promoted as effective guardians of diverse stakeholder interests, planned action and risk strategies (TSO 2007); with project management methods being seen as forms of guidance rather than regulations.

Czarniawska (2001) suggests that there may be some incompatibilities with the interaction sense-building approaches of constructivism and the traditional more positivistic enforced hierarchical structures of many traditional organisations and projects. Consequently, constructivist micro-consultants can interpret the hierarchy, symbols and ritual of traditional organisations differently to they way the organisation understands them Czarniawska (2001), which can help to overcome organisation boundaries (Balogun et al 2005). However, these differences can also cause friction and resentment with client staff, which may manifest itself in resistance to micro-consultants and their operations (Franklin & Nurius 1997). In extreme cases it may become impossible for micro-consultants to complete their work successfully.

As a project management consultant, I find the becoming constructivist perspective very appropriate. As a micro-consultant, I am often given vague and imprecise directions from clients concerning future events, such as 'bring the programme back on target'. However I am also aware of the different needs of client staff and project teams, who are all trying to achieve these goals, and how they may influence others. Consequently, I need to understand the events that have occurred or are occurring within and around a project, including interactions between the different actors involved with the completion of the project. To do this I frequently need to construct mental models of relevant previous and concurrent events and interactions and review them with the client staff or their representatives, as well as my peers. This approach allows me to build scenarios of possible future events, which helps me to select appropriate solutions; whilst my

understanding of the interactions of the actors allows me to implement the solutions in the most appropriate way.

Thus a constructivist perspective allows me to build mental pictures of relationships and interactions between actors within the client project management environment. It also allows me to build pictures of the interactions aimed beyond the projects, such as future work for clients, consultants and suppliers. Whilst the forward looking aspects of the becoming perspective ensures that my views are orientated forward, towards the products of the project and the way they are prepared.

5.3 Epistemological Stance

Johnson (1992) posits how the world of micro-consultants and others operating in the project management arena, can be made up of interpretations of events and symbols, and it is these interpretations which form the basis for knowledge, understanding and action. Suggesting an interpretive epistemological perspective is appropriate for micro-consultants involved with projects. Sheldon (1980) and Cummins & Staw (1981) have also argued that project teams interpret signals from the environment according to their own knowledge and experiences as well as histories and paradigms, identities and interpretive schemes and models (Chaffee 1985). This questions the notion that project managers have full knowledge and access to good information that enables them to act on the basis of an objective and unambiguous environmental reality. Instead project

managers can be seen to work on fragments of imprecise information, which may be ambiguous and inaccurate (Barr & Huff 1997). This process of interpretation provides some insight into empirical observations of project managers' failure to notice changes in their working environment and to take timely action (Fleetwood 2005).

Schemas, scripts and paradigms create meaning and guide actions within projects (Johnson 1992). Contradictory information tends to be recast within the constructs of the known paradigm; which if not possible is often ignored or discredited (Johnson 1992). When contradictory information is treated in this way during complex change management projects, these can cause misalignments between managers and their targets; the strategic drift of Johnson (1992). Barr & Huff (1997) analyse the differing abilities of organisations to undertake strategic change when faced with a deteriorating environment, and link it to managers' abilities to change their cognitive maps and respond to the new situation appropriately; an aspect which partly accounts for differences in the timing of responses to external changes. Managers tend to feel reassured that competitors projects are facing the same difficulties and reacting in similar ways. This allows them to attribute poor performance to industry dynamics and specific projects rather than strategic or managerial shortcomings (Fiske & Taylor 1991). These aspects can be reinforced, or refuted, by micro-consultants, based on narratives of their previous experiences and external support networks (O'Conner 2000).

As a project management consultant my ability to maintain an interpretive perspective can be beneficial. Within any major project, the actors are involved with a series of complex interactions, many of which may be undertaken for reasons which are not

wholly related to the project environments. They could be undertaken to effect completely separate programmes; they may be used to secure a micro-consultants or clients future position, to support a personal event or decision, or to support a potential future assignment. An interpretative perspective allows me to visualise these possibilities, taking them into account when considering solutions for projects and their implementation. For example a decision to utilise a specific technology in a project may be announced as a technological advance which will improve processes and reduce implementation timescales. However the decision may also be interpreted as accelerating project timescales, reducing resources and forging links with a preferred supplier. Practitioner research, such as that discussed below can be used to explore the multiplicity of interpretations attributed to any project event.

5.4 Research Approach

In order to undertake any research, approaches need to be identified which take account of the philosophical stances of the author, as well as the areas to be researched and the availability of data (Blaxter et al 2006). The research approach should also take account of the research subjects and their environment as well as that of the researcher (Bryman 2004). This will enable the most appropriate research methods to be selected (Richardson 1996). With the focus of this research on identities and interactions between micro-consultants and their client from my own practitioner perspective, many of the elements

included intangible and subjective elements, which pointed towards qualitative based research.

Inevitably, my own opinions and personal biases were reflected in the literature review, as well as the research field notes and findings. Qualitative studies accept research bias will occur (Miles & Huberman 1984); although where possible these were minimised to help provide objective results. In order to understand the level of bias that may be included (Silverman 2005), my own perspectives are discussed in this Chapter, including information relating to personal issues and any a priori assumptions which may have had a significant impact on the research (Richardson 1996).

Given the nature of this research, results and findings may be interpreted in different ways, even by researchers close to the subject (Bryman & Burgess 1994). In addition, because of the uniqueness of the assignments and the projects undertaken, there may be difficulties in providing external validation of the observations made (Silverman 2005). However, the research has been written up in a way to ensure that the data provided are sufficiently clear to enable any deductions and findings to be clearly understood and even reproduced (Roco 2003). This should limit the amount of reader misinterpretation; ensuring that the understanding is close to that of myself (Richardson 1996), helping to ensure its validity and reliability.

The extended assignment with EPDO, discussed below, provided good opportunities for me to conduct practical research into identity interactions between embedded micro-consultants and their clients. The assignment provided me with direct access to a number of embedded micro-consultants and client staff at different levels, working together in a project management environment. Consequently the assignment provided opportunities for observations to be made of micro-consultants and their clients interacting together. There were also a few opportunities to discuss some of these interactions with micro-consultants and their clients, providing further qualitative insights into the observations.

Given the nature of my work within the EPDO project management environment and the dynamics of the fast moving project environment it was necessary to moderate the research element to allow for the normal working approaches within EPDO. In turn this reduced the types of research methods that could be used, preventing the use of methods such as action research (McNiff & Whitehead 2002) or grounded theory based research (Strauss & Corbin 1990). However, there were many opportunities to observe identity related interactions and dilemmas facing micro-consultants and their clients. All of which pointed to the use of ethnographic research approaches.

Within the EPDO there was also a close and intense relationship between the micro-consultants and client staff, clearly focussed on resolving issues and ensuring the success of the projects. In addition, the EPDO project environment was very dynamic, requiring managers to react to problems and issues encountered at short notice, as well as ensuring the preparation of key reports and other information to short timescales. The nature of the

work meant that interventionist ethnography (Denzin 1997), where participants are questioned about events and actions immediately after they occur was not practical; although limited discussions were possible later. Therefore an ethnographic approach had to be devised, which would take account of the dynamisism and consequential limited ability to question participants directly on their actions.

5.5 Ethnography

Based on anthropological studies, ethnography uses observations, field notes, discussions and relevant artefacts to provide datasets which will allow researchers to understand more about social phenomena (Atkinson et al 2007). Ethnography, does not aim to resolve problems or provide research solutions; it aims to provide context and explanations, allowing generalisations and theories to be developed later (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). According to Glesne (1999) ethnography is a research method that:

> *…..describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of action. The goal of theorizing then becomes that of providing understanding of direct lived experience instead of abstract generalizations. These scholars consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple meanings and interpretations.*
>
> (Glesne 1999 p22)

This research uses elements of corporate ethnology (Denzin 1997) to capture observations of identity related interactions within EPDO; which ensured the research was bounded by business elements. However, the prime focus of the ethnographic

observations is on identity related interactions between micro-consultants and their clients.

The basic method of ethnography used in this research was in the style of the original Chicago School approach of the 1930's (Atkinson et al 2007), where ethnographers observed and recorded interesting events as they happened, later analysing their field notes to identify patterns, provide understanding and selecting areas for future research. This approach was developed further by authors such as Hammersley & Atkinson (2007); Davies (2005); Kutsche (1998) and (Neyland 2008); providing the modern concepts of ethnography. Modern ethnography is characterised by the researcher being embedded within the research subjects' environment often for a period of months (Davies 2005). This allows the building of comprehensive datasets including observations and discussions, supplemented by artefact examination (for example presentations, e-mails, minutes, and briefing notes) which provides detailed insights into the group studied and its interactions (Neyland 2008). This rich-picture of the group will improve the understanding of the group and its dynamics in the areas studied (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

With ethnography requiring the researcher to become embedded within the studied group, it is inevitable that the researcher should be part of the results. This may simply be an acknowledgement of participation and an indication of the role and relationship of the researcher to the group; or it may include a rich description of the researcher's involvement and emotions whilst within the group (Coffey 1999). The findings may also

contain elements of personal interpretation, bias and reflection by the researcher (Hansen 2006). Because of my direct involvement with the workings of EPDO, the results from the research must include an element of my own self-observation, and associated biases, as well as my own comments and reflections on the observed situations. However attempts have been made to reduce the social and emotional aspects, together with any overt bias, producing a more detached view of my work. This approach also ensured the focus remained on identity related elements, as seen during the EPDO assignment.

Despite the abilities of ethnography to provide a rich picture of the interactions and workings of a group, such as EPDO, there are various challenges and concerns regarding the preparation and production of ethnographic studies. If the ethnographer is from outside of the society being studied, heavy reliance is often made of 'friendly' subjects to provide context and interpret observations (Atkinson et al 2007), with any context and interpretation being subject to the influences and bias of the 'friendly' subjects, which may be undeclared (Denzin 1997). Additionally, if the ethnographer is an outsider, they may never fully appreciate and understand the full significance and nuances of the interactions observed (Hammersley 1992). With my being an active participant in the working of EPDO, many of these aspects are reduced. Indeed, as an insider providing the ethnographic research, I was in a position to provide unique and intimate insights into the study, which an outsider could not possibly expect to provide.

Field studies tend to be subjective and reflect the perspective of the observer when the studies took place (Jick 1979). Consequently, there can be difficulties in identifying the true causes of many actions, due to the interactions of many variables (Richardson 1996). Good ethnography will ensure the contextual validity and reliability of the research area and its findings (Neyland 2008). When analysing the field notes for this research, care was taken to ensure that any theories or comments regarding the understanding of groups and the research area were appropriate (Bryman 2004).

It can be difficult to provide a complete picture of all interactions relating to a particular subject, person or artefact. This may be because the ethnographer is not able to observe all encounters (Atkinson et al 2007). Some encounters may be spontaneous, others may be integrated within a completely different context, whilst others take place away from the environment being studied (Hammersley 1992), or are considered too sensitive to include (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Additional data is often required to identify and understand these aspects, which often highlights other situations which were not previously noticed, requiring further investigation (Denzin 1997). All of which provides an increasingly complex paradox relating to the richness of the data and the situations identified.

Another concern with ethnography is that the ethnographer may not be aware of sub-plots and power plays which are being made away from the observed element, but may have a direct effect on the actors and interactions observed (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Linked to this is the fact that any long term ethnographic study will generate a significant

volume of data which may include links and references to past or present sub-plots and power plays which can not be included in the published research, even if known about (Hammersley 1992). Thus any ethnographic research will only provide an incomplete and fragmented view of the complexities of the area studied, which may also appear to be ambiguous and riddled with contradictions (Bryman 2004).

Whilst ethnography provides insights and interpretations of the interactions studied, highlighting that part of society to others. Traditionally there is often no detailed feed back into practice, either to the groups studied, or to the wider society (Hammersley 1992). However, this area of concern is usually countered by comments to the effect that this is not the purpose of ethnography (Denzin 1997), or that no two parts of society are alike, therefore it would be difficult to provide detailed feedback or guidance to other parts of society based on a few specific studies (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). However, recently elements of ethnography have been used to construct generic feedback and guidance in many areas such as process control, architecture and engineering, see for example Ball & Ormerod (2000) and Holtzblatt & Beyer (1993). Indeed, it may be appropriate for aspects from this study, and my participation, to be fed back to the EPDO participants, helping to improve the interactions between micro-consultants and the EPDO client.

5.6 Researcher as a Participant Observer

The concept of participant observation is considered to be a significant element of ethnography (Davies 2005). In participant observation, the ethnographer is directly involved with the group being studied, which can include closely observing the group or various forms of participation such as initiating discussions about the group and its role, or taking part in the normal activities of the group. Kluckhohn's (1940) classic definition of participant observation is appropriate:

> *'Participant observation is conscious and systematic sharing, insofar as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and activities of a group of persons. Its purpose is to obtain data about behaviour through direct contact in terms of specific solutions in which the distortion that results from the investigator's being an outside agent is reduced to a minimum'.*
>
> (Kluckhohn 1940 p331)

To be effective, participant observation requires a significant commitment from the researcher, as indicated by Davies (2005):

> *'In its classic form participant observation consists of a single researcher spending an extended period (usually at least a year) living among the people he or she is studying, participating in their daily lives in order to gain as complete an understanding as possible'*
>
> (Davies 2005 p67)

As an active member of the EPDO during my assignment, I was able to fulfil all the participant observation principles of Davies (2005) and Kluckhohn, (1940). The basic type of participant observation undertaken was similar to that of Gold's (1958) *complete participant*; where most of the EPDO did not appear to be aware that the research was

underway, as such they appeared to exhibit the normal kinds of behaviour expected during work and social interactions. However, as some members of the EPDO were aware of my research work, there was also an element of Gold's (1958) *participant as observer*. Based on these definitions, I found the role of 'participant as observer' to be the most appropriate for this research; working with clients as a micro-consultant whilst simultaneously acting as a research observer.

Observations of participants also followed Schwandt's recommendation in Denzin & Lincon (2000) that qualitative researchers continually ask themselves 'how should I be towards these people?' Guidance was also taken from Prus' (1996) suggestion that the researcher should attempt to minimise any obtrusiveness in the field and in the text eventually produced, becoming a researcher who as Prus (1996) suggests becomes 'chameleon-like' fitting into the situation with a minimum of disruption, and whose work allows the habitas' of others to surface in as complete and unencumbered a way as possible.

Participant observation has strengths and weaknesses. Yin (2008) argues for the increased richness of data that comes with perceiving reality from the viewpoint of someone inside the case situation. It offers fuller coverage of the phenomena being studied with the opportunity to observe what people do, rather than what they say they do. Coffey (1999) observes that by becoming a member of the group to be studied the researcher can achieve a high level of understanding of their behaviour, feelings, values and beliefs. Becker and Geer (1957) describe the role of participant observer as providing first hand

reports of events and actions and much fuller coverage of an organisation's activities, giving direct knowledge of matters that, from observations, we could know about only by hearsay; as seen in this research.

Participant observers must consider how far they may influence the setting in which they work. Jorgensen (1989) identifies the potential for bias due to the researcher's inappropriate manipulation of events as potential weaknesses. Yin (2008) suggests that it is difficult for the researcher to operate as an external observer and may, at times, have to assume positions, or advocacy roles, contrary to the interests of good practice. This is perhaps less of a danger in ethnography as the researcher has to maintain a position as one voice among many (Ellis 2004). If the participant observer 'goes native' this changes the relationship between the observer and other participants, and may provide opportunities to exert inappropriate influence over the phenomena being studied (Yin 2008; Jorgensen 1989). Reflective practice, as discussed later, can be used to reduce this possibility.

As indicated, undertaking this research as a participant observer enabled me to gain access to participants, view interactions and obtain information as an insider which may have been difficult for an outsider to achieve. Additionally, as an experienced project management consultant, I was able to differentiate interactions which appeared to be directly related to the implementation of projects and interactions which may also have had wider implications than the specific projects and their environments. Additionally, as a micro-consultant, I was also able to recognise interactions which were related to the

success and continuation of consultancy and identity elements, rather than the usual interactions of actors involved with projects. Because of these aspects, I was also able to highlight activities and interactions which included relevant and significant identity related foci, using reflective practices.

5.7 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice in management consultancy is often considered to be synonymous with Schon (2003), who used the term as a paradigm in his models of consultancy. Reflective practice encompasses the essence of a crisis of truth; questioning our relationship with the social world and the ways in which we account for our experiences (Cunliffe 2003). This can be considered to be part of the process of micro-consultants thinking about and considering actions and events that have taken place and using the most appropriate outcomes of the reflections to furnish the next steps in the consultancy assignment, improving interactions and the success of the assignment (Schon 2003). This approach has been extended and broadened by authors such as Jarvis (1999) and Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) to enable a contribution to research and knowledge from the reflections.

There are other approaches which use similar principles to reflective practice. Action research, where the lessons learnt from the previous actions and events are developed into future actions (McNiff & Whitehead 2002), uses similar reflective processes. Although,

Action Research usually relies on the thinking and ideas of groups, or teams, rather than individuals (Radnor 2001). Grounded Theory also requires the development of practical evidence and the identification of common themes before developing theories based on the evidence (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

There is also some uncertainty as to whether reflexive research can make sense of our experience through questioning the foundations of knowledge and interactions, without undermining the plausibility of the account and its discussion (Cunliffe 2003). Although Weick (1995) considers this type of ontological osculation a necessary part of sense-making when dealing with multiple realities. There are also some concerns about the status of reality, whether a single reality exists that can be studied or whether it is constructed by the actors as it is studied (Chia 1996) and therefore seen differently by all actors, every time; making the reflective process meaningless. Consequently, research may need to take account of the possible multi-dimensional understandings of the actors, such as seen in constructivist views (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000).

The process of critical reflection encourages the practitioner to consider all relevant aspects, including positive and negative ones. Reflecting on negative possibilities can lead to personal insecurity, uncertainty and dilemmas for the practitioner (Cunliffe 2003). However, experience and related knowledge can help to overcome these doubts (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). Reflection during assignments helps me to identify options and approaches, but also allows me to see them from other perspectives, which can cause uncertainties. Likewise, the process of reflection can lead the consultant

practitioner to question the validity of the assignment, or even the consultancy profession (Sturdy 1997). A clear assignment brief, together with relevant consultancy experience can help to resolve these aspects (Phillips 2006). Before, or during the initial stages of an assignment, I usually reflect on its need and validity; this reflection has occasionally caused me to reject assignments, or complete them early.

As a project management consultant I regularly employ the principles of reflective practice; reviewing events and interactions relating to projects and the wider environment. During these reviews I assess the interpretations of the interactions and their subsequent outcomes. Assessing the positive and negative elements from the interactions; trying to see if there are any improvements, or new approaches, that I could make to the interactions and their outcomes. In turn this helps me to understand similar events and interactions when they occur in the future. I can then try to implement the new approaches in the way I react to the interactions, helping to improve the outcomes. All of which should make me a better consultant; whilst helping to improve the success of the assignments and projects I am involved with. These approaches also help me to understand my own identities, as well as the identities of others with which I am involved.

5.8 Voices in Ethnography

An apparent paradox within contemporary theorising around the self and reflexivity is that while theorists, of all persuasions, are increasingly drawn to the idea of identity as fragmented, decentred, multiple, and illusionary (Archer 2000), the practices or discourses of individuality within society seem stronger than ever (Brewer & Hewstone 2003). In other words, although theorists often consider the self to be an unstable fiction, the pursuit of individuality and self-expression appears inscribed as a right, if not demanded, in increasing numbers of societies and cultures (Lawler 2008), including occupations such as consultancy.

This spur to 'invent ourselves' (Rose 1998) is not new, but it does appear to be changing, increasing in intensity, 'deepening' and becoming more individualistic. This could possibly be a response to a heightened sense of ontological insecurity (Gergen 1984). Which may partly arise from the apparent breakdown or questioning of those previously assumed 'trust systems' (Mead & Morris 1934); which once appeared fixed but seem more vulnerable today (Read 2001). In which case, the urge to frequently reinforce and validate one's identity, or sense of self, can be argued to be a particular condition of the current age (Clark & Greatbatch 2005). This self reinforcement of identity is often undertaken through reflexivity of the self and narratives to others, which discuss participation in actions, events and justifying them and validating subsequent decisions (Rosaldo 1993). The use of self narrative and reflection is also increasingly used in the organisation change arena, with participants using narrative techniques to justify their

participation or the effects of change on individuals and their identity (see for example Sturdy & Grey 2003; O'Conner 2000 and Doolin 2003).

It is possible to see a move towards the preferential use of self-narrative and reflexivity across many areas of society (Delanty 1997), whereby the subject, as storyteller, becomes not only the hero of their history, but also the apparent architect of their self and their identity (see for example, Byrne 2005). In so doing, the self appears centred around ones individual identity (Czarniawska 2004), while the reflexive process which produces this effect attracts ever greater status and currency across societies (Chia 2002). A combination of reflexive approaches and narrative has been used in this thesis to provide a richer picture of the research and its elements.

As discussed above, once individuals move to a place which recognises the absence of any recognisable single core 'I' to our self, then we must attempt to understand how the 'I' comes into existence for the discursive subject. We operate across multiple discursive subject positions, often in contradictory fashion, although we clearly have some degree of investment in these subject positions, not least because they serve to sustain our sense of self as a coherent identity (West et al 2004). But how is this achieved? How do we go from a multiple, fragmented self, surrounded by the apparent and imagined threats posited by the postmodern condition, to the ontologically grounded self which underpins the social presentation of our individuality? For, as ever, our desire is not to present ourselves as unstable and incoherent, but as stable, unified, and very coherent (West et al 2004).

