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Of “spectres” and “ghosts”: transitional and contradictory identifications with the founder’s spirit

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Abstract

In what way does a leader influence an organisation when traces of her/his presence remain after their departure? Our paper explores the persistent influence of the spirit of the absent founder on employee identification through the metaphors of the “spectre” and the “ghost”. From a single case study, we show that, after a first phase of identity construction and identification of members with the organizational identity established by the founder, his departure leads to changes still influenced by the persistence of the symbolic imprint of his spirit. In a second phase, this influence takes the form of a spectre that remains a malleable reference point and leads to a transitional identification, characterised by the shift between two organisational identities: from the declining old one to the burgeoning new. In a third phase,

this conversion is threatened by the symbolic return of the founder, as an imposing ghost, with the announcement of a new company strategy based on the original identity forged by the founder. This return will lead to a process of contradictory identification among employees now divided between two organisational identities. Our article contributes to the understanding of the persistence of a founder's influence by suggesting the existence of two different types of spirit with distinct organisational impacts: the spectre and the ghost. Further, we add to the identity literature by proposing the concepts of transitional and contradictory identification to describe the development of parallel processes of disidentification and identification. Finally, we contribute to research on organisational founders by showing that the return of their ghost may have a negative impact on organisations when employees wish to disengage from the past and engage with new alternative identities.

Key words

Identification, organisational ghosts, organisational founders, identity change, process study.

Introduction

In what way does a leader influence an organisation when hallmarks of his/her presence persist even after his departure? Management literature has shown an increasing interest in the lasting influence of founders on organisations (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Authors recognise that, even after his or her departure, a leader's legacy can still have a significant impact on the development of an organisation (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2016; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Maclean et al., 2014). Some authors have suggested that the influence exerted by these actors is particularly crucial when it comes to organisational identity, that is, the features that make an organisation distinctive (Gioia et al., 2010).

Research carried out into this phenomenon suggests an overall positive perception of the impact

founders continue to exert following their departure (Glynn, 2000; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999). This view suggests that leaders are able to use a founder's legacy strategically in order to reinforce the company vision (Wadhvani et al., 2018; Brunninge, 2009; Schultz & Hernes, 2013) or to reinforce the organisation's identity by mythologising the company's past (Maclean et al., 2014; Basque & Langley, 2018; Foroughi, 2020). However, we suggest that this positive and strategic vision may be linked to the fact that this literature generally relies on a version of organisational identity that is constructed by current leaders (Basque & Langley, 2018; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011).

The impact of a founder's legacy is, though, less frequently examined from the perspective of employees (Foroughi, 2020), particularly in terms of how they (employees) adhere to organisational identity (Nelson, 2003). It is known that this identification process determines employees' symbolic attachment to their company and their feeling of belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chédotel, 2004; Dameron, 2004). Yet the literature on the subject, while extensive on the motivations and variants of the phenomenon (Elsbach, 1999; Dukerich et al., 2002; Cardador & Pratt, 2006), is generally silent on the process of identification with company heritage (Eury et al., 2018), particularly with regard to identity linked to the spirit of an original founder. Thus, our research question is: how does a founder's spirit continue to influence the process of employee identification?

In order to explore this question, we refer to the growing literature on "organisational ghosts" (Orr, 2014; Pors et al., 2019; Pors, 2016). This "ghostly perspective" is particularly relevant for our research, firstly because it primarily focuses on the impact of the spirit of absent people (Gergen, 2001; Derrida, 1994). Secondly, research on the "ghostly" within organisations upholds an interpretative approach whereby actors' practices are influenced by their relationships with absent presences (Pors, 2016; Gergen, 2001). Finally, according to some researchers, leaders, acting both as those who haunt and as those who are haunted, are key to

ghostly practices (Orr, 2014).

We analysed the phenomenon of identification with the founders' spirit by carrying out a qualitative study at an international consultancy and training firm known for the legacy of excellence developed by its founder. His departure led to identity changes, which are still influenced by his symbolic traces. Our analysis shows that the company underwent three phases of identity development linked to changes in governance, in which various manifestations of the founder's spirit – as a “spectre” and as a “ghost” – had distinct impacts on employees' identification processes.

During the first phase (the “creation phase”), the company founder created an unequivocal identity based on values of excellence and “straight jacket” practices that encouraged a uniform employee identification based on pride and prestige. In the second phase (the “transition phase”), characterised by the sale of the company and the departure of its founder, a process of transition from the original rigid identity toward new, caring values and flexible practices began. This shift led to a transition in employee identification defined by a move away from attachment to the old vanishing organisational identity toward the new emerging identity. During this time, the founder was an absent-present point of reference that manifested as a malleable spectre. Finally, during the third phase (the “tension phase”), characterised by an employee buy-out of the company, a new strategy was put forward based on the identity of the original founder now reappearing as an imposing ghost. This reappearance caused identity tensions that manifested as a contradictory identification characterised by a split in employees' attachment between different sources connected to either the revived founder's identity or the more recent flexible identity.

Our article contributes to identification literature, to recent research on ghosts in organisation studies, and to founders' legacy research. First, we add to the understanding of the persistence

of the influence of founders by proposing different manifestations of the spirit that have specific influences on the organisation. Our case suggests that a founder's spirit can appear as a "spectre" that acts either as a flexible identity reference for employees or as a "ghost" that imposes its way of being on employees.

We further add to the identification literature by exploring the effect of multiple and changing sources of identity. In our study, various manifestations of the founder's spirit provoked transitional and contradictory identification processes that were characterised by the simultaneous and parallel presence of disidentification and identification dynamics.

Finally, we propose a new perspective on identity inheritance in which the return of the founder's ghost can have a negative impact on employees who wish to free themselves from the past and connect to new alternatives identities.

Organisational identification and founders' ghosts

The construction of organisational identity is seen as an important process that defines a company's characteristics and distinguishes it from its competitors (Gioia et al., 2010). Many studies suggest that the founder's contribution is a central element to this identity creation (Blombäck & Brunninge, 2016; Jaskiewicz et al., 2015; Maclean et al., 2014) because he or she creates the company's fundamental core values and practices (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, more recent research has focused on the impact founders exert even after their departure (Glynn, 2000; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999; Basque & Langley, 2018).

This perspective is associated with research centred on the "historic turn" (Wadhwani et al., 2018), which argues that the past is a strategic resource in the construction of organisational identity (Brunninge, 2009; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). The impact of the past in transformation

processes is essential when it comes to the values and practices that have existed since the company's foundation (Maclean et al., 2014), particularly with regard to the influence of the founder (Basque & Langley, 2018; Foroughi, 2020). Some studies suggest that the influence of founders may guide the strategic choices of future leaders (Gioia et al., 2013), even after the departure of the former (i.e., founders). The referential importance of this organisational legacy (Orr, 2014) appears even when leaders want to justify major transformations within the company.

The internal aspects of this phenomenon, however, are less studied, particularly with regard to the symbolic impact of the founder on organisation members (Foroughi, 2020). Often focused on leaders, the literature (Maclean et al., 2014; Basque & Langley, 2018) highlights the strategic opportunities to accentuate mythologised aspects of an organisation's heritage. However, this rather positive view of the persistence of the past (Glynn, 2000; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999) does not take account of the influence of absent leaders on the process of employee identification and attachment to the organisational identity (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Ashforth, et al., 2008), which is deemed essential to employee commitment and guidance (Dukerich et al., 2002; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Employee identification and founder's legacy

Literature on organisational identification initially focused on the generally positive and stable ways in which individuals become attached to company values (Elsbach, 1999). Identification is based on different sources of motivation such as security and comfort, perceived status gain, improved self-esteem, and pride in membership (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Cardador & Pratt, 2006). However, recent research has developed a more complex and dynamic view of this identity relationship (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Albu, 2018).

Two elements seem to be central to this approach: the realisation that identification processes may lead to different results; and the investigation of the impact of multiple identities.

On the one hand, some authors suggest that employees may maintain more ambiguous or negative symbolic relationships with their organisation (Elsbach, 1999). Thus, many researchers (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) have explored mechanisms of disidentification, ambivalent identification and neutral identification. These mechanisms respectively represent the disaffection with or denial of organisational identity by individuals, the parallel existence of positive and negative views, and employee indifference (Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

While these studies offer a more nuanced view of the identity relationship between the individual and the organisation, where the possibility of identification failure is taken into account (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004), they nevertheless initially assume a singular organisational identity (Sillince & Brown, 2009). More recently, though, researchers have suggested studying the impact of multiple identities on members' symbolic attachment (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; MacLean & Webber, 2015).

These multiple identification processes are linked to the various internal affiliations of employees, whether to the team, the department or the profession (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Further, research also suggests external sources of identification such as professional associations or trade unions (Hillman et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2006). Finally, authors also refer to distinct symbolic sources of identification within hybrid organisations (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; MacLean & Webber, 2015).

Nevertheless, although the literature on this subject offers a thorough examination of the motivations behind, and variations of, this phenomenon (Elsbach, 1999; Dukerich et al., 2002), it generally does not address the process of identification with a legacy (Eury et al., 2018) or

with identity linked to an absent founder. One important exception is the research carried out by Eury and her colleagues (2018) who bring the role of temporality in identification processes to the fore and suggest the concept of “legacy identification” in which individuals maintain an attachment to an organisation’s former identity. Through their contribution, Eury and her colleagues (2018) open a space for the idea, still underdeveloped in the literature, that identification is not necessarily stable and that there is, therefore, a need to examine its variation over time. In fact, while the temporal perspective of organisational identity is well established in the literature (Schultz & Hernes, 2013; Gioia et al., 2013), including in relation to founders (Phillips & Kim, 2009), identification is generally seen as a “state” rather than a “process” (Cheney, 2009). Thus, in considering the effect on identity of a founder’s departure, it is important to question the impact of his or her absent presence on the employee identification process.

Identifying with a ghost

Identification literature tends to agree on the importance of the influence of leaders, including founders, on employee attachment to an organisation (Phillips & Kim, 2009). However, research is generally limited when it comes to the analysis of the effect of the departure of individuals with high symbolic impact. In order to address this gap and, therefore, to understand how employee attachment to this absent identity source develops, we draw on the growing body of literature on organisational ghosts.

