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"Who are you?" – Constructing managerial identities in post-apartheid South Africa [**]

This study focuses on the construction of identity concepts and values, in the process of developing managerial identities within a selected publically owned utility in South Africa. The methodology used is a multi-method case study approach which is conducted in the phenomenological, qualitative research paradigm. The findings show that managers define themselves in terms of "intra-personal" and "social identities" which are based on strong individual and socio-cultural value foundations. Data highlight that managerial identities are connected to the organisational identity. Seventeen years after the end of apartheid, managerial identities are no longer reduced and limited to fixed racial, cultural or professional identities founded on historic perspectives, but are rather viewed as a dynamic cross-cultural construct of interpersonal interactions. This article provides the reader with new insights into managerial identity constructions in a multicultural public utility setting in post-apartheid South Africa.

Key words: **identity, South Africa, management, ethnography, interviewer-interviewee interaction, values**
(JEL: F54, J17, J71, O10, O55)

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Introduction

The question: "Who are you?" has gained particular interest in management sciences and organisational studies during the past years (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Thereby, identity concepts are often interlinked with managerial and organisational values which are usually associated with particular roles, managerial belonging, identification with the organisation and its history, the cultural context, imagination of the future and the organisational identity (Mayer, 2008a). However, narrating identity is a process of intra-psychological and socio-cultural reconstruction (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001).

The South African societal context of contemporary organisations and public utilities is highly complex and fragmented regarding global, national, local and individual influences (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). They provide space for individual and managerial identity (re-)construction as a process of intra- and inter-psychological, as well as socio-cultural reconstruction. In the South African context, identity constructions still refer to apartheid categories, current politically correct values and attitudes towards diversity (Mayer, 2008). This specific context increases the importance of interrelated, flexible identity constructions. Managers need to make sense of the inherent complexity and ambiguities of their identities (Keupp 2004, 2004a) beyond race, in order to manage and conduct themselves appropriately.

Extensive research has been conducted on managerial identity constructions (such as Albert et al., 2000; Mayer, 2008). The importance of studying identity and values in South African management contexts is obvious: South African society has undergone tremendous change on societal, political, economic and individual levels since 1994 (Hart, 2002). The process of "double transition" (Webster & Adler, 1999), referring to the global impact of change on South African society as well as to intra-national transformation, has affected identities, values and management in organisations and public utilities. New approaches, therefore, are required to understand the newly emerging identities and value concepts in South African organisations and public utilities to address and manage them adequately (Mayer & Louw, 2011). However, identity reconstructions have hardly been researched in the South African public utility context, which has undergone tremendous change in its organisational structure and in diversity during recent years.

The contribution of this paper is therefore to increase the understanding of identity and value constructions in managers in the specific work context of a South African post-apartheid public utility, and thereby add to theoretical knowledge. It explores how managers define themselves and express their identity through narrations by referring to individual and organisational values. It additionally provides practical suggestions on managing identity and values in South African public utilities.

Identities in organisational settings

The discourse on identity in management sciences and organisational studies is influenced by the constructivist view of identity creation as an interrelated process of the individual and his/her environment (Sennett, 1998; Svenungsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson 1994, 2008). It is assumed that multi-layered (organisational) identities influ-

ence managers, organisations and public utilities and their management (Albert, et al., 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). For the purpose of this article, the term "organisation" is all-encompassing and includes public utilities by definition.

Identity has been studied extensively in organisational contexts (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2002; Hatch & Schulz, 2002; Rothman, 1997; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Previous research has shown that identity in South African organisations may be reduced to cultural stereotyping, culturalisation processes and generalising identity aspects as overall identity topic (Mayer & Louw, 2011). However, in this article it is argued that identities cannot simply be reduced to certain stable institutionalised markers such as race, gender or profession, but should rather be seen as a dynamic process of (re-)construction of multiple identity aspects. The (re-)construction of identities refers to self-ascriptions and socio-culturally constructed identities which are situationally and contextually created and founded on basic values (Mayer, 2008a).

Organisational research concerning identity often focuses on organisational identity (Brown, 2001), both as essential to organisational success (Collins & Porras, 1996) and enhancing pro-activity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Identity is considered a major resource in managing and leading organisations (Glynn, 2000, p. 295), and interlinks individual identities and organisational management levels (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) as well as organisational images and member identification (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). It is a complex, pluralistic form of the self: a kind of multiple identity (Keupp, 1998, 1994, 1997) which reflects the increasing complexity of social patterns and social fragmentation in organisations. The individual's identity becomes a type of "patchwork identity" (Keupp, 1988, p. 425) which is equivalent to the social and organisational multiplicity. Such a patchwork identity conveys multiple and diverse identity aspects. It can either result in positive effects such as synergies and creativity spaces (Keupp, 1994, 1997), or in the creation of conflict and tension (Rahim, 2002, p. 207).