Theorists including Gergen & Gergen (1986); Shotter & Gergen (1989) and Wood (1991) were some of the first to develop the idea of self narrative as a means of explaining existential discontinuity in our identity work. They also explored resolution of the theoretical tensions which exist between notions of the self as an actor with choices surrounding their individuality.

Our lives are temporally located, that is, they are lived out in frames of time. We are, in a very real sense, our history (Archer 2000). But that history could have many voices, many accounts of it (Shotter & Gergen 1989). The account we give of our history (our identity) renders us true, if only to ourselves (West et al 2004), but always potentially, to others (Wood 1991). In voicing our history, our story, to both our self and others, we assemble and constitute our identity into existence (Rose 1998). Through the discourses at our disposal and taken up by us, so we enunciate and formalise our otherwise elusive self (Gergen & Gergen 1986). However, there are limitations to this process (West et al 2004). They arise from the bounds of our language, the interpretation by others, and the dominant discourses of our culture and social setting (Stacey 2007). As McNay (2000) puts it; *'the narrative structure of self-identity is neither authentic nor ideological but an unstable mixture of fact and fabulation'* (McNay 2000 p94).

We employ narrative or stories to make sense not only of events, but of ourselves and our identities (Ramsey 2005); such as stories told during micro-consultants networking events, or the story of the EPDO provided in this thesis. In giving an account of ourselves

to others, and to ourselves as micro-consultants, so we substantiate our individuality (West et al 2004), give it meaning, colour, expression and identity (Garfinkel 1984). Sometimes we use emotional and symbolic narratives together with props and gestures, forming dramatology to emphasise aspects (Cairns & Beech 2003). Our narrative representation is a social construction, but one which we, as discursive subjects, have brought about (Stacey 2003), to promote or reinforce our sense of our individual self, our own identity (Czarniawska 2004).

Theories of the self as a narrative construction enable us to place temporality at the centre of our existence as subjects; as well as untying us from the agency/structure dualism (Stacey 2003); they also explain how our sense of coherence might come about (Chia 2002). In which case we are no longer subject to the dilemma as to how the otherwise fluid and contingent subject acquires a sense of itself as static and constant.

As Riceour & Wood (1991) argue, self narrative has an ontological status in that it arises from experience as well as imagination and in so doing provides a framework and reference points, which together serve to locate us in the social web, provideing us with an understanding of its operations and our relationship to it (Garfinkel 1984). Our narrative renders us real, and in the process serves to reinforce our identities (Gannon 2006), societal or work; as well as my own individuality as a micro consultant.

So the self remains illusionary, but is expressed as real, fixed and essential in narrative (Archer 2000). In which case, when asked ‘who are you?’ the ‘I’ can answer with some

confidence, ‘this is who I am’, and immediately begins the story of ‘me’ as presented to the other, the listener, the audience, you (Wood 1991).

The narrative of the self, the ‘me’, can be expressed in many ways; with autobiographic content often used to provide an individual’s unique voice (Shotter & Gergen 1989). Autobiographies often include the self as the narrator or a central character (Bochner & Ellis 2002). This allows the author to insert personal views, emotions and insights directly into the narrative (Reed-Danahay 1997); it is also possible to include these personal insights, intimacies and emotions from the insider observer as part of ethnography (Garfinkel 1984).

Whilst immersing oneself in another culture, by venturing into the field, has long been a rite of passage for would-be ethnographers (Glesne 1999; Rosaldo 1993). Autoethnography explores the culture and narrative of one’s own group (Reed-Danahay 1997); i.e. the EPDO discussed in this thesis. Autoethnographers examine their own groups, viewing them through different perspectives: objectively or emotionally; outwardly or inwardly; individually or as a whole; whichever view is considered necessary. Ellis (2004) describes this process:

> *Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward, and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition.*
>
> (Ellis 2004 p37)

Autoethnography displays a self-conscious interest in narrative form; allowing the author to blend descriptions, emotions and personal views of the self and others encountered; which will provide a rich picture of observations, including insights and access not available to an outside observer. According to Ellis (2004), the characteristics of autoethnography include:

> *The author usually writes in the first person, making herself or himself the object of research. The narrative text focuses on generalization within a single case extended over time. The text is presented as a story replete with narrator, characterization, and plot line akin to forms of writing associated with the novel or biography.*
>
> (Ellis 2004 p30)

Autoethnography has often been considered to be a hybrid of ethnography and autobiography (Ellis 2004); combining elements of both types of narratives, whilst remaining separate, but retaining roots and connections to each of them. Consequently, autoethnography also encounters many of the challenges of ethnography and autobiography. This includes the possibility of some autobiographical elements becoming too personally intrinsic (Bochner & Ellis 2002); or the remoteness of detached objectiveness from ethnography (Denzin 1997). Concerns have also been expressed about the validity and robustness of autoethnography, especially when a single person is the only data source (Holt 2003). The use of many voices and data sources from within the EPDO and related areas are used to substantiate and validate the narrative within this thesis.

This thesis provides an autoethnographic narrative of observations made on the EPDO environment of EPDO, including client staff, micro-consultants and my own role during the assignment. This allows observations as well as detailed findings to be included, all of which contribute to a rich picture of the EPDO environment. In turn, the reflections and discussions on the findings also contribute to the narrative. However, this narrative attempts to avoid personal emotions and intimacy; although it is also intended that the narrative is not too remote from the subjects studied and remains within the ethical bounds of research.

5.9 Ethical Approaches Towards the Research

This research followed the ethical guidelines provided by the University (University of Glamorgan 2009), with the possibility of any marginal areas being discussed by ethics committees. Using established ethical approaches, such as those proposed by the university, also helped to ensure the validity and reliability of data (Richardson 1996).

Where practical, the informed consent of participants was obtained, before any research was undertaken (University of Glamorgan 2009). Permission was also obtained, from responsible authorities, before using any artefacts or documents not in the public domain (Sheehan 2002). When obtaining the research data, care was taken to minimise, the use of subterfuge and the provision of misleading information (Richardson 1996).

Early in the EPDO consultancy assignment, permission was obtained from key participants to undertake research. Details of the research timing, timescales, topics or methods to be used were not requested by participants prior to giving consent, consequently they were not disclosed. This approach enabled me to undertake the research without the participants being consciously aware that they were participating in research. The approach also enabled participants to concentrate on their work at all times, providing a more realistic view of their interactions (Easterby-Smith et al 1997). In addition, obtaining consent from all participants prior to some of the observations was not practical, although anonymity in the findings has been ensured.

This approach has been used successfully many times in ethnography; see for example Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) or Easterby-Smith et al (1997), providing minimal intrusion and intervention from the researcher. At no time during the research period were the participants formally made aware of the observation process. In addition, no attempt was be made to influence the discussions and decision making process, for the effect of the research. However, it was considered acceptable to occasionally ask carefully phrased questions during informal discussions, to clarify certain points and to bring out the underlying thinking processes regarding the work and its environment.

The anonymity of participants has also been ensured in the results (Elliott & Sterm 1997); through the use of a group pseudonym, not related to the research group or the parent company. In addition projects were given the names of Greek letters of the alphabet rather than their official names; with some details of the projects themselves changed.

The details of some formal meetings were also changed, with some discussions and attendees left out. Finally derivations of research participant's initials were used to provide individual anonymity, whilst changes were also made to some role details.

5.10 Research Environment

All of the research discussed in this thesis was undertaken during a long term embedded assignment for a major international energy company. The assignment itself involved developing, maintaining and improving a variety of project and portfolio support elements so that EPDO senior managers and directors could improve their understanding of their portfolio and the progress of their programmes and projects, enabling more efficient reporting and decision making. The key work areas are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Primary Work Areas for EPDO the Assignment

Assignment Work Area
Developing strategies for programme and project implementation.
Establishing and managing programmes and projects effectively.
Ensuring appropriate project authorisations are provided.
Analysis of risks and benefits.
Maintenance of financial and budgetary controls.
Preparation and facilitation of programme and project meetings.

In addition to these routine tasks, a number of senior management level tasks were undertaken including: preparing summary reports and briefings, preparation and facilitation of project steering board meetings, and managing various programmes and projects. All of which required me to work closely with the senior managers responsible for the successful implementation of programmes and projects throughout the complete portfolio.

Most of the research concerned around 45 people directly involved within the EPDO project environment. The size of the team would vary depending on the type of projects underway. The EPDO was a recognised sub-group of the parent organisation which included a number of client staff, micro-consultants and third party suppliers (as previously seen in Figure 3). The EPDO comprised individuals and teams working on a variety of European programmes and projects for the parent organisation.

The research population fulfilled a variety of different roles and job functions which covered the complete range of change management operations, including programme and project management functions, together with other roles and functions which provided support within the project environment; the key roles and their functions are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8 Key EPDO Roles & Functions

Role / Function	Summary Description
Directors	Responsible for a variety of different programmes and projects within a region or country; or a portfolio of projects with a common theme such as consumer outlets, retail systems.
Programme Managers	Responsible for specific combinations of projects, all of which were focussed on a particular service such as card payments, customer loyalty schemes or telecommunications.
Project Managers (PM)	Responsible for the successful completion of specific projects, usually within a programme. Generally these were also aligned to a single country such as Project Sigma, the loyalty project in Germany.
Business Relationship Managers (BRM)	Relationship managers responsible for a specific regional portfolio of programmes and projects.
Programme Office Manager (POM)	Responsible for providing the standard EPDO tools and techniques required to manage programmes and projects.
Project Assurance Manager (PAM)	Responsible for providing a detached and independent view of project performance and compliance with EPDO project management standards.
Business Analysts	Specialists providing dedicated support to managers within the project environment including programme managers BRM, POM and PAM.
Support Staff	Specialists providing support to specific systems or techniques such as accounts, procurement and ICT.

In all, a series of ethnographic observations were undertaken on the EPDO over a period of some eighteen months during 2006 and 2007. During the course of the assignment, as an active member of the group I participated in over 100 formal project related meetings,

together with many more informal meetings and discussions. These meetings and discussions were held either face to face or via telephone and conducted in English.

All observations were undertaken directly by myself as an insider ethnographer, undertaking participant observations of the EPDO group and individuals involved during the course of their normal work. In my exploration of micro-consultants identities, many of my research encounters are at a personal level, undertaken with a wide variety of micro-consultants and client staff working in many different positions within the EPDO project environment. These aspects are shown in the findings as observations which illustrate the ways various micro-consultants, including myself, work and interact. In addition, some of my own experiences and reflections are provided the first person.

The EPDO team worked on a variety of organisation change projects throughout Europe; many of which were critical to the future of the parent organisation. The roles played by participants frequently involved, or referred to, within the research are shown in Figure 9 (overleaf). Initials and roles have been used to illustrate the key participants; with micro-consultants being highlighted in bold. In a number of instances, participants not listed in Figure 9 had occasional involvement within the research; when included their initials and roles are shown.

Figure 9 Roles of key Research Participants

Role Title and Function Summary	Client Staff	Micro-consultants
Directors Responsible for programmes or operations throughout a region such as Europe, America etc. These were all permanent staff with many years of senior management experience.	JS, EM, WC	None
Business Relationship Managers (BRM) Relationship managers responsible for a specific regional portfolio of programmes and projects.	FJ (Senior), JL, RT, MS, RM, HS, RT	**KB**
Programme Managers Responsible for specific combinations of projects, all of which were focussed on a particular service such as card payments, loyalty schemes or telecommunications.	PR	**RL (Senior), TE, KW, DB**
Project Managers (PM) Responsible for the successful completion of specific projects, usually within a programme. Generally these were also aligned to a single country such as Project Sigma, the loyalty project in Germany.	DH, KO	**TR, AK, JT, JP, BH,**
Programme Management Office (PMO) Responsible for providing the standard tools and techniques required to manage programmes and projects.	NK, RF	**AH (Senior), DT, SG**
Project Assurance Manager (PAM) Responsible for providing a detached and independent view of project performance and compliance with company wide project management standards.	HK	None
Support Staff Specialists providing support to specific systems or techniques such as accounts, procurement.	None	**ML (Senior), RC**

Notes: Micro-consultants initials are shown in **Bold** throughout the findings.
My own involvement is shown by my initials (**AH).**

All discussions were conducted in English, although participants were from a variety of European nations including France, Germany, UK, Poland and the Netherlands. Whilst English may not have been the native language of many of the participants, in most cases their English language skills were sufficient for them to conduct the majority of their work in English, as well as participate in social elements. English language classes were also provided where necessary, by the parent company, to ensure a good knowledge of the language. Consequently there was no need for any translation of languages used by the research participants.

This research was primarily focussed on identity related interactions between micro-consultants and EPDO employees working on the European projects portfolio. Most of these interactions manifested themselves during meetings, both formal and informal, as well as other discussions. I was an attendee at all of the meetings and discussions considered in this thesis. In addition, I was often directly involved with the discussions themselves, providing supporting information and advice where necessary. Consequently, I was also usually involved with the outcomes of the meetings, undertaking further investigations, compiling reports or influencing members of the group and preparing for subsequent meetings. Examples of EPDO formal meetings are shown in Figure 10 (overleaf):

Figure 10 Key Formal Meetings

Meeting Type	Summary Description
Portfolio Reviews	Monthly meetings exploring progress on the complete suite of programmes and projects; lasting 1-2 days, involving 8-12 EPDO team members and support staff.
Project Steering Boards	Meetings held nearing the completion of each major stage of a project; lasting around 4 hours and including consumer business managers, relationship managers, EPDO members and project team members.
Deep Dives	Detailed reviews of individual programmes or projects within a specific country; lasting 4-8 hours and involving EPDO members, support staff, consumer operations business staff or relationship managers.
Preparations for Director Reports	Meetings to finalise high level reports, which would involve 4-6 team members and last about half a day.
Stage Gates	Project review undertaken towards the end of every stage in the project lifecycle. The Stage Gate ensured that all work was complete and preparations were underway for the next stage. This could also provide a convenient point to put a project on hold, or cancel it. Typically these would involve 4-6 people and last 2-4 hours
Health Checks	Project quality assurance meetings undertaken during each project stage, which would involve 4-6 team members and last about 4 hours.
Desk Discussions	Casual meetings concerned with aspects of the more formal meetings discussed previously. These could involve 2-4 participants lasting a few minutes to a few hours.

Telephone conferences (audios) were regularly undertaken within the EPDO team and beyond, including consumer operations, business teams and other support teams. Complete meetings could be held via audio; or with audio participants often joining a face to face meeting. Audios could involve participants from all parts of Europe, and further afield, reporting progress and discussing any aspects of project work, such as

those described above, and were considered to be a normal aspect of working in EPDO. Audios could be held regularly, such as weekly progress audios, spontaneously when problems arose, or where additional information was required during a face to face meeting. Audios were considered an efficient and cost effective way to manage this geographically dispersed portfolio.

Because audios, e-mail and other remote methods of communication are not able to cover all elements of a project such as inspections and demonstrations; many physical meetings were held between EPDO staff, micro-consultants and support staff. Meetings could also be instigated, truncated or delayed as a result of significant incidents and problems occurring on projects and related areas. These meetings took place all over Europe; usually at the EPDO locations where the majority of attendees were based. This inevitably required an element of travel by one or more of the meeting attendees. Consequently meetings could also be delayed or shortened because of travel requirements and related restrictions. Which sometimes meant the meetings needed to be very focussed, only concerning the essential aspects of the meeting, with very little time available for informal social interactions, or discussions relevant to the research.

In order to enable physical meetings, an element of travel was necessary for all the EPDO. Due to the distances involved, the travel inevitably involved staying overnight in hotels. Social interactions and informal discussions often took place outside the formal meeting environment, in the evenings after meetings or when travelling in company. Informal discussions took place in liminal space in a number of different countries

throughout Western Europe, with most discussions taking place in Germany, UK and the Netherlands. The discussions were undertaken at a variety of different locations, as illustrated in Figure 11:

Figure 11 Sample Informal Meeting Locations

Meeting Venue	Location
Airport lounges	Düsseldorf, Birmingham, Heathrow, Amsterdam, Paris.
During flights	Heathrow – Düsseldorf, Birmingham – Amsterdam.
Hotels	London, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, Paris.
Meetings	Before, or after, formal meetings
Taxies	London, Dusseldorf, Cologne, Amsterdam, Paris.
Trains	Cologne – Amsterdam, London – Brussels.

Informal meetings also included discussions over lunch or coffee, between more formal meetings. Most of these informal discussions involved a high degree of business related discussion, about events, individuals or particular situations. Indeed, informal discussions within the EPDO could also be used to sound out ideas, gain support, suggest actions or justify stances.

In all, observations were made in this way over a period of some eighteen months during 2006 and 2007. This provided sufficient time for me to understand the ways in which the EPDO participants worked and the influences upon them. It also provided time to see the build up of various identity related interactions and positions. In addition, it was also

possible to see how much identity changed over time. All of which allowed me to develop a comprehensive set of observations and associated field notes for my research.

5.11 Research Data Development

A comprehensive set of field notes were developed for this research which included observations from meetings and discussions as well as artefacts such as meeting minutes, reports, discussions, e-mails and other artefacts, together with contextual elements and actor profiles to help ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Radnor 2001). Field notes concerning identity interactions were usually made during the meeting and written up in more detail after the event. Aspects for further ethnographic observation, or discussion were also noted when compiling the detailed field notes. As an active participant in the meetings considered in this research, there were many elements outside of the research area which required my attention during or immediately after the meeting, which occasionally delayed the preparation of detailed observations.

The delays in preparation of observations often provided opportunities for reflection on the elements concerned as well as highlighting areas for further investigation (Hammersley & Atkins 2007). These reflections sometimes identified areas of ambiguity or uncertainty. Where practicable, these ambiguities were revisited during indirect discussions, to clarify or elaborate the observations (Emerson 1995).

As the research progressed analysis of the field notes was undertaken. Significant or frequently occurring identity related observations were developed into scenarios, or miniature case studies (Emerson 1995), as illustrated in Figure 12. Each of these scenarios focussed on a particular event concerning identity; providing details of the observation together with context the actors involved and related scenarios.

Figure 12 Sample Practitioner Experiences Observation

Date/Time	15 Sep/16:00	**Duration**	30 min	**Location**	Germany head office
Type	Near end of meet	**Team**	EPDO Core	**Project**	Sigma

Key People	**Functions**	**Team**	**Audio?**
FJ	BRM	BRM Team	No
HK	PAM	PAM	No
AH	POM	PMO	No
DB	Programme Manager	Terminal Systems	No
RL	Programme Manager	Retail Systems	No

Background
Meetings included formal reviews of major programmes / projects and related issues.
Project Theta had encountered various installation problems during roll out to site; possibly due to lack of co-ordination between telecoms supplier and sub-contractors.
After considering the problems, the meeting discussed reasons for poor co-ordination.

Initials	**Comment**
HK	Gate Reviews should have picked up the need for co-ordination.
RL	These concentrated on key concerns such as resource availability, timescales and progress relating to the appointment of the telecoms supplier.
DB	Telecoms supplier should be able to manage their own sub-contractors.
HK	Perhaps the monthly progress reports should have identified these as risks.
FJ	We have flagged concerns over the new global telecoms supplier for a while.
AH	Previous Project Theta progress reports did raise these as risks.
HK	Perhaps better training would have picked up the problems earlier
AH	The PM is experienced and has undertaken the two day CfE PM course.
HK	Health Checks should have highlighted co-ordination as a area of concern.
RL	The previous stage Health Check was undertaken before the appointment of the new telecoms supplier.
HK	Perhaps better assurance would have picked up the problems earlier.
DB	Early opportunities were available. PAM was invited to participate in Gate Reviews. PM also receives the monthly progress reports & commentaries.
HK	Need to flag these elements as part of the lessons learnt.

Significance

Minor conflict between client staff.	Project team bonding.
Mutual support for project team members.	Alienation of outsider (HK).

Individual scenarios were developed for each of the observations made during the research period. This allowed a rich picture to be developed of the observations themselves, the actors involved and their functions. The scenarios also included the relevance of the observations. Appropriate contextual elements were also included such as time and location, reasons for the meeting or discussion and any relevant wider issues or events. This allowed the development of a series of mini case studies based around the observations. During their development, or following their review or those of others, additional comments were also included which highlighted the potential significance of the observations to the research; especially where potentially identity related elements were found.

Later, these individual scenarios were reviewed as a group and classified according to the research themes developed in previous Sections. These included roles (Section 2.3), organisation change (Section 2.4), interactions (Chapter 3) and identity (Chapter 4). The next step involved and comparing the various scenarios with the themes which had previously been developed from the findings of the literature concerning the key elements of consultancy, interactions and identity (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). These were also compared with the research questions, developed in Figure 6 and grouped accordingly. The association between the research questions, the literature Chapters and the key themes is shown in Figure 13 (overleaf).

