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### THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY FROM A RICOEURIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract:** Identity is said to define a “thing”. When the concept, however, is applied to organizations, it introduces a problem of definition. And yet, this problem, which is related to an analysis of the different facets of organizational identity using multiple methods, also reveals the power of this specific concept for management science in general. In this paper, we propose to study the evolution of the identity of a media organization - a television channel for young viewers created several years ago - with the aid of a “five-faceted model”. The paper describes a new theoretical model for organizational identity: drawing on concepts of identity dynamics and narrative identity, our modeling of *Identity Transition* enables us to restore the internal dialectic of organizational identity. To further clarify this dialectic, we discuss Paul Ricoeur’s use of the concepts “sameness” and “otherness”, “character” and “promise”. In our conclusion, we examine the ethical implications of this research and suggest an agenda for future investigation.

**Key Words:** Cultural Management, Five-faceted model, Transition Identity Model, Organizational Identity, Paul Ricoeur, Reputation

## **1. Introduction**

The question of identity interests several disciplines in the social sciences - psychology and anthropology, first and foremost - and can be approached in various ways (Levi-Strauss, 1977). When the study of identity describes a social agent, its primary aim is to establish a number of recognized standards, whether material, moral, or emotional, at any rate, always conclusive and characteristic. In doing so, the study must consider two paradoxes: on the one hand, as Margaret Mead's "interactionist approach" (1934) demonstrated, it cannot be insensitive to the perception of these characteristics by other social agents, since the perception of self appears to be one of defining elements of selfhood. On the other hand, an identity emerges most clearly, as Erikson showed in his study of adolescents, when it is a troubled identity (Marc, 2005).

Borrowed from different fields of anthropology and psychology, the term "identity" acquires a different meaning in management (Godelier, 2008: 71). Thus, corresponding to the question: "Who am I as a person?" in the field of psychology, is a parallel question in the field of management and organizational science: "Who are we as an organization?" (Albert and Whetten, 1985). According to these authors, the goal is to define the key characteristics, which members of the organization perceive as distinctive and permanent. Yet Albert and Whetten's definition is little more than a starting point (Ashford and Mael, 1996; Gioia, 1998; Moingeon and Soenen, 2002; Nag et al., 2007). In fact, by focusing on the "key" and "enduring" characteristics of organizational identity, they deliberately adopt an essentialist and fixist point of view on it. This narrow focus, acknowledged as such, provides the main axis for managerial decisions and action. It enables each member of the organization to strengthen his/her commitment to the organization and to identify with it (Ashford and Mael 1989; Ashford and Mael 1996). Here identity refers to an "internal cosmology" (Gombault 2000: 74) comprised of belief systems and norms; it alludes to factors of comparison with other organizations in its industry and to a capacity to construct meaning collectively (Weick 1995). In this respect, identity establishes a cognitive / emotional, subjective / intersubjective "base" shared by all members of the organization (Hatch and Schultz, 2000: 16). It is the "base" that activates the identification process that provides meaning and justifies action. And yet, as Gioia points out, only the existence of a certain ambiguity with regard to the core essentials enables identity to make adjustments and take into account the opinions, beliefs, and values permeating the organization (1998).

Since the seminal article by Albert and Whetten (1985), several noteworthy authors have pointed out that organizational identity is, indeed a dynamic phenomenon, that it must be able to hold past and present events in a coherent, sense-making framework (Czarniawska-Joerges 1997; Gioia and Thomas 1996; Bishop Smith, 2011). Identity changeability, or “instability” (Gioia et al., 2000), can be reactive or proactive, a response to the environment or the result of a negotiation (Gioia et al., 2010), but also a way of making oneself stand out in a competitive environment (Clegg et al. 2007). In sum, we are back to the second paradox noted above, based on Erikson’s work on personal identity. Certain transitional and process-oriented aspects of identity emerge from repeated interaction and constant interpreting. These elements provide another pathway to the discovery of an organization’s identity, viz. through phases of development, uncertainties, and challenges. Identity is not a static, immutable phenomenon.