Studies on organisational ghosts seek to draw attention to the importance of ghostly elements within organisations (Orr, 2014; Pors et al., 2019; Pors, 2016). This emerging field is largely inspired by Derrida’s (1994) analysis of the persistence of the “spectre of Marx” as well as by Gergen’s (2001) concept of ghost relationships. These authors suggest that spectres and ghosts

have a social characteristic in that, in all their relationships, individuals bring elements of the past that visit, haunt and are remembered by us.

According to these authors, two elements seem to emerge from studies on organisational ghosts.

On the one hand, there is an interest in the impact of the persistence of the past on organisations, that is, how history can come back to haunt company activities (Orr, 2014). For example, Pors and her colleagues (2019) argue that spirits make it possible to transcend time and restore forgotten memories in order to disrupt present organisational order. From this perspective, researchers suggest that it is important to understand how the past resurfaces, whether we like it or not (Pors, 2016). Pors and her colleagues (2019) have been particularly interested in organisational phenomena that are disrupted by ghostly events and incidents, while Gabriel's (2012) analysis of the organisational miasma also refers to these poorly exorcised aspects of companies that continue to haunt them.

On the other hand, considering the often-undesirable aspects of these memories, authors often examine the activities that control this legacy (Orr, 2014). In essence, they pose the question of "how do organizations deal with and organize things like ideas, structures or human beings that have become disposable but continue to linger?" (Pors et al., 2019, p. 12). Moreover, these authors stress the importance of understanding the political impact that practices of remembering and forgetting have on organisations (Gabriel, 2012).

More specifically, Orr (2014) has focused on the relationship between ghosts and leadership in organisations. Encompassing the two approaches mentioned above, the author suggests that leaders are often haunted by the company's past and legacy, while at the same time they are also important haunters themselves. In this way, they are key actors in that liminal space where relationships between the past, present and future are negotiated. Above all, Orr (2014) suggests paying particular attention to "what cracks are exposed, or what is unsettled, when people give

ghosts a voice and take that voice seriously, and [...] how ghosts mediate the action and the ethical choices of leaders” (p. 1045).

However, whereas Orr (2014) asks us to pay attention to ghosts of former leaders, we know little about the different forms this legacy takes. In fact, the writings inspired by the work of Derrida (Paoletti, 2016; Davis, 2005; Petitdemandge, 2007) suggest that the spirit can take different forms. According to Paoletti (2016, p. 71), “it is because more than one spirit exists, that Jacques Derrida tasks philosophers to continually call forward the ghosts, spectres and spirits that haunt.”

Petitdemandge (2007) argues that Derrida saw the spectre as the manifestation of a absent-present spirit. In Derrida’s view (1994, p. 69), the spectre haunts the new dominant rhetoric that aims to sweep away the past: “Hegemony always organises repression that substantiates a haunting. A haunting belongs to the structure of any hegemony.” Within such an interaction, the spectre thereby creates a space for the creation of new meanings (Paoletti, 2016). In contrast, Davis (2005) relies on the analysis of Abraham and Torok (1978) who suggest that the ghosts brings the secrets of the past to confront the present. According to Davis, spectres and ghosts differ essentially because “[ghosts] lie about the past whilst spectres gesture towards a still unformulated future” (2005, p. 379).

These spectral and ghostly variations, as well as the various effects of hauntings on an organisation and its employees, have been little explored in organisational research. More specifically, we do not know much about the different ways in which employees deal with the “dust” that these spirits raise. Scholars argue that we keep our relationships with our past; however, less has been said about the impact of these relationships on the attachment of employees to organisations. We therefore ask the question: how does the founder’s spirit continue to influence the employees’ identification process? We examine this phenomenon

through a case study of a training company that was influenced by the spectre of its absent-present founder and came to be haunted by his ghost.

Research context

Company C, created in 1971 by Eric C, is a Swiss company which specialises in coaching and training. It is established in 29 countries, employs 170 consultants and provides training in 21 foreign languages. Initially based in Western Europe, the company continues to expand across the globe. It offers over 300 training modules in sales, management, leadership and change management.

Training aims to develop the behavioural competencies of managers and sales staff. Consultants in the firm have a dual role: they are responsible for developing sales and for running training for clients. The company's goal is to promote behavioural change and encourage employee commitment. The integration process for consultants includes 50 days of training during which they are encouraged to adopt the company's best practices. Consultants' skills are reinforced throughout their career at the company university, which operates twice a year.

In 2010, the company contacted us to conduct some research into the company's identity. The objective was to identify the distinctive attributes of the company that were most likely to have transcended the temporary fluctuations of the business environment (i.e., since the company was created). After a few meetings, we were able to identify the importance of the now absent founder's presence on the company. The impact of both the founder and the identity he first created convinced us that this was an ideal case study (Yin, 1994) for exploring the dynamics of the influence of an organisational legacy on employees. Indeed, this case presents the history of a company whose development has been marked by both the influence of its founder and changes in governance, offering a research setting that is well suited to a processual analysis.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is based on a collaborative research approach that involves two parties (academic and professional) working together, with the shared goal of solving a problem and increasing understanding (Shani et al., 2007). The advantage of collaborative research lies in the ease of access to the research environment and the ability to “speak” to practitioners in so far as the study is co-constructed with them (Bartunek, 2007). The project team was made up of five members: three researchers and two consultants from the company. Collaboration was limited to the data collection stage; this facilitated our access to the field and created an atmosphere of trust during interviews. We geared our study toward the internal manifestations of organisational identity. The study concluded with a presentation of preliminary findings to the company’s executive committee, and a presentation during a team-building day that took place eleven months after the beginning of the project.

Data collection

The research drew on both primary and secondary data in the form of interviews and documentary analysis.

First, we carried out 38 semi-structured interviews with internal stakeholders. Our collaborative approach made it easier to identify and recruit participants as the meetings were organised by the company’s Marketing Director. The interview guide consisted of twenty questions exploring four themes: building trust, characteristics of organisational identity at Company C, the distinctive attributes of this organisational identity, and key events behind identity changes. These topics were inspired by the literature in the field, and, in a process typical of semi-structured interviews, the questions evolved over the course of our conversations while still remaining centred on elements of organisational identity.

Data collection took account of the diversity of the company's workforce (Figure 1, Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4). The goal was to gather a range of perspectives and interpretations of identity development within the organisation, and to triangulate these in order to reduce retrospective bias. The respondents were divided into three categories: first-generation employees who knew the founder (1971–1995), second-generation employees who joined the company shortly after the founder's departure (1995–2008), and third-generation employees who joined the company more recently (2008–2011). The interviews, carried out in English and in French, lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. All interviews were audio-recorded and manually transcribed.

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

--- Insert Table 3 here ---

--- Insert Table 4 here ---

Second, we collected internal documents from the company: a report documenting the company's official history, the 2010–2012 business plan, and an email from a senior partner addressed to all employees. This email was carefully preserved by the Marketing Director and represented a key marker in the development of the company since the sender outlined a major identity change following the founder's departure. These documents allowed us to understand the organisation's history, and identify transition points – that is, discontinuities between relatively stable periods caused by a contextual change or the intervention of an actor (Langley, 1999) – mentioned by participants as the origins of identity changes, as well as periods in the history of the company during which employees' identification process developed.

The data collected enabled us to characterise the identity of the organisation and to present this to our company partners, who were satisfied with the initial results. This rich body of material allowed us to deepen our understanding of the company's identity history. In fact, as explained below, our in-depth analysis allowed us to study employees' identification processes and to discern the importance of the founder's spirit throughout the history of the company.

Data analysis

We undertook processual analysis in order to explore the changes in the company's identity since its creation. As pointed out by Langley (1999, p. 692), "process research is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way". It involves focusing on key events that have influenced the dynamic phenomenon being studied (Jarzabkowski et al., 2017) where contextual elements are essential (Yin, 1994). Our analysis was completed in three steps. These steps followed the precepts of process analysis (Langley, 1999): narrative analysis, temporal bracketing, and grounded theorising. During each of these stages, one of the researchers brought the outsider's perspective to ensure that the data analysis properly captured the experience of the respondents.

Step 1: Narrative analysis. This first step focused on data organisation prior to in-depth analysis. Here, we gathered together all the information on the company history drawn from both interviews and internal documents. The goal was to develop a narrative that would enable us to identify the key incidents that marked the development of the identity of the company and influenced the identification process from the perspective of the stakeholders involved.

This data organisation step was essential to subsequent stages of the analysis. Moreover, narrative analysis enabled us to recount a richer story of the organisation's identity development. This strategy was particularly important to our micro-organisational case study, which sought to be faithful to the experiences and viewpoints of the stakeholders involved in

the phenomenon.

Step 2: Temporal bracketing. Having established the history of the company's identity development, we sought to identify chronologically significant events that marked important milestones in this process. The aim was to enable comparison of similar processes from a dialogical perspective through the "constitution of comparative units of analysis for the exploration and replication of theoretical ideas" (Langley, 1999, p. 703). This strategy makes it possible to understand the interaction between individuals' actions and certain "structuring" organisational elements (Jarzabkowski et al., 2017), such as identity.

We cross-referenced the key events mentioned in internal documents with the qualitative data from the interviews to identify those that had influenced the organisation's identity. We were able to determine that the underlying mechanism behind the observed identity changes was that of governance change and, in particular, change in the company's leaders who have consistently promoted new values and practices. Three key years – 1971, 1995 and 2008 – were identified linked to critical incidents that encouraged significant identity transitions, through the arrival of new leaders (as a result of the sale of the company), a major change in governance arrangements (as a result of an employee buy-out, EBO), and the development of a new company strategy referred to as "first-class" by the company.

These dates delineate three significant periods in the company's history during which identity change took place. During the next stage of the analysis, we defined stakeholder identity representations across these three periods. Thus, we differentiated periods (or phases) of organisational identity creation, transition and tension.

Step 3: Grounded theorising. We followed the tenets of processual analysis described by Langley (1999), and used the inductive approach of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This analytical perspective is particularly suited "to explor[ing] the interpretations and emotions

of different individuals or groups living through the same processes” (Langley, 1999, p. 700). As shown below, our initial analysis focused on identity change, and evolved according to the interaction between theory and data.