Figure 13 Key Themes Explored in Findings

Section	Research Questions & Associated Common Themes
	In What Ways do Roles Shape Identity?
2.3	Roles & Capabilities including: Problem identification and resolution Providing knowledge, information, insight and advice Undertaking specialist support Educating, mentoring and tutoring and assessing Implementing organisation change
2.4	Organisation change
	What Effects do Interactions Have on Identity?
3.3	Relationships
3.4	Perspectives on Power
3.5	Negotiating & Influencing
3.6	Availability, Visibility & Embedding
3.7	Communications, Language & Culture
	How Can Micro-Consultant Identity Manifest Itself?
4.2	Identity & the Self
4.3	Group Identity
4.4	Organisation Identity
	What Kind of Identity Dilemmas Face a Micro-Consultant?
3.9	Interaction related uncertainties including: Client practices and decisions, The uncertainty of projects and innovation Building and maintaining relationships Maintaining independence Obtaining other assignments
4.5	Identity related uncertainties including Promotion of consultancy practice Legitimacy of decisions and advice Reputation Preparation of future identities Selection of organisation identities

An approach was then developed which allowed an assessment to be made of the scenarios which included their use, groupings and frequency, as well as highlighting any interrelated patterns (Hammersley & Atkins 2007). This approach also allowed the most frequently occurring identity events to be established, as well as ensuring a focus on significant identity related events and interactions.

Applying the various themes developed from the literature to the observation based scenarios also provided an additional layer of categorisation; allowing direct comparisons to be made with relevant elements from the literature. Consequently, similarities and differences between the practitioner research and relevant literature were highlighted. It was also possible to refine the literature elements further, with new themes added (such as negotiating and influencing) and other possible themes removed (such as group bonding and allegiance).

These scenarios were then compared with the research questions, originally developed in Figure 4. The scenarios which appeared to be most relevant to the research questions were selected and sorted and used accordingly. This ensured that only scenarios which were particularly relevant to the research questions and therefore the research objective were considered. These aspects are illustrated in Figure 14 (overleaf), which uses the scenario previously shown in Figure 11.

Figure 14 Sample Assessment of Observation Scenarios

Section & Theme	Significant Elements
Roles & Identity	
2.3 Roles	Problem solving, advice and support
Capabilities	Experience, knowledge, training
2.4 Change	Project implementation.
Interactions & Identity	
3.3 Relationships	Sub-group bonding Possible eroding of marginals
3.4 Power	Process – conforming to CfE project guidelines
3.5 Availability	Not relevant
Visibility	Not relevant
Embedding	Use of embedded micro-consultants
3.6 Negotiating	Not relevant
Influencing	Convincing BRM that work was undertaken correctly
3.7 Communications	Possibility of significant elements missed, or poorly communicated
Language	Not relevant
Culture	Not relevant
Identity Manifestation	
4.2 Self	Not relevant
4.3 Group	Sub-group of meeting attendees Sub-group of project senior managers
4.4 Organisation	Need to conform to CfE project guidelines
Identity Dilemmas	
3.9 Interaction	Possibility of micro-consultants exceeding authority
4.5 Identity	Not relevant
Others	Bonding Alienation

Note: Data derived from assessment of observations shown in Figure 11

This approach allowed a comprehensive assessment to be made of the data developed from the observations. Development of observation scenarios ensured that relevant information on the observation was included, together with appropriate levels of context.

Comparison with the research questions and literature themes ensured that the observation scenarios included were appropriate for the research. The categorisations allowed patterns to be highlighted between similar observations and events. In turn, this allowed the frequency of similar scenarios to be captured, as well as any variations in the events themselves or the context. All of which allowed a comprehensive picture to be developed of the types of interactions between micro-consultants and their clients, together with their effect on identity.

As a consequence of this long term study, there were many cases where a large number of observations related to similar interactions and situations. Where duplications occurred the most relevant or appropriate interactions were used to illustrate these findings. Some of the observations crossed over several research objectives, or could be reinterpreted to cover different research objectives. Consequently, some of the incidents and events referred to could be considered in more than one research objective.

The most significant observation scenarios were selected for inclusion in Chapter 6 Practitioner Experiences & Findings. Where observations showed the occurrence of a number of similar or overlapping events, these were summarised where appropriate. An approach was developed which would allow the context to the research observations to be included in the thesis, as well as an exploration of the theme and its significance, this is shown in Figure 15 (overleaf).

Figure 15 Components of Practitioner Experiences & Findings Sections

Component	Comment
Introduction	Overview of area to be explored. Selection of relevant themes from the literature.
Themes Explored	Exploration of relevant EPDO micro-consultant interactions, based around the themes developed in the literature and illustrated in Figure 12. The exploration includes: Illustrations of discussions from field notes. Extracts from relevant artefacts. Reflections on experiences.
Conclusion	Highlighting significant experiences and key reflections.

During the discussion in Chapter 7, the selected observations were compared with the earlier literature findings. This provided an additional check on their relevance. It also allowed the differences between the literature and practitioner experiences to be highlighted, as well as reinforcing the boundaries and limitations for the research.

Comparing the research data with the literature also provided opportunities for further verification of the research data. Observations which were found to be significantly different from the literature were re-checked to ensure their accuracy, with additional checks made on the literature. All of which helped to confirm that the relevant observations were accurate and that any differences with the literature were appropriate. This approach has also helped to ensure the robustness of the research

5.12 Limitations of This Research

The practitioner research undertaken, which is discussed in this and the following Chapters, uses ethnographic techniques to examine the identity related interactions of a mixed micro-consultant client group – the EPDO. As with any research there are limits to the research subjects and their environments, the methodological approaches used to obtain relevant data and the methods used for assessing the research data, together with their interpretations.

The details of some of the potential limitations to the research have already been identified and discussed in earlier Sections. These included limitations concerning the research population which were considered in Section 5.10, as well as the definition of micro-consultants considered in Section 2.2, together with the limitations of organisation change discussed in Section 2.4. In many cases, relevant limitations relating to particular methods, approaches and theories have already been considered by various other authors in the literature. These limitations have been included within relevant parts of the discussion and have often been expressed as challenges or concerns throughout this thesis. Some of the key limitations relating to this research have been summarised in Figure 16 (overleaf).

Figure 16 Possible Limitations of the Research

Area Investigated	Possible Limitations
The research population of Micro-consultants	Too small to be representative. Does not represent the consultancy profession. Does not represent other micro-consultants. Does not represent project management professionals.
The ICT change management approaches, theories and projects considered	Other, more representative, change management theories may be available which have not been considered. Each project considered is unique and may not be the same as other change management projects.
The EPDO multinational energy company parent	Each company has its own unique characteristics and therefore may not represent other multinational or energy organisations. As a multinational, it may be difficult for the operations and approaches discussed to be related to a specific country. There may be too much influence from UK / Western Europe for the operations and approaches explored to be considered truly international.
EPDO research population studied in the research	The unique mixture of people, skills and experience may not be representative of the way micro-consultants and client staff work together in other organisations. There may be too much influence from micro-consultants; as such it may act differently from other parts of parent company. Whilst operating in the consumer services environment; the EPDO work and approaches may not be the same as other groups or organisations engaged in consumer services.
Methodology	The research method used may not reflect the established approaches expected of ethnographic techniques. The approaches used and assessment mechanisms may not reflect established views of the selected philosophical stances. Assessment mechanisms and interpretations used may be irrational or misleading.

Many of the limitations highlighted are those of representation. Here the interactions and approaches of a small population may not be considered to be representative of a wider population; such as another organisation or business sector. As with all ethnography, the intention is that the research explores the population studied, highlighting points of interest, without attempting to generalise to other parts of society. If the research is considered in this way, many of these potential representation limitations can be dismissed.

Some of the limitations indicated could be as a result of misunderstandings or misinterpretation of the methodological approaches or philosophical stances. From some perspectives, these may be seen as flaws, which undermine the contribution of the research. However, they could also be viewed as testing the boundaries of the methodological approaches or philosophical stances; which may help to clarify the thinking in these areas.

These limitations also provide boundaries within which the research is undertaken. Consequently, they help to ensure that the research was conducted appropriately, within the specified areas.

These possible limitations may also provide challenges for other researchers, such as opportunities for further research, using different populations or techniques. However, they also indicate the difficulties of making comparisons and drawing generalisable

conclusions on the ethnographic research which may be applied to other areas of business and society.

5.13 Summary of Key Methods

This Chapter has discussed the philosophical positions taken for this research. It has also discussed the methodology used when conducting the research. An overview of the research population and its working environment has also been provided.

The selected constructivist approach was used to understand the contextualised meaningfulness of actions and interactions as experienced by the research participants. These constructions are influenced by historical, geopolitical, lifestyle work and cultural practices and discourses (Gergen 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2008), and by the intentions of the actors. Whilst the 'becoming' variant enabled a forward-looking ontological stance to be taken (Chia 2002), which is appropriate for the EPDO project environment. Constructivism recognises that different people create different meanings out of the same situations, depending on their individual circumstances and their individual perceptions of the social context (Kukla 2000).

The acceptance that actors may have different views of the same encounters enables the interpretive epistemological stance. Authors such as Sheldon (1980) argue that actors interpret signals from the environment according to their own knowledge and experiences

as well as histories and paradigms, or interpretive schemes, providing an interpretive paradigm (Chaffee 1985). This is appropriate for commercial organisations, such as the EPDO, where increasingly management is seen as being part of an ambiguous and contradictory environment in which they need to work on fragments of imprecise information which may be ambiguous and inaccurate (Barr & Huff 1997).

It is within this type of ambiguous and fragmentary environment that the current research was undertaken. The EPDO was a very dynamic organisation which is primarily focussed on the successful delivery of major ICT and associated organisation change management projects for its consumer outlets throughout Europe. Project teams needed to react to problems and issues quickly to ensure they were overcome using the most suitable solutions, using appropriate tools and approaches. Often these reactions were based on incomplete information and were influenced by power plays from various stakeholders.

Inevitably discussions relating to the problems and their potential solutions would inadvertently highlight differences between the EPDO staff or client managers and the embedded micro-consultants providing support. Many of these differences had an impact on the identities that the micro-consultants were trying to promote, or were expected from the client.

The extended assignment with EPDO provided good opportunities for me to conduct practical research into identity interactions between embedded micro-consultants and their clients. Given the nature of my work within the EPDO environment and the

dynamics of the fast moving project environment it was necessary to moderate the research element to allow for the normal working approaches.

Corporate ethnography (Denzin 1997) was selected as the most appropriate ethnographic approach for this study. The elements of corporate ethnography have ensured that the focus is maintained on the work related interactions of the participants. Given the unprecedented access to the EPDO environment, the most appropriate ethnographic approach for this research was as a participant observer. Participant observers work alongside the research subjects gaining detailed insights which only insiders can provide.

Voice is given to the participants on the ethnographic observations through the use of narrative approaches. The use of narrative and story telling allows reflection and opinions relating to different views of the same events, seen from other perspectives (Ramsey 2005). Autoethnographic techniques take the concept of the narrative to the individual, the first person (Ellis 2004); which can also be used as another voice, in conjunction with others.

With ethnography requiring the researcher to become embedded within the studied group, it is inevitable that the researcher should be part of the results. The findings may also contain an element of personal interpretation and reflection by the researcher (Davies 2005). Because of my direct involvement with the workings of the EPDO, the results from the research must include an element of my own self-observation, as well as my own comments and reflections on the observed situations. However attempts have been

made to reduce the emotional and aspects and any overt bias; producing a more detached view of the research, which is focussed on work related identity and the associated interactions.

Observations made were developed into a series of scenarios, with common formats. These scenarios were assessed for frequency, common themes and patterns. Significant scenarios were also compared with relevant parts of the literature to assess similarities and differences. Scenarios which highlighted specific aspects were summarised for inclusion in the thesis.

CHAPTER 6

PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES & FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter discussed the philosophical aspects and methodology used to develop this research. This Chapter presents the findings from the practitioner experiences relating to this ethnographic study on the identity related aspects of an embedded micro-consultant's interactions with his clients.

The research aims to provide understanding and insight into the influences of identity on an individual micro-consultant, myself. Participant observation techniques were used to provide research data from an insider perspective, during an embedded assignment within the EPDO group. These insights and findings are primarily focussed on the complex identity related interactions between an individual micro-consultant, the client staff, other micro-consultants and other stakeholders within the EPDO project environment. A number of research questions were developed concerning key aspects of identity and help to maintain the focus in this area, as previously and repeated in Figure 17 (overleaf):

Figure 17 Research Questions

Research Objective
To explore how embedded micro-consultants interactions with their client affects their identity.
Research Questions
In what ways do the roles undertaken by a micro-consultant during an assignment shape its identity?
What effects do the interactions between a micro-consultant and its clients have on identity?
How can micro-consultant identities manifest themselves during an assignment?
What kind of identity related concerns and dilemmas face a micro-consultant during an assignment?

These research questions have been used as the basis for Section headings in this and the following Chapter. In addition the themes developed from the literature, and shown in Figure 12, have been used ensure focus on identity and related aspects. It is appropriate to start the exploration by looking at the first research question.

6.2 In What Ways do the Roles Undertaken by a Micro-consultant During an Assignment Shape its Identity?

This research question enables the exploration of links between the roles undertaken by a micro-consultant during an embedded assignment and their professional or work based identity. As discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, consultant roles can be grouped into a

number of distinct types including: problem identification and resolution; providing knowledge, information, insight and advice; undertaking specialist support; educating, mentoring and tutoring, as well as assessing and implementing organisation change. These have been used as common themes in this Section. It is also appropriate to consider whether any of the more specialist roles have an influence on the identity of the micro-consultant.

All members of the EPDO, including micro-consultants, were involved with the development and integration of organisation change projects. All projects were required to be implemented systematically, using the EPDO project management framework developed by the parent company's Projects Centre of Excellence (CfE) to provide guidance and governance regarding the key elements of a project. During the course of implementing projects within these guidelines, micro-consultants exhibited all of the consultant roles discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4; including problem assessment and solving.

During the course of the EPDO assignment, I was frequently expected to undertake roles relating to problem identification. In addition I was often part of teams expected to evaluate problems at strategic levels; taking account of any wider aspects of the problems encountered, or their resolution and their impact on interrelated projects and programmes. Consequently, I was expected to provide a PMO perspective on most of the problems and issues discussed in these findings, which included ensuring the projects continued to work within the CfE guidelines and remained within budget. In addition, I was also

expected to provide detailed resolution of specific problems encountered within the PMO environment, which could also have an effect on wider aspects such as other projects, processes or systems; such as the persistent resistance by programme managers to performing mandatory project assurance Health Checks.

Within the EPDO, problems could be encountered at almost any time and within most projects. These could range from relatively minor ones such as progress reports not being completed or procedural issues; to major problems which would have a significant effect on a major project or programme; such as systems failures or projects being caught up in major reviews which often caused significant delays. Micro-consultants, such as myself, were expected to actively participate in the assessment and resolution of these problems.

The ways in which the problems were tackled and the speed with which they were resolved could have a significant impact on the success of the project and the reputation of the teams and individuals involved with the problems. A critical issue could entail teams and individuals, including micro-consultants, being drafted in to tackle problems at any time; with the expectation that the problems were resolved quickly. This was illustrated by the payments systems failure, following the cutover from Project Chi. Whereas persistent, but relatively minor, problems such as the continual failure of the VP Tool data upload could be tackled systematically' when time permitted between other duties.

Problem solving was usually undertaken in a supportive environment with a mixture of clients, micro-consultants and support staff assessing problems, evaluating options and proposing solutions. An example of this occurred during a programme review; when a high number of failures in terminals were reported in Project Zeus. The programme managers and I were encouraged by the BRM to collectively evaluate all aspects of the failures, contribute suggestions for further investigations and approaches to resolving the failures. The ensuing discussion focussed on the details and known extent of the problems, rather than the culprits or consequences. This enabled the root cause relating to firmware incompatibility to be identified quickly, without unnecessary excuses or justifications for actions.

The ability to successfully implement solutions which would resolve the various problems which arose during the lifecycle of projects was considered important. Indeed implementing a good solution could increase micro-consultant's standing, with a positive impact on the perceived identity and possibly assignment length. A micro-consultant PM who successfully completed a major project, and resolved its associated problems, would be considered for other suitable projects. An example of this occurred when **JP** successfully completed Project Sigma; I recommended him as the PM for Project Kappa, a similar project in Austria which was about to re-start.

If micro-consultants were not able to understand or resolve the problems effectively, it appeared to affect the relationship with the EPDO staff, and other stakeholders. This was illustrated by the persistent problems with the VP Tool data upload. I assigned **SG** to

resolve the upload problems and he tried a number of approaches with limited success; as soon as one problem was resolved, a different one was encountered. FJ accepted that time was needed to resolve the problems, but eventually removed **SG,** with the problem unresolved. Subsequently, the systems manufacturer reported a fault with the upload system and recommended that it should not be used until a forthcoming upgrade was installed. However, the VP Tool problems tarnished **SG's** reputation and identity throughout the EPDO.

Contributing to the assessment and resolution of problems appeared to reinforce my identity as a project specialist. With the client staff and other micro-consultants often being seen to use my advice and guidance to help implement solutions to various problems encountered by projects.

Provision of knowledge, information, insight and advice is another consultant role and identity. This type of role envisages consultants using their specialist knowledge and expertise to provide their clients with beneficial insights, information and guidance about the problems. Elements of which the clients may not have been aware of; whilst other advice helped to reinforce existing, or partial knowledge, possibly providing additional insights and perspectives on areas such as technology, markets or processes. The advice and knowledge provided could be built up during the course of various discussions over several months, often with slight variations on them.

This aspect was particularly noticeable during a series of discussions over a 6 month period I had with HK, the PAM, regarding the need for qualified project managers. An early discussion centred around the merits of the American PMP standard. During a later discussion, HK suggested that the projects CfE were considering mandating the PMP standard. I reminded HK that the PMP standard was not well known in Europe and that there were other standards which were better recognised, such as Prince2 or the IPMA certification. A subsequent discussion confirmed that the CfE would be willing to accept most professionally recognised project management standards. I then suggested that experience in running relevant projects was also essential. During the final discussion in this thread, it was accepted that significant relevant experience could override the need for formal professional qualifications for some specialist projects.

In parallel with the PM standards thread, I undertook some research into the various project management standards, to understand the different qualifications and their level of recognition within Europe; which provided up to date information and insights on this topic. I also made a short survey of PM expertise within the EPDO. The survey suggested that of the 20 responses, only four project managers (including myself) had any formal project management related qualifications. However all of the 20 respondents had over 10 years involvement with major projects; some, such as myself, had over 20 years involvement with projects. Therefore within the EPDO, there was considerable practical experience of major projects, although few formal qualifications. These preparations enabled me to participate in the qualifications discussion from a position of knowledge, providing relevant advice and insights on the topic. If I had not been able to provide

appropriate advice, the PAM may not have been aware of other qualifications, or the need for experience, and provided incomplete information to the CfE. In addition, my reputation and identity as a ‘trusted advisor’ could have been damaged.

It was accepted within the EPDO that micro-consultants occasionally provide the wrong advice, or have insufficient experience in some areas. In general, this did not appear to effect the micro-consultant’s reputation, unless the advice provided was frequently perceived as wrong, or the micro-consultants were obviously lacking knowledge or experience in a key area. Inevitably, many frequent small errors would degrade the micro-consultant’s reputation and identity, at least within the EPDO, with the possibility of premature ending of the assignment. This was the case with **DN**, who was appointed PM at the start of Project Epsilon. **DN** attempted to establish the project using processes which were not aligned to the EPDO standards; in addition he did not have sufficient in-depth knowledge of the complexities of this type of project. This resulted in his assignment being terminated after just a few weeks.

As a project management consultant, I consider the ability to provide advice and insights for client staff to be an important part of my identity. My research observations show that within the EPDO, other micro-consultants were also expected to disseminate relevant aspects of their knowledge and experience to the EPDO staff. This ability can be considered to be an essential part of their professional identity.

If client staff were not able to use the knowledge and insights provided by micro-consultants themselves, the micro-consultants were required to provide it to other client staff in the form of support. This support may have been in the form of developing or managing technical or procedural aspects on a temporary basis, or with micro-consultants undertaking specific temporary roles, such as a project manager or technical expert. Micro-consultants were also engaged to act as temporary or interim managers during re-organisations or prior to the appointment of EPDO staff or interim operations manager, providing further support in these areas.

Micro-consultants were regularly used within EPDO and the parent company to perform specialist support tasks. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that the parent company could not function effectively without the support provided by micro-consultants. Support could be provided as part of specific roles, with micro-consultants providing support for systems and tools or using their expertise and knowledge to ensure efficient operations. Consequently the micro-consultants sometimes became associated with the role and its expected identity. This is illustrated in this extract from an e-mail providing information on the upgrading of the VP Tool:

> **Email from PR [**Programme Manager**]**
> ……The evaluation of the new version of the VP tool has now been completed by the Projects CfE. ….. The system is currently being customised for the EPDO by **RC**, an external [micro-consultant] with specialist knowledge of the VP tool. This should minimise cutover time……..

Within the EPDO there was a policy to replace micro-consultants over time, either with redeployed staff, or as part of an outsourcing package; this option was usually considered within a year of the assignment start. This approach prevented EPDO staff from becoming too dependent on particular micro-consultants, as well as providing staff with career opportunities, and new identity elements. However, there was often a need to provide extensive training and support to the replacement staff, often undertaken by the micro-consultant being replaced, as shown in this extract from a directors briefing issued early in the month:

> **Briefing from EM** [Director]
> ……**ML** [micro-consultant] who is currently leading the VP tool support team will be leaving at the end of next month. **ML** will be replaced by PR, an [EPDO staff] logistics programme manager. …….PR is currently working alongside **ML** whilst the handover is completed…….