In fact, what the members of an organization perceive as “basic” identity traits presupposes an accepted use and an uncontested interpretation of the term “identity”. But this is precisely the problem. The impression is that since identity is the definition of a “thing”, then paradoxically organizational identity, as a metaphor for organizational life, presents a problem of definition (Harquail, 2004; Cornelissen, 2006). Or does it refer simply to its visual identity, i.e. the visible elements of its identity (Rindova and Shulz, 1998)? Is it a question of referring to an image, which people outside the organization use to describe it in terms of attributes and judgments, and which members inside the organization then perceive and recognize (Alvesson, 1990; Dutton and Dukerich 1991)? Or perhaps it refers to the organization’s *corporate identity*, i.e. the manner in which its mission is formulated strategically for the wider external world (Gioia et al., 2000; Hatch and Schultz 2000)? Finally, the perception may concern the organization’s reputation, a reflection on the level of appreciation expressed by stakeholders at the mention of the organization’s name (Fombrun 1996). Yet, listing these different orientations, we are far from thinking here that this “definitional anarchy” (Harquail, 2004: 142) entails only limitations and confusion. It is via its different angles of approach – which includes social, organizational, and corporate aspects – that the concept reveals its full richness and crucial importance for management science in general (Cornelissen 2006).

We turn now to a description of an analytical framework which can account for the various definitions suggested for organizational identity and, at the same time, build on its paradigmatic conceptual riches. Then we add to this description a conceptual definition of what identity is with the help of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

## **2. Presentation of our analytical framework**

As we saw above, the definition of organizational identity is very fragmented and has been understood in numerous different ways. The existing body of knowledge does not form an established set of concepts nor a generalizable, universal theory (Melewar and Jenkins 2002). As such, it warrants re-examination and clarification. In the absence of a reliable theoretical framework, Balmer and Soenen (1999) first combined existing research with their own empirical findings to propose an integrative, four-dimensional model (ACID) which includes different aspects mentioned above. The model was subsequently modified by Balmer and Greyser (2002) and called AC2ID.<sup>1</sup> These first two approaches were later fine-tuned by Moingeon and Soenen, who developed the "five-facets model", an integrative, analytical model of organizational identity, which comfortably accommodates approaches preceding theirs in the literature. Their revised model, arising from the "organizational behavior tradition" (Cornelissen 2006: 697), examines recent scientific contributions on organizational identity with a view to providing an improved, more coherent framework (see Table 1).

It is recognized as offering "a sharable, analytic taxonomy that works equally well in the disciplines of communication, marketing, and strategy" (Harquail, 2004: 142).<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we will apply the "five-faceted model of collective identities" proposed by Moingeon and Soenen (2002) to describe the development and evolution of a TV channel's organizational identity between 2000-2009. We will take a closer look at the following question: can dissonances between the various identity facets of a media organization provide insights into how its identity was initially formed and how it then evolved over time? But before that, we would like to better understand the notion of dissonances about identity, using a philosophical perspective and what Ricoeur has called the dialectics of "character" and "promise".

## **3. A Ricoeurian perspective: the dialectics of "character" and "promise"**

The analogy we have made between individual identity and organizational identity is similar to the one adopted by Schein in his discussion of organizational culture. Schein argues that organizational culture is akin to the personality of the organization, a kind of psyche (1985; Küng 2000). Pratt & Foreman also focus their work on organizational identity and argue that the array of organizational identities can be managed like the personality of an individual confronted with the diversity of his being, his social roles, and social

commitments (2000a; see also Hatch & Schultz, 2000: 16). However, in our opinion, too many complications arise with this approach, notably from an ethical standpoint. It is not easy to amalgamate the identity of an organization with the psychology of a human person with "a conscience, a voice, a mind, and even a soul" (Ashman and Winstanley 2007: 84-85). By shifting the analysis of identity to philosophical studies, we can remove some of the risk. Take, for example, the logical and conceptual analysis of the philosopher Paul Ricœur (1990). Ricœur's definition of identity reveals the internal dynamics of identity that management researchers have not yet been able to resolve or interpret (see Van Riel who bemoans the conceptual confusion around identity (1995), and Pratt & Foreman who notes the absence of unity of definition (2000a).

For Ricœur, identity fragmentation can be explained. As he sees it, identity is only conceivable with two elements: character and promise. Character is the set of distinctive marks of identity, its recognizable traits that remain permanent in time. "By the descriptive features that will be given", Ricœur says, "the individual compounds numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity, and permanence in time. In this way, the sameness of the person is designated emblematically" (1990: 119). He takes as an example the oak tree : "we say of the oak tree that it is the same from the acorn to the fully grown tree; in the same way we speak of one animal, from birth to death" (1990: 117). We could say the same of the organization.

As concerns "promise", it is an ethical concept (a dimension which is completely neglected by the five-facet model): the idea of keeping one's promise to another ("you can count on me"). Thus, on one side of the coin, the preservation of an inheritance, and on the other, the statement of a commitment, i.e. the promise of an organization that was made and now must be kept by the organization that it seems to have become. A promise is a reminder that identity is never bestowed, it is conquered; it is never given, it is formed.