After many rounds of coding, we found identity values and practices that had evolved through the different periods, and identity tensions that were particularly acute during the third period. Further, elements of the identification process emerged from stakeholders’ discourse, particularly in relation to their descriptions of socialisation practices within the company, and their motivations to adhere to these. As recommended by the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), we performed an iterative analysis between data and theory. Although these elements were identified from our data using an inductive approach, they echo those found in identity studies (Gioia et al., 2010) and in the identification literature (Cardador & Pratt, 2006).

Throughout our analysis, the importance of the founder as a key actor in the construction of organisational identity and in the employee identification process was reinforced, despite the departure of the founder during the evolution of the company. It was at this point that the influence of the spirit emerged as a “sensitising concept” in identity development. In order to understand the role of ghosts, we used the “ghost sighting” method described by Pors and colleagues (2019). This method invites us to pay attention, when our participants are talking, to the traditions and practices of past actors (Orr, 2014) in order to explore these “absent presences” and their impact on the organisation (Pors et al., 2019). These elements enabled us to trace the founder’s influence as well as that of his spirit, through each of the phases identified (see Tables 5, 6 and 7), as explored in the next section.

Transitional and contradictory identifications: founder’s influence and identity change

The history of company C is marked by a series of events that led to a certain evolution of its identity and employee identification as a result of changes in governance. Our analysis enabled us to identify three significant periods. The first period is the “creation phase” during which the founder established the essential elements of organisational identity. The second period, the “transition phase”, characterised by the sale of the company and the founder’s departure, saw challenges to the identity legacy and opened a space for identity change. During the third period, the “tension phase”, marked by the employee buy-out, a new leadership team promoted the return of the original identity created by the founder. This evolution is shaped by identity changes and tensions influenced by the spirit of the founder who continued (and continues) to haunt the organisation in different ways to different employees.

Creation phase: Uniform identification with an unequivocal founder’s organisational identity

Established in 1971 by Eric C, company C offered sales and management training within a burgeoning Swiss market. Between 1990 and 1995, the company expanded and opened satellite offices worldwide. During this whole period, Eric C created a comprehensive methodology and approach to coaching. This approach was supported by the establishment of a company university that ensured consultants received centralised training, and by an annual ceremony, “the jubilee”, during which the most productive employees were recognised and rewarded. In addition, the founder created a research and development centre designed to develop new training materials.

Construction of an unequivocal organisational identity by the founder

During this phase, the founder Eric C created an unequivocal company identity based on three essential features: a “passion for people”, a focus on business profit, and a patriarchal model.

A corporate dress code called “the straight jacket” and an attitude that many considered arrogant supported, reinforced and expressed the organisational values which centred on excellence (Table 5a). During this time, the company stood out from the competition because of the quality of its offer, which was associated with a passion for developing human beings. In this vein, the company’s original purpose was to transform employee behaviour with a view to improving its performance.

---Insert Table 5a ---

We found that this passion for people was broadly geared toward performance. Long-standing employees who took part in the research recalled that the founder was a highly business-oriented entrepreneur – that is, he was extremely focused on the pursuit of maximum profit. Consequently, this value played a highly instrumental role with company staff and left a deep impression on consultants, with one first-generation top management employee commenting: “At the time, Eric C used to talk about disposable facilitators.”

According to comments made by participants, a form of patriarchal management was in place in the company. One second-generation employee recalled: “If we look at the company’s past before I joined, and the history of its origins, it was a business that was managed in a highly rigid and traditional way by Eric C himself.”

The founder designed an original training package that went beyond content. Consultants were an integral part of the training modules and were involved in creating value for the business. The founder developed training practices down to the last detail and codified the behaviour of training consultants to the extreme. A first-generation top manager described how “[i]f you looked at what was written in the script, [...] it was very clear almost to the minute what you had to do”. In this moulding of behaviour, the idea of the “straight jacket” was a key symbol.

In other words, Eric C expected his employees to follow certain behavioural norms, in terms of how they presented themselves, that went as far as the details of what employees wore.

One final element that emerged from our interviews is the degree of arrogance that characterised the founder's personality, which was diffused internally via the training practices and became part of the company identity:

“Because there are some people who say: ‘Oh yes, I took a training course at C fifteen years ago, it's the jacket button’ [...], when you're a boss and you're giving a presentation in front of your colleagues, the message you would get from Eric C was: ‘button up your jacket’ [...] Eric C, it's rigid, it's arrogant.” (First-generation employee.)

Uniform identification with the founder identity

This strong identity also involved uniform identification by employees. Interviews with employees highlighted three elements that motivated their compliance: their belief in the mission, a feeling of pride in working for the company, and the prestige it gave them. The corporate university, as a socialisation tool, disseminated these aspects of identity to employees (Table 5b).

--- Insert Table 5b here ---

Our interviews suggest, in fact, that employees identified completely with the company's mission and the founder's vision of human development potential. This commitment to the mission provided a sense of pride and prestige in their work. Employees were pleased to work for a company that was devoted to helping individuals develop their potential. One first-generation employee said: “After a few months, I felt at home and proud to be part of the company.” Moreover, according to another first-generation employee, employees identified

with the prestigious image that the founder's identity reflected back to them internally: "We felt like millionaires, sitting in helicopters, flying over the desert."

The training practices promoted by the corporate university aimed to enable employees to reproduce and internalise the founder's vision. The corporate university created by the founder became emblematic of these training practices, and these practices became the company's mark of distinction with its clients.

This first period (Figure 2) in the company's development bears the highly visible imprint of the founder, which produced an unequivocal identity with which recruited employees identified in a uniform way. However, this feeling of unity around the founding values did not last long. The sale of the company and the departure of its founder, Eric C, heralded a new era in which its original "corporate" identity would be challenged and employees would progressively identify with new values of flexibility and caring.

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

Transition phase: Weakening of the symbolic power of the absent founder, and transitional identification between identities

The transition phase began in 1995 when Eric C, founder and company owner, sold his shares to a Dutch group and left the company. This period was also marked by the 2001 economic crisis that led to the company laying off personnel and by the first employee buy-out in which the company broke away from its majority shareholders and offered purchase options to all its employees. The remaining shares were purchased by a venture capitalist.

Two significant organisational changes were implemented during this phase, introducing greater flexibility and employee participation, and replacing the rigid and patriarchal system

that existed during the earlier creation phase. Firstly, a team bonus scheme was implemented. Secondly, the organisation was restructured around transversal, autonomous and accountable teams in order to better meet the demand for international expansion.

Transition of identity away from the founder

During this second phase, we can see that the company's original identity began to change and, in particular, that certain core values softened (Table 6a). A passion for people remained at the heart of the identity, but the business focus gained a new perspective that was more flexible and open, and the original patriarchal structure became more of a caring "family". These differences were reflected in a more flexible dress code and a more humble attitude among employees.

--- Insert Table 6a here ---

However, changes in governance did not lead to change in the company's approach to the market. The company name and mission statement centred on behavioural change were maintained, preserving that part of the original identity. One first-generation employee stated that, following Eric C's departure, "the products haven't changed, the training, the belief in development".

Nevertheless, shortly after the sale, new leaders introduced a fresh internal vision full of new possibilities for employees, and initiated changes to the company identity. First, the purchase of the company and its financial valuation pushed the new leaders to reinforce the value of a business orientation that had greater emphasis on the continual and participative development of new procedures. The business invested in leadership tools and allocated budgets to

employees so that they could develop their own ideas, as recalled by one first-generation employee: “You come with an idea, we accept it, but we also give you the resources to make it happen.”

During this transition phase, the old codes of conduct, especially the norms of formal address and dress code began to be challenged and replaced by more flexible practices. In general, employees adopted and benefited from the leadership’s change of perspective, which seemed to be letting go of the austere framework established by the company’s founder. A first-generation employee recollected: “People in their forties took over [...]. We injected a bit of Latin spirit to something Germanic to make it a bit more fun.”

In 2001, the company prepared its first employee buy-out, and changes to company identity were pursued within a framework of “a velvet revolution” (an expression used in an internal document). The economic crisis encouraged company employees to thoroughly revisit certain values inherited from the founder: the patriarchal system disappeared in favour of a more caring family model, and behavioural norms continued to change. One manager, a second-generation employee, remembered how the recruiters presented the company when he was recruited in 2004: “Here, we’re a family.”

Equally, according to employees, the arrogance inherited from the founder becomes less prevalent and gave way to a more humble attitude. The 2001 economic crisis and the lay-offs that followed shattered the feeling of superiority imparted by the founder. One first-generation top manager suggested: “We’re a little bit more humble because we did go through the rough times.”

Transitional identification: the shift of employee attachment from the founder to the new identity

During this period of identity shift, we see that former employees progressively disidentified from the original identity characterised by “patriarchy”, “straight jacket”, and “arrogance”, and become attached to a new, more flexible and caring, identity (Table 6b). As a consequence, the socialisation tools remained similar to those of the previous phase, but changed in nature. In other words, the content of integration remained the same but there was now more openness to flexibility and adaptation of these elements in line with the needs of each employee and their activities.

--- Insert Table 6b here ---

Thus, leaders and first-generation employees felt more comfortable in attaching themselves to new values and gradually separating themselves from a culture of rigour and moulding of behaviour. One of the leaders (a first-generation employee, and top management member), who was originally very respectful of codes of conduct, now allowed employees some freedom despite the standards imposed by the company: “So, as long as I show that I know how the rules work and I show that I can comply with them I have all the freedom to do the rest of the stuff my way.”

During this phase, adherence to the mission of developing human potential remained a strong source of motivation for identification. However, other important elements were added. So, identification motivations are reinforced by the addition of greater attachment linked to the feeling of being part of a family, much to the surprise of first-generation employees:

“I still remember how five, six, seven years ago, we were at Leysin, there were social events on a Saturday night [...] everyone was chatting, dancing, and we took a step back, looked at one another and said: ‘It’s not possible, it’s not possible to have a such a great connection, and one that is so authentic on top of that.’” (First-generation employee.)

This second phase (Figure 3) involved a gradual shift to a new identity that moved away from the “corporate” dress code toward something more flexible and caring. This identity change called for a gradual disidentification from the inherited identity embodied by the founder, and an increasing identification with new values fostered by his successors. However, this transitional identification, which was established gradually around a new identity, would be disrupted by a return of the founder’s values and practices, supported by a new strategy brought in by a new leadership team, during a third phase of tension.