Likewise, if EPDO staff specialists moved from their current roles without an immediate staff replacement, micro-consultants were often used as temporary replacements. With micro-consultants expected to fulfil the work and identity of the member of staff replaced. This happened during an early EPDO team meeting when I was introduced as the interim manager for the newly established PMO; with any decisions on my replacement by a staff member being left to an unspecified time in the future. Consequently, I was expected to perform the role, and tasks, of the EPDO PMO manager from the start of my assignment. Indeed, sometimes I saw my own working identity within EPDO, as that of the PMO manager first and a micro-consultant second. Although I frequently used my expertise as a project management consultant to ensure appropriate support was provided to the projects. Similar approaches were taken for other micro-

consultants, such as when FJ announced that one of the BRM's had moved into another area; then **KB,** an experienced micro-consultant, was introduced as his replacement.

Within EPDO, micro-consultants, including myself, were frequently expected to provide support to client staff. Indeed many micro-consultants, such as myself, were specifically engaged to provide direct support to some aspects of the EPDO project environment or other temporary roles. As such, I believe that the ability to provide support, with its expectations of knowledge transfer and education of staff, was an expected aspect of the professional identity of micro-consultants.

Inevitably, part of my role as interim PMO manager involved educating EPDO staff on various aspects of project management and the operations of the PMO. I was expected to provide a substantial part of the induction briefings for all new programme and project managers; including training in the CfE project management standards. I was also expected to provide tutoring to individual members of the EPDO on specific project management topics. These could range from project initiation processes, through completion of forms and processes to managing project teams and suppliers or the handover and closedown of a project. I also mentored a number of the EPDO senior staff; providing advice on project management related subjects, discussing options for career development and qualifications.

Other micro-consultants working within the EPDO were also expected to provide relevant coaching and training to EPDO staff, other micro-consultants and suppliers. This training and education included briefing new project members on the intricacies of their projects; how to complete the project administration elements and how to operate successfully within EPDO. This coaching was provided on request to any EPDO member, in addition to any formally provided training on project management standards, or systems operations.

Coaching could also be provided on other topics. Whilst in Germany, I was often expected to act as an English language coach. Translating phrases from German and other languages into English and advising on the most appropriate phrases for reports etc. Other micro-consultants also provided informal coaching on diverse subjects such as software development and social etiquette.

In addition to exhibiting the key roles as discussed in the literature; some of the micro-consultants demonstrated niche or specialist roles; sometimes appearing to change their identity to that of an expert specialist. For instance **DB** and **KW** were seen to become very involved in technical details when investigating some project problems, the sort of details that only people with expert knowledge can comprehend. I was also able to make in depth contributions to many discussions concerning project management processes such as financial controls, Health Checks and reporting. Consequently I, together with most micro-consultants, were able to demonstrate specialist knowledge skills and

experience in the project management environment; clearly showing this as a primary element of work identity.

During the EPDO assignment, I was directly involved with most of the expected roles of a consultant; often undertaking the roles directly, or supporting them in some way. The different roles that I undertook during the EPDO assignment also had an influence on my identity, and possibly those of the other micro-consultants involved. Some of my pre-existing roles and identities, such as change manager or PMO specialist were reinforced by the experiences; a few other roles also provided positive experiences which I may choose to develop further, possibly to the point of promoting them as an identity element, which can be used during interactions with my clients on future assignments.

6.3 What Effects do The Interactions Between Micro-Consultants and Clients Have on Identity?

This research question explores the effects that interactions between micro-consultants and their clients may have on the identity of micro-consultants. Most embedded assignments involve considerable numbers of interactions between micro-consultants and their clients. These interactions cover a wide range of activities including: communications and language; negotiating and influencing; confidence; availability and visibility, as well as the use of power. Many of these have been used as common themes in this Section, which starts with communications.

Micro-consultants need to be able to communicate regularly and effectively with their clients, using the most appropriate tools. The use of client communications tools and protocols by embedded micro-consultants also helps to reinforce the client organisation identity. If inappropriate messages are sent, or incorrect communications tools are used to provide the message, there may be delays to their receipt and misunderstandings over their meanings. All of which could have a detrimental influence on micro-consultant client relationships.

Within EPDO the preferred communications tools were face to face meetings, telephone audios or e-mails. Indeed there were regular (often daily) meetings, discussions and briefings involving EPDO staff, micro-consultants, suppliers and other stakeholders concerning major change projects; using the different communications media.

All users of company communications, whether staff, suppliers or micro-consultants, were expected to conform to the parent company usage guidelines, reinforcing the common organisation identity. Templates and other guidance were also provided to ensure appropriate use of the communication mechanisms. An extract from the e-mail guidelines presented to me when I started the EPDO assignment is provided below, which I was expected to adhere to:

E-Mail Usage Guidelines

- All resources provided with a [Organisation] e-mail account are expected to conform to these guidelines. Failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action…..
- Users are not allowed to include offensive or otherwise inappropriate information in e-mails.
- E-mail should not be used for personal or other non company business.
- Where possible company style guide standards should be used for all e-mails including…..
- Standard disclaimers regarding monitoring, virus prevention …… should always be included in e-mails.

In principle, e-mails could be sent directly from anybody in the organisation with a company e-mail account to anybody, whether staff, micro-consultants, partners or suppliers. However, in practice there were restrictions on sending e-mails to some organisations such as competitors or lobbyists. There were also restrictions which limited some users to internal e-mail only. Additionally, many directors and senior managers used secretaries and assistants to filter non essential e-mails and other communications.

E-mails could cover any topic of interest to the company; as well as occasionally other topics. E-mails were often used as substitutes for telephone conversations or meetings, with chains of e-mails being circulated to various people in an attempt to resolve a problem. They could also be a precursor to meetings, being sent initially to highlight or attempt to resolve problems; but with long e-mail chains not providing resolution, meetings were often requested.

The frequent need for meetings also provided opportunities to enact rituals which reinforced the EPDO identity, or that of groups within the organisation. For instance formal face to face meetings were required to commence with a location safety briefing,

with supplementary ‘safety moment’ briefings also being encouraged. Within the EPDO, an overview of significant and relevant company events was often provided at the start of the meeting. Whilst project and programme based meetings usually started with updates on significant project events since the previous meetings.

There were occasions when meetings were required, but were difficult to schedule because the EPDO was dispersed throughout Europe creating difficulties in having face to face meetings at short notice. This often resulted in some team members attending via audio teleconferencing, sometimes supplemented by social networking tools, such as Skype. For audio only participants, the non verbal communications were restricted; which sometimes caused confusion when there was an unexpected, or visual, reaction during the discussions.

In addition, some attendees were only available for part of the meeting time; which could accelerate the discussions, but often resulted in some essential details being missed. In a few cases completing the objectives of the meeting would be prolonged by short pre or post discussions with key team members who would not be available for the whole meeting. Most formal meetings produced minutes or reports which highlighted key decisions and actions, which were expected to conform to company standards.

Communications standards within EPDO often appeared to determine and reinforce the organisation identity. However, many forms, documents or standard e-mails originated from specific sub-groups within the organisation; such as the EPDO, the PMO, CfE, or

even specific project teams. The content and need for completion of these documents provided opportunities for teams to exert their own group identity, or a differentiated group identity within the wider community of the parent company. As members of these sub-groups, micro-consultants, such as myself, were expected to use the communications standards, conforming with both the EPDO and the sub-group identities. Persistent non-conformance to communications standards usually resulted in some kind of reprimand, such as requiring peer review of reports or only speaking with permission; sometimes alienating the consultant with detrimental effects on the assignment.

Whilst it was necessary for micro-consultants to conform to the identity of EPDO, there were a few opportunities to exercise individual identity through communications. I found that whilst there was a need to conform to the protocols of meetings and audios, individual contributions were sometimes encouraged, providing opportunities to promote my own knowledge, experience and identity. In addition, whilst it was necessary to complete templates and forms properly, it was also possible to promote my own knowledge and identity in the details, such as descriptions of incidents and progress in reports, using appropriate language.

With the working language of the EPDO being English, all managers were expected to be competent in the language. Additional tuition was also provided for all staff whose native language was not English, but whose role required a good command of the language. However, I was occasionally required to provide additional coaching to the EPDO members on the correct use of English.

Sometimes the international dimension could cause concerns and confusion in unexpected ways. On one occasion **SM**, the PM for Project Chi, enquired about the currency used for financial estimates. I asked which currencies were used:

> **SM** ….Looking at the details, I am not quite sure. The initial resource estimate was compiled by GT in Germany; so these costs may be in Euros. Most of the hardware will be sourced from the UK; so these costs may be in British Pounds. But the project itself is for Poland; so there may even be some costs in Zlotys.
> **AH** Please could you ensure all costs are converted to the standard [Organisation] currency unit – US dollars.

Within the EPDO there were also many words and phrases used which had special meanings for certain groups; some of which were technical; others reinforced the group identity. New micro-consultants also needed to learn how to utilise the language quickly, otherwise there could be difficulties in conveying messages, and understanding responses. Such as the time when **TR,** the new PM for Project Theta, was unsure of some of the technical terminology used in a contract with a supplier, I had to explain what the terms meant and when they were used.

Briefings by directors and senior managers also provided opportunities to reinforce the common EPDO identity. Inevitably, these briefings were dramatalogical and laden with the language and symbolism of the organisation, as illustrated by this extract from a directors briefing:

> **Extract from a directors briefing**
> As a global organisation we operate around the world and around the clock…… …….. It makes sense to merge these countries together into two large Regions, within Europe. …..Bringing the countries together in these regional groups will enable resources with similar ideas and approaches to work together….. However, both regions will maintain the objectives of the company, using the same tools and techniques to develop projects…..

It was necessary for micro-consultants to use the language and terminology of EPDO to help ensure messages were understood. Indeed if micro-consultants persistently used other specialist language or terminology they could be openly admonished, or have the statement rephrased in EPDO terminology by others, a form of punishment. Occasionally specialist terminology and new phrases were accepted; especially if accepted (and used) by directors. Initially, there was no appropriate terminology to express the temporary organisation structures that were required by different parts of the organisation whilst another area underwent a major re-organisation; leading to ambiguity and confusion. Eventually the term 'docking' was adopted by directors and was subsequently used throughout the EPDO, and other parts of the parent organisation, to define temporary organisation alignments.

It was noticeable that EPDO teams from the same nation would often speak in their own language, even in meetings, deferring to English only if requested. On occasions, EPDO team meetings and breaks would be a cacophony of different languages as participants struggled to understand the implications of actions and discussed them with team members from their own nation. This sometimes necessitated formal requests to reconvene the meeting in English. The use of English as the common language did not appear to hinder understanding by non-native speakers. Although, it was sometimes

necessary to carefully phrase, or explain, some aspects of the language, such as idioms or similes, which often related to national culture.

Many EPDO cultural aspects had been established for some time and were part of the traditions of the company. Some cultural elements evolved with the development of specific teams, dying when the team was disbanded. Whilst many of the rituals, such as safety briefings, appeared at times to be spontaneous, they were probably so engrained in the organisation they became second nature. Other cultural elements appeared to be relatively new, at least to some client staff. An obvious example was seen in some long established staff who were still trying to get used to the results of a major rebranding exercise, which had been completed a few years before.

Almost every item owned by the company was branded with the company logo, often including company objectives, targets or motivational items. There were also some cultural elements attributable to sub-groups, such as promotional material, the customisation of a specific team location, or the provision of team notice boards. Culture elements for individuals were mainly limited to small areas, such as desk displays. Some culture aspects extended beyond the organisation boundaries into liminal space, such as restrictions on team members travelling together, or limitations on hotel accommodation. Other cultural elements could be found in the extensive use of company rituals.

Working in different locations also provided its own culture and identity rules as this extract from a German office stair code, which was prominently displayed on all stairwells, suggests:

Stair Code

- Always walk on the right hand side of the stairs.
- Do not run for any reason, even in an emergency.
- Maintain one hand on the stair rail.
- Never carry anything in both hands on the stairs.
- Never carry hot drinks without a lid.

All of which suggests that the EPDO culture is unique, frequently changing, but usually enshrined within organisation guidelines. Consequently micro-consultants, such as myself, appear to be influenced by the EPDO culture encountered whilst working within the organisation, and in turn influence it. The amount of cultural influence on myself may be linked to my level of exposure to EPDO; with embedding providing more exposure (and therefore potential for influencing), because of the frequent close association with EPDO staff, rituals and standards.

Within EPDO, and the parent organisation, there were many embedded micro-consultants. Most micro-consultants were embedded with the EPDO staff that they were most likely to interact with. This would allow the combined teams to interact closely, providing fast responses and forming a common group identity. An example occurred when a project progress report was not provided on time; I happened to be on the project site and discussed the reasons for the delay with the PM, who was able to provide me with the report before I left.

Due to work or time commitments, it was sometimes difficult for micro-consultants to access other managers, even if they were located together. The limited availability of key client staff could also be compounded by their need to operate throughout Europe. I frequently had difficulty meeting with some managers, due to incompatibilities with our movements around Europe. This often meant additional travel, or meeting at transitory locations such as airports, holding short discussions in liminal space between other meetings, in the evenings or during meals.

With EPDO being a global operation, during key phases of some major problems, or when there were critical problems, it was acceptable to hold audios with different parts of the world at almost any time, including the middle of the night. I was occasionally expected to attend audio conferences early in the morning or late at night, from home or a hotel room, to help provide advice or resolve problems.

Likewise, client and micro-consultant availability could occasionally be limited, or changed, by circumstances. With the development and implementation of projects being dynamic, problems or incidents could occur at almost any time. When these occurred, the main focus would be on resolving the project problems; with non essential elements being deferred. Consequently, I was sometimes tasked to help resolve a major problem within a project, often at short notice, which occasionally delayed my scheduled work.

Sometimes availability would be used to avoid confrontations. Such as when the processes for portfolio approval were not working properly, I arranged a meeting with VK the senior portfolio analyst to discuss improvements. Once VK realised that aspects of the process she had established were not working properly, she deferred the discussion to another member of her team rather than face any confrontation from myself.

Micro-consultants also appeared to use their availability to avoid confrontation with EPDO staff. They sometimes claimed the need to continue seeking the resolution of related problems, rather than confront a member of the EPDO staff, or report work not achieved.

Availability could also be used as part of a power play, which may directly involve the participants, or be part of a wider, more indirect, scheme. An example of an indirect power play occurred during the preparations for a major re-organisation, one of the BRM's wanted to relocate and move out the EPDO environment. The BRM was seen to concentrate efforts on work for a particular for a region, promoting selected projects and highlighting how much they benefited the region; at the expense of projects outside of the region, which suffered from the lack of attention.

It was accepted that most micro-consultants involved with projects throughout Europe, such as myself, would sometimes work from home at the beginning or end of the week. Although, they would normally need to be available for their projects, via emails or telephone calls. Additionally, it was accepted that some micro-consultants may not be

available occasionally, due to their involvement with other assignments or networking support groups. It was observed that these aspects were occasionally used by micro-consultants to assert their independence and individual identity.

Availability was sometimes a factor in the development and maintenance of relationships. Relationships often appeared to be closer, or more intense, when EPDO participants were in regular contact. Relationships could also be degraded by the lack of availability of one or more participants.

Within EPDO, relationships were often developed and maintained at a personal level, as can be expected with most services essentially provided to individuals. I quickly developed a number of good relationships with the people I worked with. I often used the exchange of relevant experiences to form common bonds, shared identities and experiences with my colleagues; such as the discussions about similar experiences following the team's first visit to an EPDO logistics facility. Relationships and common identity could also be formed just by taking the time to find out more about someone, than their working life; simply enquiring about family life, pastimes or holidays could help to build relationships.

Sometimes relationships were built when working and supporting people in difficult circumstances on EPDO projects. Early in the assignment I provided support and encouragement during the difficult initial implementation of the VP Tool. This was noted by a director who subsequently reminded me of it; using it as a foil to share a mutual

understanding, and to involve me with the forthcoming upgrade of the VP Tool. This association with the VP Tool and my capabilities in the area were a perceived identity element for the director.

Relationships were often built through dependability and reliability. This is illustrated by the regular review of director level progress reports by HK and myself. Projects, and countries, providing comprehensive reports on time, such as the Rhine projects, were usually accepted and used with few comments. Whereas projects, and countries, regularly providing late or incomplete reports, such as some Iberia projects, were treated with some suspicion and often required further investigation.

Well developed relationships could be useful when problems occurred, even if the parties were not well known to each other. During the initial implementation of the VP Tool, I had various discussions and workshops with client staff and micro-consultants from different parts of EPDO, and the parent organisation. A few months later, during a reporting period, I had a telephone call from a micro-consultant working in another area, concerning the use of reports in the VP Tool. Because I knew a little about the micro-consultant and the work area, I was able to quickly provide the necessary support so that the reporting could be completed on time.

However, it was also easy to erode an emerging relationship with a few inappropriate words. During an EPDO team meeting in Germany, the discussion turned to the venue for the formal team dinner. One of the BRM's suggested a particular restaurant which was

convenient to the office. However, **DB** retorted ‘Do we have to have the team dinner in that restaurant again? It has been very crowded and noisy in there the last few times we have been.’ This caused concern with the BRM’s present, throwing a shadow over the rest of the meeting, and the subsequent dinner at a different restaurant.

Relationships could also be lost through poor reliability or provision of incorrect information. This happened with Project Iota. The monthly progress reports were persistently provided late and incomplete on this relatively short but important project, which was the precursor for other major projects in the country. Towards the scheduled end of the project JL was unsure if the project would finish on time, because of the lack of progress reports. **RL**, the programme manager, stated that **TB**, the project manager thought that reports were provided by exception, rather than every month. I agreed to discuss the schedule with **TB** and provided additional coaching regarding reporting. However, JL appeared to loose faith in **TB**, who was not used on any of the subsequent projects.

Relationships were often used as part of power plays in the EPDO. Some members of the group encouraged relationships with influential people. Others sometimes used their power to destroy relationships.

In the EPDO, the power of resources was used frequently to provide legitimacy to projects and reinforce their timings, as well as ensuring a common focus and identity. Power could initially be used to promote, the initiation of projects through its

justification. Power could also be used to resist a new project, though the need to review aspects, or deferring resource requests. Once a project was agreed, the power of resources would often be exercised in obtaining project managers or project team members. When funding for Project Beta was approved, JL requested the accelerated appointment of a new PM. **RL** indicated that an EPDO staff PM could take 3-4 months to appoint, whereas an external micro-consultant could be engaged in a few weeks. The timescales encouraged the engagement of micro-consultants within the EPDO, even though company policy was to appoint internal PM's where possible.

The power of resources was also regularly used when establishing meetings, such as project Stage Gates. The meetings were usually held only when key specific people were available. However, occasionally they were held when specific people were not available, which could avoid discussion on a sensitive or problematic area.

The power of process was often used to ensure an errant project conformed to EPDO policies. Initially, the new PM (**TW**) for Project Eta used strange practices, which were effective but did not conform to CfE guidelines. The non-compliance was highlighted to **TW** and I spent some time coaching him on the EPDO best practices and the need to conform to the EPDO PM standards.

The power of symbolism was also used extensively in EPDO to promote and reinforce identity, especially with suppliers. This aspect was emphasised when a Stage Gate meeting was held immediately after a site visit to a major integration contractor. FJ

insisted that I started the meeting with the standard EPDO style safety briefings and other introductory statements; even though the meeting was on the supplier's premises.

The power of meaning was also used regularly to justify actions in EPDO and reinforce a common identity; such as to ensure compliance with guidelines. An example of this relates to a risk report received from a Project Rho integrator. This was passed to me for comments by the PM; I reviewed the document, which clearly covered most of the anticipated risks; but requested a number of changes, to ensure it would comply with the CfE risk management guidelines.

The power of narratives was often used by EPDO senior managers to help provide a vision of the future and a common identity. Especially when introducing and justifying a major reorganisation, such as this extract from a re-organisation briefing:

> **Extract from a briefing provided by EM**
> ….. With the recent successful completion of major projects in Europe. The [EPDO] is now seen as a beacon of excellence in ICT project implementation throughout the organisation. .....
> We are better than any other ICT project unit. We are completing more projects on time and on budget than the whole of the US. This is despite the complexities of multiple languages, currencies and cultures, which are not found in the US…..
> I have discussed this with JS [director] and agreed with him that we now need to spread this project management excellence into other areas than the consumer business units. As part of the reorganisation the existing [EPDO] team will take on board project responsibility for new areas including…..

The different forms of power were also exercised when negotiating and influencing within the EPDO. These were sometimes used overtly to set a direction, reinforce a boundary or enforce a decision. Power was also used indirectly to provide guidance and influence participants.

Within EPDO, there were many situations where micro-consultants were able to use their influence to engineer particular situations concerning their projects, as would be expected with independent consultants. This happened when the programme managers were reluctant for their projects to participate in independent project assurance Health Checks conducted by the PMO and required by the CfE at every stage of the project lifecycle. This reluctance was discussed in an EPDO meeting; with the programme managers using their knowledge of individual projects and their status to persuade the BRM's to seek exemptions from the PAM.

In many cases prior actions and achievements from micro-consultants provided significant influence on client decisions. There was a clear dilemma within the EPDO regarding the capabilities of the VP Tool. The tool was slow and cumbersome to use, with limited benefits for individual projects; however the tool was mandated for use in portfolio reporting by the CfE. FJ enquired when the VP Tool would be rolled out for project managers to use; I updated FJ on the current situation regarding trials, which had limited success. I also briefed FJ about a survey I had recently conducted on the potential use of the tool by project managers; only a few appeared to be enthusiastic, with the

remainder being neutral or reluctant to use it. Discussing the problems with the tool and the reluctance of the PM's to use it, persuaded FJ to delay its rollout within the EPDO.