The dialectical character of the relationship between the two terms "character" and "promise" reflects their opposing and interdependent character alike. Here, dialectic is a progression, a becoming, an alternation, a reciprocity, an internal pendulum, whose movement back and forth repeatedly challenges any fixed position transcending the two concepts. It is as if, by means of this dialectical movement, the character of the organizational identity achieves its fulfillment in its promise.

## 4. Presentation of the Case Study

### Methodology

The analysis of a single case study is relevant when the researcher applies an existing theoretical model (here, the five facets model of collective identity). It should not matter that the case is a one-off opportunity or has, until now, been closed to scientific investigation. The single case study is also justified when the aim is to propose a new theory in a field where earlier theories prove fragile and available research data scarce (Yin 2003; Brickson 2005: 604).<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental aim of our paper is exploratory; it proposes to open new frontiers and horizons from a theoretical perspective. We have, therefore, elected to explore in depth the case of a « mass media » organization, which by definition is sensitive to questions of external perception and audience (Spicer and Sewell, 2010). Our own study of the MarbaiKinder+<sup>4</sup> (henceforth MKI+), a free-to-air channel for young Arab audiences, meets the requirements of the stated research objective: to investigate in depth the formation of an organizational identity over a multi-year period.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of data analysis, our methodology emphasizes the dynamic evolution of MKI+'s organizational identity over an eight-year period, around three identified landmark events: the decision to launch the channel, the end of the partnership with TVIC (the european strategic advisory partner from project inception), and the launch of a second channel for preschoolers. For each facet of the Moingeon and Soenen framework, we study how they were impacted by those three events and how they evolve over time. Our study of the dynamic evolution of organizational identity draws on a comparison of the organizational leaders' opinions at different moments during the eight-year period, as well as on a discourse analysis (semantic changes) and the political and strategic turbulence in the environment.

### Data sources and data analysis

Our primary data source was confidential internal documents made available by TVIC. In order to investigate "the neglected puzzle of identity endurance" (Anteby and Molnar, 2012: 516) in the organizational identity and to achieve a longitudinal reconstruction of events which marked the history of the organization, we consulted documents from the entire period between 2000 and 2009.<sup>6</sup> This empirical data has been further supplemented by on-site observations and the collection of additional internal and external documentation (e.g. media coverage). In addition, before drawing any preliminary conclusions, we conducted nine in-depth interviews over a four-month

period with key people directly involved in the creation of the channel, i.e. people either in a management role or in a technical or editorial advisory capacity (350 pages of interview transcripts, a total interview data set of approximately 100,000 words). The aim was to reconstruct the intricacy of the case, i.e. to make sense of the development process of MKI+'s organizational identity from the viewpoint of the key players, but also to take into account the "many voices" (Brown, 2006: 743) which make organizational identity a "multiple intertextually networked narrative". Our interview approach was primarily semi-directive, user-centered, supported by a questionnaire with thirty open questions, supplemented by a general guide for the interviewer. Interviewers allowed the interview to progress unconstrained by the interview guide, which enabled interviewees to express themselves as they wished.<sup>7</sup> Interview data was systematically analyzed using standard software for qualitative data (Nvivo 8.0); this allowed for constant comparison, by means of iterative and inductive reasoning, between two data sources for the formulation of final coding nomenclature (Glaser and Strauss 1967).<sup>8</sup>

In the following section ("Findings"), we apply the analytical framework proposed by Moingeon and Soenen. For this we use "key-words" for each of the facets selected by the authors (see Table 1). Next we discuss the results and show how changes over time form a dynamic system. To conclude, we try to open new theoretical perspectives for the study of organizational identity and suggest a new theoretical model.

## **5. Findings: A study of the evolution of MKI+'s identity seen through the prism of the Five-Facets Theory**

### **Evolution of the Professed Identity**

*Core purpose/mission* - In the case of MKI+, the "core purpose claimed by the organization" is above all to "provide high-quality media solutions"<sup>9</sup>. It does adhere to the principle of an "educational media", associating learning and fun: this explains the channel's constant swing back and forth between education and entertainment. At the outset, the channel's orientation was more education than entertainment. Moreover, the channel will have "no taboos" and remain free and independent.

*Principal aims* - The three ascribed aims of the channel, purporting to help it achieve its core purpose, were a cultural agenda (dialogue with the real world), a political agenda (explore Arab identity) and an educational agenda (provide a supplement to, not a substitute for

school). Moreover, the channel set itself uncompromisingly high standards of quality.

