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Abstract

Creative workers often experience identity tensions. On the one hand, 'creatives' desire to see themselves as distinctive in their artistry, passion, and self-expression, nurturing an identity that energizes their innovative efforts. Yet daily pressures to meet budgets, deadlines and market demands encourage a more business-like identity that supports firm performance. Through a comparative case study of New Product Design (NPD) consultancies, we explicate the potential management of such identity tensions. Case evidence illustrates overarching, paradoxical approaches to identity regulation as the firms emphasized both differentiation and integration strategies. Differentiation practices promoted disparate identities by segregating related roles in time and space, while integration efforts encouraged a more synergistic meta-identity as 'practical artists'. Leveraging paradox literature, we discuss how these strategies may accommodate creative workers' needs to cope with multiple identities, as well as their aversion to sanctioned subjectivities.

Keywords

creative workers, creativity, identity, identity regulation, innovation, paradoxes, management

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Creative workers – such as those employed in the creative industries (e.g. product design, music) – face tensions from multiple identity demands (Michlewski, 2008). On the one hand, being part of a bohemian milieu and sharing cultural, rather than materialistic, values lies at the core of their artistic self-perception (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). A key feature of creative industries, however, is that their goods are not developed for the sake of art (DeFillippi et al., 2007). Daily work pressures, including deadlines, budgets, market demands and client satisfaction, spur identification with the business. In conjunction, ‘creatives’ are expected to innovate within manageable bounds as production is embedded in an economic context, where art and business are intertwined (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007).

Seeking to weave together their artist and business identities often generates friction as creatives’ identity work juxtaposes conflicting values and expectations (Hackley and Kover, 2007). Identity regulation strategies represent managerial efforts aimed at influencing how employees cope with such tensions (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Indeed, contemporary managers are increasingly attentive to how control might be exercised through the manufacture of subjectivity (Watson, 1994). Critical literature has provided rich insights into such nuanced controls, and their potential abuses (Deetz, 1992; Knights and Willmott, 1992; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Yet researchers bemoan the scarcity of studies examining how firms might help employees cope with multiple identity demands (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Watson, 2008).

In response, our research explores strategies of control aimed at regulating identity tensions within highly creative settings. Conducting a comparative case study (Eisenhardt, 1989) of five product design firms, informants articulated both the importance and challenge of multiple identities. In their words, the demands of product design – clients seeking exciting, new products in short timeframes with limited budgets – require creative workers to be artists *and* consultants. In successful projects, creatives ‘live and breathe design’ and take advantage of streamlined processes that speed innovation. Yet informants also articulated concerns over either identity in isolation, and depicted supportive identity regulation practices. More specifically, managerial strategies involved both differentiation and integration. Segregating creatives’ varied roles in time and space helped compartmentalize and leverage their distinct identities. To minimize identity conflict, however, socialization efforts sought to cultivate an integrative meta-identity. Helping creative workers view themselves as ‘practical artists’ accentuated synergies between their identities, reducing the sense of tensions and resulting defensiveness that can fuel destructive extremes.

We leverage paradox literature to unpack these strategies, contributing understandings of paradoxical approaches to identity regulation that may accommodate creative workers’ needs to cope with multiple identities, as well as their aversion to sanctioned subjectivities. Interestingly, this literature also accentuated the paradoxical nature of our own research lens. Given our emphasis on regulating identities yet our use of a more managerialist framing, our approach departs from and builds upon critical literature. Contrary to critical theorists that have traditionally highlighted the oppressive effects of management control programs (Frost, 1987), our study reveals that paradoxical approaches to identity regulation can be a productive form of thinking and acting in creative settings. Such framing can mobilize the critical link of managerially inspired

identity regulation strategies to processes of active identity work, thereby extending Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) catalogue of means through which identity regulation is enacted. We propose that this alternative view may infuse novel insights into traditional approaches to managing creatives. Remaining linked to the critical base, however, ensures that we and others remain wary of subtle means of domination and provides a useful inspiration for reflexivity. Such awareness corresponds to Alvesson et al.'s (2008) call for identity researchers to be explicit about their lens, while exploring interplay across varied and even divergent philosophical perspectives. In so doing, researchers may open new and richer avenues for debate and discussion.

Identity tensions and regulation

A growing and diverse literature has helped complicate understandings of identity, surfacing change and plurality as potential sources of tension. For instance, the view that identity is fixed has long been challenged (Watson, 2008). Identity is increasingly conceptualized as fluid and malleable (Kreiner et al., 2006a), impermanent and fragmentary (Bendle, 2002), multiple and contextual (Alvesson, 2000). As Giddens notes (1992: 30), 'the self today is for everyone a reflexive project'. Identities are continuously constructed and reconstructed, constantly negotiated through processes of identification and differentiation (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). 'Identity is thus of necessity always a project rather than an achievement' (Watson, 2008: 124), since the self is reflexively understood by the individual through multiple and competing discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Through ongoing identity work, individuals seek to achieve an affirmative well-being by securing a strong self in their social relations (Alvesson, 1994). Likewise, identities are no longer seen as uni-dimensional or fully integrated (Gabriel, 1999). On the contrary, individuals rarely experience a unitary sense of self (Nkomo and Cox, 1996). Coexisting identities characterize the multiple nature of selves (Collinson, 2003). Multiple and shifting identities can be mutually reinforcing, but can also trigger tensions when experienced as contradictory or incompatible (Kreiner et al., 2006b). Identity work is, therefore, often characterized by ambiguity and paradox (Knights and Willmott, 1999).