Sometimes the appropriate use of language can help with influencing, even indirectly, as well as reinforcing a common identity. This was sometimes happened with EPDO staff when English was not their first language of EPDO staff. They would often ask me for help in compiling difficult briefings or e-mails, especially if they concerned delays to projects or additional expenditure. This sometimes provided opportunities for me to influence the project, or soften the impact of difficult announcements.

Within their projects, micro-consultant project managers were frequently observed influencing the project teams and other stakeholders. Typically this influencing included: trying to persuade reluctant staff to become more involved in a failing project, discussing installation schedules with retail sites, encouraging suppliers to speed up deliveries, persuading integrators to complete site implementations, or assuring staff that sites and projects were ready to handover to operations.

Most of the interactions that I was involved with appear to have had an effect on my identity in some way. In some cases, encounters with different people may have been influential; in others the methods and circumstances may be the influence. For example the discussions I had concerning project management qualifications enabled me to review the different types available, whilst reminding me of the need for experience as well; undoubtedly the discussions also influenced the CfE.

It would appear that the interactions between micro-consultants, such as myself, and their clients have a significant effect on micro-consultant's identity. This may be particularly the case when embedded with a client and working at their behest; with interactions often subject to their identity wishes and restrictions. So, if the micro-consultant is embedded with a client, almost every encounter with the client during an assignment will affect their identity in some way, directly or indirectly. Having considered the effects of interactions on identity, it is appropriate to explore how the identities of a micro-consultant identity can be seen during an assignment.

6.4 How can Micro-Consultant Identities Manifest Themselves During an Assignment?

This research question explores the ways in which the identities of an individual micro-consultant can be seen during assignments. They have been broken down into the three distinct identity characteristics; self, group and organisation, previously discussed in Chapter 4. Initially, the findings based around observations of self, the personal or individual, identity of micro-consultants working within the EPDO project environment are explored.

Within EPDO, the personal identity of micro-consultants was often most prominent with newly engaged micro-consultants. Often new micro-consultants would reveal aspects of their personal identity through discussions around previous work experiences and family life. At the start of the EPDO assignment, when meeting team members for the first time I was often provided with opportunities to recall my previous project management experiences and discuss the relevance of them to the current assignment. Sometimes personal identity was described when encountering new experiences. Shortly after **AR** started as a project manager; in a casual conversation he told me that he had not worked in Europe before, let alone visiting two or three countries in a few days.

Sometimes at the start of assignments, micro-consultants would expose their personal identity by trying to use their own approaches or techniques which were different to the EPDO expectations; or even against the established CfE standards. Once this was noticed, they would usually be mentored to use the appropriate EPDO approaches. This was the case with a new project manager, **CZ**, who tried to take an authoritarian approach to managing his project, which was contrary to the established EPDO guidelines. I reminded **CZ** that in the EPDO, project managers used a democratic approach, taking into account the views of the project team where possible, and that he should adopt this approach. This approach was enthusiastically accepted by **CZ,** and successfully used to manage this long term project. In this way expectations of group or organisation identity could be infused into personal identity.

Once a micro-consultant had been embedded within the EPDO for a while, the opportunities for promoting and revealing personal identity appeared to be more limited. Although, due to the extensive amount of travel required by the EPDO group members, opportunities were provided; whilst travelling, over meals and in hotels. It was also possible to promote individual identities in the liminal space between meetings. Otherwise, it could be difficult for a micro-consultant's personal identity to be visible in the working environment; which was often masked by the need to conform to the team, or group identities, which were usually intertwined with the organisation identities, as discussed later in this Section.

It was sometimes possible to exhibit personal style and identity during meetings as well as some documents. Micro-consultants could intersperse personal views and reminiscences in narrative laden responses during meetings; although this occasionally disconcerted other attendees, who would sometimes ask to be reminded of the significance of the narrative. Likewise, micro-consultants with specialist subject knowledge sometimes inserted personal views and ideas in the details of technical documents; although these were often removed during subsequent reviews.

Aspects of personal identity could also be promoted as an element in influencing or negotiation. This sometimes happened when micro-consultants recalled previous experiences, knowledge or skills in an attempt to get more involved with part of a project. This occurred during a progress meeting I attended, concerning payment systems in

Project Zeta. **KW** reminded the meeting that he had been involved with similar payment systems during a previous assignment, and could provide support and advice in the area.

These insights into personal identity by micro-consultants could also be used by others as a reminder of the identity of individuals, using their awareness of a micro-consultants previous knowledge. During a Deep Dive into Project Delta, RT realised that more information and advice was needed regarding till positions. I reminded RT that **KW** had been involved in this area on a previous assignment and he should become involved in the project.

Occasionally the client's awareness of personal identity could be used to the detriment of micro-consultants. This would sometimes happen when a project manager became involved with other projects, or clashed with the approaches of others. JL used the approaches of **CZ** against him when **CZ** started to become involved with Project Mu. JL suggested to me that in view of his previously displayed authoritarian management styles (as discussed previously), **CZ** was not appropriate for that project and a different project manager would be required.

Within this environment I sometimes felt that I was not being allowed to express my views on projects and the way they worked. I regularly had to support the EPDO view, even though I may have had a different opinion. At times when I provided a valid alternative, or personal opinion, this was viewed with suspicion and often dismissed without further consideration. Consequently, I sometimes struggled with promoting my

own identity in the face of seemingly overpowering demands to conform to the EPDO or the parent company identity; where, non conformance to the common group identity was sometimes seen as resistance and suppressed.

Within the EPDO, group identity was used as a means to ensure cohesion and involvement within teams. This happened when I was involved with the establishment of Project Psi. At the project initiation meeting, I made a short speech reminding the project team of the organisation related objectives and the benefits of the project and extolling them to work together; using the accepted EPDO behaviours and processes, to successfully complete the project and overcome any problems.

Group identity was often reinforced to members of the EPDO through narrative and dramatology; especially around the time of team meetings, where recalling mutual experiences helped to re-enforce group identity. After one EPDO team dinner, there were reminiscences about the recent visit to a logistics site that I had arranged, with participants recalling the events, extolling the significance of the visit. Later the concept of site visits was extended to new team members, who visited selected sites as part of their induction. Inevitably, during the visits opportunities were taken for some dramatology in the form of story telling and group identity bonding.

The cohesion of the group could also be used to differentiate an outsider, sometimes making them feel as though they were intruding unnecessarily. This aspect was clearly illustrated during an EPDO team meeting, where HK (the PAM) was a guest. During the

meeting, concern was expressed about the implications of the deteriorating relationship with the telecoms supplier in Project Theta. HK suggested that the situation should have been identified earlier, possibly from Stage Gate reviews and Health Checks, or in the regular progress reports. FJ retorted that concerns had been expressed within the EPDO for a while. **RL** added that that these uncertainties had been raised as risks in recent reviews and progress reports. Following which HK suggested that if the project managers were more experienced they would have warned about the problems earlier. I reminded the meeting that the project managers had undertaken the full EPDO project management training course. All of which suggested that HK was considered to be insufficiently aware of the ways the EPDO worked, and therefore was alienated from the group and its associated identity.

Group cohesion could also be difficult when a number of different teams were involved in a project. Inevitably, each team tried to place its own objectives as a higher priority than others. This happened towards the end of the Project Omnicron when the retail team focussed on marketing elements and training the operations staff, to the detriment of the final installations and testing, which delayed the handover of the project.

Many project teams contained specialists who appeared to impose their own group identity differentiators and particular approaches when undertaking work to legitimise their identity; such as preparing specifications and plans, resolving problems or installing systems. Because of their specialist nature, some groups worked in different ways to the teams they were expected to co-operate with. The EPDO commercial team became

involved with the selection of a telecoms supplier for Project Theta. Because of the legal implications regarding the selection of the most appropriate supplier, the commercial team appeared very pedantic in their responses to queries from the project, causing delays, frustrations and uncertainties for the EPDO.

When these teams needed to work together, their different approaches and identity requirements could result in tensions, friction and resistance. This would sometimes manifest itself in poor co-operation, to the detriment of a team or even a project. Sometimes teams participating on one project were clearly focussed on other projects, which they considered had higher priorities. For instance Project Lamba was delayed whilst the BSG team concentrated on resolving technical problems with project Mu; causing friction between the project teams and the BSG. These delays persisted until they became critical, when I formally requested the BSG team to concentrate on Project Lamba, which allowed the project to be completed successfully.

Organisation identity, protocol and knowledge could be overcome when challenged from an authority higher up in the organisation. For instance, whilst undertaking a series of reviews on different projects prior to a re-organisation EM, The EPDO director, would request information from anyone concerned with the projects being reviewed, often at short notice. EM did not always go through the expected hierarchies of discussions with his BRM’s or programme managers; he would sometimes contact the project managers, or even project teams direct.

Group identity was usually abandoned when the project team dispersed. This happened following the completion of a successful project, such as Project Sigma; or one that had been placed on hold for some time, such as Project Tau. However, if the project group had been established for a while, it could be remembered in the narratives of different sub-groups. For instance the successes and tribulations of Project Sigma were sometimes recalled during Project Kappa progress meetings, because of the similarities of the two projects.

During the course of the EPDO assignment, I usually considered myself as a member of the various groups I was involved with. This often appeared to be a symbiotic relationship. I was expected to conform to the needs of the group, but also provide a positive contribution to it. This occasionally led to conflicts and dilemmas, when I was expected to conform in a way I did not wish to, such as participating in some social activities. Likewise, conflicts and concerns sometimes appeared when I wished to impose my own identity or views on the group; which were rejected. However, I also noticed that the EPDO group benefited from my contributions and presence, enhancing its productivity and cohesion, for the benefit of the whole organisation and its identity.

When new suppliers were involved with projects, the EPDO was expected to provide inductions regarding the way the team and the parent energy company worked; even if the supplier was the world leader in the systems or installations. Inductions were used to ensure the supplier complied with EPDO working practices, as well as reinforcing its identity and helping to ensure cohesion. This happened with the time management system

supplier for Project Omnicrom. When they arrived for a project induction meeting, I provided a briefing on the CfE project management standards, and the information and approaches expected from them. Other team members provided briefings on the EPDO organisation and information standards, whilst the project manager provided detailed information on the project and its interfaces.

The parent company also required all staff, suppliers and micro-consultants to use its communications systems and branding when on company business. This provided a common approach to the organisation and reinforced the organisation identity.

Work was outsourced to many external organisations as suppliers and partners to provide routine operations for project implementation. All partner organisations, including micro-consultants, were expected to use the parent company branding and identity. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult to be sure if contact with another part of the parent company was with permanent staff, other micro-consultants, or part of an outsourced function. This was illustrated in an e-mail I received from the HR Department:

> **Email from HR Department.**
> ….All external [micro-consultant] recruitment work has been outsourced to [a company]….. If you call the resourcing team, or send them an e-mail, they will respond with the [Organisation] name…..
> …..They have also been provided with the current organisation structures and authorisation limits for people involved with recruiting externals ……

Organisation identity within EPDO was often used by senior managers as part of the dramatology relating to major policy announcements. This was particularly noticeable when senior managers announced or introduced major changes and re-organisations. Inevitably, this approach rippled through the organisation and was used by other managers and the narrative approach became part of the organisation identity itself. This is illustrated in the following extract from a briefing by a senior director:

> **Extract from a senior director's vision**
> As an organisation we work closely with each other. Even though we work in many different fields……
> We all work towards the company objectives. …. Even when we step into the unknown, we have the company values to support and guide us……

Organisation identity was sometimes used to enforce differences between micro-consultants and client staff; such as the requirement for client staff in the EPDO to undertake regular driver training; even though micro-consultants often did more driving than the EPDO staff. Organisation identity differentiation was also enforced in authorisation limits. Micro-consultants financial authorisation levels were always lower than the equivalent EPDO staff; which sometimes caused difficulties when negotiating or making decisions.

As has been illustrated, the need to conform to the identity and culture of the EPDO organisation often inhibited the identity of my own consultancy practice and at times my own identity. However, I was also conscious of the benefits of conformity; helping to ensure uniformity and providing a clear focus on the project work. Although, there were occasions during which the need for conformity inhibited the project teams; such as when

significant problems occurred, which needed a novel approach to their resolution. This occasionally provided opportunities to provide original ideas and promote individual identity.

Sometimes there appeared to be battles between individuals (micro-consultants, EPDO staff or stakeholders). The micro-consultants were trying to promote their own identity in the face of the seemingly overwhelming requirement to conform to the identity requirements of EPDO, or its parent company. However, the organisation identity requirements usually dominated. This inevitably caused tensions for the individuals and their peers whether staff or micro-consultants; often leading to concerns and dilemmas.

6.5 What Kind of Identity Related Concerns and Dilemmas Face a Micro-Consultant During an Embedded Assignment?

This research question enables the significant dilemmas, contradictions and ambiguities facing micro-consultants which relate to aspects of their working identity to be highlighted, some of which have been touched on earlier in this Section. As discussed previously in Sections 3.9 and 4.5, micro-consultants could encounter a wide variety of identity related contradictions, uncertainties and dilemmas during assignments. These may be concerned with: consultancy practices, client decisions, the uncertainty of projects, maintaining independence, building and maintaining relationships and obtaining

other assignments; which have been used as common themes in this Section. In addition, micro-consultants need to maintain their own consultancy practice.

Whilst attending consultants networking meetings, I would sometimes be asked by my colleagues if I was available to help them, or to provide consultancy for a known client. I was also asked to provide consultancy on project management subjects by potential clients. However, due to the heavy workload of the EPDO assignment, I had to turn down most of these possibilities, which could have had a detrimental effect on the relationship with my networking colleagues and other potential clients.

Another way that the embedded assignment with EPDO affected my consultancy practice was with my attendance at networking meetings. Because of my work with EPDO in Europe, I was not able to attend many networking meetings. Consequently, a number of my colleagues wondered why I was not attending the meetings and if anything was wrong.

Another concern is the time taken to maintain networks. When not on assignments, in addition to attending networking meetings, I need to be in regular contact with my consultant colleagues via meetings, telephone or e-mails. Whilst on assignment, such as with EPDO, I have to reduce the level of contact with my networks significantly. This occasionally, puts me out of touch with networking events and activities and can have a detrimental effect on my relationships with other micro-consultants. There was also the

possibility of long term assignments, such as the EPDO assignment, degrading my external support network and fragmenting my contacts.

It was acceptable for micro-consultants to maintain some level of independence whilst on assignment with EPDO. This independence often manifested itself as working off site for short periods. Examples included micro-consultants who travelled most of the week working from home on Monday or Friday, or working compressed hours to look after their children or whilst caring for relatives. It was also acceptable for micro-consultants to occasionally arrange their EPDO work so they provide direct support to their own practice, as long as there was no significant impact on their EPDO work. This independence sometimes took the form of attending networking meetings or visits to accountants or lawyers.

Micro-consultant independence and use of their own identity was sometimes encouraged for short periods in the EPDO; especially if it provided further insights or helped to resolve problems. Micro-consultants could investigate aspects such as technology or markets using their own practice to disguise any interest from EPDO. When concerns were expressed regarding the forthcoming VP Tool upgrade, I contacted the supplier through my consultancy practice and obtained detailed information about the upgrade and related aspects, without informing them of EPDO's interests. In this way, I obtained more information than had previously been released by the supplier, or the CfE.

Whilst the independent identity of micro-consultants could be useful, it was often suppressed in EPDO. The need to conform with EPDO guidelines and processes, forced micro-consultants to use the EPDO identity. However, EPDO sometimes deliberately separated staff and micro-consultant identities, such as with holiday allowances and staff only meetings or activities. This enforced differentiation was noticeable when discussing a possible team building event for a forthcoming EPDO meeting in Germany. I suggested that we could use a transport theme, and NK informed us that we would soon need to undertake compulsory driver training. RF explained that every three years they needed to take part in a one day driving course which included presentations and discussions on safe driving, demonstration drives and practice on a skid pan. There was enthusiasm for this training and further details of the venue and possible arrangements were discussed. Then MS informed us that according to the e-mail that she had received on the training, it was only for staff; micro-consultants were not allowed to attend. A few weeks later the EPDO staff members attended the training.

The level of independence micro-consultants were allowed was frequently based on decisions of the EPDO client staff. These decisions usually had an influence on micro-consultants and their identities. The decisions could be based on strategic requirements; the need of the programmes and projects; or as part of power plays.

During the course of assignments, clients sometimes required micro-consultants to fill resource shortages or take on new roles temporarily. This happened at EPDO, when **TE'**s assignment concluded, without a direct replacement. **DB** was nominated to take on the

role in addition to his current duties by FJ. **DB** did not wish to take the role because of the amount of time taken for the duties. However, when some of **DB**'s other duties were moved to other programme managers, and with additional support from the PMO, **DB** reluctantly agreed to take on the new role for a limited period.

Sometimes client decisions appeared to act against the micro-consultant's view of best practices, causing dilemmas as to which route to take. I faced this when trying to organise an end of stage Health Check on Project Mu, at the request of **PD** the project manager. When the need was highlighted at a programme review, **RL** the programme manager suggested that there was no need for a Health Check, because the project was going well. FJ the BRM appeared reluctant for it to happen because of the time it could take. I reminded them that the CfE required Health Checks during every stage and that the project manager had requested one. After a lively discussion, FJ made the decision not to have a Health Check and to seek dispensation from the PAM.

Many of the decisions made by the EPDO staff were related to the progress of the projects and any problems encountered. All projects encounter problems during their lifecycle, with major problems sometime leading to uncertainty as to the future of a project and the team.

Within EPDO very few projects were cancelled, possibly due to good strategic decision making. However a number were placed on hold, sometimes for several months, with an impact on the micro-consultants directly involved. In these cases, the EPDO managers

were sometimes unsure as to what to do with the micro-consultant project manager. In a few cases, such as Project Pi, the PM continued for a short while, completing administration and providing support to the business. The potential loss of a good project manager when the budget ran out was often used as part of a power play to force a decision. This happened with Project Xi, which suffered a prolonged delay due to a major re-organisation and subsequent review of related operations. After a while the budget ran low and there was the possibility of loosing a good project manager due to lack of funds. However following discussions with the business, additional funds were made available for his continued support in the organisation review.

During the course of a project, there may be reviews or major changes which could cause the project to change direction. A major change to a project could also have an impact on a micro-consultant, and their identity. This happened with Project Epsilon, when improvements to firmware meant they did not have to replace the terminals. The PMO calculated a variety of budget and time savings for the project, which resulted in the project team completing their work early.

A change in company strategy could also have a significant impact on projects. A strategic decision was made to have a single telecoms supplier responsible for providing infrastructure and data transfer, which would result in more reliable and cheaper connectivity. It took a long while to identify and appoint the global telecoms supplier, which caused delays to some telecoms related projects. All regions, countries and projects were then expected to use the supplier for all their telecoms needs. However,

some countries were not aware of the supplier's capabilities and were wary of their working processes. Other countries had long term relationships, and preferences, for local suppliers and were reluctant to engage with the global supplier. Some countries had deteriorating relationships with the selected supplier. Where this happened, projects had to appoint local intermediaries to manage and negotiate the telecoms aspects of projects. Establishing new relationships with the new telecoms supplier and intermediaries took time and caused delays to some projects, with micro-consultant project managers sometimes being indirectly blamed for the delays.

A failing project will often have a detrimental impact on micro-consultants, including their reputation and identity. This happened to the Project Omega project manager, **BH**. The project was beset with many problems, not all of them attributable to the project itself. Following an upgrade to a different project in the overall programme, there was a major failure of newly installed Project Omega components. Whilst not directly involved **BH** took some of the blame, for not having any fall back in case of failure; adding to his poor reputation as a project manager.

Well maintained relationships can sometimes provide early warning of project uncertainty and help in its resolution. Within EPDO, building and maintaining relationships were encouraged. Micro-consultants and EPDO staff often travelled to project meetings together; taking advantage of the liminal space between meetings to get to know each other. It was also recognised that it took time to build relationships and understand how micro-consultants worked. This was illustrated by a remark from JL

following an initial meeting with a new project manager ‘We will see what happens. It will take a few months before I know that the new PM is any good. Until then, we need to keep an eye on him.’

It was recognised that relationships could be built with anybody in the company, sharing common identities. However, sometimes particular relationships were encouraged. These were sometimes pointed out by managers; such as when FJ indicated that I needed to get to know the PAM and how he works, so that I could be more aware of the impact of project assurance on the EPDO.

Relationship building also happened within projects; such as when the work on Project Phi was becoming critical. During the course of a progress meeting, RT indicated to the programme manager, **KW**, that he needed to get to know the project manager better; providing additional support if required to anticipate and prevent problems.

Likewise, some relationships could be actively discouraged. This occurred when **DT**, from the PMO, suggested that he should support and mentor **PL**, a PMO manager from outside of the EPDO. He was rebuked by RT, who indicated that **PL** was a capable manager who was doing a good job and currently did not need the support and contact offered by **DT.**

The development and maintenance of relationships can also be influenced by the apparent hierarchical level of the micro-consultant. Relationships are often fostered by members on a perceived similar hierarchical level. Relationships outside of these levels were sometimes seen as power plays.

In common with other organisations, EPDO promoted a vision of a relatively flat hierarchical organisation structure and therefore a common identity with senior managers and directors. This was highlighted in a casual discussion when FJ indicated that he was only six levels away from the Chairman. Also, with the Open Door policy, he could simply walk into any directors office for a discussion or to obtain information. Whilst this may have been possible; in practice it sometimes proved difficult for FJ to contact directors even one or two levels higher than himself.