It is particularly noteworthy that the expression “no taboo” disappeared from MKI+ vocabulary in late 2005, precisely when TVIC left the scene: the primary preoccupation was then to insist on Arab identity. Then the channel’s goal became to pay closer attention to program contents and to provide programming for children of all ages, thus creating the need for a second channel for the youngest age group. During the most recent period, educational mission became MKI+’s number one priority.

*Highlights of editorial policy* – In the words of TVIC’s Programming Consultant: “we are looking to create a pendulum swing from learning to fun and fun to learning”. To resolve the audience targeting issue, MKI+ had little choice but to create another channel, Younger+, a pre-school channel for Arabic children between the ages of 3 and 6 years.

*Future projection* – To continue solving its targeting dilemma, MKI+ plans to create a third channel for adolescents. And the 15 to 20-year old age group also represents a major strategic challenge for MKI+. Future projections also open up several new paths for MKI+: either preservation of the status quo or a radical transformation of the Professed Identity. In the latter event, the channel could evolve into a cluster of channels broadcasting from several platforms (not just one) across five continents (not three). It could also provide a mix of free and pay-for-view contents. In regard to these changes, the CEO of MKI+ comments: “We will not go down the path of revenue generation if it means selling our soul”.

## **Evolution of the Projected Identity**

*Organizational name determinants* – After hesitations, the Board suggested the compromise solution of double branding, proposing to add the name Marbai to the name Kinder+. The aim was to enable the new channel to benefit from the reputation of the established Marbai News TV group, while disentangling it from possible down-side connotations arising from such association. This choice led to grumblings throughout the organization, including the CEO: “I am not a mini-version of Marbai News TV”.

*Communication strategy* – Aforementioned difficulties over the choice of the name of the channel and a too abstract visual identity made the communication strategy remain unclear.

*Communication tools* – Branding was sober, colorful, tasteful, and dissociated from the visual graphics of Marbai News TV, while the logo was directly associated with the Marbai News TV image.

## **Evolution of the Experienced Identity**

*Shared values* – From the start, the values advocated by MKI+ – openness to others, dialogue, educational priority, uniting peoples of different nations, promoting Arab identity, editorial quality and freedom in the treatment of topics – were defended forcefully. These values strengthened collective aspirations as well as each individual's sense of belonging.

*Sense of belonging* – The two-year run-up period – 2000 to 2002 – was, in the words of TVIC's CEO, “a time when the people involved in the project believed themselves to be part of an exceptional adventure”. Their sense of belonging, involvement and commitment was striking. It lasted well beyond the launch of the channel and was greatly enhanced by the excellent working relations between local teams and TVIC experts. But it eventually grew weaker, probably due to the vast diversity within the organization (of religion, language, clans, degrees of professional experience, etc).

*Self-esteem* – Many awards rewarded over a very short period of time (2003-2005) the channel's creativity, as well as the audacity and innovativeness of its programming. Moreover, the channel hosted a number of high-profile personalities from a host of Arab countries. Finally, the channel reinforced its internal production capacity by going against the trend of out-sourcing production to independent units. All these elements encouraged, at least at the beginning of the experience, a strong sense of self-esteem.

## **Evolution of the Manifested Identity**

*Rites* – Of the fairly few rites in existence at MKI+, only those associated with local traditions remained, while the only rite with a more Western character (“drinks parties”) soon disappeared.

*Management style* – MKI+'s Board of Directors is composed primarily of leading members of the Marbai Ministry of Education, which controls 90% of the ownership. In fact, MKI+'s management functioned as an interaction of people dealing with conflicting expectations of various groups and demands of their public service mandate. In the recent period, it became more centralized.

*Market position* – Everything about MKI+ distinguishes it from its competitors: its history, its programs (primarily in-house), its legal status (ownership by the Marbai Ministry of Education).

## **Evolution of the Attributed Identity**

*Brand image* – As the CEO of MKI+ remarked: “when we launched the channel, the Arab world saw us as a European channel; that was

disastrous for us. (...) Little by little, we began to change our approach, and we added more and more identity”.

Moreover, the channel corresponded to the tastes of adults more than to children's, with problems of format, style, and information treatment. Among the team's preoccupations for 2007 are the compression of formats, the avoidance of polemical topics and the branding of Younger+.

*Reputation* - MKI+'s reputation seems inseparable from that of its big sister, therefore too narrowly associated with the adult world of the parents. Western producers acknowledged its very high artistic and technical standards.