--- Insert Figure 3 here ---

Tension phase: Return of the founder’s values and practices, and contradictory identification with identities in tension

This phase of the company’s history started in 2008, and was marked by the economic crisis, which led to a 25 per cent cut to the workforce. The company recruited a Finance Director in the same year, and established a board of directors which included the Finance Director and two senior partners. This board of directors initiated a second employee buy-out to secure full ownership of the company by its employees, as well as full financial independence from the venture capitalist.

Then, in 2010, the new leaders announced a new “first-class strategy” that aimed to increase performance and boost the company’s image and reputation as an exceptional organisation. This strategy derived straight from Eric C’s legacy and sought to bring back the values and practices first implemented by the company’s founder. This effort, however, created a tension with the identity developed in the previous period and, consequently, led to a contradictory identification with two sources that divided the employees.

Return to original values and practices and emergence of identity tensions

During this period, there were tensions between the return of the original identity promoted by company leaders and the values developed in the previous stage (Table 7a). The emphasis placed by the leaders on the profitability of the enterprise was to the detriment of the participation of employees. Moreover, the return of a more formal structure conflicted with the benevolent family model. Finally, there were tensions between those who reaffirmed the straight jacket and arrogance inherited from the past and those who favoured flexibility in dress and humility.

--- Insert Table 7a here ---

During this phase, the leaders seem to have felt the need to reassert the founder's thinking in the development and implementation of the company's strategy. The founder had made the company profitable via a very business-oriented approach with a strong focus on profitability. The leaders remembered this ghost and sought to replicate previous success by following the founder's precepts – as one first-generation top manager said: “And that [the fact that Eric C was very business oriented], I think we kept it, and I hope we'll keep it now that we're owners.” However, the focus on profitability seems to have been to the detriment of the “passion for people” value. One second-generation company employee deplored the fact that financial pressure was relegating one of the founding values of the company's identity to the background: “Today we have more and more reporting with figures, demands for commercial performance, speeding up our deadlines, which does not allow a simple value [humanity] to be lived every day.”

The identity promoted by the new leadership team also signalled a return to a hierarchical

structure. Although different to the original patriarchal model, the leadership team re-established formal authority and central control of the business. In this way, they challenged the caring family model that characterised the organisational identity during the company's second phase. One first-generation top manager explained as follows: "We are ten years in [since 2001] and we are actually reaching a place where, in a sense, we're returning to a hierarchy that is contrary to the idea of what could simply have been one big family."

The identity change begun during the preceding phase, characterised by the previous leaders' willingness to allow employees some freedom over their actions, proved to be short-lived. Influenced by the new executive, the "straight jacket" once again became a powerful symbol of identity, and the way the suit is worn seems not to have fundamentally changed. One leader (a third-generation employee, and member of top management) who joined the company in 2008 stated: "But being new as a consultant [...] you come in, you get into that straight jacket or you're out."

Finally, the formulation of the new "first-class" strategy was closely associated with the original identity of the company and echoed the arrogance of the founder. This arrogance was difficult for employees to shake off because it was so closely linked to the company's prestige during the founder's time, and to its association with excellence. This return was not well received by a first-generation employee of the company who had been attached to the flexible and benevolent identity: "There is a kind of arrogance that remains from Eric C [...] If I were one of the bosses, I wouldn't write 'first class'."

Contradictory identification: a split between two organisational identities

During this period of tension, contradictory identification processes were apparent among the leaders and other staff members (Table 7b). Firstly, the vision of the leaders oscillated between the desire to remember the founder and the desire to free themselves from him. Secondly, while

most first-generation employees seemed nostalgic for the founding identity, second- and third-generation employees were opposed to it because it threatened to erase the flexible and caring identity that had superseded it.

--- Insert Table 7b here ---

Contradictory identifications first appeared among the company leaders. One of them (a first-generation employee, and member of top management) stated that the university continued to embody the founder's values and preserve the company's "exceptional" identity: "The clients recognise C's signature in everything we do. [...] I also think we should credit our founder with that; and the main source of all that is our university. It is the reason why we are here. Without it, this wouldn't be possible."

However, according to some other company leaders, the university had deviated from its original objectives. On the one hand, the university had become a place to meet, and no longer a place solely dedicated to learning. On the other hand, the financial pressure exerted by the company during this phase had led employees to withdraw from training activities in order to pursue sales objectives. Among first-generation employees, the university was also perceived as having deviated from its original principles insofar as they observed a certain disintegration of the founder's philosophy marked by the disappearance of certain norms, such as that of exigency, perceived as fundamental to forging an exceptional identity.

Furthermore, first-generation employees perceived a threat to their prestige, which was attached to the "exceptional" identity of the company. The magic had gone, and so had the sense of pride with one interviewee saying: "People remember [feeling like millionaires] with deep nostalgia and say, 'Oh, it was great', and if you ask, 'Where's the magic?', they answer, 'Bring back the

magic and we'll come back to the party, we'll come back to this great proud moment'."

Similarly, second- and third-generation employees did not recognise themselves in the new identity promoted by company leaders, but the motivations were different, not having known the original identity of the company and thus being less imbued with the founder's mindset.

Third-generation employees criticised the management's re-establishment of the company's heritage, which was out of line with the flexible identity developed in the previous phase. As one such employee said: "Changing mentality, when the very essence of integrating a staff member tends towards moulding, is obviously much more difficult." These employees were attached to the flexible and benevolent identity of the second period, and had become aware of the identity tension caused by the company's new strategy. Its implementation seemed to threaten the idea of belonging to a family, with one third-generation employee saying: "What is valued today is performance, through figures, but there are also contributions, and how do we encourage people, to what extent do we encourage people to make contributions, to live the value of one team and passion for people? [...] Today, yes, I see a gap." Another third-generation employee expressed this dissonance: "These days, I get the impression that either the vision has changed or that the honeymoon period is well and truly over."

This third phase (Figure 4) demonstrates the conflict that existed between the flexible and caring identity developed during the transition phase and a return to the earlier "straight jacket" approach. This identity tension created a contradictory identification that stems from different sources of organisational identity. Our analysis seems to suggest that the founder remains symbolically influential even after his departure. Although his spirit remains present, we have established that his actions and impact vary according to the period under examination, either taking the shape of a spectre or a ghost.

--- Insert Figure 4 here ---

Spectres and ghosts

The analysis of the identity history of Company C from the employees' point of view suggests the importance of taking into consideration the traces left by the founder. In our analysis of the founder's influence, his symbolic contribution is still present in the minds of the organisation's staff members. However, we have seen that these manifestations are gradually developing in different ways (see Figure 5).

--- Insert Figure 5 here ---

The first phase (1) is characterised by the presence of the founder who is able to create a uniform identification based on the symbolic motivations of pride and prestige linked to an organisational identity based on excellence and a "straight jacket" approach. A socialisation process based on the moulding of behaviour reinforces this. This whole process changes with the departure of the founder.

Shortly after his departure (2), the founder becomes more of an absent-present spectre that is progressively exorcised by the employees of the company. Although his legacy remains, the new leaders negotiate a move toward a new identity based on values of flexibility and caring. In fact, while his spectre is preserved as a point of reference in the creation of new meanings, the founder's influence slowly fades from the organisation's symbolic space. Here, we see the introduction of a transitional identification process: a parallel and gradual process of disidentification from the founder's spectre, and identification with the new, emerging organisational identity motivated by a feeling of "belonging".

In contrast, the third phase (3) sees the reappearance of the founder as a ghost invoked by the new leaders. This time, the manifestation is highly intrusive, bringing back elements of the past and symbolically imposing itself on employees. At this stage, unlike the spectre, the founder's ghost creates a conflict between the organisational identity created after his departure and a return to the original identity reintroduced with his comeback. The spectre that had slowly been disappearing is given a new "life", a new "body".

We then observe a contradictory identification process as staff members attach themselves to different sources of organisational identity. The founder's ghost comes back to haunt employees. The haunting manifests itself in very different ways according to whether or not employees experienced the original identity. Specifically, first-generation employees are haunted by their memories of the past, and the present represents a real threat to the future in which the company will lose its identity of excellence. Third-generation employees experience the ghost as an unhealthy spirit that wants to steal their benevolent values and flexible practices. So, unlike the previous period (i.e., the transition phase) when the "friendly" spectre was slowly disappearing, we have an identification process that develops in the face of contradictions brought out by a ghost evoked from the past.

According to our analysis, both spectre and ghost seem to have many elements that distinguish their action, impact and control over the employees of the organisation (see Table 8). In terms of the spectre, our case study suggests that he has a temporality that is geared toward the future in so far as his impact centres on the creation of new meanings through an open process of comparison between the company's present and past. The second phase of company C suggests that employees have been able to control the spectre through a process of exorcism that focuses on the organisation's pragmatic needs, and by developing a relational identification with a caring family organisational model. Thus, the spectre suggests a more nuanced and malleable influence that operates as an evolutionary point of reference for the company. Employees are

able to use the spectre as a counter-example and develop alternatives that suit the way their work is developing, even though certain elements remain as identity memories that preserve the company's historic roots.

--- Insert Table 8 here ---

In terms of the ghost, the temporality is anchored in the past through a closing-off process in which the final goal is to substitute the identities that exist within the organisation. Our case study suggests that the leadership team have invoked the ghost, justifying its presence by mythologising the founder's legacy and citing employees' symbolic attachment to the pride and prestige of the past. Its impact centres on criticising the present, and attempting to bring back the past and this creates conflict between employees: while some employees cannot relinquish the principles of the past and see internal values and practices differently, the ghost prevents other employees from implementing the changes they deem necessary to adapt the organisational identity to the changing context. In our case study, at the time we finished collecting data, the ghost had not yet been exorcised and the tension remained.

Discussion: The identification process and the founder's spirit

At the start of our paper, we asked the question: how does the founder's spirit continue to influence the employees' identification process? Through a processual analysis of the evolution of Company C, we found that, following a first phase of identity creation led by the founder, his departure left behind a symbolic imprint that impacted both organisational identity and employee identification in various ways. In our case study, the absent-present spirit of the

founder initially manifested as a spectre that influenced an identity shift and a transitional identification among employees who gradually disidentified from the founder's values and became attached to a new identity. Next, this spirit took on the form of a ghost that imposed itself on the identity developed during the transition phase, leading to contradictory identifications among first-generation employees who were nostalgic for a mythologised past that no longer existed, and other employees who rejected the dust raised by this disruptive ghost.