Sometimes access to more senior managers was used as a power play by managers, to control micro-consultants. This happened when discussing technology options for Project Gamma. **DB** suggested the use of a new technology, whilst FJ favoured an upgrade of older technology. **DB** was sure that the retail business would prefer the longer term solution offered by the new technology; and offered to discuss it with WC, the retail director. FJ was reluctant to allow **DB** access to WC; possibly because FJ considered **DB** to be at lower grade than himself, which could undermine the tenuous hierarchical relationship between WC and FJ.

It could also be difficult for staff and micro-consultants at lower grades to work higher than their assigned level, gaining necessary skills, knowledge, experience and an associated identity. An example of this occurred just before **TE** left. The need to replace **TE** was discussed, I suggested utilising an experienced existing project manager as a replacement; possibly **JP** who was about to complete Project Sigma. **RL** pointed out that **JP** had also been involved with related projects and therefore had some experience managing programmes. FJ was not keen; indicating that whilst an experienced project manager, **JP** was lacking programme management skills, suggesting that a new experienced micro-consultant should be appointed instead. Consequently, **JP** was released when Project Sigma completed and eventually a new programme manager was appointed.

Within EPDO, a micro-consultant could be expected to present several different identities at short intervals, which may cause confusion. Sometimes, just before a meeting started, I would be asked to discuss a completely different subject. Occasionally I would become confused about the details of a project, especially if there were several similar projects being undertaken in different countries; such as the separate the truck computer projects being rolled out across five countries.

There could often be uncertainties over identities when a person was expected to work outside of their preferred identity habitas. This happened when **RL** was presented with detailed budget and resourcing information for his programmes. **RL** reminded me that he was not numerically orientated and therefore did not need the details, although he did

need assurances that the summary figures were correct. Likewise when **KW** admitted to me that when he received a new project, it sometimes took him a while to understand the intricacies of the work involved.

In some cases, micro-consultants were required to work in unfamiliar areas outside of their identity habitas, which was not considered to be appropriate. This conflict sometimes emerged as resistance to the work by the micro-consultant. This happened shortly after **PC** was appointed as project manager on Project Chi. He resisted the use of the standard five page detailed progress report required every month; preferring instead to present a single page report, similar to that used on a previous assignment. I discussed the situation with him and reminded **PC** of the CfE standards. Eventually, we agreed that the EPDO report should be produced and I would provide additional coaching to help him with the next few reports.

Concerns and dilemmas could also be raised when an unfamiliar tool or process was required; such as the VP Tool. After training and familiarisation **DT** indicated that the tool was inefficient, tedious and could not be used; suggesting that the forthcoming upgrade, due in a few months, may help. I reminded **DT** that the VP Tool had been mandated for use from now on as part of the monthly portfolio reporting process and we could not wait until the upgrade was available.

Within EPDO, the assigned hierarchy level also determined the level of detail which the micro-consultant was expected to be involved with and consequently an element of their

identity. This sometimes happened when **DB** was discussing technology or process details of particular projects; he would sometimes be interrupted by a BRM who indicated that there was no need to provide so much information.

Apparent limits on hierarchical access appeared to cause dilemmas for micro-consultants, such as **DB** who felt the need to discuss issues with more senior managers. This also appeared to be the case when micro-consultants became aware of dysfunctional power plays which prevented access to senior managers.

If persistent, these hierarchical conflicts would have an impact on the micro-consultants reputation and identity; possibly resulting in a premature conclusion to an assignment. These dilemmas could sometimes continue following the completion of one assignment and whilst seeking another.

Most of the discussions relating to potential future assignments took place outside of the EPDO. There were also some informal discussions between the micro-consultants between meetings, in the evenings and during travel. One of the primary concerns regarded the impact of the various reorganisations on the micro-consultant assignments; as well as policy statements, such as the intention to replace micro-consultants with EPDO staff where possible. There was also some exchange of information concerning possible roles with other organisations and approaches from intermediaries.

At the end of assignments, micro-consultants need to look for and find further work, such as following the completion of the EPDO assignment. Explorations of potential assignments usually appeared to be undertaken outside of the EPDO environment, possibly due to the sensitive nature of the investigations; which also applies to any personal information exchanged. Many micro-consultants also appeared to be sensitive to any leads provided; treating them with confidence, especially if provided by others. Many of the discussions observed in consultant networking groups were focussed on potential clients and obtaining future assignments.

Future work was often a prime topic of interest during consultants networking meetings. Invariably, many discussions would focus around the prospects of future work, or potential clients. These discussions also highlighted some of the uncertainties and dilemmas facing micro-consultants, who were not always embedded with their clients. Such as the discussions regarding working with local authorities; **MS** summed up some of the uncertainties. 'The first problem is finding out which ones may need our services. Then we need to find out how to register our interest. We will also need to arrange preliminary meetings to find out exactly what they need and who are the best people to talk to. If we are lucky, we can avoid competitive tender situations.'

Micro-consultants also need to assess whether they have suitable skills and experience for potential roles and associated identities. This was highlighted during a consultants networking meeting when **NF** enquired about project management qualifications. **DR** briefly described some of the key qualifications such as Prince 2; I then added a few other

qualifications which could be significant depending on the type of assignment such as the British MSP and the American PMP. We then discussed the best way for micro-consultants to obtain these qualifications.

It would appear that a variety of consultancy and organisation related contradictions and dilemmas were encountered by micro-consultants working with the EPDO; although, the circumstances, timing, details and effects of their use will remain unique to the EPDO. During assignments, micro-consultants, including myself, sometimes exhibited signs of dilemmas and uncertainties. These were most noticeable during the early stages of an assignment; but could also be visible when a project had significant problems.

Based on the observations, it can be seen that there were many identity related concerns and dilemmas faced by myself during the EPDO assignment. Many of these dilemmas occurred within the EPDO as a result of the nature of project work, or the people involved with them; as such they could be resolved, or moderated internally. Some of the dilemmas were introduced from outside of the EPDO sphere of influence, having been introduced as a result of reorganisations or commercial decisions; they could not be resolved by the EPDO, but could only be moderated and worked around until another external decision resolved them. Some of these dilemmas caused tensions and conflicts between micro-consultants and EPDO staff. Other dilemmas and contradictions remained as unresolved paradoxes.

6.6 Other Relevant Findings

During the course of the research a number of other findings were made which had relevance to the research, but cannot easily be grouped into the research questions discussed in previous Sections. However, these have some significance to the objectives of this research, its environment or similar research areas.

Amongst the micro-consultants and clients studied, various philosophical stances were exhibited, as can be envisioned in any large organisation. However, all involved with the EPDO appeared to exhibit clear forward looking 'becoming' philosophical approaches. This manifested itself in the need to progress programmes and projects and supporting elements, such as the preparation of budgets and plans, rather than concentrating on historical aspects or process elements.

There were many instances where exceptional tolerance and patience were demonstrated by micro-consultants and client staff. This often manifested itself in the provision of extra time being found for tasks and work. At the start of micro-consultant assignments, time was sometimes allowed for 'settling in' familiarisation with the EPDO culture, identity and way of working, as well as the international environment. Patience was often noticeable when micro-consultants were trying to explain technical details to clients, or influencing and encouraging them to take an appropriate decision. Tolerance was also shown to project managers and support staff when working their way through the often

bureaucratic systems and procedures required by EPDO, to ensure projects were undertaken properly.

Many of the interactions observed exhibited the need for tolerance and patience between the various parties involved. Many of the encounters took place over long periods, with time being provided to achieve tasks or resolve problems before the next meeting. If the tasks were not achieved by the next meeting, additional time was sometimes available, as was the case for various project reviews. However, the tolerance (and time) was finite. Alternatives would found if the initial approaches proved unfruitful; as illustrated by the concerns over the VP Tool interface.

Assessment of EPDO demographics shows that there were many nationalities involved within EPDO; with the UK having the highest number of nationals in the group. Analysis of gender indicates that the EPDO was male dominated, with only one micro-consultant being female. However, within the EPDO staff, females appeared to function well in key roles such as BRM. Whilst there is an unequal representation of females in the EPDO, it is not unexpected. Many cross border teams have a predominance of males. In addition, the EPDO origins in energy and related areas provided the foundations for a strong male orientated culture.

Most of the EPDO were in the age range between 40 and 55 years; which is expected when encountering a group of senior managers responsible for multi-million pound budgets. Most of the micro-consultants and EPDO staff involved were at a senior level; so the higher age of the group also appears to be appropriate for this level of management and experience.

During the eighteen month timescale of this ethnographic study, there were a number of major ongoing reviews and subsequent decisions, which were led from outside the EPDO, but had a significant influence on the group. These included major company wide re-organisations; the upgrade to the VP tool and various regional re-organisations and project reviews. Updates and further information was usually sporadically provided to resources not directly involved; although rumours were regularly passed on and discussed. These major ongoing items were usually played down; often referred to as background items, or other aspects which did not need to be taken into consideration, or they could be used in power plays. However, they sometimes caused ongoing uncertainty and anxiety for both client staff and micro-consultants. Because once the outcomes of the decisions were implemented, they had a significant impact on the EPDO.

6.7 Reflections on Research Findings

The eighteen months of ethnographic research undertaken within the EPDO observed many identity related interactions between micro-consultants, client staff and other stakeholders during the course of various change management operations. The study from an insider perspective has provided unique insights into these interactions, which an outside observer could not provide. These included the discussions regarding roles, or the debates regarding the need for Health Checks, future assignments and project

management qualifications, as well as uncertainties over identity and the need to conform to EPDO identity elements.

Whilst a fragmentary and incomplete picture has been provided in the observations; they illustrate the breadth of work and interactions undertaken by the EPDO. The observations provide an indication of the variety and complexities involved when working on major projects within an international environment. There are indications of a multiplicity of influences and interrelationships affecting the work, together with associated power plays. Some of these were under the control of the EPDO, many were not. Many micro-consultants, such as myself, work successfully within this complexity, often for many years; influencing the complexity and in turn being influenced by it. I sometimes promote my ability to operate within this complex environment as part of my identity.

All of the observations in some way involve micro-consultants identity. Reinforcing the concept that almost every aspect of an assignment can be influenced by the identity of a micro-consultant, such as myself. During the EPDO assignment, there may have been limited choices and options regarding micro-consultant identity; because of the overwhelming needs to conform to the EPDO organisation identity. Outside of the EPDO environment, there was more choice available regarding identity. I was often able to select which identity elements of the EPDO assignment I wished to promote or suppress.

The findings from the observations have captured the essence of the micro-consultant and client interactions undertaken by the EPDO, with a focus on identity. These findings were

grouped around the research objectives established at the outset of this thesis; together with the associated themes developed from the literature. This approach allowed the research questions to be developed and explored in detail from a practitioner perspective. The observations presented in the findings were also aligned to the research objectives and themes. This enabled a focussed discussion to take place on identity related aspects of micro-consultant and client interactions; drawing together the research objectives, literature findings and practitioner experiences. All of which have been brought together in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter presented a series of observations which form the findings from the practitioner experiences of this research. This Chapter discusses the findings and provides comparisons with the literature elements discussed previously in Chapters 2 (Management Consultancy), 3 (Micro-consultant & Client Interactions) and 4 (Identity – the Self and the Organisation). A number of conclusions have also been drawn based on the practitioner experiences and the literature discoveries.

As previously, the Sections in this Chapter are based around the research questions shown in Figure 6, which have been abbreviated in the Section headings. The common themes developed in the literature, and shown in Figure 12, have also been used to ensure appropriate focus within the Sections. This approach will support the original objective of the research: to explore how embedded micro-consultants interactions with their client affects their identity. Additionally, this approach will ensure that the primary focus on the complex identity related interactions between an individual micro-consultant, the client

staff, other micro-consultants and other stakeholders within the EPDO project environment is retained. It is appropriate to commence the discussion by looking at the first research question.

7.2 In What Ways do Roles Shape Identity?

This research question enables the exploration of links between the roles undertaken by a micro-consultant during an embedded assignment and the associated professional or work based identity. As discussed in Section 2.3, roles can be grouped into a number of distinct types including: problem identification and resolution; providing knowledge, information, insight and advice; undertaking specialist support; educating, mentoring and tutoring and assessing and implementing organisation change; which have been used as common themes in this Section.

All of the EPDO work involved aspects of organisation change such as assessment, preparation, support and implementation of organisational change programmes and projects for the company consumer environment. All of the team, whether client staff or micro-consultant, made significant contributions to the organisation change elements required within the company. This included most of the specific change management roles described in the literature on change management by authors including Carnall (2007); Chia (2002) and Hayes (2006). Consequently, micro-consultants also fulfilled the generic consultant roles concerned with the management of change as discussed by

authors such as Hayes (2006); Czarniawska & Sevon (1996); Burnes (1996); and Johnson (1992).

Like many organisations, EPDO staff, at all levels, relied on external support such as micro-consultants to provide them with additional specialist knowledge, insights, advice and recommendations (Clegg et al 1996). Information and advice could be requested on almost any area within the project environment. The ability to provide consistent appropriate and timely advice in specialist areas (Phillips 2006) whilst taking account of the client's environment (Simon & Kumar 2001), is considered to be an essential requirement for micro-consultants (Kumar et al 2000); an expected part of their identity (Werr 1999). Knowledge and insight from the micro-consultant's previous experiences was provided on many aspects of the EPDO project environment and related subjects. Topics could range from technical details such as the need for detailed connectivity and payment mechanisms, through administrative matters such as the development of highlight reports for senior managers, to social insights such as suitable hotels to stay in when visiting a country. This is consistent with authors including as Alvesson & Johansson (2001) and Philips (2006), who suggest that consultants need to use their experiences to provide advice on a variety of topics. However, the provision of advice on peripheral areas such as social insights does not appear to be specifically addressed.

EPDO micro-consultants were frequently engaged to provide embedded support for their clients (Poulfelt and Payne 1994). This ranged from specialist support in skilled areas (Peel & Boxall 2005), to interim placements in dedicated client roles (Dearlove &

Clutterbuck 1998). The micro-consultants provided this specialist support in the organisation change (Carnall 2007) and project management environments (Goodman 2008).

Many EPDO micro-consultants were expected to engage in knowledge transfer of relevant aspects of their skills and experience (Kipping & Engwall 2002), such as discussions on project methodologies. This was provided via formal training, coaching or mentoring sessions (Philips 2006; Werr 1999); or less formally as part of another established role such as the provision of insight and advice (Sturdy 2004), or a client developed interim role such as project manager (Knutson 2001).

In addition to exhibiting the key roles discussed in the literature; some of the micro-consultants demonstrated niche or specialist roles (Phillips 2006), sometimes appearing to change their identity to that of an expert specialist. For instance **DB** and **KW** were seen to become very involved in technical details when investigating some project problems. I was also able to make in depth contributions to many discussions concerning project management processes such as financial controls, Health Checks and Stage Gates. Consequently I, together with most micro-consultants, were able to demonstrate specialist knowledge skills and experience in the project management environment; clearly showing this as a primary element of work identity (Webb 2006).

For micro-consultants working within the EPDO project environment, providing coaching and training appeared to be a normal part of the knowledge transfer process. This training was provided to all that needed it, not just to client staff. As such, it can be considered to be part of the expected micro-consultant identity (Hogg & Terry 2002), and conforms with the roles suggested by authors such as Alvesson & Johansson (2001) and Kubr (2002). Although, the diversity of the training and coaching observed was probably wider than discussed in the literature. In addition, it often appeared that there was very little differentiation between micro-consultants acting as coaches or mentors and other roles such as providing support, or advice.

All of the key consultant roles and capabilities identified in the literature, by authors such as Alvesson & Johanson (2001); Kitay & Wright (2003) and Lambert (1998) were exhibited by the micro-consultants observed during this research. These included problem identification and resolution, providing information insight and advice, providing supplementary skills and knowledge, assessing and implementing organisational change and providing education, mentoring and coaching. The roles were exhibited at various times by different individual micro-consultants, with frequent overlaps between the roles and the micro-consultants involved.

With micro-consultants being expected to perform many roles, this often resulted in the display of multiple identities, exhibited to different groups, often within short periods of time (Hogg & Terry 2002). The multiplicity of identities exhibited by individual micro-consultants working within the EPDO and the frequency of the need to switch from one

identity to another were clearly seen during the observation period. This is comparable with the findings of Clark (1995); Hatch & Schultz (2004) and Webb (2006). However, the micro-consultants were required to switch between identities more frequently than suggested in the literature. Undertaking a variety of different roles as part of the EPDO assignment provided additional skills knowledge and experiences for the micro-consultant. All of which could contribute to the future identities of the micro-consultant, whether work, social or lifestyle (Woodward 2002).

The different roles that I undertook during the EPDO assignment also had an influence on my identity, and possibly those of other micro-consultants (Hogg & Terry 2002). Some of my existing roles, such as project specialist were reinforced by the experiences; other roles also provided positive experiences, such as change manager. Any of which I may choose to develop further. Although, some of the roles that I was required to undertake do not appear to have been beneficial and will probably not be pursued or promoted further. Therefore they are unlikely to be utilised during interactions with clients on future assignments.

7.3 What Effects do Interactions Have on Identity?

This research question explores the effects that interactions between micro-consultants and their clients may have on the identity of micro-consultants. Most embedded assignments involve considerable numbers of interactions between micro-consultants and

their clients. As discussed in Chapter 3, these interactions cover a wide range of activities including: communications and language; negotiating and influencing; availability and visibility, as well as the use of power. Many of these have been used as common themes in this Section.

The use of communications to promote and reinforce organisation identity through standards such as e-mail guidelines or meeting protocols, with punishment for wrongdoers, has been discussed by various authors including Alvesson & Willmott (2002); Tajfel & Robinson (1996) and Tobin (1999) whilst the ability of official sub-groups to promote their own organisation differentiation has also been considered by Swann et al (2004). The ability of individuals or groups to personalise communications has been seen as resistance by some (Jermier et al 1994), creativity by others (Hatch & Schultz 2004), as well as promoting individualisation and identity (Woodward 2002). The level of group and individual identity allowed by an organisation appears to be dependent on its ideals and perceived need for conformity (George 1990) and whether the communications are internal or external (Bovee & Thill 2007).

EPDO made available a wide range of communications media for project teams; together with comprehensive sets of guidelines for their use, as postulated by Bovee & Thill (2007). However, the content and frequency of communications was often left to individuals and teams, as seen by Dutton (1996). Therefore communications on any topic could appear to be overlapping, fragmented, ambiguous and sporadic. This sometimes led to some aspects appearing to be over-communicated; as often happened with critical

problems. Whilst other elements appeared to be under communicated, such as progress on reorganisations or external project reviews.

From the observations and findings provided in this Section, it can be seen that micro-consultants were expected to quickly understand and use the EPDO preferred communications techniques, such as teleconferencing and e-mail (Dow & Taylor 2008). This included using many of the styles and formats of the group, including language and phraseology (Lewis 2000). Linked to this was the need to participate in the culture, rituals and traditions of groups such as the EPDO (Deal & Kennedy 2000). In addition to ensuring appropriate communications and the understanding of EPDO staff communications helped to legitimise the organisation (Castells 2004); requiring users to reinforce the existing EPDO organisation identity and that of its sub-groups. At the same time these requirements suppressed the individual identity of micro-consultants (Alvesson & Willlmott 2002); possibly constraining their preferred working approaches and methods of building relationships.

Building and maintaining relationships appeared to be important to client staff and micro-consultants in the EPDO, as indicated by Ford et al (2003). Time was allowed, during or between meetings, to reinforce identities, as well as to ensure the right types of relationships were developed. This sometimes included dedicated team building sessions (Wysicki 2002). EPDO members were also encouraged to meet and socialise during travel (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000). Good relationships were sometimes considered essential to achieving good work and meeting deadlines, especially during times of crisis

(Fill & Fill 2004). An element of the relationship building also allowed micro-consultants to gain the confidence trust and loyalty of EPDO staff (Cofta 2007). Discussions showed that improved understanding of EPDO members and the way they work provided EPDO staff and other parties with confidence in their abilities; improving relationships and productivity, whilst encouraging availability.

The embedding of micro-consultants within the EPDO usually ensured their availability (Phillips 2006); although the EPDO staff could be elusive. The use of client or consultant availability in EPDO power plays and avoiding confrontations was notable and in accordance with authors including Hardy (1995) and Clegg et al (2006). While not considered explicitly, availability has occasionally been noted as being an influence on membership and the identity of groups by authors such as George (1990) and Ford et al (2003). They suggest that frequency of attendance at group meetings etc. helps with the association of individuals with particular groups and their personal identity. This often appeared to occur within the different sub-groups forming the EPDO; with regular attendance at meetings etc. encouraging familiarity and relationships.

Authors, such as Fill & Fill (2004) and Ford et al (2003) emphasise the importance of consultants building good relationships with client staff and colleagues. Within the EPDO, there appeared to be many carefully built relationships, which seemed to provide support and information to all parties. Authors including as De Raffele & Hendricks (1998) and Tonge (2003) suggest various reasons for building relationships with clients, in the immediate and longer term futures including: the provision of insights and

information, early warning of activities and the provision of support. Within the EPDO, most of these elements appeared to be exhibited frequently. There were also some incidents during the research period which showed how fragile relationships can be (Ford et al 2003); some of which may have been influenced by power plays, such as the request by **DT** to provide support to a POM outside of the EPDO.