This patchwork identity is a construct of the inner self as well as of social and environmental interaction and communication (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). It is therefore not an institutionalised stable condition, but rather a dynamic and flexible construct, influenced by different aspects, such as race, gender and profession. Identity construction evolves through role clarification, interests, feelings and needs. Self-reflection and narration are part of creating identity (Watson, 2008) through "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). This process is part of organisational constructions: individuals "strive to shape their personal identities in organizations and are being shaped by discursive forces" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). Watson (2008, p. 128) emphasises that, whilst identity work requires an internal process, it would gain more power if the concept of external identity aspects could be incorporated "alongside shaping of the 'internal' aspects of personal identity". Values play a significant role in shaping personal identity aspects and are addressed in the next section.

Values in organisational settings

Value research in organisations has become a focus in management and has been studied in the context of organisational culture, identity and organisational conflict (Mayer, 2008). Value research follows a long scientific tradition (Rokeach, 1973; Spini, 2003) and particularly during the past decade, value research in African contexts has intensified (Mayer, 2008a; Boness, 2002; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Sub-Saharan Africa is, however, still under-represented in (organisational) value research (Mayer & Louw, 2007, 2011).

> Schwartz (1994, p. 124) defines values as follows:
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> Values are desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance and serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity. Implicit in this definition of values as goals is that (1) they serve the interests as of some social entity; (2) they can motivate action – giving it direction and emotional intensity; (3) they function as standards for judging and justifying action, and (4) they are acquired both through socialization to dominant group values and through the unique learning experience of individuals.

Values and value orientations are patterns of thoughts and actions (Kluckhohn & Stroedtbeck, 1961, p. 4) which are important aspects of organisations and of group membership. Values influence both the organisational processes (Agle & Caldwell, 1999; Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv, & Wrzesniewski, 2005; Smith, Peterson, & Schwartz, 2002), and the organisational culture which plays a major role in managing organisations constructively (Hofstede, 1998; Pool, 2000).

The consensus on values is subject to change over time and group members are basically able to adopt the values of others (Burton, 1990, p. 213). Values are essentially dialectic and contradictory (Stewart, Danielian, & Foster, 1998) and can lead to conflict and be reflected in incompatible and competing goals (Berkel, 2005).

Clashing value concepts are common in diverse settings (Miller, 1997), such as in post-apartheid South African organisations, including public utilities. They are highly interlinked with identity and the cultural background of a person (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Values, if known, can contribute to managing organisations (Agle & Caldwell, 1999; Gandal et al., 2005). Analysing values in the context of identity research can lead to new insights in identity development processes. This is most important in the South African context where value priorities and identities are changing rapidly and individuals with different cultural backgrounds work together. Previous research shows that value orientations in international organisations in South Africa are often interlinked, but at the same time undermined by and reduced to racial categories (Mayer & Louw, 2011). When identifying with the organisation, organisational attributes also define employees personally with personal and organisational characteristics overlapping (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Dutton et al. (1994) highlight the cognitive connection between the definition of the organisation (including the organisational identity and organisational values) and the definition of a person. When organisational identities and values match with the personal identity and value constructions, the organisation is attractive for the employee (Shamir, 1991) and information are easy to process and understand. A strong fit of organisational values and personal values leads to satisfaction in employees (Chatman, 1991). A greater person-

organisation fit results in a greater degree of similarities between the perceived organisational and the individual identity (Dutton et al., 1994).

Identities and values in South African organisations

Since the end of apartheid, there has been an increase in the number of studies on identities in South Africa (Booysen, 2007; Bornman, 2003; Cilliers & May, 2002; Hart, 2002; Korf & Malan, 2002). It has been highlighted that dynamic changes in demographic and organisational variables have impacted on South African identities (Booysen & Nkomo, 2007) and are related to intra-personal and intra-organisational value constructs (Mayer & Louw, 2011). Identities and values can only be understood by assessing emic perspectives on identities and values (Mayer, Boness, & Louw, 2008). Identities and values are bound to perceptions (Korf & Malan, 2002), and to unconscious social norms and power structures (Booysen, 2007; Cilliers & May, 2002). In order to address the complexities of identities and values in South African organisational settings, identities which are "shaped by discursive forces" (Watson, 2008) require analysis to understand their impact on managing South African organisations, including public utilities.