Our article makes three key contributions to the literature relating to the distinction between two spirit manifestations – the spectre and the ghost, the concepts of transitional and contradictory identifications, and the employee perspective on the identity legacy.

Of spectres and ghosts

First of all, our study contributes to the body of research on organisational ghosts (Orr, 2014; Pors et al., 2019; Pors, 2016) through our analysis of their differing expressions, based on Derrida's (1994) works (Paoletti, 2016; Davis, 2005; Petittemandge, 2007). In our study, we defined two distinct manifestations of the spirit: the spectre and the ghost. We set out their differences according to their original state, their impact on the organisation and the type of control they exert, which speaks to the importance of attempts at de-mythologising. The case of the spectre suggests a more nuanced and malleable influence linked to a de-mythologised past that operates as an evolving point of reference in an open process geared toward the future through the creation of new meanings for an organisation increasingly centred on daily practical demands. Our analysis suggests that the transformation of a spectre into a ghost necessitates a ceremonial invocation (Derrida, 1994) based on the mythologising of a lost past, such as that introduced by the leadership team in the case of Company C, where a former leader's legacy is reaffirmed and imposed as the only possible symbolism.

Conversely, Gabriel (2012) suggests that its disappearance and transformation calls for an exorcism in which the “survivors” confront the ghost, and its memory is consciously and willingly buried. According to Davis (2005, p. 378), this exorcism calls for an update or even a reckoning with the “secrets” of the past. In Davis’s words, “[i]t is not at all that they cannot be spoken; on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcized”. In organisational literature, Bell and Taylor’s (2016) analysis of Apple’s efforts to transform the ghost of Steve Jobs into a spectre, despite its ever-present nature, in order to allow the company to resume its course in line with present-day challenges is a great example of this dynamic.

Transitional and contradictory identifications

Our second contribution adds to the identification literature (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chédotel, 2004; Dameron, 2004; Elsbach, 1999; Dukerich et al., 2002). Our study builds on earlier work by suggesting that if an organisational identity is diverse and mobile (Schultz & Hernes, 2013; Gioia et al., 2013), the effect of this instability on the identification process needs to be considered. Thus, based on a processual and multi-stranded approach to identification processes, (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; MacLean & Webber, 2015; Eury et al., 2018), our article suggests the existence of transitional and contradictory forms of identification that simultaneously bring dynamics of identification with and disidentification from different sources of organisational identity.

Our study suggests, on the one hand, a somewhat different understanding of the process of organisational identification from that offered by the concept of ambivalent identification (Eury et al., 2018; Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004), which sees the possibility for different relationships with respect to a single

organisational identity. On the other hand, however, notions of transitional and contradictory identification have contributed to studies that refer to different identity sources (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Hillman et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2006) by adding a temporal element (Eury et al., 2018). In essence, in our research we are talking about forms of identification with different sources of organisational identity that evolve over time, something that has not yet been well explored in the literature.

Identity legacy: discourse and impact

Finally, our study makes a particular contribution to research on identity legacy (Maclean et al., 2014; Fauchart, & Gruber, 2011; Foroughi, 2020). In particular, our ghostly perspective adds a more nuanced view of the strategic use of the past by corporate leaders. In fact, our analysis suggests that the permanence or return of the founder's spirit, which is often perceived as a competitive advantage or a discourse on the past that can be explored strategically by leaders (Basque & Langley, 2018), may have a negative impact on the members of an organisation if it takes the form of a ghost. In our case study, whereas the founder's spectre lives on as a symbolic reference that can be used for negotiation purposes, the return of his ghost creates conflict between employees who wish to move on from the past and identify with alternative organisational identities.

With the reappearance of the identity established by the founder, the tensions created endanger the very identification of employees with the company. In our case, we have seen how the original and persistent motivators of their symbolic attachment – prestige and pride – are challenged by employees of the company who identify themselves through their employment within the company as a benevolent family. Although the new leaders reaffirm the founding identity as a way of reclaiming the company's image and attracting a new clientele, the ghost

appropriated by the leaders risks limiting new forms of identification and destroying the old sources of attachment of those employees who see this heritage hijacked. In short, the haunted house created by the management may attract visitors, but the dust created disturbs those who live there.

Conclusion

Our article demonstrates the importance of paying attention to how the spirits that live on in a company's history impact identity processes. The case studied here also shows that these spirits may take on different forms – spectre and ghost – with different creation conditions, symbolic effects, and possible forms of control. More recently, and following the conclusion of our study, the ghost's re-emergence in the vision of company leaders has taken a new turn. Third-generation employees suggest that Eric C's ghost has in fact been "reincarnated". The former founder has been invited to internal events to speak to company employees about his history and legacy. It seems that an invocation of spirits from the past has morphed into direct intervention that gives some people hope that overturned practices can be reintroduced, while simultaneously limiting the possibility of the exorcism that others had hoped for.

Finally, our theoretical contribution is based on one case study and could be extended to other organisational environments. Our analysis on the manifestations of spirit, spectre and ghost, as well as their dimensions, could be generalised and extended in light of the experience of other organisations impacted by particularly influential founders and leaders. It may be interesting to study an example of a family business from which the founder, who often has an important informal relationship with his employees, has departed, or to study political organisations, exploring, for example, the shadow cast by François Mitterrand on the Socialist Party in France. It would also be interesting to study the identity imprint left by leaders of large organisations

that have a publicly recognised and celebrated history such as that of Antoine Riboud at Danone or Jean-Dominique Senard at Michelin. In essence, traces are left behind and we have to understand the implications of this.

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Figure 1: Participant characteristics (role and company entry time)

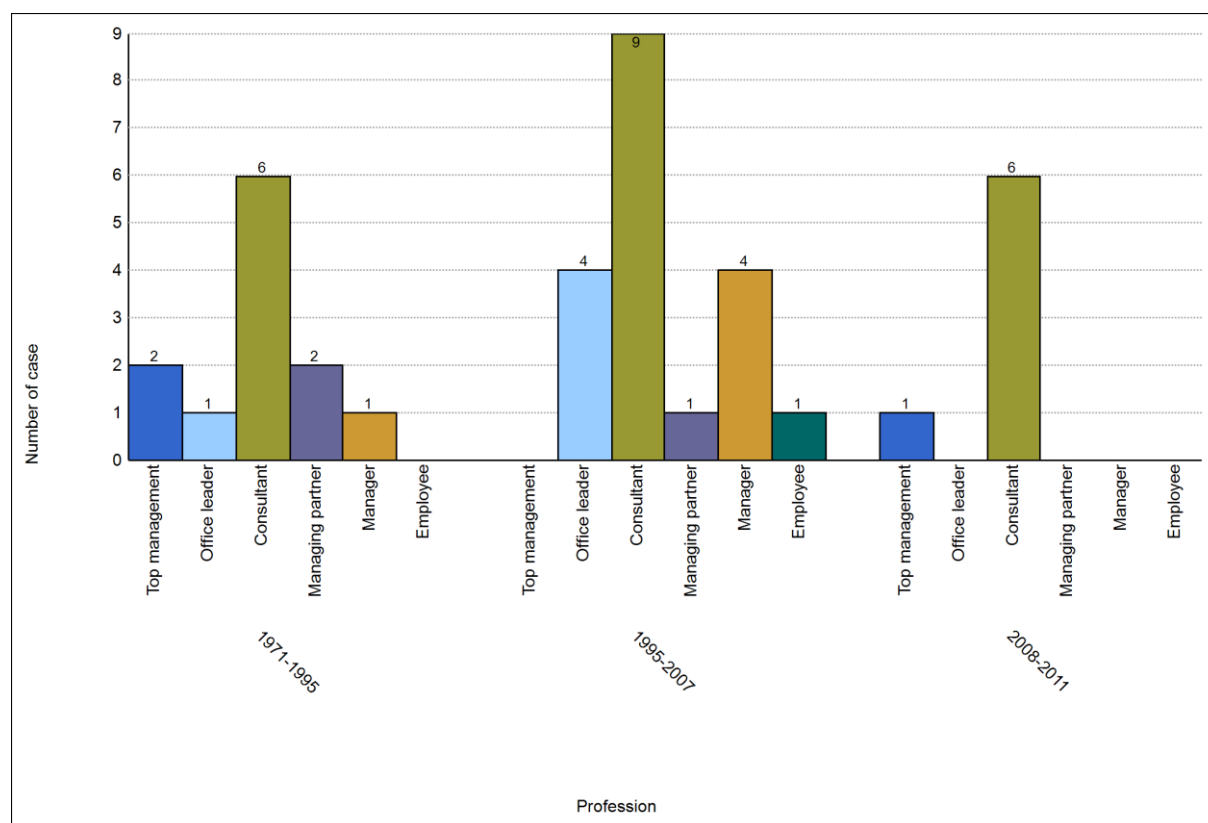


Table 1: Distribution of interviewed members according to age and sex

Sex	Male	Female	Age	< 30	<30-39>	<40- 49>	> 50	Total
	27	11		1	9	16	12	

Table 2: Distribution of interviewed members according to employment level

Employment level	Top management	Office Leader	Consultant	Managing partner	Employee	Manager	Total
	3	5	21	3	1	5	38

Table 3: Distribution of interviewed members according to geographic location

Country	France	The Netherlands	Sweden	Spain	Switzerland, Belgium and Germany	United Kingdom	Eastern Europe	Total
	13	13	2	2	3	2	3	38

Table 4: Distribution of interviewed members according to length of employment

Length of service	Joined between 1971 and 1995	Joined between 1995 and 2007	Joined between 2008 and 2011	Total
	12	19	7	38

Table 5a: Creation phase – Uniform identification with an unequivocal founder’s organisational identity