Observations of the EPDO, highlighted examples of the different power perspectives considered by Hardy (1995); Pettigrew (1985) and Mangham (1984); together with variations on these concepts. The frequent exchange of power between client and micro-consultants, as noted by Clegg et al (2006) was also observed, with an apparent influence on micro-consultant identity. Various types of dysfunctional power plays were also seen, involving micro-consultants, EPDO staff, and staff outside of the EPDO. Whilst authors with specific experience in power such as Klein (1999), Hardy (1995) and Clegg (1989) discuss power in organisations, they appear to assume that most power plays come from within the same organisation. However, power plays involving micro-consultants, EPDO staff and other suppliers outside of EPDO appeared to occur regularly. This possibility is suggested by authors discussing consultant-client relationships including Clark & Fincham (2002), Fincham (1999b) and Ashford (1998). Although, when considering power relationships with suppliers or partners; the focus tends to be on negotiating and influencing.

Influencing by micro-consultants to support decision making was frequently observed (Klein 1999), especially when the decisions were controversial or beyond the habitas of the EPDO staff (Mangham 1984). Micro-consultants also appeared to indirectly influence decisions through the use of carefully phrased communications, such as reports and other project documents (Dow & Taylor 2008), which undoubtedly contributed to EPDO staff decisions and opinions.

The micro-consultants within the EPDO environment were clearly involved in most of the micro-consultant-client interactions discussed in the literature by various authors including: relationships (Ford et al 2003 and Tonge 2003), power (Hardy 1995 and Clegg et al 2006), communications (Bovee & Thill 2007 and Guirdham 1999) and availability (Philips 2006). Numerous variations on the literature findings were also observed, including some which appeared to contradict the literature. In addition, there were also a few interactions which showed different emphasis to that of the literature, including: the extensive use of audio (telephone conferencing), meetings, juggling multiple currencies, co-ordinating meetings in different parts of Europe, as well as the amount and mechanisms of influencing undertaken by the micro-consultants.

Observations of the EPDO have shown how complex these interactions can be. Many of the interactions overlapped with each other, addressing the same elements in different ways over long periods of time. It is also apparent that many of these interactions were fragmentary, ambiguous and subject to various power plays. These aspects often required

the micro-consultants involved to provide support and advice based on incomplete information; an aspect not clearly covered by the current literature.

Interactions with EPDO client staff and partners form part of the experiences encountered during any assignment (Webb 2006). Some of the decisions made as a result of the interactions, such as changing the duration of an assignment, or assigning a new role to a micro-consultant will have a direct effect on the micro-consultant's identity. Others, such as understanding decision making processes or how to behave in certain conditions will have a more subtle effect on identity.

Thus it would appear that the interactions between micro-consultants and their clients have a significant effect on micro-consultants, such as myself, especially when working at the client's behest and with the interactions often subject to their identity wishes. So, if a micro-consultant is embedded with a client, almost every encounter with the client will affect their identity in some way, directly or indirectly.

Most of the interactions that I was involved with have had an effect on my identity in some way. In certain cases, encounters with different people may have been influential; in others the methods and circumstances may have been the influence. For example, the discussions I had concerning project management qualifications enabled me to review the different types, whilst reminding me of the need for experience as well; undoubtedly the discussions also influenced the CfE. This event and related ones also allowed me to promote and reinforce my identity as a micro-consultant project specialist during the

assignment. However, whilst on the EPDO assignment, there may have been limited opportunities to promote my own identities.

7.4 How can Micro-Consultant Identity Manifest Itself?

This research question explores the ways in which the identities of an individual micro-consultant can be seen during assignments. As previously considered, the Section has been broken down into the three distinct identity characteristics; self, group and organisation, as discussed in Chapter 4. Initially, the findings based around observations of self or personal or individual identity of micro-consultants working within the EPDO project environment are explored.

For a micro-consultant on embedded assignments, such as myself, personal identity usually refers to the personality or individual image that they promote to clients and contacts as consultants (Hogg & Terry 2002). This can relate to their skills, knowledge and experiences (Woodward 2002), as well as their lifestyle and relevant elements of their social identities (Fiske & Taylor 1991). Whilst the focus of this practitioner experience is on the professional or working identity of micro-consultants, inevitably some aspects of their social identities, were revealed in the observations (Woodward 2002), although these have been minimised in this exploration of the findings.

Organisation identity refers to the unique characteristics of a structured group (Clark & Chandler 1994) which may be an organisation in its own right (Hatch & Schultz 2004), or it may be a formalised sub-group within a parent organisation (Meleware & Jenkins 2002). The EPDO was a formalised sub-group; in addition, there were also other clear sub-groups within EPDO, such as the project teams. All of which exhibited many of the characteristics discussed in the literature.

In many cases, the regulations, rituals and policies of EPDO and the parent company actively suppressed the promotion of individual identity; for example through requiring all users of communications to use the company code of conduct. All of which were designed to ensure micro-consultants, such as myself, conformed to the requirements of the organisation; as considered by Alvesson & Willmott (2002). If a micro-consultant did not abide to the identity requirements of the EPDO, this was viewed as a flaw in their expected identity, with persistent non-conformance seen as resistance; an aspect which has been discussed by Jermier et al (1994); Fleming & Spicer (2007) and Hardy (1995).

Clear allegiances to the identities of groups were also shown by the micro-consultants involved with the EPDO; these could be towards the whole EPDO, a specific programme or project team, as well as a department or section; as discussed by George (1990); Read (2001) and Swann et al (2004). Likewise the ability for the group to alienate outsiders was also shown, such as when the PAM was alienated during a review meeting, as suggested by Alvesson & Willmott (2002). In addition, the ability for EPDO staff to exclude micro-consultants when appropriate was clearly exhibited by the ‘staff only’

driver training incident, aspects discussed by Alvesson & Willmott (2002); Fleming & Spicer (2007) and Hardy (1995).

Organisation identity can be promoted through regulations (Hatch Schultz 2004), branding (Whetten & Godfrey 1998), and narratives (O'Conner 2000); with all involved expected to comply with the identity requirements. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 6, the EPDO used a variety of methods to promote and reinforce the company identity to staff, micro-consultants and other stakeholders s; as suggested by Hatch & Schultz (2004) and Clark (1995). These methods included communications guidelines, meeting rituals and travel restrictions all of which were expected to be used and promoted by staff and stakeholders alike, as seen by Bovee & Thill (2007); Illia & Lurati 2006) and Clegg et al (2006).

It would therefore appear that assignments provide limited opportunities for individual micro-consultants, such as myself, to promote their own identity. Within the EPDO the need to use the established standards, processes and systems, with their associated branding and identity characteristics, effectively suppressed individual identity, and that of micro-consultants practices. Occasionally identity differences could be reinforced by the client organisation, such as the provision of training, or by the micro-consultant when investigating supplier problems. Sometimes, these enforced differences could result in identity related dilemmas and concerns for the micro-consultants involved.

7.5 What Kind of Identity Dilemmas Face a Micro-Consultant?

This research question provides insights as to whether there are significant dilemmas, contradictions and ambiguities facing micro-consultants which relate to aspects of their working identity. As discussed in Sections 3.9 and 4.5, micro-consultants could encounter a wide variety of identity related contradictions and dilemmas during assignments. These may be concerned with: consultancy practices, client decisions, the uncertainty of projects, maintaining independence, reputation, building and maintaining relationships and obtaining other assignments; which have been used as common themes in this Section. In addition, micro-consultants need to maintain their own consultancy practice as well as their own external support networks.

Some of the possible effects of embedding micro-consultants are inferred by Buono & Poulfelt (2009), Ford et al (2003) and Philips (2006); although they emphasise the importance of supporting consultancy practices and the client, rather than the consequences of their neglect. For myself, this lack of ability to maintain my own consultancy practice suppressed part of my working identity, affecting my ability to provide consultancy to clients other than EPDO, losing work and possibly reputation, an aspect discussed by Brown (2007). The difficulties encountered in promoting my practice whilst embedded with a single client may also have an effect on my ability to remain independent and objective (Phillips 2006).

Within EPDO, identity related divisions between clients and micro-consultants could sometimes be enforced, as highlighted by Alvesson & Willmott (2002). Requirements, rituals and guidelines enforced the EPDO identity upon all workers, as discussed by Hatch & Schultz (2004) and Clark & Chandler (1994). The need to conform to the EPDO identity was often reinforced by the behaviour of sub-groups such as the project teams (George 1990). All of which may be intended to subsume the identity of individual micro-consultants (Read 2001), such as myself; making it difficult to maintain their independence causing uncertainty and confusion. However, it was occasionally possible to exercise independence of identity; when exploring sensitive problems with suppliers and in the development of documents. The need and ability for micro-consultants to maintain independence does not appear in the identity literature, except when considered to be resistance to the organisation or group identity (Fleming & Spicer 2007; Jermier et al 1994).

Discussions with some micro-consultants indicated that their equivalent hierarchical level was not appropriate to their expected duties. For EPDO micro-consultants, this usually manifested itself through difficulties in accessing some more senior EPDO staff, or the lack of suitable authorisation levels. These aspects are frequently considered in the organisation and human resources literature (see for example Cummins & Staw 1981; Lovelock 1993; Martin 2000). However, these usually refer to access and authorities from within a single organisation, rather than the more complex aspects of micro-consultant involvement. These aspects are occasionally touched upon by the more recent

consultancy based literature including Benjamin (2008); Frade & Darmon (2005); Philips (2006).

Apparent limits on hierarchical access appeared to cause dilemmas for micro-consultants, such as **DB** who felt the need to discuss issues with more senior managers. These aspects are considered in some of the organisation literature including Clark & Chandler (1994); Robins & Finley (2000) and Weick (1995). Dysfunctional power plays also occasionally prevented micro-consultants accessing more senior managers; aspects of which have been covered in the literature on power by Clegg et al (2006); Law (1986) and Klein (1999). But these often assume the power is based within a single part of a homogenous organisation; rather than mixed organisation groups such as EPDO, which included staff, suppliers and micro-consultants, each with differing hierarchical needs. These different requirements sometimes lead to uncertainty and confusion in related areas, such as identity.

The potential for identity conflicts and confusion has been discussed by Gergen (1984). The possibility of conflicts between the identity of the self and the group has also been noted by George (1990). These may be especially prominent when the requirements of the group appear to conflict with the social needs, ethics or lifestyle of the individual (Woodward 2002). This occasionally happened with the micro-consultants involved with EPDO, which sometimes resulted in their working from home for short periods. These aspects highlight one of the key underlying conflicts observed in the embedded micro-consultants studied; that of remaining independent and objective (Phillips 2006), whilst

having to subsume to the needs of their client (Alvesson & Willmott 2003). I have sometimes found the potential for this type of conflict to be reduced during short term assignments; or if the client (or assignment) is considered to be good and beneficial. However, for longer term assignments, such as EPDO, these restrictions on my independence and the need to use the client identity did cause frustration. The length of assignments, and associated identity restrictions, may conflict with my own identity needs and therefore be detrimental to my relationships with clients, ultimately affecting the longevity of some assignments. An aspect not covered in the current literature.

The potential for sub-groups to conflict with the main group, or organisation, has been seen by Castells (2004) as resistance identity, and noted as a characteristic of teams working together by Robbins & Finley (2002). Both of which could result divergences of identity, which may threaten the group. Authority or related actions can sometimes be used to ensure group cohesion and minimise any identity divergence in sub-groups residing wholly within the organisation (Clark & Chandler 1994). However these approaches may not be successful if the sub-groups provide specialist support to the organisation, such as accountants or project teams (Brown & Hesketh 2004). Likewise the approaches may not work if the sub-groups are outside of the direct control of the organisation (Huxham & Vangen 2005), such as supplier teams, or micro-consultants. In these instances more subtle means of control may be required, such as power plays, negotiation or motivation (McKenna & Maister 2002). As a micro-consultant, I sometimes found the threat of early termination of an assignment helped to ensure my compliance with organisation identity requirements. However, the threat of enforced

conformation could sometimes be mitigated by the client's need for my specialist skills to provide critical support and the counter threat of leaving prematurely (McKenna & Maister 2002). Although, persistent rebellion against the organisation identity would lead to deteriorating relationships and increased working difficulties which would be seen as resistance (Jermia et al 1994), requiring the client to make decisions which could effect the successes of the assignment.

Within the EPDO, there were many examples of when the micro-consultants were required to conform to the wishes of their client, even though the decisions sometimes appeared inappropriate, causing dilemmas and uncertainty. For example; the discussions that I had with FJ concerning Health Checks and the subsequent decisions made. Whilst these aspects are considered in the literature on consultancy (Lambert 1998; Philips 2006; and Fincham 1999b) and on partnering (Mathews 1999; Huxham & Vangen 2005; Rost 2006) they appear to be almost incidental and outside the main thrust of the literature. However it appears that client decisions could have a very significant effect on the identity of a micro-consultant, such as myself; especially when the decisions affected assignments or projects the micro-consultants were working on.

Uncertainty was a constant theme of some EPDO projects. Even key strategic projects could be placed on hold due to a stage review or re-organisation. Consequently some micro-consultant project managers always appeared to be unsure of the status of their projects, their continued involvement with the EPDO and therefore their identity within the group. These aspects are considered in the project management literature (TSO 2005;

DeWeaver & Gillespie 1997; PMI 2008), as well as the organisation change literature (Guowei 2007; Stensaker & Falkenberg 2007; Hayes 2006); they are also touched on in the consultancy literature (Goodman 2008; Biswas & Twitchell 2001; Lambert 1998).

Within the EPDO, the establishment and maintenance of good relationships appeared to be essential; helping to ensure open discussions, clarifying uncertainties and reducing micro-consultant dilemmas. The need to build and maintain appropriate relationships is covered in the literature on relationships (Fill & Fill 2004; Ford et al 2003; Williams 2003), as well as the consultancy literature (Benjamin 2008; Clark 1995). However, the impact of poor relationships does not appear to have been covered as much. An element was occasionally observed within the EPDO, apparently causing concerns and dilemmas for the micro-consultants involved. Although, some of the relationship and networking literature does provide indicators for recovering deteriorating relationships (Fill & Fill 2004; De Raffele & Hendricks 1998; Tonge 2003).

When assignments are offered by clients, there is often some initial confusion regarding the nature of the work involved or its true role (Clark & Fincham 2002). Early discussions may provide an indication of the work, and a role title. However, more detailed discussions may reveal ambiguities in the title or role description, which may entail a number of different roles (Fincham 1999b). In addition, the work itself may turn out to be quite different to that envisaged (Weiss 2003). This may be due to the results of an initial detailing exercise (Lambert 1998), the changing nature of projects (Knutson

2001), or the whim of the client (Hislop 2002). Any of which may have an effect on the micro-consultants behaviours and identities.

Many of these dilemmas and concerns are covered by the literature to some extent. Although, the literature seldom discusses them as a whole, preferring instead to treat them as individual entities. Whilst this approach allows them to be isolated and discussed, they can be seen as fragmented, contradictory and ambiguous; however, in practice many of the dilemmas could be interrelated with each other, as part of an assignment. The interrelationships, between the different dilemmas and their effects on each other are seldom discussed in the literature; yet there are clear overlaps between them, as seen in this research.

In addition, the literature suggests that these dilemmas are often encountered and resolved in a linear fashion; see for example Weiss (2001) and Phillips (2006). This research clearly shows that many of the dilemmas were encountered in parallel within the EPDO, often with significant overlaps. Some of them were encountered over a short space of time, perhaps a few days, providing increasing frustrations to the micro-consultants concerned. Many of them developed over a long period, sometimes becoming critical, otherwise remaining below the surface, until resolved. Once resolved similar dilemmas could be encountered in different situations later in the assignment, such as new projects; sometimes requiring similar approaches to resolve them. These aspects are only briefly covered in the literature.

Based on the observations and findings provided in this Section; it would appear that there are a variety of consultancy and organisation related uncertainties and dilemmas. Many of these are described by authors such as Clegg et al (1999); Cummins & Staw (1981); Alvesson (1993) and Fincham (1999a). Many of which were also encountered by the micro-consultants working with the EPDO; although, the circumstances, timing, details and effects of their use will remain unique to the EPDO. So, whilst the literature provides indications of the types of contradictions and dilemmas which can take place, they cannot predict the details for individual micro-consultants or their assignments, such as those working within the EPDO.

There appear to be many dilemmas and contradictions facing micro-consultants during and in between assignments; some of which could be overwhelming when first encountered. However, as a micro-consultant with some 30 years experience in the project management environment, I have experienced many of the concerns before, and am aware of others. Many of these have made me more aware of my own identity, changing it to become more resilient and flexible. Encountering these concerns previously has also provided knowledge, skills and experiences to manage and mitigate potential concerns. This has allowed me to develop a variety of approaches to help me cope with these uncertainties. These range from initial assessments of assignments; through maintaining situational awareness, preparing mitigation techniques to post assignment reviews. Where possible, I also develop an experience based habitas, allowing elements of my previous knowledge and skills to provide comfort and security during controversial assignments. All of which help me to understand and operate

successfully in the ever changing situations found on some assignments, such as the EPDO. These approaches also help me deal with the sudden change of perspective needed following completion of an assignment.

7.6 Conclusions on Research Objectives and Questions

The findings from the observations have been compared with related findings from the literature to illustrate similarities and differences between the observations and previously published materials. The significance of the key observations and identity aspects were also discussed. This Section aims to draw together overall conclusions from the research.

Clear allegiances to the identities of various groups were shown by the micro-consultants involved with the EPDO; these could be towards the whole EPDO, a specific programme or project team, as well as a department or section, as discussed by George (1990); Read (2001) and Swann et al (2004). Likewise the ability for the group to alienate outsiders was also seen in its attitude towards the PAM during a review meeting, an aspect considered by Tajfel & Robinson (1996). The need for micro-consultants to conform to the EPDO organisation identity through its standards and rituals was also illustrated; together with the ability for EPDO staff to exclude micro-consultants when appropriate, as considered by authors including Alvesson & Willmott (2002); Fleming & Spicer (2007) and Hardy (1995).

Many of these aspects may also have had a significant effect on the success of projects. EPDO projects which did not appear to have all team members working towards the success of the project may have caused the alienation of support teams, such as the BSG group or the commercial team. EPDO members not working together on a project may also prevent the team forming a common project identity (Webb 2006); which may also be detrimental to the success of the project. These aspects are seldom covered in the project management literature, but appear to have played a significant part in the success of some EPDO projects. An alternative may be to enforce a common identity on the team possibly through the use of rituals (Deal & Kennedy 2000), although these approaches may cause other dilemmas and tensions; an aspect which is also not considered in the project management literature to any depth.

In many cases, the regulations, rituals and policies of EPDO appear to have actively suppressed the promotion of individual identity; for example through requiring all users to follow the company communications codes of conduct. All of which ensured micro-consultants, such as myself, conformed to the requirements of the organisation; as discussed by Alvesson and Willmott (2003). If a micro-consultant did not adhere to the identity requirements of the EPDO, this was viewed as a flaw in their expected identity, with persistent non-conformance seen as resistance; an aspect which has been discussed by Jermier et al (1994); Fleming & Spicer (2007) and Hardy (1995).

Within the EPDO, initially there appeared to be few opportunities in the working environment for me to promote my own identity, or that of my practice. There were some opportunities at the start of an assignment and occasionally during meetings, when my specialist knowledge was sought; as suggested by Weiss (2003) and Phillips (2006). There were also a few occasions when I could exert my identity, when dealing surreptitiously with external suppliers, to gain covert information or resolve problems. Opportunities occasionally presented themselves when compiling documents or reports. However, in the liminal space outside of the working environment, there were many opportunities for me to promote my identities to EPDO staff and others; as seen by Czarniawska (2003) and Sturdy et al (2006).

Whilst working within the EPDO I was expected to consistently perform successfully within the working environment and to conform to its needs (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). To achieve this, I needed to be able to quickly adapt to working in this environment (Weiss 2003); even though there were unclear expectations, conflicting messages and fragmentary information; all of which provide an ambiguous and fragmented picture of events and their dependencies (Johnson 1992). In order to operate successfully in this environment, I needed to have a good awareness of my own abilities and limitations (Thatcher & Zhu 2006). I also needed to be able to successfully represent myself or my teams under a wide range of ever changing situations (Philips 2006). This suggests that I must have a strong sense of self identity; whilst knowing how I can adapt it to my client’s identity.

Identity concerns are perhaps more prominent when undertaking long term assignments for major organisations, such as that with the EPDO. This relationship with EPDO during the assignment appears to have been symbiotic, which was fragile and fraught with uncertainties, ambiguity and dilemmas, as discussed by Biswas & Twitchell (2001); Fincham 1999b and Werr & Styrhe (2003). Sometimes the interactions cause conflicts and uncertainty for me because I continually felt the need to conform to the identity of the EPDO organisation. However, the assignment with any client is finite. I therefore need to retain some aspects of my own identity for future assignments; exploiting the identity aspects of previous clients has limited value, sometimes appearing to limit my flexibility as a micro-consultant and therefore my potential for future assignments. Consequently, I need to be able to select the most appropriate parts of my identity to promote to potential clients which reflect my own abilities, rather than relying on the reputation of previous clients with whom I have been embedded. Being able to select appropriate parts of my identity to use during assignments provides another approach which I can use, alongside my skills, knowledge and experiences, when working in the fragmented and frequently paradoxical world of embedded micro-consultants.

Whilst embedded on the EPDO assignment, I appeared to face a series of paradoxes regarding the assignment. These included paradoxes related to success, flexibility, external knowledge and identity. An initial paradox concerned the duration of assignments.