Purpose and aim of the paper

Deriving from the literature review, the purpose of this paper is to present selected qualitative research findings on managerial identities and values in the South African public utilities context by considering recent research on the topic. The main aim of this paper is to understand managerial identities in the selected utility and cultural framework from a managerial viewpoint in order to better develop a more coherent organisational culture. To achieve this aim, the following research questions will be answered:

- How do managers define their identity in the defined context?
- What are the most important values in constructing managerial identities?

To place the responses to these research questions in context, the theoretical framework of the study on identities and values is provided; the research methodology is introduced; and findings are presented and discussed, conclusions drawn and practical suggestions provided.

Research design

Research approach and strategy

In this study, the most relevant are the phenomenological and interpretative paradigms (Collis & Hussey, 2003) which are based on the epistemological tradition of constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 2000) and interpretative hermeneutics (Habermas, 1999). This case study is based on the post-modernist premise that different realities exist which are socio-culturally constructed (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). It is therefore assumed that all narrations, including their interpretations by the researcher and others, are equally valid and that no single way of interpretation exists (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996).

In order to gain an understanding of the processes and situations of identity and values in the selected public utility, a single-case explanatory study approach was used.

This approach was chosen to ensure an in-depth understanding of the identities and values in the specific utility, to gain context-specific intra-organisational knowledge. Research results were created through the interdependent relationship between the "issue of research" (identity and values) and the "process of research" (identification of keywords) (Stellrecht, 1993, p. 36).

Research setting

The public utility used for this case study operates in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. It ranks as one as the top public utilities of its sector in the country. The selected utility is a growing organisation with numerous work sites throughout the Eastern Cape province. The utility aspires to establish a strong organisational culture that is aligned with its purpose statement which addresses sub-cultures observed in employee behaviour. To do so, an understanding of the emic views of the managers regarding identities and values is needed. The selection of this organisation was based on:

- national and regional business involvement and standing;
- diversity of managers and workforce;
- established Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment policies;
- the South African management profile;
- interest of the Human Resource Department, the leaders and managers of the utility in the research topic;
- access to the utility.

In this state of change, it is of major importance for the public utility to focus on identity and value formation in the organisation from the viewpoint of its employees and managers. Therefore, this research study has significant value for gaining insight into the emic views of the managers on identities and values after having undergone organisational structural change. The focus of this study is on providing the reader with information about a certain moment in time rather than identity and value change, per se. The findings are being used to develop practical steps for management and leadership in creating a more coherent organisational culture in the context of organisational structural changes within the utility.

Research method

Sampling

A total of 17 managers from a population of 31 managers agreed to participate in interviews on identity and values. The population consisted of top, middle and lower management levels of the selected public utility. The sample comprised managers with South African citizenship. Most of the interviewees defined themselves as African (43. 33%), followed by White (36. 67%), Indian (13. 33%) and Coloured (3. 333%). The most prevalent age group was 40-49 (36. 67%) while the majority of the respondents were male (76. 67%). Middle management comprised 43. 33 per cent of the sample, while lower management represented 40 per cent and top management 13. 33 per cent. Respondents were rated as religious if they scored four or above on the seven-point Likert scale. Seventy-six per cent of the respondents were religious and 70 per

cent were married. Most of the interviewees grew up in a city (43. 33%), some in a town (33. 33%) and a few in rural areas (23. 33%).

Data collection methods

Triangulation of data was applied. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, as well as through observation, secondary literature and document analysis. The managers' in-depth-interviews were recorded in full to ensure precise transcription, verbatim. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Time for observations in the organisation was provided.

Data analysis

After the data collection, a content analysis according to the five-step process of Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006, p. 322-326), was conducted to analyse and interpret data as follows: Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion; Step 2: Inducing themes; Step 3: Coding; Step 4: Elaboration; and Step 5: Interpretation and checking of data.

- Firstly, the researchers were immersed in the data by reading it several times, making notes, drawing diagrams and brainstorming on interpretations.

- Secondly, themes that "naturally" underlie the material were viewed with regard to labelling themes by using the interviewee's language, optimal level of complexity and the focus of the study. Key terms are defined as words that occupy key positions in text through the importance of their content, their significance in the text structure and conception or repetition or other emphasis. The distillation of key terms and concepts leads to categorisation and coding. Through these criteria, the data material is reduced to selected aspects (Kohler Riessman, 1993, p. 60). The key terms were defined through an interactive process of the research team.