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“One day, I was with Jacques, we were on a motorbike, coming off the motorway, we stopped at the toll, and he went ahead of me, he was waiting for me, and I took about five minutes to get to where he was. He said: what happened to you? Well, I was chatting to the lady in the booth, who’s all by herself, on a motorway exit where hardly anyone ever comes, and I’d reached the point where I know where she lives, how many kids she has, and the rest; we have a natural approach to making a connection with others.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“I would really like to stress and say that the thing that’s really specific about our group is the willingness... the willingness to give something to others... to help, sometimes even when people don’t ask us to.” (Former employee)</i></p> <p><i>“The thing that doesn’t change is the fact that we tell ourselves that people and behaviour are at the heart of everything.” (first-generation employee).</i></p>	Passion for people		
<p><i>“I believe that since before Éric C. launched the company, he was someone who... when he set up the business he worked with a psychologist, he ran the sales side of things and C. was always someone who was highly business-oriented ». (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Not because he... the day he sold his company, to choose an external company and not his close partners, to us, it felt like he didn’t trust us, even though we’d been partners, we’d worked; with hindsight we see why, it was purely a question of money.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“The thing that hasn’t changed is that the business, the sales side is the crux of everything and everything is geared toward that.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Focus on business profit	“Excellence” value	Unequivocal founding organisational identity
<p><i>“and in some cases, not me, but others were governed by fear. If I can put it in my own words, it was a case of “if you don’t succeed then you’re out, here’s your slip.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve also heard that when Mr C. walked into a room you had to stand up.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Patriarchal model		
<p><i>“I can still see a photo of a teaching session, and everyone’s off on one side, lined up, all wearing navy blue, [...] you wonder whether someone came in to measure everything, down to the last decimetre... the plumb line is aligned in pretty much the same way.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“There were so many explicit rules about how things should be done and how you should behave, what you should wear. Everything was totally explicit, here, or in other companies, things are more implicit.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	“Corporate” dress code	“Corporate” dress code practices	
<p><i>“When leaders have an oversized ego, they think they’re above the law. And I saw that in Eric.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Ron was really intrusive, no, not intrusive, his top lip was a little stiff, like I say, a little arrogant.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Arrogant attitude		

Table 5b: Creation phase – Uniform identification with an unequivocal founder’s organisational identity

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“The University of C. is by far the most significant distinctive company trait.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“There was a group of guys who were always in suits, who clapped every three seconds from when we said ‘good morning’, and we spent the day learning how to say: “Good morning, it’s nine o’clock!” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	University	“Moulding” socialisation	Uniform identification
<p><i>“When you listened to [the founder] who says something you feel or something you believe, that is a profound message, you start to follow it and try to tell others about it, [...] enthusiastically. » (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“There’s a notion of imprint, also linked to things clicking, particularly in our ability to help others become aware, especially by honing down on image, on practices, on how to handle situations, things click. [...] So yes, this idea of an imprint, a click, an impact. And then yes, I’d say, intensity and depth, because the C. brand, the imprint, [...] is profound, [...] it has a very holistic dimension for the individual, that is, it affects his whole system, his personal system, in fact.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Mission		
<p><i>“After a few months, I felt at home and proud to be part of it. The people impressed me. For me, it was like entering a whole other world. A completely different world. The consultants were dressed to win, very confident, very dark. I wanted to part of the crowd. (...) You know, it was really special here. I’m a trained psychologist and what those people did in two weeks, it was exceptional, because what they did, what they said, I told myself they can’t possibly believe things work that way. There was so little intellectual content, but it had such a powerful impact.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“And so when I saw the rest, the C. consultants, I looked around and I actually had to look up, I didn’t look straight ahead, I didn’t look down, I looked up as if to say, ‘one day, I’ll be big like them’! And that’s the first feeling of, so feeling of... intense pride, of value. Just a small detail, I live in Strasbourg, we were in Leysin at the time, Strasbourg-Leysin is 350 kilometres; for the first training session, they had me travel by plane, first class, I thought [phew] this is going to be huge!” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Pride	Motivation based on pride and prestige”	
<p><i>“A former colleague told me: “We’re not a regular company.” He got really angry when I said: “Jos, we are a regular company.” He said: “No, we’re not a regular company, we’re an exceptional company.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“I heard that name for two years before joining, it had a lot of mystery attached to it, just the name by itself, just C.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Why did you respond favourably [to the offer of employment]?” and the guys would say: “Hold on, C. is the best, being a consultant for C. really is something!” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Prestige		

Table 6a: Transition phase – Weakening of the symbolic power of the absent founder, and transitional identification between identities

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“The culture has also developed since Eric C. left to now, particularly in terms of the universities, the initial training, when you talk to people who joined ten years ago, or even five years ago, they haven’t experienced anything like the same initial training as the one I might have had, I don’t think the word ‘caring’ would have come up at that time, so that’s really positive.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“There’s a certain empathy, a certain caring between people.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Because of the care, the positive internal attitude, the team, the [C.] family does everything for you.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	<p>The caring family replaces the patriarchal model</p>	<p>New “caring” values</p>	<p>Organisational identities in flux</p>
<p><i>“It really helped that the founder, Eric C., changed, and it was a really big change. And then, we had people like Ronald X on the Board of Directors. So the new generation took over from the money hungry. Until it was managed by them, money was the KPI.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Empowering, (...), at the same time as the support that we can offer, the help and the encouragement, before long the message is ‘your destiny is in your hands’! It’s not negative, it’s really good, really quickly. Within other systems you always get the feeling that, right, we’re going to find who is responsible for a failure or a success, it’s watered down a little, whereas here, they say, no, no, no, we’re going to do this, we’ll give you the resources and if it doesn’t work then you have to ask the real question, there’s real work.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	<p>Focus on business becomes participative</p>	<p>New “flexible” practices</p>	<p>Organisational identities in flux</p>
<p><i>“New authority, a letting go... silly things, like addressing lecturers by their first names, stopping the nonsense of having to wear your jacket even when it’s 35 degrees outside [...]. So much more authority to say: “Let’s stop that!” [...] So there’s a generational change. » (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“When I first joined the company, at every monthly meeting, and during the month, everyone showed up with their suit jackets buttoned up, with ties, etc. And we, we would show up in jeans, in boots... and people would say: “You can’t do that”. And now they’ve changed.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Now, personality can play a bigger role, whereas before, the script took up everything and we had to change to fit the script, to fit into the mould, it wasn’t even that we had to adapt, we had fit the C mould (second-generation employee)</i></p>	<p>Softening of the “corporate” dress code</p>	<p>New “flexible” practices</p>	<p>Organisational identities in flux</p>
<p><i>“In a way, [the initial training] helped me with humility.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Humility wins over arrogance.” (Email from a senior partner)</i></p> <p><i>“Before, company C. might have been seen as being a little arrogant. [...] That’s just what I heard” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	<p>Humility replaces arrogance</p>	<p>New “flexible” practices</p>	<p>Organisational identities in flux</p>

Table 6b: Transition phase – Weakening of the symbolic power of the absent founder, and transitional identification between identities

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“I spoke to a few people about, at a given moment during a lecture, making the decision to finally say we’re going to take a short walk together for a half hour. It became possible for me, but it was almost... as though I was lazing around at one time, if you know what I mean.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“I have to present the same module a hundred times. I have to find something for myself, otherwise I’m just a robot and it brings me no pleasure. There are rules, a framework, and I can personalise it. And no one told me: “Agnieszka, this doesn’t conform to our standards.”” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Creation of a “free space”	New “open” socialisation	Transitional identification
<p><i>“I think that people here have real pride, that is, they really have that inside them, and that raison d’être. I remember how fifteen years ago [when the founder left] we took a week to find that raison d’être; it was worth the investment (..) We’re here to help one another, to express ourselves, to develop our full potential. And I’m convinced that’s the right raison d’être.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“I find that the messages used to be... well, still are, the key to such a great feeling that can change people’s lives, which I found stunningly brilliant.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Mission	New motivation based on belonging	
<p><i>“It was my job to serve them and do whatever they wanted. Because I realised, and the way they explained it was that this wasn’t for them but for the company, you know? So it was it a kind of privilege to work for a higher goal and I was, of course, really proud to be part of it, you know.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Pride		
<p><i>“Most people knew C, and for me it was a unique endeavour too, because we’re not that big, we’re not all that big, (...) but most people have heard of C: “Oh, you work for C ?” So they [the employees] identify with that.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Back then I had the answer, an invite to a meeting with C. and I spoke to the trainer about it, he’d trained with C. ten years earlier, and he told me it was the best of the best in the training field, the gold standard.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Prestige		
<p><i>“I feel like I belong to something bigger (...) at the end of the day, the feeling, the spiritual connection, the way that’s going to make people want to be part of a community, it’s the unit, and I think getting the best out of people is a good thing.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“You kiss, you hug, and there’s a lot of love. And I think that the attitude, of love, is much more recent [than the period between 1971-1995], if you know what I mean.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Belonging		