Such tensions often arise within organizations, as employees harbor a repertoire of identities that are made salient by their various roles and that may evolve with role changes (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). Hall (1995), for instance, argues that transitions among roles fuel changes in aspects of identity relevant to those particular roles. This is not to say, however, that roles and identities are synonymous. Unlike the concept of role, identities are imbued with personal meaning, which individuals construct and reconstruct (Karreman and Alvesson, 2004). Yet 'what one *does* is often compared with expectations about who one *is* to motivate the construction process' (Pratt et al., 2006: 255, italics added). Role enactment therefore influences self-definition (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). When organizational members internalize varied and often disparate role expectations, the result is multiple, potentially conflicting identities (Stryker and Burke, 2000), which may exacerbate insecurity and anxiety during identity work (Collinson, 2003).

Studies suggest that management strategies may influence identity and related tensions by exercising controls toward the manufacture of subjectivity (e.g. Alvesson and

Willmott, 2002). Such practices seek to shape organizational members' self-directed actions, 'reaching to the very core of each employee's sense of selfhood and identity, defining his/her very being' (Gabriel, 1999: 180). Indeed, studies suggest that management strategies have shifted from a focus on technocratic control (through work standardization and direct supervision) toward attempts to influence workers' beliefs (Alvesson and Karreman, 2001). Literature refers to such efforts as normative control, concertive control, ideology and identity regulation (see Karreman and Alvesson, 2004).

Identity regulation denotes strategies aimed at influencing identity work in directions that support organizational goals (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The supply of managerial discourses and practices, the frequency or intensity of their presence and the linking of managerial efforts to underlying and varied work roles may influence employees' ongoing identity negotiations and incite members to enact particular identities (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001). Such strategies seek to prescribe how organizational members should think about themselves and their work (Kunda, 1992). Managerially defined roles and scripts locate employees within a structure (Kuhn, 2006), and therefore help create, maintain and transform their identities (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Notions of identity regulation find resonance in Foucault's technologies of the self, wherein individuals affirm and transform themselves while merging autonomous action with institutional expectations (Kosmala, 2003).

Specific strategies of identity regulation, however, are rarely examined in research. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) offer an exception. According to their study, regulatory efforts may target four elements: 1) the employee: helping directly define the individual and/or related others; 2) action orientations: providing a specific vocabulary of motives and values (e.g. through stories, archetypes, recruitment, social activities) through which employees may construct the meaning of their work, developing supportive knowledge and skills; 3) social relations: clarifying group categorizations and affiliations; specifying hierarchical location; and 4) the scene: establishing clear 'rules of the game'; bounding the context (e.g. market or industry). Similarly, Zanoni and Janssens (2007) explain how espoused values and stories, social events in organizations and education programs orient members' identities in a particular direction. Karreman and Alvesson (2004) also discuss 'sensebreaking' as a managerial practice that can 'disrupt an individual's sense of self to create a meaning void that must be filled' (Pratt, 2000: 464). This form of managed identification may occur via linking identity to a void and perpetuating the tension between current and ideal identities.

Yet critical theorists often present such control efforts as means of hegemony (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Willmott (1993: 534), for instance, notes how control programs are 'designed to deny or frustrate the development of conditions in which critical reflection is fostered. They commend the homogenisation of norms and values within organizations.' From a critical perspective, resistance normally prevails when managers attempt to exercise extensive control over employees' mindsets (Frost, 1987). Control strategies are seen as problematic, because individuals need to some extent to subordinate their autonomy to the collective will of the organization (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Building on critical literature we are attentive to such potentially oppressive effects of control that can spur employee resistance (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998), yet we do not see all identity regulation strategies as necessarily oppressive and

unsuccessful. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) acknowledge that when wisely applied, regulation efforts accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses can be a productive form of thinking and acting.

We concur with critical theorists that organizational members are not only targets but also contributing designers of normative organizational control, enabling the vital linking of identity regulation discourses and practices to processes of active identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Organizational members may draw upon managerial discourses when such discourses allow them to construct a positive identity (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). On the contrary, when employees feel threatened, defensive, subordinated or insecure, strategies of identity regulation may amplify cynicism and resistance (Ezzamel et al., 2000; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006). For instance, employees may create their own spaces within firms and refuse responsibility for the organization (Collinson, 1994). Individuals may also become skilled manipulators of self and image in the eyes of 'significant others' when they feel visible yet threatened within the regulatory context (Collinson, 1999; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006).

Creative, knowledge-intensive firms are ambiguous playgrounds that render identity regulation more valued and more problematic than other settings (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). These settings pose complex tensions for creative workers and for management. Creatives often grapple with competing artist and business identities (Hackley and Kover, 2007), while managers face demands for autonomy and control (Scarborough, 1999) and for exploration and exploitation (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009). Normative control can serve to integrate individuals within these environments and help creatives cope with conflicting identities (Robertson and Swan, 2003). Yet identity regulation may also prove counterproductive and alienating. Driving conformity toward an 'organizational self' may foster homogeneity that impedes innovation (Dukerich et al., 1998). Regulation may also spur resistance as 'creative people tend to rebel at efforts to manage them overly systematically' (Florida, 2002: 133).

