



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research



What creates a collaboration-level identity?

Christina Öberg

Örebro University, School of Business, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 July 2015

Received in revised form 15 February 2016

Accepted 22 February 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Collaboration

Identity

Perception

Stakeholder

ABSTRACT

Collaborations of different sorts have increased in importance. In order to make parties work better together and promote the collaboration to others, the development of a shared collaboration-level identity may prove important, but company-level identities may challenge such developments. Identities here reflect shared values for collective entities. This paper sets to explain the establishment of collaboration-level identities through asking what explains whether the collaborating parties and parties external to the collaboration perceive the collaboration as sharing an identity. The study points to how pre-collaboration history reduces the likelihood for collaborating parties and external parties to perceive a collaboration-level identity, and how the more formalized the collaboration, the more probable that parties perceive a shared collaboration-level identity. External parties' perception is dependent on the collaborating parties' representation. The paper contributes to the literature on identity through discussing the possible coexistence of different collective identities, their impact, and antecedents for separate identities.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In today's society, collaborations of different sorts have increased in importance (e.g. Jarvenpaa & Majchrzak, 2016; Schilling & Phelps, 2007; Stuart, 1998). Such collaborations may be more or less formalized, ranging from transaction-based collaborations to joint ventures with shared ownership (Bengtsson, Holmqvist, & Larsson, 1998), and the collaborations often involve parties that act on their own to different extents. While the fundamental reason for establishing collaborations is for parties to combine and complement resources and knowledge (e.g. Colombo, Grilli, & Piva, 2006; Das & Teng, 2000), the creation of a shared collaboration-level identity may prove important. Such a *collective* identity reflects the shared values of the collaboration's constituents, and their belief in themselves as an entity (cf. Whetten, 2006). The shared identity can help in the organizing of work and in communication to others (Beech & Huxham, 2003; Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005).

Identity on collaboration levels puts focus on the possible coexistence of company- and collaboration-level identities, the collaboration's impact on the collaborating companies' identities, and vice versa, as well as whether and how parties external to the collaboration (that is, business partners to the collaboration or the companies constituting the collaboration) perceive the collaboration's identity and/or the individual companies' identities. The purpose of this paper is to *explain the establishment of collaboration-level identities*. Focus is on how various collective identities affect one another, whether and how a collaboration-level identity takes form, whether and how collaborating and external parties perceive the collaboration as sharing an identity, and how such perception affects one another. The paper focuses on

identities among collaborations and companies in business-to-business settings.

Recent trends including, for instance, how self-employed individuals work in collaborations rather than companies (Öberg, 2015) while others complement the acting as a company with the participation in collaborations, provide relevance to study collaboration-level identities. The focus on how different collective identities (here: the company-level and collaboration-level identities) may affect one another, and further affect and be affected by how parties external to the collaboration perceive the companies or collaboration, produces new insights into research on identities. The paper contributes to previous research through discussing links among various collective identities and different parties' perceptions of such identities, and specifically does so through combining the company's and the collaboration's identities. Previous literature has focused on the complexity of shaping identities, and the distinction between self-understanding (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2009) and external parties' perception of a company (Soenen & Moingeon, 2002), but has rarely discussed the possible coexistence and impact of various collective identities in collaborations.

Following this introduction is a section that describes collaboration and identity. These areas create the theoretical point of departure for the paper, and a discussion combines them to debate identities of collaborations and how various identities may coexist and affect one another. The research method consists of a single case study, which describes companies and collaborations in the advertising sector. The method section presents the data collection and analysis. The next section reports on the case study, and the paper goes on to analyze the case in terms of how collaborating parties and external parties described the collaboration and the companies making up the

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.027>

0148-2963/© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Öberg, C., What creates a collaboration-level identity?, *Journal of Business Research* (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.027>

collaboration. The paper ends with conclusions, managerial implications, and ideas for further research.

2. Theoretical point of departure

2.1. Collaborations among companies

The literature has reported with an increased interest on companies that collaborate for various reasons and with different degrees of formalization and durability. A collaboration denotes how various parties (individuals, self-employed, or companies) come together and complement or share resources (e.g. Lin, Tsai, & Wu, 2014; Murphy, Perrot, & Rivera-Santos, 2012). Collaborations often aim to provide resources or knowledge not held by the company (Das & Teng, 2000) and are pursued to strengthen the individual companies' market positions and increase their competitiveness (Rosas, Macedo, & Camarinha-Matos, 2011; Shenkar & Reuer, 2006).

Contracts may underpin the collaboration, and the collaboration may take the form of transactional business arrangements or include shared ownership, for instance (Bengtsson et al., 1998). The literature thus discusses collaborations of different kinds in terms of their degree of *formalization*, with formalization referring to role divisions, shared organizational units, etc. among collaborating parties. Shared ownership implies a highly formalized collaboration, while more transaction-based collaborations have the advantage of being more flexible (Bengtsson et al., 1998). Expectedly, transaction-based collaborations may not be as long-lasting as collaborations based on shared ownership, thus linking the degree of formalization to the *durability* of the collaboration.