- Thirdly, data are coded. The coding process "entails the marking of different sections of the data as being instances of, or relevant to, one or more of your themes" (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 324).

- Fourthly, data are elaborated. This means that the text is reconstructed in a new order, giving new perspectives and new views on the grouping, and on issues and sub-issues appearing in the text.

- Finally, the interpretation is put together and thematic themes are used as sub-headings.

Findings are reported in a qualitative reporting style according to the research methods used in this case study.

Quality criteria and ethical considerations

With regard to the qualitative research findings, qualitative research criteria were considered. As research quality criteria, four major concepts were defined, namely conformability (Riege, 2003; Seale, 2002; Tuckman, 1999, p. 400,), credibility (Poggenpoel, 1998, p. 349), transferability (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2008, p. 92) and trustworthiness (Gummesson, 2000, p. 186). Relevant strategies of qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation were used.

Ethical considerations were approved by the utility and the research institution which included the respect accorded to and the rights of the managers, the creation of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and transparency (Mayer, 2008, p. 111).

Research findings

The research findings indicate that managers define their identity in the frame of intra-individual characteristics as well as social relationships. The identity definition is strongly related to the utility and its fundamental tasks, aims and values, and also to its socio-cultural context. There is a broad variety of ways in which cultural identity aspects are addressed in identity narration. Managerial and organisational values are constructed in a harmonious way. Managers can easily identify with the utility and the organisational culture, and therefore do not experience any challenges with regard to individual and managerial value constellation conflicts or even identity crises.

How do managers define their identity?

Managers in the selected utility define their identity by indicating personal characteristics which they believe describe their identity, and which they define as the core aspects of their individual identities. For the presentation of findings, the emic categorisations of the interviewed managers are used. These have been analysed with the five-step process of content analysis described above (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Managers emphasise that the following identity aspects are core issues, which they describe extensively during the in-depth interviews, as being :

- respectful (P1, P7, P9, P15);
- hard-working (P1, P6, P7, P10, P13);
- achieving (P10, P14, P15, P16, P17);
- religious (P7, P11, P15, P16);
- a "learning" person (P11, P13, P16);
- understanding (P3, P17);
- a perfectionist (P14, P17);
- fair (P4, P17);
- ethical (P1, P4);
- a female (P3).

At the same time, selected managers (P3, P5, P6, P11, P13, P14, P16) refer to their social relationships and their group belonging both inside and outside the organisation. These social groups play a significant role in identity definition. Four of the managers (P3, P6, P11 and P16) define these socially defined core aspects of their identity as 0. "social identity". This emic definition is taken from the interviews and used for those socially determinated identity aspects based on the three following social relationships and their impacts on the managerial identity:

- family belonging (P11, P13);
- belonging to a sports group (P6; P16);

- belonging to a cultural group (P3, P5, P14).

In the following section, selected examples will be presented to illustrate how managers define themselves with regard to the above-mentioned categories of identity creation.

Excerpts on identity narrations

Respectful, hard-working and ethical

P1 is a 39-year-old male South African top manager of English-European descent. His identity narration is related to the above mentioned identity definition categories "respectful", "hard-working" and "ethical".

This interviewee believes that his identity is mainly influenced and constructed by his personal values. These values are the identity foundation in which he believes. This indicates his feeling of authenticity as an individual, as a person. He defines himself as "a values-driven person" whose most important values are respect and hard work. Respect is a particularly important value for P1 and a foundation of his identity, as it is for most participants.

P1 highlights values and identity aspects which (re-)present him in a positive, open-minded and very self-reflective way in relationship to the researcher. By discussing his identity in this reflexive way, he connects to the researcher and presents himself as "strong" with regard to his value-drivenness. Respect and hard work are very important to him in the work context, as stated below:

> Look, obviously I believe values make you who you are. I'm very strongly based on that. So every part of my values creates who I am as an individual. And from that point of view, my entire identity at the end of the day is created on some sort of value system. Whether it be simpler things when growing up like hard work and respect for all individuals and all of that type of thing, to the three which I listed early. Every part of me really is made up first and first most of values. I am a very values-driven person.

This statement shows clearly that identity for P1 is a core issue. "I believe values make you who you are." The concepts of values and identity are not divisible according to this interviewee;. core values are hard work and respect for all individuals. The interviewee therefore shows that his outlook is humanistic-orientated.