Our study links and expands existing understandings of identity regulation by investigating strategies within leading, highly creative organizations. As such, our work responds to calls for more comparative research of managing creatives and related tensions (e.g. DeFillippi et al., 2007) and addresses demands for greater attention to managing identity as an insufficiently explored dimension of organizational control (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). We acknowledge that while identity regulation may serve valuable purposes within creative settings, such techniques can be turned toward oppressive ends. This possibility renders their value precarious, and raises the simultaneous need for greater reflexivity and vigilance. Guided by a critical lens, 'managing' identity tensions, in this context, shifts the responsibility from elitist groups toward both a more personal and more collective process.

Research methodology

Our research entailed a comparative case study, an inductive design that applies replication logic. Given the scarcity of studies investigating identity tensions and regulation and our particular interest in creative industries, this qualitative approach was deemed suitable to enable contextualization and vivid description (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Cases are treated as multiple experiments, each case helping to confirm or disconfirm the findings drawn from the others (Yin, 1994). Following a neo-positivist approach (Alvesson, 2003), we adopted Eisenhardt's (1989) process of selecting theoretically relevant cases, collecting case data, and conducting iterative, inductive analyses. As such, we retain the analyses and language consistent with this approach, while recognizing that processes of identity construction and regulation can be accessed and studied through varied methods and lenses (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Case selection

Our research was conducted in five leading New Product Design (NPD) consultancies for several reasons. First, NPD firms are particularly creativity-intensive settings, seeking to provide their clients with highly innovative solutions that foster commercial success and competitive advantage (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997). Similarities between NPD and other industries may also enable generalizability to a wider population. This industry resembles others that rely on knowledge workers, such as cultural (e.g. movies), high-technology (e.g. research, biotech) and professional (e.g. medicine, law) industries. Second, we theoretically sampled firms to fit our research focus (Eisenhardt, 1989). The five case firms demonstrated both creative and business prowess themselves. Over the past decade, each of the consultancies has been renowned for its cutting-edge innovation, as evident by numerous design awards, while remaining highly profitable. Lastly, within this setting, we sought firms with similarities that would aid comparisons and replication, yet with sufficient heterogeneity to assess potential generalizability. Selecting firms that offer common services, including product design, engineering, and branding, helped control for certain contextual factors. In addition, all firms are headquartered in the United States. To provide variety, however, we chose firms with different industry specializations, thereby offering eclectic settings for creative work, and with clients ranging from entrepreneurial to Fortune 500 companies. We also selected firms of varied size (ranging from 16 to 250 employees) and age (from nine to 34 years in business).

Data collection

Informant interviews were our primary source of inductive data, while archival materials and observations expanded our understandings of each case context, offering insights that might refute or reinforce our findings (Forster, 1994). We conducted a total of 86 semi-structured interviews. In all five firms, an entry interview was conducted with the founder(s)/CEO(s) to learn more about the firm, its history, structure, culture and competitors. Participating interviewees consisted of individuals (68 men and 18 women) directly involved in the creative process (e.g. executives, directors, designers, engineers). Informants' ages ranged from 24 to 56 and averaged 35 years, while tenure at their respective firms ranged from four months to 23.5 years and averaged 5.6 years.

Interviews began broadly and indirectly by asking informants to describe their varied roles and expectations, then became focused on their reports of managerial processes and practices in place to support their efforts. To avoid guiding responses, we purposefully did *not* include words related to identity (e.g. identity, identification) or tensions

(e.g. conflict, contradictions, tensions, paradox) in any interview questions. Interviews were held at the NPD firms' offices and lasted 70 minutes on average. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure reliability (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988). Throughout data collection, we sought to minimize interview bias via informant diversity, anonymity and confidentiality (Huber and Power, 1985). Informants included multiple employees across levels and functions. We have not identified significant differences in informants' descriptions of identity regulation practices, so retrospective bias was not an issue (Seidler, 1974). Within each firm, we continued recruiting informants until we reached a stage when additional interviews failed to dispute existing or reveal new categories or relationships – that is, until we achieved theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Archival data and observations expanded our understandings (Forster, 1994). We examined industry reports, articles and web material related to each firm, and documents produced by the firms themselves, including employee handbooks, marketing materials and press releases. We also made non-participant observations, shadowing creative workers and their managers in their daily routines, attending team meetings and observing social interactions. We wrote these notes as a field journal after each observation period.

Data analysis

Following Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Miles and Huberman (1994), systematic, iterative comparisons of data, emerging categories and existing literature aided our development of an integrative theoretical framework. Analysis started by examining all interview transcripts, with an aim to identify patterns and variance in descriptions of identity regulation strategies. To assess the reliability of our emergent categories of identity regulation, we then involved one independent coder with considerable qualitative research experience and unfamiliar with the study. We compared codings, resulting in an inter-coder agreement of $k = 0.842$, which was well above the minimal threshold of 0.70 suggested by Cohen (1960). After completing all five cases, we conducted cross-case comparisons using standard techniques (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994). We looked for similar themes across cases, which we gathered into aggregate dimensions that served as the basis of our emerging framework. We labeled these dimensions either by capturing the content at a higher level of abstraction or by referring to existing literature. In the final stage, we drew on past studies of identity regulation to refine our labels and understandings.