The collaboration may result in shared outputs, or be of a supportive kind. Strategic alliances and joint ventures suggest that companies shape shared units and possibly compete on the level of the alliance or joint venture, rather than on a company-to-company basis (Achrol & Kotler, 1999; Doz & Hamel, 1998; Gnyawali & Park, 2011; Gomes-Casseres, 1996), but the collaboration may also complement the company in how the company acts as an individual unit as well.

As noted in the recent literature, collaborating parties may not participate in the collaboration for the same reasons. Divergent logic and misalignment in interaction goals indicate how companies engage in collaborations while doing so with *different agendas*, and how such differences may negatively affect the collaboration (Corsaro & Snehota, 2011; Öberg & Shih, 2014). Such differences may affect preferences for the company or the collaboration among the collaborating parties. When connecting different agendas to durability and formalization of the collaboration, such differences may negatively affect the durability, while not necessarily result in less formalized collaborations. This last aspect follows from how different agendas may be

interchanged with control, while the differences may mean a lowered willingness to invest in the collaboration.

2.2. Identity

Identity has many different meanings and applications (see Table 1 for some examples), but some common denotations. Essentially, identity refers to specific characteristics that define the unit the identity represents, while distinguishing the unit from others (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Depending on whether the party perceiving the unit is part of the unit or an external party, identity creates a sense of “we” (or the self-reflexive “I”) or “them”. The sense of a shared “we” constitutes shared values of the unit (cf. culture) (Alvesson & Björkman, 1992; Whetten, 2006), while the outside-in perspective (“them”) focuses more on recognizable and separating features compared to others. Whichever perspective taken, others may well influence the identity, either in how the connections to others affect the self-perception, or how such connections affect external parties' perception of the unit (Anderson, Håkansson, & Johanson, 1994). This latter regard may include how the connection between the perceiving external party and the unit affects such perception.

Various research practices emphasize the self, others, and the influence of others to varying degrees. To exemplify, organizational identity, as referred to in organizational studies, depicts the culture of the company (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Ran & Golden, 2011) and focuses on self-perception. Organizational identity helps to guide individuals' behavior as part of an organization (Hsu & Elsbach, 2013). In marketing studies, brand identity describes the intended perception of a company or product (Kapferer, 2012; Melewar, Karaosmanoglu, & Paterson, 2005; Schau, Muñoz, & Arnould, 2009). Network identity in business marketing studies incorporates the influence of others, specifically in how self-perception and how others view the company result from its business connections (Anderson et al., 1994).

This paper departs from the view of identity as *collective*, and emphasizes how identity is made up of shared values and beliefs beyond the sum of its constituents' identities (Czarniawska, 1997; Hardy et al., 2005; Whetten, 2006). These values are central, enduring, and distinctive as described by Albert and Whetten (1985), which points out that the identity is not only what separates a party from others, but that identity also includes features that are important in the understanding of the party and that last over time. The *sharing* of values indicates how the identity is common among its constituents and agreed as such; that is, the constituents voluntarily commit to the identity. The paper grasps such collective identity on both the company and collaboration levels, and further reflects on influences from various

Table 1
Identity — various conceptualizations.

| Identity | Description | Selected sources |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| (Personal/individual) identity | The perception of the self as a private person. The identity may be influenced by connections to others and set out as how the self differs from others. | E.g., Woodward (1997) |
| Social identity | How a party is perceived or perceives itself based on its connection to others. The “I” as part of an organization, for instance. | E.g., Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Kleppesstö (1998) |
| Organizational identity | Culture or values of a company, as perceived by its members. | Alvesson and Björkman (1992) and Blau and Scott (1962) |
| Corporate identity | Deliberate presentation of the company to others, emphasizing distinct values associated with the company, often including also the business objectives, etc. | E.g., Balmer, 1998 |
| Brand identity | The intended perception of a company or brand. Intentions reflects the company's deliberate communication. | Kapferer (2012), Melewar et al. (2005), and Schau et al. (2009) |
| Network identity | How a party (company normally) is perceived based on its connections to others, and how such others perceive the party based on such connections. | Anderson et al., (1994), Bonner et al. (2005), and Öberg, Grundström, and Jönsson (2011) |
| Collective identity | Shared values among members of an organization or related, and their commitment to these values and the collective. | Cf. Czarniawska (1997), Hardy et al. (2005), and Whetten (2006) |
| Company identity | Here: Collective identity on the company level, including commitment to the company (rather than the collaboration). | |
| Collaboration-level identity | Here: Collective identity on the collaboration level, including commitment to the collaboration (rather than or in addition to the company). | |

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10492491>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10492491>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)