Understanding, female, belonging to a cultural group

For P3, a 33 year-old female senior manager, her identity relates to her culture. She says she is a "person of the world", suggesting this is a way to relate to the interviewer who has a different cultural background. At the same time she emphasises her cultural roots which she experiences as very strong. However, with regard to the society she lives in and the external cultural categories which are defined by societal policy frameworks, she is not clear about her identity definition:

> Well then in terms of the law of South Africa, they define it as Indian in terms of employment equity. But in terms of the constitution, it's Asian. So I don't which one they – I think it would be Asian basically because the constitution… We want it so pedantic.

P3's identity definition falls in the identity definition category "cultural group". This manager states that she sees herself as South African, but prefers an "open-world perspective" which connects her to other people. Values such as "open to other cul-

tures", "learning" and "understanding" strengthen her desire to create a broad identity. Her identity develops basically out of the South African context and in interrelationship with the cultural definitions which are defined by the political and constitutional framework which is provided by the state. In contrast to this rather narrow way of defining cultural identities, she defines herself as a world citizen driven by open-mindedness. Such a definition is easy to create in this situation, sitting in front of a non-South African researcher who does not share the societal history and present from an internal perspective. P3 uses the situation to re-define her identity in an "open" and "free" way which might not always be possible between South Africans.

Also in the following paragraph she defines herself in terms of gender, thereby connecting to the female researcher, emphasizing the identity definition "female":

> Okay, definitely the aspect of femaleness in terms of femininity. I try to uphold myself in that because that's who I believe I am. In terms of my culture, definitely, specifically at home, it's very difficult to do it here because this organisation has its own set of values that you basically live by, which, in general, I have a strong inclination towards, but there's a certain set of values at home as well that I can't really practise here in my work environment. So at home, there are other values which might be just lower down than the three I listed, but it comes from my culture basically. So definitely in terms of being Indian, that's something I uphold and even if I can teach people about it here, I try and do that.

This excerpt shows that P3 highlights the identity definition "understanding". In addition to her open and understanding identity, this interviewee returns to the aspect of her Indian-bound female identity which is closely linked to her gender-identity and her "femininity". However, her femininity is a part of her identity which she mainly expresses at home in her role as a mother and wife and which moves into the background when she is at work. She tries to teach her colleagues about her culture-specific values of femininity, but mentions that at work she usually follows the "set of values" which mainly influence the organisation and the work context. This interview provides P3 with the possibility of bringing her femaleness into the work context and having it acknowledged by talking to a German, female researcher. P3 uses the interview to construct her identity in her work context and uses the situation to re-construct many different parts of her identity which might normally be unheard of in this context in daily work interactions.

In addition, P3, P5 and P14 mention their culture-specific background as an important part of their identity and as described in the section "identity definition". P5, a 50 year-old, male Afrikaans-speaking manager who is in a middle management position refers to his cultural origins whilst defining his identity (identity definition category "cultural background"):

> My parents are both from Belgium, so I'm not a pure-bred Afrikaner like all the others. I've got European blood in me, you know. So I'm slightly different from some of the others.

P5 indicates very carefully that he is not a pure-bred Afrikaner, although his mother tongue is Afrikaans. However, he says that he is "slightly different from some of the others" emphasising that he is not fully included in the Afrikaner in-group. By referring to the "European blood", he connects himself to the interviewer who is also of

European descent. To this manager it is important to differentiate himself from the South African Afrikaans-speakers and to highlight his European origin which makes him feel proud.

A female manager who is 45 years old and in a middle management position (P14) defines herself as being a German-South African with English-speaking roots: "I'll go back a bit in my history. My great-grandfather came out from Germany, I think it was what, I think it was 1850, the German Settlers. It was my great grandfather's Martin and then his son was Martin Christian and then my dad and myself. Ja, my late dad, ja my great grandfather came out from Germany, so I've got a bit of German blood in me. I've always lived in East London ever since I was born. My mom and them originated in that area."

In terms of identity definition categories, P14 describes herself as a "perfectionist" who knows what she wants in life and who "does it herself". She seems to be very independent, very ambitious and goal-oriented whilst wanting everything to be "perfect". During the interview, this interviewee connects with the researcher by talking about her "German-ness" and her German roots and thereby focusing on similarities, which serve to increase the sameness and connection in identity and values. The family history and the German family background are positively interpreted by this female manager. Her cultural family background is interlinked with characteristics such as perfection, independence, ambition and achievement.