Artist-consultant tensions and managerial strategies of identity regulation

To present our results, we first describe briefly the identity tensions evident across these case studies. Informants richly articulated the value of both artist and consultant identities, while noting the dangers of either in isolation. We then examine how managerially inspired strategies of identity regulation were applied to help creatives cope with these tensions. Interestingly, differentiation and integration strategies were prevalent in each

firm. Case evidence illustrates these robust, overarching patterns, while depicting a variety of specific tactics used to implement each strategy. Differentiation strategies help leverage creatives' distinct identities, as tactics separate their underlying roles in time (e.g. during phases of the creative process or while working on different projects) or in space (e.g. in physical areas dedicated to exhibiting either identity). Strategies of integration, in contrast, seek to position identity differences as synergistic. Across our studies, integration entailed nurturing a meta-identity of creatives as 'practical artists'. Socialization tactics, such as hiring, mentoring and ongoing communications, accentuated connections among divergent, yet interwoven roles.

Tensions of donning 'artist' and 'consultant' hats

The multiple identities depicted in our case studies reflect conflicting demands for artistic expression and business performance. As others have noted, art and business collide in creative industries (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). Indeed, across the firms, managers were well aware of the need for creatives to wear both artist and consultant hats. An informant explained:

It is not only about the ability to be creative, but the ability to be creative in a controlled way that deals with project profitability. (Principal, Industrial Design, Firm B)

Another elaborated:

That tension is the hardest thing that we manage, and it is the thing that drives the best creative work, because you have to make money. You have to work within constraints, but do world-class design. (Director, Firm C)

Informant depictions, however, went beyond describing the need for multiple identities to stress dangers of resulting tensions. As Kreiner et al. (2006a) noted, identity tensions can harm actors' personal well-being, as well as their work performance. Identity *imbalance* can be draining emotionally and cognitively (Kreiner et al., 2006b). In our cases, an artist or consultant identity in isolation was described as problematic to creative workers and to their firms.

Over-identification as an artist was bemoaned for fuelling work obsession that can undermine work–life balance and foster counter-productive behavior. In the words of one designer:

... at the same time it [too much emphasis on artistic expression] can be very stressful and it can lead to burn out. It can lead to very emotional, angry people at times, and I'm sure that has a negative effect on creativity. (Industrial Designer, Firm C)

In addition, a sole artistic identity was feared for breeding prima donnas that were difficult to manage and a barrier to collaborative efforts:

A prima donna says, 'I am wonderful, and there will be no other.' There is a difference between that prima donna mentality and the mentality of the inquisitive mind. The inquisitive mind always says 'Gee, there is so much I don't know,' no matter how gifted or talented they are. (CEO, Firm B)

On the other hand, over-identifying as a consultant threatens individuality and the firm's reputation for cutting-edge innovation:

Some of the problems are that you start writing your proposals all in the same way; it takes a little spice out of them . . . You start approaching work in the same way and anticipating your results in the same way as you did in the last three projects . . . It starts getting too old habit. (Vice President, Engineering, Firm E)

Blending differentiation and integration strategies

Managerial strategies sought to engage creatives in active identity work to reduce the frustrations of artist-consultant tensions and avoid the danger of isolated extremes. Yet while past research depicts strategies of identity regulation based on either differentiation or integration (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kreiner et al., 2006b), these design firms demonstrated an exceptionally mixed approach. Managing in these creative contexts entailed efforts to influence identity work in ways that segregate and embrace multiple identities.

Identity differentiation denotes separating disparate roles that underlie conflicting identities. Conflict is experienced when individuals must simultaneously don different hats, thereby intensifying ambiguity in identity work (Pratt et al., 2006). Yet while such juxtaposition strains cognitive abilities to cope with tensions, differentiation seeks to preserve distinct identities (Kuhn, 2006). Across cases, supporting tactics leveraged time or space to compartmentalize artist and consultant identities. Temporal and spatial differentiation may alter the work context sufficiently to render only one or the other identity salient. Table 1 illustrates these common strategies as well as tactical variations across the case firms.

Temporal differentiation helped creatives switch between their artist and consultant roles at different points in time. Two temporal tactics appeared consistently in our studies. First, different roles were called upon explicitly in different phases of the creative process. Such segregation pushes individuals to alternate sequentially between identities depending on whichever is most salient (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In these cases, as a project evolves, creatives' focus shifts from the freedom of exploration to the discipline of execution. Artist identities were made central during early exploratory efforts:

When we talk about creativity, I would say in the concept phases when we don't look much at costs or whether the client can manufacture it, so there are no constraints. (Industrial Designer, Firm A)