If, as discussed previously, micro-consultant success can be measured by the longevity of an assignment, a successful micro-consultant may undertake an embedded assignment for many years, gaining knowledge and skills relating to the client organisation, its business sectors and operations. Paradoxically, once the assignment is completed, the micro-consultant may be considered as being too specialist in terms of the client organisation or skills, to work for other potential clients. This may require the micro-consultant to take time to re-train or re-invent aspects of themselves in order to obtain a new assignment. Therefore, there may be a hidden limit to the length of an assignment, beyond which there appears to be limited benefits with regard to the current knowledge, skills and identity.

Linked to the paradox of success is a paradox of the relationships I need to build and maintain. In order to operate as a successful micro-consultant, I need to establish good external support networks which will ensure that I am up to date with my skills and knowledge; as well as potentially providing sources of work. All of which takes time to establish and nurture. However, once I am on an embedded assignment, I am expected to focus on the needs of my client and build client based internal support networks. To achieve this, I need to reduce my contact with the external networks, potentially eroding them and losing access to a key source of knowledge. This paradox is reversed when I complete the assignment; I am usually expected to dismantle the client based support networks and need to rebuild my eroded external support networks, in order to obtain new knowledge and work.

In turn, this leads to a paradox of knowledge. As a micro-consultant, I am frequently engaged by my clients to provide external knowledge and perspectives. My new client usually expects me to use my previous experiences and knowledge of other organisations, their operations, approaches and identities to provide support. However, if I remain with my single client for long periods of time, I may lose aspects of my previous external awareness, knowledge and experiences of processes and concepts undertaken by other organisations; due the need to focus on the client's own operational approaches, and therefore identity.

This leads to a final paradox regarding identity. I am usually engaged as an independent micro-consultant by my clients who are aware of my professional knowledge, capabilities and experiences – my unique identity. As part of my assignment, I will usually be embedded with client staff, providing my services at a direct and intimate level. However, inevitably part of the embedding process requires me to utilise the tools, processes and techniques of the client organisation – their identity. The need to use my client's identity often suppresses parts of my own unique professional identity, eroding aspects of my own identity over time; or requiring me to undertake different roles and identities for my client. All of which appears to contradict some of the reasons for my initial engagement.

In order to survive in this apparently paradoxical world of embedded micro-consultant assignments, I must rely on the knowledge and experiences gained from previous assignments. I also rely on the professional and personal skills that I have developed over

time. All of which provide the building blocks of my unique identity, which can be used as stable foundations on which to base my work as a micro-consultant. In turn, during controversial assignments, elements from these foundations can be used to develop a habitas, which provides essential comfort and security. This habitas can also be taken with me when venturing into the various unknowns of new embedded assignments.

During assignments, I use my skills knowledge and experiences to ensure that I remain adaptable, flexible and capable of working in many different arenas. I also use them to ensure that I can understand, interpret and adapt to difficult situations quickly, so that I am able to quickly provide suitable ideas and solutions. However, I am also expected to operate within the sometimes rigid operations, processes, hierarchies and identities of my client. This can reduce the options for solutions as well as limiting my knowledge, flexibility and creativity. In turn, these fuel the dilemmas, uncertainties and tensions that I face during these assignments; which need to be mitigated in some way.

Reflections on my previous experiences and identities also help me prepare for future assignments. These reflections also make me more aware future experiences and the potential within them for gaining knowledge and skills. The reflections also sometimes suggest opportunities to hone my skills and develop my identity further. In turn providing with more capabilities, which ensure I can operate successfully in the uncertain, complex, ambiguous and paradoxical environment of change management consultancy.

CHAPTER 8

REFLECTIONS & FURTHER STUDIES

8.1 Introduction

This Chapter provides reflections on the research described in this thesis. These personal reflections evaluate what has been learned about the research and what could have been done differently.

The reflections on the literature review some of the influences on the initial explorations; as well as considering how they may be undertaken in the future.

Reflections have been provided on the philosophical stances and the methodological approaches adopted, which have also helped me consider other perspectives. The reflections have also helped to reinforce the stances and methodological approaches taken, whilst improving my knowledge and awareness of these subjects.

Reflections on the practitioner experiences and the practicalities of the ethnography field study have provided me with insights into consultancy practices and research. These include how the research has changed my thinking and approach to consultancy as well as consideration of how my approach to undertaking research has changed.

A number of ways this research could be extended have also been considered. This includes using other research populations, different philosophical approaches and alternative research methods.

A summary at the end draws together the key findings from the practitioner experience and provides some overall conclusions regarding the research. Initially, some of the key elements of the research concerning the literature are considered.

8.2 Research Reflections

The literature review opened up a variety of new theories and concepts, many of which have been taken account of in the research. However, there have also been many, diversions, dead ends and potential study areas which have had to been excluded from the current study. Although, it may be appropriate for some these elements to be considered further in any future studies.

Undoubtedly, future literature based research will be undertaken differently. I will be able to immediately use some of the search techniques that took time to develop, such as the interactive bibliography. Indeed, it may be possible to refine these further, improving the search and assessment processes used. When writing up any research, I will also be able to benefit from the techniques developed when preparing and completing the research, probably expanding them further to take account of the new research knowledge.

The current study has assessed some of the vast range of literature and brought together a number of different, but interrelated areas, such as identity and management consultancy. The literature has also helped me to select appropriate philosophical stances which complemented my way of thinking and working, as well as helping to determine the methodology used in the research. The selected 'becoming' constructivist interpretive philosophical stance determined much of the course of this research. This stance immediately indicated that qualitative research methods would be needed; as well as helping to determine some of the data requirements and therefore limiting the areas to be researched. Whilst helping to determine the research area, the philosophical stance also placed boundaries around it; narrowing the research field and ensuring the focus on identity was maintained. Another stance, such as a more positivist one, with its quantitative data requirements would have set the research on a completely different course.

The selected ethnographic method of participant observation appears to be an appropriate approach for the type of research undertaken. This research method allowed me to remain an active participant in the workings of EPDO, whilst developing a comprehensive set of research materials. In addition, developing the ethnographic research as a micro-consultant provided a series of unique insights into the way micro-consultants work, which outsiders could not hope to match. Participant observation enabled the recording of micro-consultant and client interactions as they happened, undoubtedly increasing the richness of the data.

Other qualitative methods could also have been used, such as interviews and focus groups, which could have also provided relevant data for the study. However these methods would have required the research to have been undertaken outside of the everyday work environment, with the possibility of participant reflection retrospectively justifying and biasing discussions on previous events and actions. Whilst the ethnographic approach was able to also able to observe and highlight aspects of micro-consultants and identity not previously covered.

This type of detailed research has never been undertaken on micro-consultants in this type of environment. Because of this, at the start of the research, there were a significant number of options, of unknown factors and influences which would have an impact on the research. As such, other qualitative research methods could have been used such as action research or grounded theory. This would have allowed the research data to be collected and then analysed without recourse to predetermined theories or themes whilst

allowing some concepts to be tested. Whilst the current research had few pre-determined theories to follow, the theme of micro-consultant identity provided focus to the research and a clear set of boundaries.

Ethnographic research in the EPDO project environment proved to be more challenging than expected. Like most organisation change environments, the EPDO proved to be very fast moving and dynamic. Occasionally there would be obscure references to people, projects, problems and their solutions in the middle of discussions concerning another project. Because of this it was sometimes difficult to keep track of the people and projects involved. In addition to the number of projects discussed during the study, a wide range of supporting elements was also discussed. These elements could be referred to during the middle of a detailed discussion on specific project problem. Researching from an insider perspective within the organisation, allowed the significance of these ad hoc comments to be understood and placed in context.

Interspersed with discussions were the inevitable interactions between micro-consultants and their clients, and their identity. Because these interactions were often an integral part of the project related discussions, it was sometimes difficult for me to recognise identity elements in the exchanges, especially if the identity related, position or expectation evolved over a period of time. However, participant observation proved to be a good method for capturing these micro-consultant client interactions and tracing them over time.

The research also highlighted the significance of identity within the change management environment. Whether it is the dilemmas facing individual micro-consultants on assignment, the dynamics of different groups and their differing identity needs, or the imposition of organisation identity elements. The research also indicates that identity elements may have an influence on the success of organisation change projects.

The research also highlighted the importance of interactions between different groups working within the change management environment. The effects of many of the interaction themes considered in this thesis have previously been considered from the project management perspective, such as communications, influencing and power. The research also highlights other types of interaction which may also be significant in the change management environment.

Most of the interactions described in this thesis, and in the literature are shown as individual activities. In practice, these interactions often overlapped, or followed others in quick succession; intermingling with each other to provide a pattern of homogeneous interactions around a core topic or theme; whilst occasionally including unrelated fragments. Many of the interactions also developed over a long period of time. Generally, the integration and associations between the different interactions and the time spans are not discussed in the literature. This may be to ensure a focus on the different types of interactions, enabling the provision of clear descriptions and associated commentary. This can result in interactions appearing isolated, fragmented or truncated; although patterns may become apparent when different themes are considered or over longer

timescales. The use of ethnography helped to place these interactions in context within the EPDO research group and the wider organisation elements over an appropriate period of time.

The length of the research study of about eighteen months provided sufficient time for me to understand the ways in which the participants worked and the influences upon them. It also provided time to see the build up of various identity related interactions and positions. In addition, it was also clearly possible to see how identity changed over time. This was especially noticeable in micro-consultants who started an assignment during the course of the study and successfully embedded themselves.

A brief demographical study was undertaken towards the end of this study, with some surprising results. The demographic study concluded that those involved in the EPDO were overwhelmingly male; whilst this was suspected, the extent was unexpected. A further outcome of the demographic findings indicated that most participants were male in the 40-55 age range; which was expected. The inclusion of figures in this research suggest that quantitative elements can provide useful insights even in a qualitative research environment as discussed in this research.

The research has also made me aware of the variety of influences when working in this environment, as well as the fragmentary, ambiguous and contradictory nature of the interactions involved. In some ways it is difficult for me to function effectively in this

kind of environment, however, my previous experiences, together with the skills and knowledge I have gained, have enabled me to make a positive contribution in this field.

As a practicing project management consultant, I anticipate the need to regularly embed myself with clients during assignments; providing the benefits of my knowledge, skills and experiences to help ensure the success of my client's projects. As such there will be opportunities to use some of the lessons learnt and findings from this research in the practitioner arena. In addition, some of my future assignments may provide opportunities to develop this research, or even extend it into other areas. Combining future research with consultancy assignments would allow me to explore this area further.

In the exploration thus far, I have gained understanding and awareness of identity, what it means to myself and to others, as individuals and groups. The present research has helped me understand better how micro-consultants function and interact with their clients. The research has also enlightened me as to how complex these interactions can be. In part the complexity is provided through the specialist nature of the project management environment, and my work within this area. The research has also highlighted a number of areas which are not comprehensively covered in the literature including the identity uncertainties and dilemmas facing micro-consultants, the importance of micro-consultants external support networks and and the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of change management. All of which indicates that this thesis has provided a significant contribution to the theoretical and practical aspects relating to the micro-consultant identities in a change management environment.

8.3 Research Contribution

The research has made a significant contribution to the way in which I work in the change management environment. It has provided me with new insights into the way I and my peers work; helping me to understand some of the wider issues often involved. The research has also helped me to understand the importance of retaining my own identity as a micro-consultant whilst working on embedded assignments. The research has also helped me come to terms with some of the dilemmas and contradictions that I regularly face whilst working in this environment. In addition to helping me understand the arena in which I work; this research has provided significant contributions to both the academic literature.

The practitioner research concentrated on a few key identity related themes which were illustrated through the observations. In Chapter 7 (Discussion) the observed themes were compared with relevant parts of the literature. This approach provided a comparison between the two areas, highlighting the similarities and the differences. In many cases it was found that there was some correlation between the literature and the practitioner observations. However, there were a number of cases where there were significant differences. These included the variety of different types of coaching provided during the course of an assignment; the complexities of the relationships between the micro-consultants and their client staff.

The research also highlighted a number of other areas which have not been covered to any depth in the UK academic literature. These included an exploration of the ambiguities and dilemmas experienced when micro-consultants needed to present multiple identities to different groups at similar times. The significance of micro-consultants external support networks was discovered. The links between group identity and project success were also considered. The difficulties that may be encountered when controlling micro-consultants, or other specialist external groups, embedded with their client were also explored.

The research is also useful for practitioner micro-consultants and others involved with them. The research highlighted many of the identity related ambiguities, tensions and uncertainties that may be faced by micro-consultants operating in this environment. All of which could provide useful insights to aspiring and practicing micro-consultants and others working with them. The research also provided previously unseen insights into the way micro-consultants work and how they interact with their clients in the change management environment. The research also highlighted importance of the micro-consultant's external support network and the delicate balance that micro-consultants may need when juggling the needs of the client and the micro-consultant's support network; an aspect not previously considered. Many of these aspects could be candidates for further research.

8.4 Areas for Future Study

Within this thesis there is a rich set of data concerning a variety of areas involved with the theory and practical aspects of micro-consultant and client interactions; not just that of identity. It would be interesting to review this thesis from different perspectives and with different foci such as: project management, communications, power, relationship building and obtaining assignments. It may also be appropriate to extract relevant data from this study and merge it with any other similar studies in the area.

In addition to the above, research could be undertaken on micro-consultant and client interactions in areas other than the organisation change environment, such as marketing or manufacturing. Whilst maintaining the micro-consultant client interaction theme, the focus of the research could also be changed from that of identity to other areas touched upon during the research such as communications or power relationships. Aligned to these aspects it may also be appropriate to specifically look at consultant-client interactions with large consultancy houses or with internal consultants.

It may also be appropriate to study other groups of micro-consultants who are embedded with their clients, such as engineers or accountants, from identity perspectives. These could allow comparisons to be made with the current study.

This thesis has identified various micro-consultant client interactions, whilst providing appropriate groupings and commentary relating to the main theme of micro-consultant identity. It would be appropriate to provide further analysis of the findings from more theoretical perspectives such as Actor - Network theories or Complex Adaptive Systems theories, discussed in Chapter 3. It may also be appropriate to undertake similar research using other methodological approaches such as Action Research or Grounded Theory.

If undertaken, research such as the above could provide a wide range of complementary studies in different, but related, organisation and interaction environments. Altogether they would provide a comprehensive view of the interactions in this little researched area. A series of similar studies on interactions could be developed, which would complement the current focus on identity of this study. In addition, if various sets of related data were available, synthesising the complete data sets to provide a consolidated view would provide informative and may allow the development of theories relating to the way consultants and clients interact.

8.5 Concluding Reflections

This thesis has explored aspects of identity facing an independent micro-consultant during a long term change management assignment within a large multinational organisation. There is a large body of knowledge available many of these areas including management consultants, identity change management and multinational organisations.

However, there did not appear to be sufficient data on the specific areas that I was interested in – how the interactions of micro-consultants embedded with their client affects their identity. Consequently, there was a need to focus on some of the key areas of concern. This was achieved through the development of a primary research objective together with relevant sub-objectives, to ensure the key areas of micro-consultant identity interactions were maintained. These were later developed into a series of supporting research questions which helped to maintain the focus of the practitioner research. The research questions were shown in Figure 16.

In order to ensure a focus on these objectives and research questions, there was a need to provide some context on the management consultancy profession, including the number and types of consultant, their contribution to business and the ways in which they operate. This enabled the term micro-consultant to be defined and differentiated from larger consultancy houses. The characteristics of micro-consultants were also considered including their resilience and flexibility; as well as their vulnerabilities. The symbiotic relationship between micro-consultants and their clients was highlighted; being shown as providing skills, support and even recruitment possibilities.

It was also necessary to understand more about management consultants, their roles and capabilities. A number of key roles, and associated capabilities, were identified including: problem identification and resolution; providing knowledge, information, insight and advice; undertaking specialist support; educating, mentoring and tutoring client staff and assessing and implementing organisation change. The close links between roles and

identity were highlighted and how role and capability development can affect identity considered. During this part of the exploration, a number of ambiguities, dilemmas and contradictions which micro-consultants may face were highlighted.

With the research environment being based within the organisation change arena, it was necessary to explore this area in more detail; concentrating on the contribution of micro-consultants. The reasons and possibilities of organisation change provided context, with the key mechanisms of implementing change through the management of projects highlighted. It was shown that many micro-consultants are involved in change management, often playing leading roles. The potential effects of change management projects on clients and micro-consultants and their identities were also considered. It was noted that most change management projects do not achieve their objectives for a variety of reasons and that sometimes micro-consultants are blamed for their failure, which may affect their reputation.

An objective of the research was to explore the effects of micro-consultant and client interactions during assignments. This study highlighted a number of key interactions including: relationships, power, availability, communications and culture. Some of the mechanisms of these interactions were considered in detail and the identity related elements surfaced.

The exploration of the micro-consultant environment highlighted a wide variety of dilemmas and uncertainties. Whilst many of the concerns were shown as being similar to those facing larger consultancy houses, or other small businesses; there were concerns which appeared to be specific to micro-consultants including: Client practices and decisions, the uncertainty of projects and innovation, maintaining independence, obtaining other assignments. These aspects were moved into the identity arena as part of a more detailed exploration of identity and its components.

Initially, the concepts of identity and the individual were explored. It was found that almost every encounter in some way affects the identity of the individual, with the individual being the only person who knows the true extent of their own identity. The individual can usually select elements of their identity and choose which aspects to present to different groups. Every assignment will affect micro-consultants identity in some way, enhancing skills, knowledge and experiences. However, micro-consultants can usually choose which elements of their working identity to promote to clients and peer groups.

The effects of group identity on micro-consultants were also considered, together with its links with more formalised organisations. When working with clients, micro-consultants also need to conform to the identity needs of the group or organisation; otherwise they may face resentment and alienation, which may be detrimental to the assignment. However, the main purpose of micro-consultant involvement with client groups is often to change them in some way. However, the process of changing the group habitas may

also cause resentment. Whilst the micro-consultant work may focus on changing the identity of the group, the group will also influence the identity of the micro-consultant.

The exploration of aspects of identity which may concern micro-consultants highlighted a number of concerns and dilemmas. Whilst many of the concerns were seen to be similar to those facing larger consultancy houses, or other small businesses; there were concerns which appeared to be specific to micro-consultants including: the legitimisation of their own identity during assignments; their reputation; their skills and experiences; promotion of themselves and their practice.

In parallel with the literature review, a research programme was developed. There was a need for the methodological approach to be compatible with the needs of the research and its objectives, as well as my own interpretive constructivist philosophical stance. This led to the selection of qualitative approaches for the research.

Ethnographic research was selected as the most appropriate research technique, with participant observation giving intimate insights into the way the EPDO group worked, from an insider perspective. The ethnographic study of the intricacies of the EPDO environment remained aligned to the research objective and questions, whilst highlighting a number of common themes. This allowed the research findings to be grouped around the research questions and associated key themes. The research findings clearly showed the multiplicity of interactions involving micro-consultants and their clients. It was also

seen that many of these interactions can have a direct influence on the identity of micro-consultants.

The research findings aligned to research question on consultancy identity illustrated how EPDO required micro-consultants to conform to its organisation identity through the use of communications and rituals. These aspects were reinforced by the various sub-groups within EPDO, such as the project teams. This need to conform to the EPDO identity suppressed my own identity in many areas; although it was possible for me to assert my own identity occasionally.

The research findings aligned to the research question concerning micro-consultant dilemmas clearly illustrated many of the uncertainties, conflicts and contradictions facing micro-consultants in this environment. It was also shown that many of these dilemmas can have an effect on the identity of micro-consultants. I faced most of these dilemmas during the research period.

Exploring the research questions allowed a number of paradoxes to be exposed that appear to have had an effect on my identity during the EPDO assignment. These included paradoxes concerning the length of embedded assignments; knowledge awareness and transfer; relationships and identity.

The research findings also illustrated the complex, fragmented and fragile environment faced by micro-consultants within the EPDO. In turn, this helps to illustrate the need for

me to remain flexible and adaptable whilst on similar assignments. The findings also helped me to realise the depth of my identity and the confidence that I have in it. All of which will provide additional support when faced with difficult identity related situations in future assignments.

In order to survive in this apparently paradoxical world of embedded micro-consultant assignments; I must rely on the knowledge and experiences gained from previous assignments. I must also rely on the professional and personal skills that I have developed over time. All of which provide the building blocks of my unique identity. These building blocks of my identity can be used as stable foundations, helping to form a habitas when venturing into the various unknowns of new embedded assignments.

The research has also shown how much I need to use my skills, knowledge and experiences to ensure that I remain adaptable, flexible and capable of working in many different arenas. The research has also shown how this assignment has contributed to providing new experiences and opportunities to hone my skills and develop my identity; providing additional capabilities to ensure I can operate successfully in this uncertain environment.

The research has provided a number of insights into micro-consultants and their environment, as well as the identity arena. These insights have also helped me to understand the ways micro-consultants interact with their clients and the effects they have on my working identity. Overall, it would appear that this research has made substantial

contributions to this area; helping me to understand the complexities relating to working in this environment. The research has also provided further insights and understanding regarding the extent to which, the type of assignments undertaken and the way I operate during them is intertwined with my identity and its development.

The research has reinforced many areas previously discussed in the literature concerning consultants, their operations, interactions and identity; as well as discovering a number of variations and other elements which may also need to be considered when exploring this arena. The research has also explored some areas of micro-consultant work and identity focussed interactions not previously considered in the available literature; as well as expanding some areas not covered in depth. Consequently, the insights provided into the micro-consultant environment discussed in this research can be considered to have made a substantial contribution to the academic literature.

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