Five managers (P1, P6, P7, P10, P13) consider hard work important for their identity, and five managers (P10, P14, P15, P16, P17) also rate being able to achieve as a very important value which reconstructs their professional and managerial identity in the context of the organisational structure changes in the utility. These values and identity aspects might represent values which are important in the new organisational structure, thereby representing the organisational change and needs.

Apart from the above-mentioned aspects, fairness is also an important concept for two managers (P4, P17). Fairness is bound to "inner fairness", justice, to being fair to oneself, and to inter-personal relations. It is strongly connected to the values of respect and justice.

In addition to these, culture, religion, family, ethics, understanding, hard work, achievement and sports are very important for managerial identity and value construction, as shown under the section identity definition.

With regard to culture, P7, a male English-speaking manager with an Indian background, defines himself as "cosmopolitan" after a discussion with the interviewer about the meaning of culture, cultural background and mother tongue. This manager is irritated by the question of his cultural background and does not want to define himself in apartheid terms. Therefore, like P3, he uses the definition of being "cosmopolitan"; one who is "at home in the world". Like the female Indian manager who defines herself as a "world citizen", he also seeks a new and open identity construct, which does not narrow him down to a specific cultural background. This open construct gives them freedom from former social race categories and simultaneously connects them to the researcher. During the interview, it becomes clear that the believe system is very important to P7: he views religion as the basis for an "ethically operat-

ing organisation", work ethics and respectful relationships amongst the employees. P15 also mentions that the utility "was a religious environment" when he started to work there. However, he sees a change in the utility towards a non-religious organisation. He does not clarify whether this development is positive or negative. However, obviously religion seems to be an identity aspect, which can connect managers across racial boundaries.

Finally, selected managers define themselves with regard to their family, family relationships and values (P11, P13) as well as in terms of sports (P6, P16). This indicates that besides work-related values and socially defined in-group identities, managers see a need to define themselves based on various identity parts which construct themselves though belonging to different groups.

Managers in this utility do not refer to any kind of "identity conflicts". However, it can be assumed that identity conflicts in this organisation exist. It is possible that since this utility was in the process of changing management, managers seem to be reluctant to talk about conflictual issues. It can be expected that managers in this utility at this specific point in time do not want to speak out freely about critical or problematic identity issues.

What are the most important values in constructing managerial identities?

Managers note during the interviews that their identities are based on core values which contribute to their identity construction: individual, work and organisational values seem to blur in the narrations on values. Often, individual and organisational values correlate, contributing to creating a positive, multiple and coherent identity.

Individual values

- Managers highlight the personal values of:
- honesty (P5, P6, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, P17);
- integrity (P1, P2, P3, P7);
- respect (P5, P9);
- excellence (P4);
- fairness (P6);
- religion (P8);
- personal development and family (P10).

Honesty is the value which is fundamental for eight of the 17 managers. P5 who is a 50 year-old Afrikaans-speaking middle manager describes honesty as an important part of an individual's identity:

> Honesty. . . honesty, the word is straight. I mean I think if everyone is really honest and straight about what they're doing and what their intentions are, then I think the world will be a lot better and probably the organisation will be if you find people.

As with P5, most of the interviewees relate honesty to the value of straightness, integrity and ethics. Honesty would create a "better world" and a "better organisation". This statement shows that P5 sees room for improvement within the organisation

with regard to honesty. Focusing on the interview statement of P13, dishonesty is connected to the attitude of not doing the work that is required.

P13 is 46 years old, male, Afrikaans-speaking, and a long-standing member of the utility in middle management. Honesty is linked to reliable behaviour in work contexts and seems to be a core value for this interviewee; he even describes the concept in his mother tongue.

> Honesty. Integrity and in Afrikaans we say *betroubaar*. You must be reliable. If you ask somebody to do something, it's very important, you shouldn't, it shouldn't be necessary for me to go back always to ask, did you do it, or didn't you do the job.

The interviewees who mention integrity as a core value of their identity also relate it to the concept of honesty, as does, for example, P3 below:

> Definitely integrity, that's the first one, in terms of the integrity, for me it's the whole honesty element that goes along with it in basically everything. Obviously we tell little white lies now and then. But generally being an honest person, being very open, transparent. Being confidential when I need to be confidential when I need to be confidential. So if I can describe integrity in that way to you.

Integrity, in this interpretation, includes honesty, openness, transparency and confidentiality. Obviously, the core values of the managers form value systems which are fundamental for their identity and which are based on honesty and integrity.