Table I Cross-case comparisons: Identity regulation through differentiation

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
Switching roles within different phases of the creative process <i>From exploration (artist) to execution (consultant)</i>	<p>‘There are phases in the project where it is all about creativity ... but then as we move on I need to follow the structure and look at the constraints.’ (Industrial Designer)</p>	<p>In one of the walls of the main meeting room, there is an explanation of the five-stage process adopted by the firm. The initial stages focus on envisioning the product, while the stages at the end are about development, refinement and launch. (Observation notes, Boston office)</p>	<p>‘... the goal is to widely ... and then ... measure those criteria ... narrow the field.’ (Director, Mechanical Engineering)</p>	<p>‘When we first start our brainstorming session we tend to try to let that go at first ... because usually the really crazy ideas tend to trickle down and maybe a part of that can still be applied to what the end result will be.’ (Design Director)</p>	<p>‘On the creative side we give people the opportunity to do big brainstorming ... but when you’re implementing you need to get the job done.’ (Senior Industrial Designer)</p>
Switching roles between projects <i>Being new to the project domain (artist) or being expert in the project domain (consultant)</i>	<p>‘The market often favors picking someone who has done such consulting before and it is very compelling to discover your strength, they use you a lot in that particular area ... diversity in projects makes you realize that you don’t know what you are supposed to do and there is this tension.’ (CEO)</p>	<p>‘So, we are trying to put together a group of people that has a certain amount of experience but also a certain amount of naiveté.’ (CEO)</p>	<p>‘So it’s this constant injection of fresh perspectives and ideas ... and that would keep anyone on their toes, at the same time you have people ... who lend their experience to projects.’ (Industrial Designer)</p>	<p>‘The trouble is you can build a lot of expertise in an area by doing projects multiple times but you can also become quite stale as well. So ... you’ve got to marry a younger designer with energy, naivety and talent and moderate that with experience and control.’ (Design Director 2)</p>	<p>‘We’re taking away someone with experience and we’re replacing them with someone with no experience of this area ...’ (Director, Industrial Design)</p>

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
Space for creative identity	'People do things within their space, an essence of expression of personal self. There are people here that have actually brought in musical instruments that they play' (Senior Vice President, Design)	Employees are encouraged to personalize their space with sketches, objects, photos or prototypes. (Observation notes, Boston office)	Employees are encouraged to personalize their space with sketches, objects, photos or prototypes. (Observation notes, Silicon Valley and San Francisco office)	'I think that's just a form of self-expression ... if they can do anything they want with their space, at least they have some form of free expression ... it's almost like fine art.' (Creative Director)	Employees are encouraged to customize their workspace with artifacts (photos, sketches). (Observation notes, New York office)
Personalized work space					
Gallery-like walls	Inspiration walls where employees tack new-born ideas/sketches. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	Inspiration walls where employees tack new-born ideas/sketches in a dedicated space. (Observation notes, Boston office)	Inspiration walls where employees tack new-born ideas/sketches in a dedicated space. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	Inspiration walls where employees tack new-born ideas/sketches in a dedicated space. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	Inspiration walls where employees tack new-born ideas/sketches in a dedicated space. (Observation notes, New York Office)
Physical space for creative expression	In the office, there is a space dedicated to music. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	The company encourages its employees to draw and pin up the generated pieces in a dedicated space. (Observation notes, Boston office)	'I try to promote group sketching so that they can see what each other is doing at the time that they are working.' (Creative Director)	Designers are encouraged to sketch together. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	No evidence
Space for consultant identity	Meeting rooms where project teams bring project related material to aid discussion. (Observation notes, Silicon Valley and San Francisco offices)	War rooms which are used for brainstorming and testing life-sized prototypes. (Observation notes, Boston office)	Several project spaces displaying objects, sketches, prototypes and newspaper or magazine articles related to specific projects. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	Several meeting rooms for exchanging viewpoints among team members. (Observation notes, San Francisco office)	Office is centered around projects and teams. For a radio satellite, the company set up a war room, took apart existing products and collected articles written for the industry and its products. (Observation notes, New York office)
Meeting/war rooms					

In contrast, during later phases, client demands, deadlines and budgets push creatives to think and act like consultants and thereby narrow project boundaries. As a designer explained:

... we will have pressure to create and finish a certain design in a limited time...sometimes we have to narrow down 100 ideas to 10. (Industrial Designer, Firm C)

Another means of temporal differentiation encouraged role switching between projects. Creative industries necessarily revolve around projects – whether production of theatre plays, movies, music or product design (DeFillippi et al., 2007). In these design firms, projects were purposefully diversified to ensure continuous knowledge development, while honing firm competencies in certain areas. Likewise, the composition of project teams was managed to vary the roles of creative workers. Teams comprised those without preconceived ideas, to spur creative inquiry and greater artistry, as well as those skilled in the project domain, to ensure efficiency, market fit and related consultant expertise. By participating in multiple teams, creative workers could alternate between identities, depending on their role in each project team. In resourcing meetings we observed that directors were keen to assign employees to projects where they had no experience in the area (and, therefore, could contribute fresh perspectives) but also to projects where their experience would enable implementation. For instance, one director explained how his firm leverages the consultant identity in the resourcing of projects:

So we try to put the right people on it (a project), to have the background to be most efficient because of their experience. (Director, Product Design, Firm A)

Space also provided a medium for identity differentiation, but the cases illustrated common and varied tactics within this strategy. As shown in Table 1, all five firms encouraged creative workers to personalize their work space. Artistic displays were apparent in eclectic venues that showcased individuality and personal expression (Elsbach, 2003). In Firm A, for instance:

Persons' spaces are decorated with all sort of junk they design ... spending most of your waking hours in this environment, it would be crippling to not be encouraged to personalize your space. (Director, Product Design, Firm A)

Differentiation tactics varied, however, in more public spaces. For instance, all firms had dedicated walls for exhibiting workers' ideas and sketches. In Firms A and D, such spaces looked like galleries, mixing works in hopes of inspiring novel connections and applications. In contrast, Firms B, C and E provided more structured spaces, grouping creative postings by projects. Furthermore, the cases illustrate how space might be used to encourage other forms of creative expression, such as music in Firm A or drawing in Firm B, or to foster a 'studio' mode, illustrated by group sketching areas in Firms C and D.