## 6. Discussion

### For a “dynamics of identity”

In our case, we have constantly sought to shed light on the mechanisms of the identity process. Although the five-facet model does not provide an appropriate answer to this question, especially to expose the first steps of organizational identity construction, its application in the context of MKI+ has enabled us to distinguish critical aspects of the identity dynamics of an organization :

- The *Professed identity*, and particularly the core mission/claimed purpose, is not the only facet that functions as a “first cause” of sorts, setting the identity process in motion. Our findings show that sense of belonging and brand image, neither of which belongs to *Professed identity*, also play a role in a lengthy process, which actually embraces several different facets. These findings also substantiate an argument put forward by several earlier researchers, to wit : organizational identity is a dynamic process. Identity changes under the impact of past and present events (Czarniawska-Joerges 1997; Gioia and Thomas, 1996); it is as much the consequence of social construction (“understandings”) as the expression of a series of initial institutional characteristics (“claims”) (Ravasi and van Rekom, 2003; Ravasi and Shultz, 2006: 436; Elstak, 2008).

- The second point our study of MKI+ illustrates is the relationship - the constant interaction - between *Experienced identity* and *Attributed identity* that appears to form the core dynamics of identity formation, while *Professed identity* constitutes the key factor of identity transformation. No change of identity occurs during the second phase of MKI+'s story, because, relatively speaking, experienced identity (within the organization) and perceived identity (outside the organization) are more or less aligned and in harmony. Before the launch of Younger+, the dynamics of identity changes under pressures

from both sides. On the one hand, self-esteem is less and less strong, and on the other, the image from outside the organization is blurred and disturbed (too "Western", too "adult/parental"). These difficulties concerning *Experienced* identity, alongside a weakness of brand image, induce management to restructure the organization (departure of the organization's international experts from TVIC) and change the style of the channel (more identity-based programs). Here again we have confirmation of a phenomenon identified in the literature, i.e. the preeminence of an external opinion in the development of the organizational identity, which gives the organization legitimacy in the given environment (Gioia et. al., 2010) and to which top management endeavors to provide a coherent formulation (*Professed Identity*). The efforts undertaken to align the *Experienced* identity and the *Attributed* identity have a dynamic, transforming impact on the *Professed* identity. This is an example of "construed external image", referring to the individual member's perception of the image his/her organization projects to "outsiders", i.e. to individuals outside the organization with which the member has a relationship at one level or another.

### **A new theoretical model for understanding organizational identity**

Organizational identity is found, on the one hand, in the interstice between the boundaries of identity dynamics, and, on the other, in narrative dissonances.

*The structure of identity dynamics: the identity "from inside" the organization and the identity "from outside" the organization*

Identity dynamics exists at the point where *Experienced* identity and *Attributed* identity, as defined by Moingeon and Soenen, intersect. We find more useful the terms *Existential* identity and *Perceptual* identity, i.e. the identity "that comes from outside" the organization and the identity its leadership strives to create "inside" the organization. What, then, is meant by identity *from inside*? We are referring to the results of a process whereby the members of an organization create a collective identity for themselves internally. In this sense, organizational identity refers to those elements that affect the degree of cooperation between the members of an organization (Dutton, Duckerich and Kramer 1994). The identity *from inside* determines the member's degree of support for the organization, his/her motivation and commitment to the organization, both in the positive sense of the proper emotional distance or degree of "congruence" (Van Riel and Balmer 1997: 347), and the negative sense (detachment, lack of motivation, lack of

commitment) (Pratt 2000). Internal communication plays a leading role in this process. Identity *from inside* is the "experienced" facet of organizational identity – a human experience in perpetual evolution, an experience that enhances the community, where everyone plays a role (Van Maanen and Schein 1979) and deploys personal values, and where in turn everyone is imbued with the other members' values in an integrative process.

Thus, the identity *from inside* is not just a "cognitive linking between the definition of the organization and the definition of self" (Dukerich et al., 2002; Dutton et al., 1994), the impact of which permeates throughout the entire sphere of managerial decision-making (Cheney 1991). It is also an emotional bond, an attachment to the group (Kaufmann 2004). For this reason, the identity *from inside* must be connected to a broader framework : namely, the relationship it entertains with the identity *from outside*; management researchers refer to this as the "construed external image" of the "perceived external prestige" (Smidts et al., 2000). Over and above the social norms and climate peculiar to the organization, the "social substratum" of the identity *from outside* extends to the image people outside the organization reflect back to it (Brown 2004: 1327). Here we find ourselves in the first of two zones which lie at the very heart of identity dynamics.