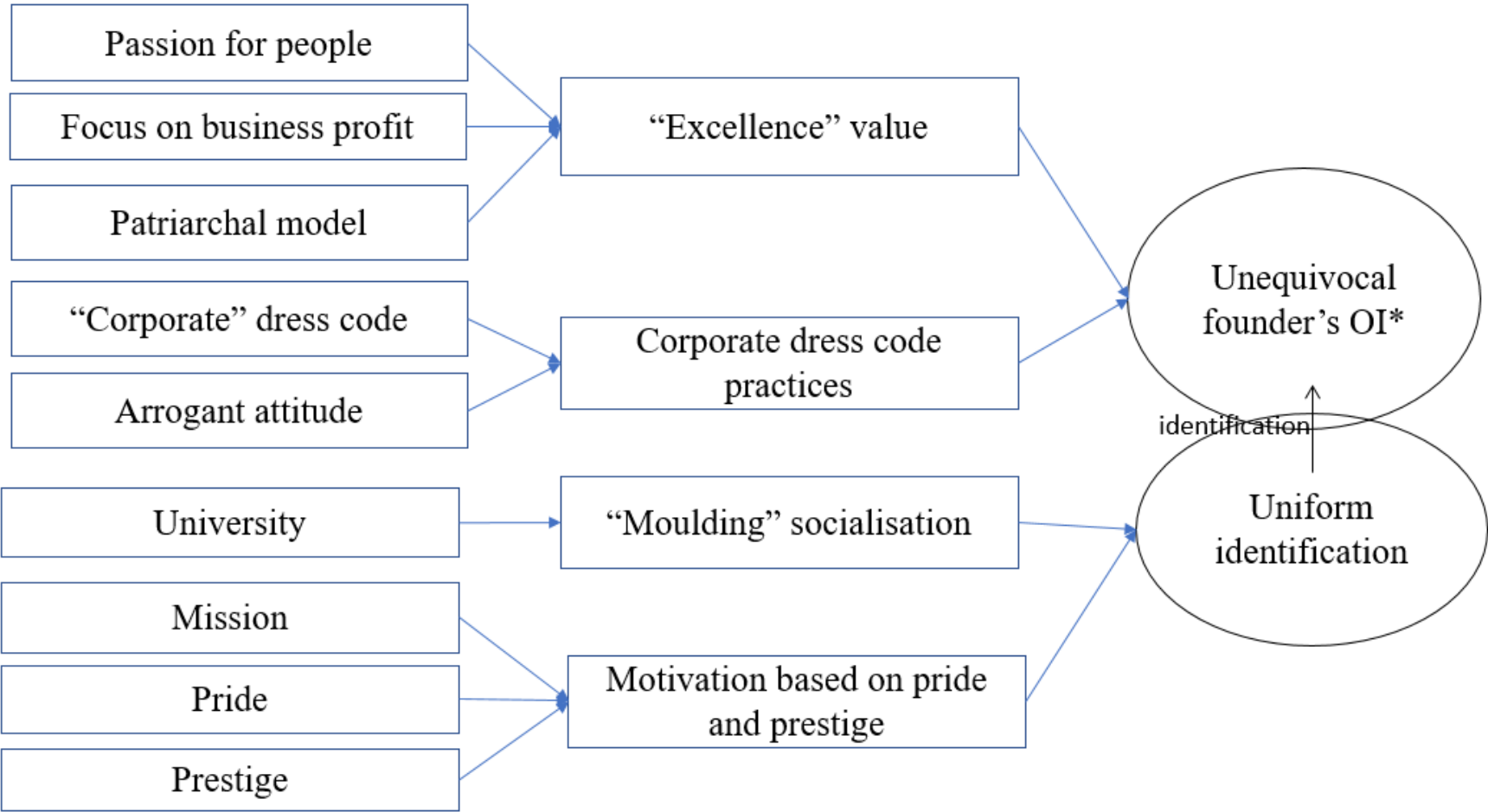
Table 7a: Tension phase – Return of the founder’s values and practices, and contradictory identification with identities in tension

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“I know that when I present C. I don’t present a PNL, luckily not, but I always present the result and I’m really proud to say that we make whatever percentage in terms of profitability, and you should be pleased and proud, and secure to work in a business that makes money.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“People passion, everything starts and ends with them, they’re our strong suit and I think we often forget that. We often talk about commercial results, or if we talk about a good result in a general session, if we talk about a good result, it’s just OK, country X is going to hit its targets. Congratulations, but the people who hit their target, it’s the norm, only those that exceed their targets are recognised and, very briefly, you know, I think we should much more often allow our people feel like kings in given situations.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Contested return of the focus on business profit	Values in opposition	Organisational identities in opposition
<p><i>“In terms of resources, we don’t do a lot of management, but we have a lot of managers.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Ten or twelve years ago, when I joined C. there was no process, your coach would help you out, he would say ‘there you go, there’s the market, go find a client! [...] The change that’s happening now, after 2-3 years, from the moment you start to implement follow-up procedures, and I know you need that to manage a business but the question is, to what extent? And someone comes to see you, to ask: have you made your appointments, your stuff? When you’ve been with a company for 12 years you think, come on guys... You let me get on with things for 12 years, and now you’re... sheesh, oh-oh, wake up! You’re not now going to start telling me what to do.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Contested return of a patriarchal authority structure and hierarchy		
<p><i>“It’s their way of being, their way of talking [“corporate” dress code]. The way they behave, the way they behave, almost in secret. I don’t know; it’s fading because I think that during the C. [founder] era, it was much worse, but it’s still perceived that way.” (third-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“So I hope that we’ve maintained our highly professional side, all that is the difference between rigor and rigidity. Rigor, yes, rigidity, well, it’s true that... And in my view, this place still has... luckily I don’t go into all the rooms, because I think I’d break out in a rash.” (first-generation employee)</i></p>	Contested return of the “corporate” dress code	Practices in opposition	
<p><i>“[Company C.] is still arrogant. We think we created the world. Some of us feel that way, yes. (Former employee)</i></p> <p><i>“We say we’re open to other people or to the market, I’m talking about tools, methods, but we’re not [...] It might be arrogance, we’re better off on our own. And we get to things that don’t at all apply.” (second-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, there’s a certain arrogance that is an obstacle to change.” (third-generation employee)</i></p>	Contested return of the arrogant attitude		

Table 7b: Tension phase – Return of the founder’s values and practices, and contradictory identification with identities in tension

Quotes	1 st level codes	2 nd level themes	3 rd level dimensions
<p><i>“The university should revert back to being a university, not just a place to meet.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“We don’t expect as much of each other as we used to.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“During the training we tell you to call the client and stuff because you’re driven by the result, but when you come back, afterwards in your training thing, [...] I’ve still got 150,000 euros in play... well, you’re not there! And that, that was a choice, to follow the market to the detriment of the quality of what’s being done. [...] In recent years, the few guys who were corrupted, most them were university coaches” (second-generation employee).</i></p>	University derailed	Socialisation “in crisis”	Contradictory identification
<p><i>“Company C. is solid because it focuses on people, their behaviour, their impact on the company.” (third-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“The service offering is fundamentally the same, so that hasn’t changed.” (third-generation employee)</i></p>	Mission unchanged	Motivation “in crisis”	
<p><i>“And like this week, when X made the announcement in the main hall: “Okay kids, now we own the company.” And then, there was an almost muted reaction. We were disappointed and said: “Why isn’t everyone shouting: be proud that we bought the company last week.” Why aren’t we celebrating that?” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“The more things move forward, the more foggy they become! No, the more foggy things become, the more the reality behind that fog no longer corresponds to the original vision. In my view, this is due to a lack of realism, a lack of realism in relation to what drives a big organisation that has a strong culture and values to change, and above all to change its essence.” (third-generation employee)</i></p>	Pride under threat		
<p><i>“These are things clients have told me too. The C. training sessions aren’t what they used to be; it’s that excellence we were talking about. It’s much more of a course now.” (first-generation employee)</i></p> <p><i>“The EBO was a huge change. So of course, you have to take care of your own company and you need money at the end of the day. So, all the positive aspects about taking care of people start to get diluted in favour of money. When we ask ourselves now about how to keep the magic at C., I say: “Alright, maybe in 2015 we’ll start to receive dividends or something like that, and we’ll feel more comfortable, that everything is working, maybe then we can talk about the magic.” (second-generation employee)</i></p>	Prestige under threat		

Figure 2: Creation phase – Uniform identification with an unequivocal founder’s organisational identity



*Organizational Identity

Figure 3: Transition phase – Weakening of the symbolic power of the absent founder, and transitional identification between identities

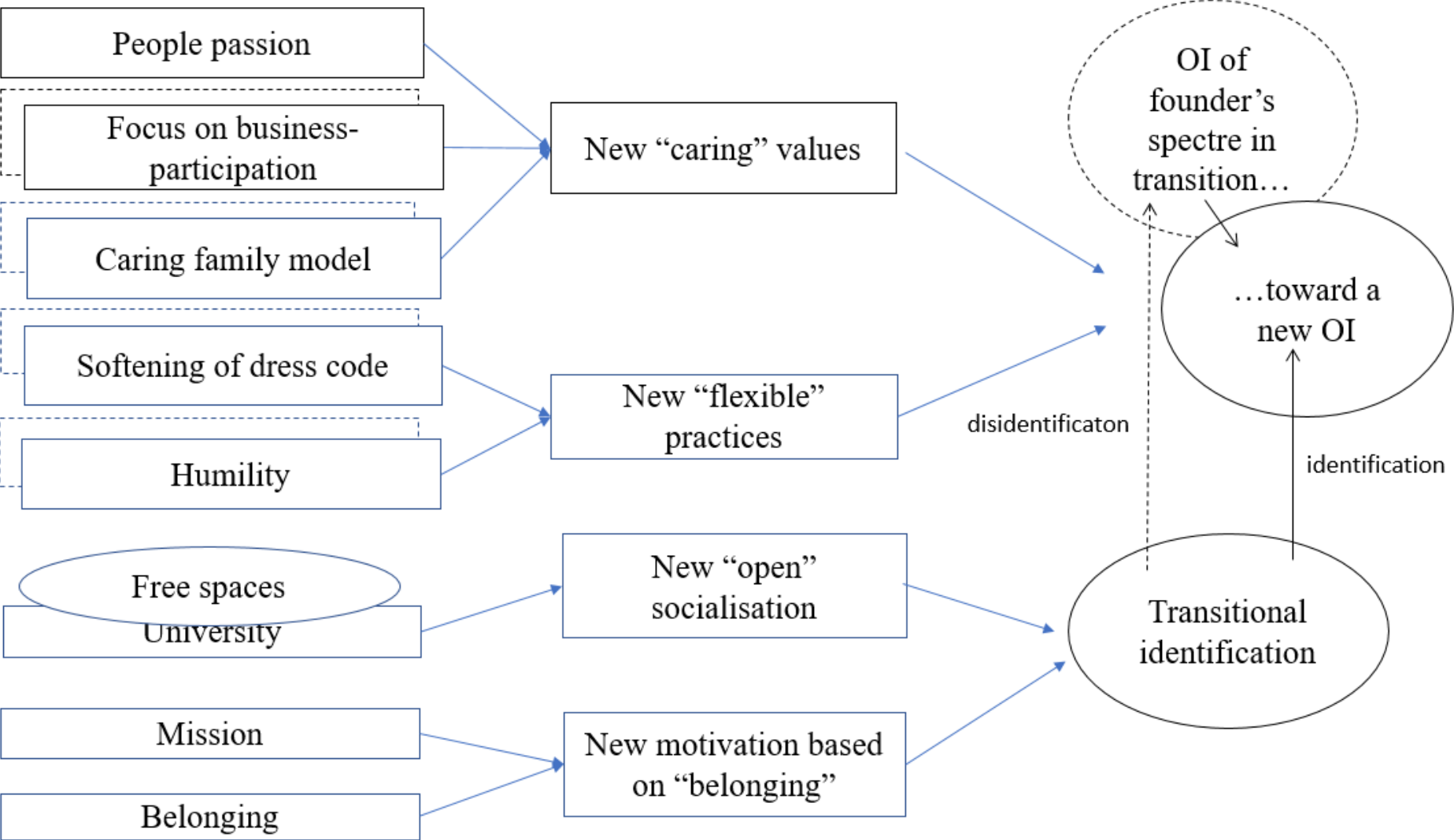


Figure 4: Tension phase – Return of the founder’s values and practices, and contradictory identification with identities in tension