At the same time, other public spaces reinforced consultant identities by helping creative workers shift into a more business mode. For instance, conference rooms geared to

facilitate client meetings were prominent in Firms A and D. In contrast, ‘war rooms’ (a label used by Firm B but with similar examples in Firms C and E) signaled aggressive and focused team efforts, decorated with project timelines, goals and budgets, as well as related prototypes, objects and sketches. Firm E’s President offered this example of a war room:

There’s a certain project that we’re working on now that involves a lot of our people . . . there’s specialized computer equipment, and all the boards and whiteboards and diagrams are in a room upstairs, which is where they’ll go to work on certain aspects of the project. (President, Company E)

Identity integration, in contrast, denotes managerial attempts to help individuals embrace disparate roles as synergistic and, thereby, cope with their tensions. Our cases illustrate how a meta-identity may serve this purpose. A meta-identity offers a superordinate self-categorization within which discrete identities can relate (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). Contradictions among identities may be reconciled by emphasizing their interdependence. Following Deetz (1994), such a regulatory approach provides an integrative system wherein identities are preserved, but channeled in the direction of organizational expectations. In these design consultancies, the meta-identity of creatives as ‘*practical artists*’ appeared to serve this purpose. The term ‘practical artists’ was used by multiple informants in Firm A. Yet this notion, as elaborated in the quote below, and similar language permeated all five case studies. We, therefore, came to use the term as it appeared to nicely reflect the paradoxical identity described across cases:

. . . product design is art but it’s also got this analytical side to it. And I always found them really intriguing, people who were, who were really artistic and they had a sense of design, that could actually apply their *art* in something a little bit more *practical*, rather than just pure graphics or just painting or something, you know. (Vice President, Firm A)

The following description depicts the managerial discourses surrounding this both/and identification:

. . . art is used as a means to make good business sense and to make happy users. I mean, we want to make the user emotionally respond to what we do, and that requires art. So that skill, that art, is driven by the need to push certain emotional buttons of the customer. But it has to function, and that isn’t necessarily art. It can be empowered by art, but it is more about usability principles, and features . . . I wouldn’t say that it is a matter of balancing these two (art and business). Actually when you recognize that everything you are doing is to be used rather than adorned and put on a shelf . . . it tends to clarify your mission. (Vice President, Digital Media, Firm C)

Socialization tactics seek to cultivate creatives’ identification as practical artists. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) highlight the role of socialization as a basis of control within organizations. Socialization denotes processes through which an individual comes to understand how to think and act in accordance with organizational interests (Reichers, 1987). Table 2 depicts case similarities and differences pertinent to this integration

strategy. Illustrating Pratt and Foreman's (2000) premise, these regulatory efforts attempt to render relationships between disparate identities explicit, and thereby enable synergy. Hiring, mentoring, and communicative tactics accentuate organizational values and norms that connect creatives' artist and consultant identities. Such socialization tactics do not seek to impose conformity on creatives, but rather aid the 'negotiated adaptation by which people strive to improve fit between themselves and their work environment' (Ibarra, 1999: 765).

Managers described desirable candidates as people who were not only adept and skilled in their own disciplines, but who also can work under commercial constraints. As shown in Table 2, hiring 'rounded' employees (both talented and business minded) was stressed in all five firms, yet, specific selection tactics seemed to vary by firm size. For instance, smaller firms (A and D) tended to select employees from a network of interns or freelancers who had done work for the firm in the past. Selection involved a panel interview with founders and several people from the group that the candidate would be joining if hired. The panel aimed to determine whether candidates fit the 'practical artist' profile. In the larger firms (B and C), an initial screening of potential job candidates was administered by the HR department, while senior managers and members of the respective group joined the interview panel later to evaluate the shortlisted candidates. All firms required consensus among panelists for a candidate to be selected, fostering very high rejection rates.

Mentoring practices appeared to reiterate selection efforts (Burgess, 1994). Within the case studies, senior managers continuously strived to help junior employees internalize their 'practical artist' identity as a way of life. In the smallest firm of our sample (Firm D), founders acted as mentors, displaying themselves to their protégés as embodied symbols of 'practical artists'. In the larger firms (Firms B and C), project leaders mentored staff mainly by contextualizing the importance of practical artistry:

You cannot be free and be an industrial designer – unless you are working totally for yourself. Because it is still a business. Design is very different from art and I think that is the biggest misconception in the industry . . . Design is a facet of a mixture of business, technology and art where the freedom is in how you do it, and not by virtue of what you do. (Creative Director, Industrial Design, Company C)

Finally, ongoing communications provided continuing reinforcement for identity integration. All five companies used several communication forms to emphasize the 'practical artist'. For instance, formal staff meetings often endorsed the meta-identity by highlighting both financial and creative issues in their agenda (see Table 2). Cases also illustrate uses of internal and external communications. For example, most of the firms employed external communications (websites, promotional material, etc.) to accentuate synergies between artistry and business. In contrast, Firm A's communications appeared more internal. In particular, a prominent organizational value, as documented in its employee handbook, is the 'genius of the and', a notion that supports this oxymoronic meta-identity.