The second zone is where the identity *from inside* is exposed to the identity *from outside*. This second identity corresponds to what the management literature calls reputation, i.e. the positive or negative way in which customers, investors, and partners respond to the name of the organization (Fombrun 1996). That is to say, it is identity as seen from the perspective of the organization's audiences. It is a measure of the esteem enjoyed by an organization outside its own internal boundaries. In this dialectic relationship of identity dynamics, there is a second phase in which the identity *from outside* interprets, unscrambles, and integrates the identity *from inside*. Our discussion of the MKI+ case showed that the identity *from outside* depends on its capacity to assert itself. The tensions that arise around the expression "a channel without taboos", and the frictions between groups of different national cultures, have an impact on the level of esteem that MKI+ enjoys. The CEO of MKI+ gave a striking example of this dynamic when he stated : "In the early days, we were idealist, if you will, and that's what made the contents of the programming so 'squeaky clean'. When the children looked each other in the eye, we were accused of being the channel of the Arab elite." The connection is very visible here: for the organizational members who share common values, the "idealism" stands out unambiguously; the viewing public sees "elitism", which is problematic because it runs counter to the intended project of exchange

and openness to all Arab-language children, which is supposed to embody MKI+.

*The structure of character and promise : Conceptual identity and Promised identity*

There are actually two modes of representation under what Moingeon and Soenen refer to as *Professed* identity : the one is character, the other is promise. How can two conflicting dimensions exist side-by-side and reflect each other in the "mind" (Balmer & Soenen, 1999), i.e. in the actual identity of the organization ("what organization is") (Balmer, Stuart and Greyser 2009; Balmer and Greyser 2002)? The first dimension is the seat of emotional stability and hard, tangible facts. The second is the dimension of risk and perpetual movement. Here again we come across the permanent tension - the « dilemma » in a sense - between stability and continuity (Kjaergaard, 2009 : 50). It is between these two extremities or poles that what can be called "the philosophy of the organization" is played out. This is what Collins and Porras refer to as "mission, purpose, values, strategic intent" (1991: 30-31), using four terms no doubt because of their lack of conciseness and exactness. "Whereas agricultural cooperatives initially were founded in the mid 1800s with economic purposes in mind", note Pratt et Foreman, "they soon took on social and educational missions as well" (2000b: 32). On the one hand, one asserts one's character, on the other one keeps one's promise : MKI+ is a channel for children (*Conceptual Identity*), but in contrast with the existing model of children's channels, it commits itself to producing most of its program content (*Promised Identity*). MKI+ is rooted in the language and cultural framework of Arab countries (*Conceptual Identity*), but it claims to be free, independent, without taboos (*Promised Identity*).

**Modeling "identity transition"**

Our proposed model of "identity transition" is based on the two paradoxes briefly outlined above in our introduction. On the one hand, organizational identity cannot remain indifferent to the perceptions of other social agents (internal/external dynamics). On the other, organizational identity comes to the fore in times of crisis, and gives rise to dissonances, which must be made sense of. In addition to these two paradoxes, our model suggests a distinction - call it a separation - between what belongs to character and what is promise, so as to be able to evaluate the degree of maturity of the organization's identity that heralds each phase of transition.

Our model of "identity transition" (see Table n°2) focuses attention on two fundamental aspects :

- an analysis of the dynamic interplay of identity transitions between what is experienced (identity *from inside*) and what is perceived (identity *from outside*); this allows a distinction to be made between successive phases of organizational identity (especially when discrepancies and inconsistencies occur, or when certain effects of rupture follow on from the effects of continuity). This analysis of the dynamic interplay can throw light on the proactive management of the identity *from inside* in its relationship with the identity *from outside* by means of appropriate strategies (adjustment, alignment, safeguarding, or transformation), which managers implement to preserve the internal equilibrium of the organization and sustain the range of opportunities for a fruitful relationship with external agents.

- the investigation of narrative dissonances between character and promise. What is at stake here, Kaufmann argues, "is not a definition of the complete and decisive oneness of identity ; it is the creation of partial and relative elements, reconnecting interrupted threads and leading the hunt for dissonances" (2004: 191). The challenge is to return the identity process to its "protean versatility" (2004: 79) through the study of "crises, aspirations, routines, episodes" (Boudès and Christian 1998: 115; Anteby and Molnar, 2012: 533). Over and above the creation of a chronological order, narrative activity is the formation of a "configurational" order ; to quote Boudès & Christian, "a contemplation of events with a view to marshaling them into a meaningful whole" (1998: 110). The aim is to single out the various levels of maturity that the identity has reached once the organization is in a position to fulfill its commitments.