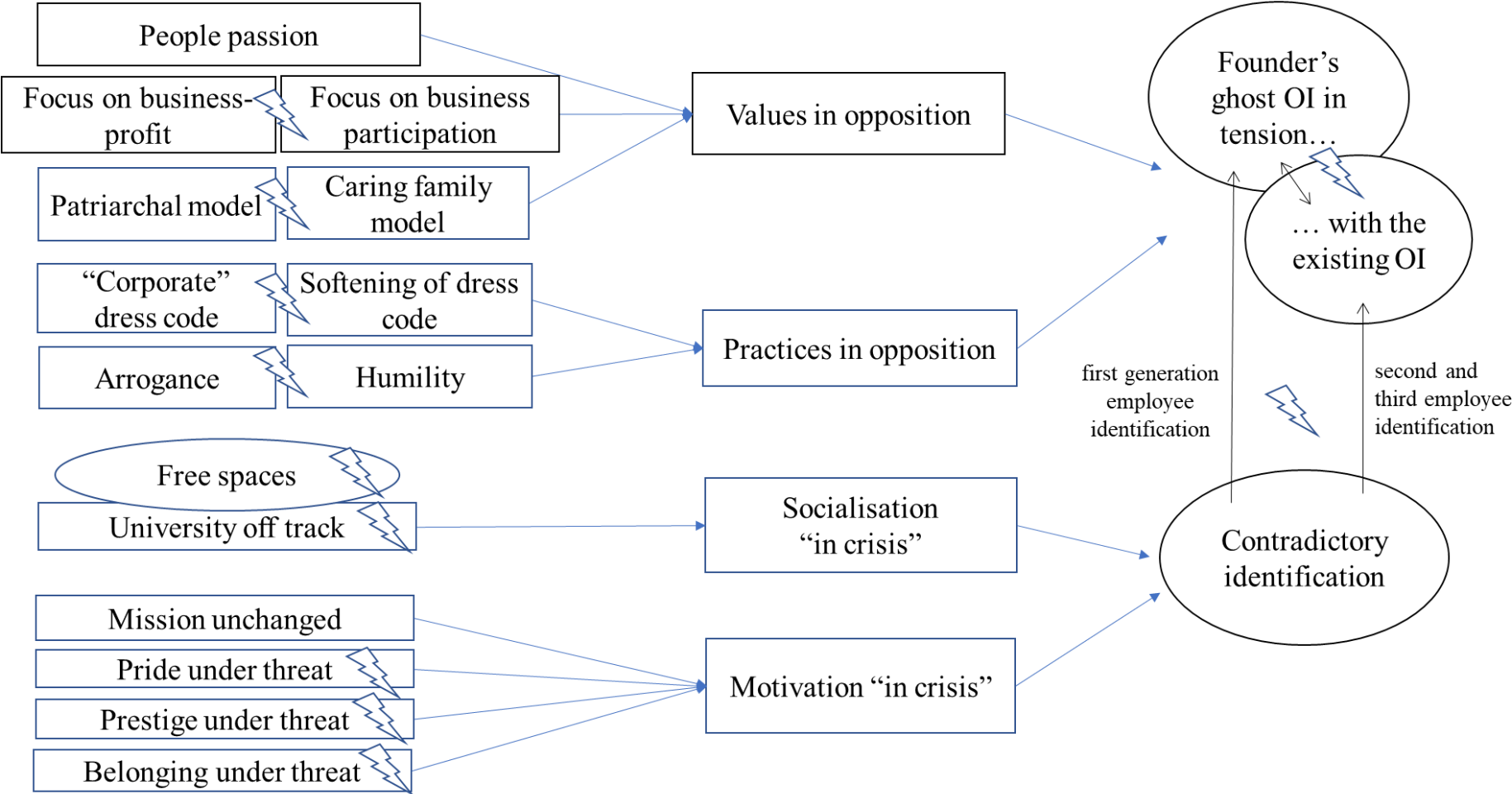


Figure 5: The process of identification with the founder, spectre and ghost

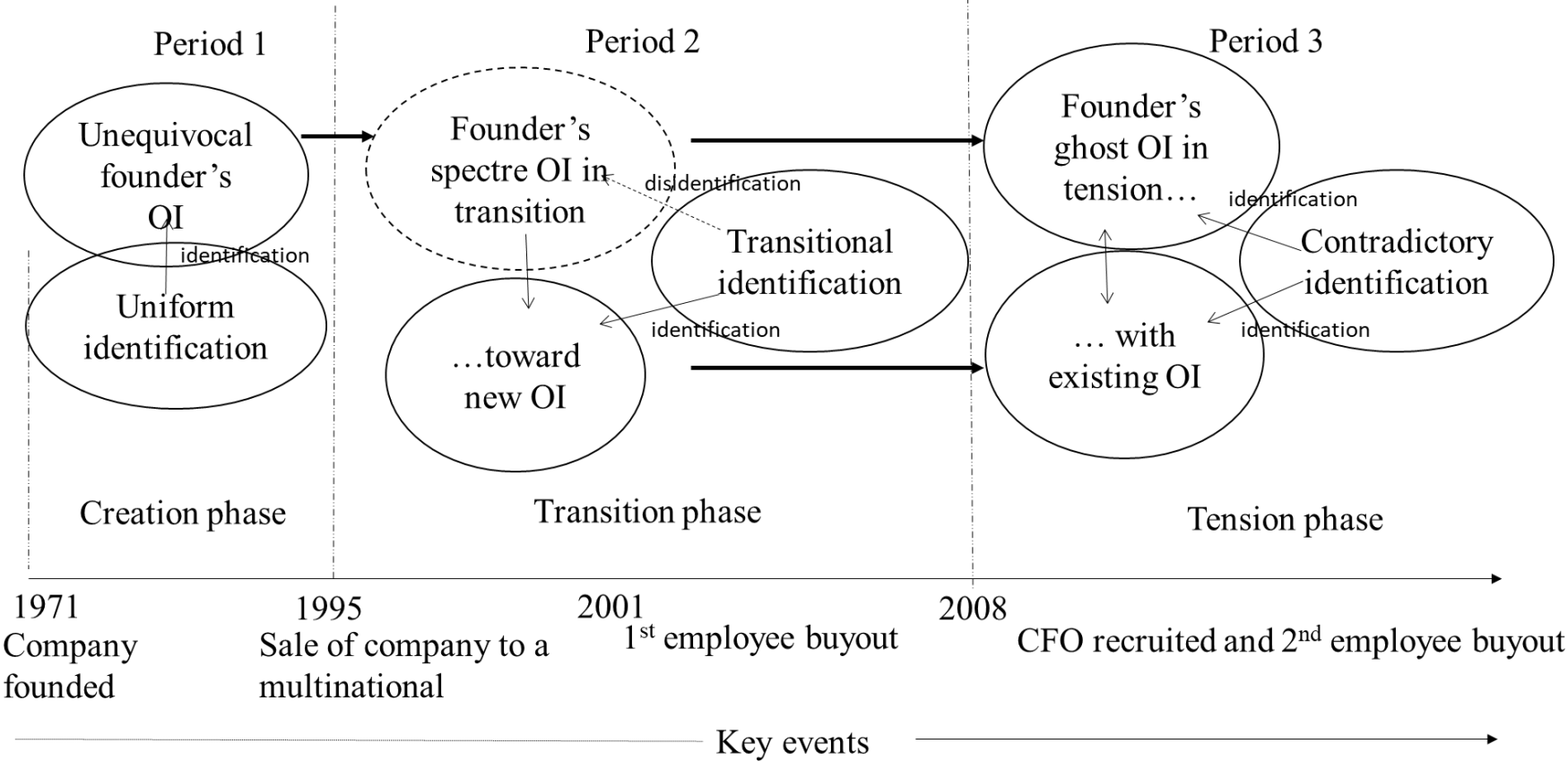


Table 8: Spectre and ghost: conditions, impact and control

Spirit manifestations	Spectre	Ghost
Temporality	<p>Future <i>Definition:</i> Creative intersection between present and past <i>Example:</i> The creation of ‘free spaces’ within the university</p>	<p>Past <i>Definition:</i> Reaffirmation of heritage and history, through the destruction of the present <i>Example:</i> University derailed</p>
Impact	<p>Meaning <i>Definition:</i> New symbols developed <i>Example:</i> The caring family replaces the patriarchal model</p>	<p>Substitution <i>Definition:</i> Old symbols reintroduced <i>Example:</i> Contested return of formal authority and hierarchy</p>
Process	<p>Opening <i>Definition:</i> Unlimited creative possibilities <i>Example:</i> Business orientation becomes participative</p>	<p>Closure <i>Definition:</i> Pre-defined possibilities <i>Example:</i> Contested return of business – profit orientation</p>
Control	<p>Exorcism <i>Definition:</i> Legacy changed by its critics <i>Example:</i> Humility replaces arrogance</p>	<p>Invocation <i>Definition:</i> Legacy activated by the idealisation of the past <i>Example:</i> Contested return of an arrogant attitude</p>
Justification	<p>Pragmatism <i>Definition:</i> Focus on the needs of the organisation <i>Example:</i> Softening of the “corporate” dress code</p>	<p>Mystification <i>Definition:</i> Focus on symbolic power <i>Example:</i> Contested return of the “corporate” dress code</p>
Identification	<p>Relational <i>Definition:</i> Based on collective construction <i>Example:</i> Motivation of belonging</p>	<p>Symbolic <i>Definition:</i> Based on references to the past <i>Example:</i> Pride is under threat</p>