Table 2 Cross-case comparisons: Identity regulation through integration

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
Hiring	<p>Practical artists are identified from a network of freelancers and selected interns and selected from a panel interview (founders and respective group)</p> <p>'We normally look for a person who is very rounded in skills, very communicative, and very creative'. (Animation Specialist)</p>	<p>Practical artists are identified from a diverse range of recruitment sources and selected from the hiring team (HR) and a panel interview (respective group)</p> <p>'People are recruited not only by the criteria of how excellent their performances and their credentials are in their areas of expertise, they are recruited because .., they have a combination of some form of design and business'. (CEO)</p>	<p>Practical artists are identified from a diverse range of recruitment sources and selected from the hiring team (HR) and a panel interview (respective group)</p> <p>'We are constantly hiring designers, who when they create something, it is an evocation of a personal style ... but expression must be a means to the end'. (Vice President, Creative, Digital Media)</p>	<p>Practical artists are identified from a network of freelancers and selected interns and selected from a panel interview (founders and respective group)</p> <p>'There is only a certain type of person who can really fit ... the more open, more self-motivated individual who can get stuff done and has to do both'. (Designer)</p>	<p>Practical artists are identified from a diverse range of recruitment sources and selected from a panel interview (founders and respective group)</p> <p>'This firm is looking to hire people who are in the intersection of business and design.' (Director)</p>

(Continued)

Table 2 (Continued)

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
Mentoring	<p>Formal and long-term direction and encouragement ('Buddy system')</p> <p>'I spend a lot of time telling people that it is wonderful idea, now put it in the machine and make something useful.' (Senior Vice President, Engineering)</p>	<p>Mentor provides guidance and direction through example and exhortation in each project</p> <p>'I think there are opportunities in phases for people to be creative and open-ended about what they're doing ... this is where the senior people come in; my job is navigation'. (Principal, ID)</p>	<p>Mentor provides guidance and direction through example and exhortation in each project</p> <p>'We constantly talk about teaching people how to switch from one side to the other because it is realistic, and ... we can't stay in business if they don't do their timesheets.' (Creative Director, Industrial Design)</p>	<p>Founders act as embodied symbols to provide guidance and direction through example and exhortation in each project</p> <p>'The two founders ... give us enough order in a chaos to make sure that deadlines are met and bills are paid.' (Industrial Designer)</p>	<p>Mentor provides guidance and direction through example and exhortation in each project</p> <p>'The company is ... providing coaching through the design process, which I personally have benefited from at those periods in projects where the client wants something but it's not quite getting what you do. This support is sort of a meta view on the creative process, which is very reassuring.' (Design Director)</p>

Table 2 (Continued)

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
Ongoing communications	<p>Formal communication involving all staff reinforces dual emphasis (two staff meetings per month)</p> <p>Staff meeting where the senior management briefed staff about expectations, profits, clientele, interesting products that people developed or are working at. (Observation notes, San Francisco meeting)</p>	<p>Formal communication involving all staff reinforces dual-emphasis (one staff meeting per month)</p> <p>'We get together and talk about what we'd like to do ... what we've done and how we've done ... and also what we want to do ... like do we want to go after some conceptual projects ...' (Principal, Industrial Design)</p>	<p>Formal communication involving all staff reinforces dual-emphasis (one staff meeting per month per office)</p> <p>'We have a management meeting where we talk to each other on a formal, but frequent basis and then we have employees who are confidently working on projects that share stuff with other offices.' (VP Creative Media).</p>	<p>Project reviews reinforce dual-emphasis 'We try to do a review after every project, and there are three things that need to be satisfied. One is did the studio make money? The secondary reason is, did we make the world a better place with this design? And the third thing is, did we help our client make money?' (Design Director)</p>	<p>Formal communication involving all staff reinforces dual-emphasis (one staff meeting per month per office)</p> <p>'... sometimes, they go down to talking figures ... There is also one part which I think is pretty cool. It is called work in progress.' (Industrial Designer)</p>

(Continued)

Table 2 (Continued)

Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E
<p>Internal communication documents also reiterate this dual emphasis. Our purpose is to practice 'the genius of the and'. (Archival material, Staff handbook)</p>	<p>External communication documents also reiterate this dual emphasis At the beginning of any project, it requires taking a complex situation and making it even more so, seemingly creating chaos. However, by delving more deeply into the problems we can gain knowledge from which more complete, profitable and uniquely elegant solutions are derived. (Archival material, Book)</p>	<p>External communication documents also reiterate this dual emphasis Our teams generate expert design solutions with a vision of inspired free thinking, optimism, flexibility and tolerance. (Archival material, Promotional document)</p>	<p>External communication tools also reiterate this dual emphasis Our mission is to connect pure creative horsepower to new business opportunities. (Archival material, Company website)</p>	<p>External communication documents also reiterate this dual emphasis We combine design savvy, business acumen and evaluative prototyping process to arrive at big ideas worth pursuing. (Archival material, Promotional document)</p>

Insights from a paradox perspective

To move beyond case findings, we searched other research for similar concepts, relationships or models. As Eisenhardt (1989) suggested, existing literature may offer valuable sources of inductive inspiration. Our efforts surfaced commonalities between case depictions and studies of organizational paradox. Reviewing paradox literature, Lewis (2000) proposed a three-part framework that summarizes the shared pattern. First, Lewis posits that paradoxical tensions stem from seemingly contradictory, but interwoven polarities (e.g. artist and consultant identities described as disparate yet interdependent). Second, favoring a preferred pole to the neglect of its opposite can spur negative, even vicious dynamics (e.g. warnings of dangers if creatives take either identity to an isolated extreme). Lastly, managing paradox may involve splitting and transcendence to accentuate distinctions and enable synergy, respectively (e.g. blended identity regulation strategies of differentiation and integration). In retrospect, such parallels should not be surprising given paradox discussions in past studies of creative industries (e.g. DeFillippi et al., 2007; Lampel et al., 2000).