## 7. Conclusion

In this discussion our intention has been to understand organizational identity in its different facets, drawing on methodological elements and conceptual analyses from multiple fields of research. This approach has enabled us to explore concepts such as brand image, construed external image, and reputation, not as "distinct concepts" (Brown, 2006: 754), but rather in interaction with each other in the development and evolution of the organizational identity. We also learned that identity is, indeed, constructed from "differences" (Clegg et al., 2007: 510); on the one hand, *spatial and temporal differences*: as identity emerges from between the two poles of self-recognition constituted by memory and promise; and on the other hand, *differences of perception*, notably between internal and external perception. In this sense, the concept of promise is particularly important to capture the narrative element (as

the performative act in discourse) in the organizational identity, as well as the ethical ones (through the fiduciary character of the commitment).

The model also highlights the dialectics of *sameness* and *otherness* which, in our opinion, is a dialectic of critical importance for the expression of organizational identity. This dialectic represents an authentic epistemological rupture with a permanent, fixist interpretation of identity. It also sheds new light on identity's internal tensions, which management researchers are well aware of, but are unable to explain. Ricoeur's opposition of character (*Conceptual* identity) and promise (*Promised* identity), which elucidates the contribution of narrative dissonance in terms of "how the concept of time becomes meaningful" (Brown 2006: 740), allows an appreciation of the maturity of the organization's identity, at the same time that it raises the question of ethics. With the exception of a few particular studies in the field of business ethics (Trevino et al., 2008) this fundamental aspect of identity has not received up to now, as Verbos et al. noted (2007), sufficient attention in the study of organizational identity.

Nevertheless, in some respects our research has limitations. For one, the case study itself was impeded by linguistic and geographical considerations. Likewise, MKI+ is somewhat of a special case historically, economically, and politically speaking. This fact alone limits the generalizability of the findings, which really are specific to this particular environment. And even though the case may have broader relevance, we feel that it would have been very interesting to interview television viewers, in particular to gather more data on the identity *from outside*. Again, we came up against a language problem, as well as a lack of information from the channel itself about its audience.

In terms of further research, our own preliminary investigation provides guidelines for developing a new, integrative conceptual framework. It would be very useful to put forward an applied methodology for the use of the model. Furthermore, to a significant degree, our investigation looked at narrative dissonances. It would also be interesting to explore the case from the point of view of "divergent interests" (Rodrigues and Child, 2008), which are by no means absent, as the results of the empirical study showed several times.

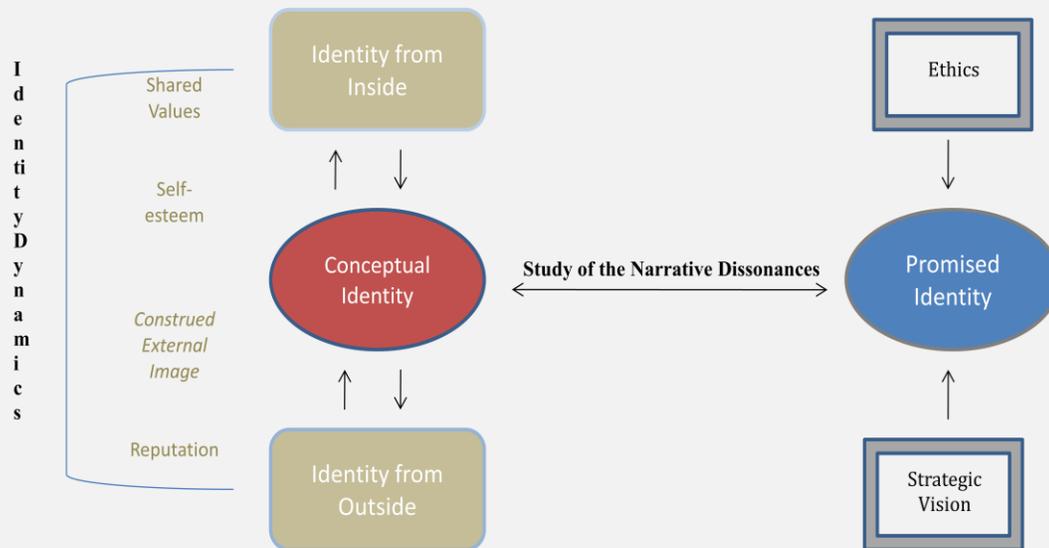
Similarly, the role of media organizational leadership is neglected in the present analysis. Indeed, our analysis clearly shows that leaders ought to pay more attention to maintaining coherence between multiple aspects (Conceptual, Promised, Existential, Perceptual) of an organizational identity. It also establishes that identity harmony or compatibility, as a becoming which never offers the possibility of any static consensus, cannot easily be 'managed' from the top (Walsh and

Glynn, 2008). It is first of all a process which permanently engages the sense of ethics of all stakeholders (Brickson, 2005; 2007). *Identity transition* needs to be considered under a relational perspective, as an open process through which continuous change occurs and emergent coordination of multiple influences is needed (Collier & Esteban, 2000; Painter-Morland, 2008). It seems to us that, in future, it would be extremely interesting to study organizational identity from this particular systemic angle.