Respect, as a core concept in terms of respecting diversity and otherness, is mentioned explicitly by two interviewees (P1, P7). Only a few managers define as core values of their identity excellence, fairness, religion and personal development.

P8, a male 30 year-old manager, who is English-speaking and of Indian descent, views religion and Christianity as the core value concept.

> God. And then I'm a Christian. And then after my God, is my relationship with him, obviously. And then after that is family and then only work. For me God and the relationship with God is that in my life, in everything I do, I put God first and I do God's principles and his ways and that's what's made me successful. And then family because I put his rules and it says that the second most important after him is my wife and my children. So they must also get their time and their opportunities. And then obviously your work as an income.

This manager is very clear about the hierarchy of his value system. God and the relationship to God guide him throughout his life and determine his family and his work. God is the leading principle for himself. The value hierarchy is clear: God, family, work of which the latter is a source of income. This shows that spirituality is highly important for the manager. His belief in God guides him through family and work situations.

Finally, P10, a Xhosa-speaking manager, highlights his individual value with regard to his personal development and his family. Family and personal development are support systems in working successfully and achieving goals. They are important for making life meaningful for P10.

Organisational values

Managers define the organisational values in terms of:

- integrity and accountability (P1, P3, P7, P11, P12),

- honesty and transparency (P3, P5, P6, P15),
- support, responsibility and care (P7, P14, P16),
- excellence (P4, P10),
- tolerance (P9),
- God's principles (P8),
- professionalism and working together (P9).

Most of the interviewees state that they are confused, because the organisational values, defined by the Board changed recently and they are not sure about the core values of the organisation as defined officially. Several managers also tend to mix values and do not really know how to describe the organisational values with regard to their definition by the Board (e. g. P3, P5).

P7 emphasises that honesty, transparency and integrity are interrelated and are an issue in each organisation. P4 also talks of excellence which is one of the organisation's core values and links it with integrity and accountability. They are the guidelines and the fundament of the organisation and in the opinion of the interviewee, managers should define their own role according to the organisational values. One interviewee (P9) explains why most of the managers share the values of the organisation: the tolerance within the organisation leads to the fact that managers do not need to change and can just be and behave how they are which leads to a close fit between managers and organisation.

> This organisation, what I value about it here is the tolerance, where you, you don't have to change. But in situations the environment is such that you learn to respect other people with their different background. So that's one thing that I like about it. The diversity that we have. And we have the ability to work along with – even though we are different – we have different backgrounds. So I think it is one of the things that I like in this organisation.

P8, the 30 year-old Indian manager, in contrast does not speak of a highly tolerant organisation, but rather of an organisation that is driven by religion and Christianity which fits perfectly with his personal values.

> Here. If I think any organisation, if you put God's principles first, it will be very successful. That is honesty, hard working, efficient. You would always be successful if you have that, because there are very few honest people out there.

With God's principle, success of an organisation is guaranteed, because reflecting God's principle means "honesty, working hard, efficient". One manager talks about the religiousness of the organisation and its religious principles which makes the organisation successful, two managers talk about professionalism (P9, P13), collegial communication (P13) and honesty (P14).

Individual and organisational values

Finally, the majority of interviewees (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P12, P16 and P17) state that they do not experience any gaps between their personal, managerial values and the organisational values. Some managers mention that they adjust to the organisational values (P2, P4) when there are gaps, that they confront the organisation (P2),

that they develop themselves (P10) and/or try to get involved into the process of creating organisational values (P15) to influence the situation within the organisation.

Generally most of the managers in this organisation seem to be highly aware of their personal as well as of the organisational values. This is due probably due to a management and organisational culture change process which the organisation is going through at the moment.

Some interviewees who could not list the organisational core values instantly and could not explain their concepts with regard to the organisational culture seemed to feel embarrassed about it. Most of the managers were able to comment on their personal and the organisational values.

However, most managers had difficulties in answering the question of the interrelationship of their personal and organisational values and the impact of these values on their identity creation. This might just be the case because of the fact that managers have probably not thought about this interrelationship before. Hence, the interview contributed to finding definitions and core concepts of managerial identities and values and becoming aware of these aspects. During interviews managers reflected on their values and identities and also discussed them to a point with the researcher by asking (rhetorical) questions, as well as asking for comments and advice from the researcher.

Discussion

How do managers define their identity in the defined context?