We now apply a paradox perspective to explicate our findings. More specifically, we propose three insights into the regulation of identity tensions within highly creative settings. First, a paradox lens helps reframe identity tensions, thereby reducing the likelihood of anxiety and counterproductive responses. Second, a paradoxical approach to identity regulation blends seemingly conflicting, but complementary strategies. And third, this lens shifts notions of managing from control to coping, potentially avoiding triggers of cynicism and resistance.

A paradox lens enables a more holistic, fluid, both/and framing of tensions (Beech et al., 2004; Lewis, 2000). A paradox perspective positions artistic and consultant identities as two sides of the same coin, rather than as polarized contradictions. Such framing reduces anxiety, enabling acceptance and appreciation of tensions (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). The resulting mindset helps creatives cope with ambiguity inherent in knowledge intensive settings (Robertson and Swan, 2003), and with the artistic and business pressures that fuel creative industries (DeFillippi et al., 2007).

Likewise, paradoxical approaches to management may include strategies that split and accommodate tensions. Paradox literature proposes temporal and spatial splitting techniques (e.g. Poole and Van de Ven, 1989) that mirror those demonstrated in the case firms. Building from identity and paradox literatures, such tactics focus related work (via segregated roles) to leverage the distinct benefits of each identity. Likewise, an integration strategy reflects efforts to transcend and accommodate tensions and thereby tap their synergistic potential (Lewis, 2000). Creatives may then embrace their artistic and consultant identities as distinct, yet mutually enabling and avoid tendencies toward a preferred mode that may become self-reinforcing toward a dangerous extreme.

Finally, a paradox perspective may recast identity regulation as a more empowering, rather than controlling and alienating effort. Existing research suggests that identity regulation may spark resistance, cynical detachment, or image manipulation (Collinson, 1994, 1999; Watson, 1994). These tendencies are exacerbated in creative industries,

where ambivalence prevails and controls can spur such intense, negative reactions. Through a paradox lens, however, identity regulation does not seek to constrain individuals, but rather to enable their coping. For example, our case studies suggest that internalizing a meta-identity may help creatives cope with ambiguity and appreciate their disparate identities. In contrast, over-identification as an artist may fuel work obsession and prima donna personas, while over-identification as a consultant threatens individuality, distinctiveness and innovation potential. Paradoxical approaches to identity regulation enable organizational members to link managerially inspired discourses and practices to processes of identity formation and reproduction (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Such identity regulation efforts may aid self-directed action (Gabriel, 1999), by engaging creatives as agents to reflect and act upon their identity tensions (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007).

Conclusion

Building from critical analyses of identity regulation while applying a normative approach raises new opportunities for understanding. The critical base helps ensure a reflexive, wary gaze at such subtle and precarious forms of control. Yet we also see potential value in managerial efforts to help creatives cope with their identity tensions. Indeed, the interplay between these disparate lenses may enable a much needed alternative to traditional approaches. In their review, Alvesson et al. (2008) depict identity as an exceptionally inclusive field, welcoming functionalist, interpretivist and critical approaches, and, in their view, needing more bridges across their varied methods and lenses. Our work responds to that call, seeking to extend understandings of identity regulation, and its role in managing creatives.

Rather than being oppressive, paradoxical approaches to identity regulation can enable a productive form of coping with identity tensions in creative settings. Paradoxical approaches to identity regulation can engage creative workers in internalizing the 'practical artist'. As such, they provide a more subtle and nuanced alternative to Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) means of cultural-ideological control. A paradox frame in identity regulation also extends Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) work by highlighting processes that can help organizational members link managerially inspired discourses to processes of self-identity formation and reproduction. Assuming a paradox perspective positions 'managing identity tensions' as a personal and a collective process, rather than the struggle of individuals or the responsibility of an elite group.

By examining leading product design firms, case patterns suggest lessons in managing creatives. More specifically, our results highlight artist and consultant identities described as disparate and complementary, and managerial strategies that blend differentiation and integration. Tapping insights from paradox literature extends our contributions. A paradox perspective accentuates identity distinctions and synergy and encourages strategies that help creatives accept, appreciate and thereby cope with their tensions. As a result, approaches to identity regulation can be energizing and empowering rather than paralyzing and controlling. In the words of one CEO, the ultimate power of a paradox perspective lies not in solutions, but in enabling a new and liberating comfort with tensions:

There are definitely a lot of tensions when you get different roles . . . Embrace the paradox idea and remind yourself that this is the way it is; then we tolerate it fine. I think the magic is when you hold that principle, and you try to live up to it. All you have to do is to remind yourself of it, and then you can be in a room with all that tension and . . . tolerate it fine, because you know you don't have to resolve it. The tension is just part of the process. (CEO, Firm A)

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