**Table 1. "The five facets of collective identity", adapted from Moingeon & Soenen (2002)**

	Definition	Key words	Main Authors
The <i>Professed</i> Identity	Refers to what a group or an organization professes about itself	Programmatic, future-oriented, statements, "central, distinctive and enduring"	Albert & Whetten (1985)
The <i>Projected</i> Identity	Refers to the elements an organization uses to present itself to specific audiences	Communications, symbols, behaviors, mediations, annual reports, logos, design	Garbett (1988), Christensen & Cheney (2000)
The <i>Experienced</i> Identity	Refers to what an organizational members experience with regard to their organization	Cognitive beliefs, collective unconscious structure, collective cognitive maps	Dutton & Dukerich (1991), Goldenbiddle & Rao (1997)
The <i>Manifested</i> Identity	Refers to specific set of coupled elements that have characterized the organization over a period of time	Past characteristics, unique history, management style, market position, myths, taboos, rites	Larçon & Reitter (1979), Downey (1996), Moingeon & Ramanantsoa (1997)
The <i>Attributed</i> Identity	Refers to the attributes that are ascribed to the organization by its various audiences	Public, reputation, brand image, "transient impressions"	Fombrun (1996), Gioia, Schulz, Corley (2000)

**Table 2. A Model of Identity Transition**



**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> With Greyser they (2009) presented a third version of the model). In the second version, the authors make a distinction between the *Communicated Identity*, i.e. « controllable » corporate communication (advertising, sponsorship, public relations), and *Conceived Identity* (corporate reputation, corporate image, corporate branding).

<sup>2</sup> « This range creates an opportunity for discriminating readers to identify connections and conflicts to pursue in future research. Moreover, the contributions do demonstrate that organizational identity can be approached from a variety of business-oriented disciplines and should excite readers anxious to make links across disciplines. (Harquail, 2004 : 143).

<sup>3</sup> Concerning organizational identity in particular, as Gombault points out, we are dealing with a cluster of theories that look into various philosophical, psychoanalytical, sociological, anthropological and psychosocial dimensions of the problem. In so doing, they add exponentially to the complexity of constructing a theory of organizational identity (2000).

<sup>4</sup> All the names like MarbaiKinder+, Marbai News TV, Marbai, Thema Group, TVIC etc... used in this study are pseudonyms that we are employing so as to preserve the anonymity of the organization and the place where the research was conducted. The dates we use in the case do not correspond to the real ones.

<sup>5</sup> In addition, our study aims to place the problem in its socio-economic environment in order to illustrate the overall dynamics of the process and make sense of the evolution of the organization's identity. Rather than start from a series of *a priori* rationalizations, we begin with a tentative theory, which is compatible with our data production and analysis (Gombault 2006; Wacheux 1996). Our research approach is

deliberately qualitative; we favor a strong narrative emphasis, as is frequent in organizational identity research.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately 750 pages of documents on budgets, program acquisitions, programming schedules, layout plans for the main building and studios, organization charts for internal and external teams, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The interviewees were part of a pluridisciplinary project team (Program Advisor, Programming Consultant, Project Leader and Technical Consultant) put together by *Thema Group* during the launch and support phases (until 2007). Six people were interviewed in Europe in late 2008; three additional interviews, including the interview of the Chief Executive Officer of MKI+, took place in Marbai. All interviews lasted between two and four hours and were recorded. Transcriptions were produced immediately, which had the further advantage of confirming that, by the ninth interview, all topics in the topic dictionary had been covered with no need for additional sub-topics (theoretical saturation).

<sup>8</sup> In keeping with our exploratory, hybrid approach, we added several more sub-topics after in-depth analysis of the first transcripts. Thus, our analytical framework remained open to new sub-topics as the interview process progressed (Van Maanen 1983).

<sup>9</sup> NB: our quotes of interviewee's statements reflect the exact statements made during the interview. No effort has been made to correct grammar or improve style.

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