This article responds to the question "Who are you?" from the South African emic perspectives of managers in the context of a public utility and thereby contributes to the broad research on identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Findings show that identity, individual and organisational values often overlap and are strongly interlinked and thereby support previous research (Mayer, 2008). Identity narrations are highly complex and fragmented, referring to various categories from global to individual influences (Albert et al., 2000). They reflect intra-psychological as well as socio-cultural reconstructions (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). Managers working in this utility view their identities beyond racial categorisations, as being important (Keupp, 2004) and in accordance with organisational values. This research study shows that South African managers do not necessarily define themselves in terms of racial or cultural categories as emphasised in previous studies (Mayer, 2008). On the contrary, managers find new ways to define themselves beyond apartheid categories (Mayer & Louw, 2011). In this study, managers do not reduce their identities to cultural stereotyping, culturalisation processes and generalising identity aspects as in related studies (Mayer & Louw, 2011). This might be due to the specific organisational environment (Watson, 2008) in terms of the sector within which the utility is located and the very dynamic organisational environment which affords the constant (re-)construction of managerial identities and values according to the changing organisational circumstances.

What are the most important values in constructing managerial identities?

Managers highlight the importance of their identities as emphasised in the literature (Glynn, 2000). They seem to identify strongly with the organisation in terms of indi-

vidual and organisational value fits (Dutton et al., 1994) which leads to positive effects on the individual and the organisation and allows creativity spaces through "patch-work identities" (Keupp, 1994). Organisational and individual values play an important role for managers in the utility, as confirmed in the literature on identity and values (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Values are viewed as guiding principles which impact on individual actions, as defined by Schwartz (1994), and identification processes with the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994). Managers hardly refer to any clashing value concepts despite the diverse setting as described in Miller, et al. (1997). A strong cognitive connection between the definition of the organisation (including the organisational identity and organisational values) and the definition of the individual are displayed (Dutton et al., 1994), which might be responsible for the dynamic, multiple identity constructs that lead to a high satisfaction in managers (Chatman, 1991) and a coherent organisational culture.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, it was stated that narrating identity is a process of intra-psychological as well as socio-cultural reconstruction. The responses to the two main research questions, together with the findings, reconfirm this assumption and provide major insights into the creating of managerial identity from an emic viewpoint.

Managers in the selected South African public utility tend to define themselves with regard to the utility, its overall aim and vision. The organisational identity of the utility as an external influence, impacts on managerial identities, whilst simultaneously incorporating individual and social identity influences. Managerial identities are based on a variety of identity aspects which develop, on one hand, from inner processes and self-ascriptions, and on the other hand, from social identities and organisational and external social relationships.

Findings show a broad variety of individual and relationship-bound identity aspects which cannot necessarily be traced back to the cultural, social, gender or age-related background of the manager. This study demonstrates that managers in post-apartheid South Africa create complex identity and value concepts which go beyond racial and cultural stereotyping and culturalisation processes. This is contrary to previous studies and might be related to this specific utility. Managers in this utility are highly conscious of their identities and values, and believe that values play a core role in identity creation. Since there is a strong value fit between organisational and individual values, managers seem to be satisfied with their position in the utility and tend to positive identity (re-)constructions without narrating conflicting identity issues or referring to clashing value concepts.

Future research

Based on the findings and the limitations of this study, future research should aim at:

- replicating this study in various international and local South African organisations to gain deeper organisational and intersectional insights into identity and value constructions in organisations;

- studying the correlation of identities and values, by applying qualitative and quantitative research methods in larger samples to increase the generalisability of the findings.

Practical suggestions

The following practical suggestions are provided for organisations in South Africa which are undergoing change processes:

- Organisations in change processes need to focus consciously on constructing managerial as well as organisational identities and values which work together well to ensure clear and harmonious organisational cultures.

- Managers should be offered counselling with regard to managing identities and values in organisational change processes.

- The conscious development of multiple managerial identities can contribute to creating stable and constructive identity concepts, which relate to the organisation and create a culture-overlapping feeling of belonging among the managers. Therefore human resources departments should focus on these issues to build a more coherent organisational culture to manage organisations effectively.

Limitations of the study

This study is a single case study, which refers to a relatively small set of data. The qualitative findings mainly provide subjective data and emic perspectives of selected individuals. Therefore, the data are not necessarily generalisable and follow-up studies are required to prove the findings in similar and different organisational and national contexts. Additionally, the study only addresses self-descriptions of identities and values and does not focus on perceptions of "the other". In other words, only emic perspectives of individual managers are studied. This study does not provide comparative information between participating and non-participating managers, but rather gives insights into intra-psychological processes.

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