Cufflinks

versus

Socks-and-Sandals

Authentic & Inauthentic Selves in a Post-Merger Organisation?

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Title: Cufflinks versus Sock-and-Sandals: Authentic & Inauthentic Selves in a Post-Merger Organisation?

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Keywords: Management Consulting, Clan, Identity, Organisational Identity, Control, Anti-Identity, Fantasy, Elite, Belongingness, Self-Esteem, Appearance

Thesis Purpose: The main purpose of our research is to create interesting theoretical and practical insights rather than developing empirical generalisations about the experiences of employees from Prestige Consulting and BigTech regarding the merger and subsequent integration of the two organisations.

Methodology (Empirical Foundation): The research is based on an empirically driven case study within the Management Consulting industry in the United Kingdom. The research was conducted from an interpretative perspective, using qualitative research methods.

Theoretical Perspective: We examine existing literature on the multiplicity of identities, the relationship between organisational and individual identities as well as the perceptions of authentic/inauthentic selves. In light of our findings, we suggest the extension of existing theory to encompass our empirical context.

Research Question: Why do some BigTech employees cling to their Prestige identities after nine years of 'integration' when their ways of working no longer reflect these identities?

Basic Findings: Ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech describe two separate selves. A non-work self seems only to have developed since the merger with BigTech. Contrary to expectations they perceive the work self – which is strongly linked to the Prestige organisational identity - as more authentic and exhibit cynicism towards the non-work self. Strong prototypes of BigTech and Prestige employees help to maintain the distinction between the selves.

Conclusion: The ex-Prestige consultants' two separate selves each fulfil a different need for the consultant: the work-hard-play-hard (Prestige) self enhances the consultants' self-esteem by providing continued association with a high-performing elite group and distinctiveness from their BigTech colleagues; the flesh-and-blood-family-oriented (BigTech) self allows the consultant a sense of belonging to a non-work group or family.

<u>Acknowledgement</u>

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Introduction

This chapter describes the organisations that were the subject of our research and tells the story of our research project from initial ideas to conclusion of theory.

As an employee of Prestige Consulting, Carys experienced what she interpreted as a cultural clash during the merger with BigTech in 2002. Both researchers felt that practical (case study) research on the pre- and post-merger culture would be interesting. During the course of the research however, its focus changed. It became apparent that there were interesting contradictions between research participants' described identities and their actual behaviour. The thesis will discuss possible explanations for these contradictions, from an interpretative perspective. We start with a background section on the two organisations involved in the merger. We follow with a description of how our research question developed and then provide an overview of each of the thesis chapters.

Background

Prestige is one of the big four international accountancy firms. Like the other large accountancies it spawned a management-consulting arm in the 1980s to capitalise on the boom in the industry. By the beginning of the millennium it was again following the crowd and looking to divest its consulting arm. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act would soon make this a necessity in order to avoid conflicts of interest in the wake of the Enron scandal (O'Mahoney 2010). Following failed negotiations with Hewlett Packard and tentative steps towards a much-ridiculed IPO, Prestige sold its consulting arm to BigTech in 2002.

BigTech is one of the world's largest companies (Forbes 2010) and employs almost 400,000 employees worldwide. It has a long history and is famous for hardware and software development; it holds more patents than any other US-based company. BigTech's professional services division is called Global Services and it is within this division that Prestige's 30,000 staff were absorbed. A new sub-division called Business Consulting Services was created which included the 30,000 ex-Prestige consultants as well as 30,000 BigTech consultants.

At the time of the merger, a spokesperson for BigTech claimed that the combination of Prestige's consulting expertise with BigTech's hardware and software capabilities would allow more integrated technological solutions for their clients. It was implied that the "complementary...cultures" would integrate without help. According to our research participants, this was not the case. Many of them left BigTech within two years of the merger. We draw on their interviews as well as our own pre-understandings and personal experiences in the following research.

Initial Ideas

Both researchers were keen to understand how employees from both Prestige Consulting and BigTech in the United Kingdom viewed the merger and subsequent integration. We wanted to know how employees of each company perceived each other and their respective cultures and how integration was effected. It was difficult not to have pre-conceived notions about the merger and the employees due to Carys' personal experience (for example, we accepted that there existed a different type of culture within each organisation). Nevertheless, we avoided a specific hypothesis when conducting our fieldwork. We performed basic observations of employees in the workplace and also conducted qualitative interviews. We posed broad questions to the participants about the career paths, training, performance measures, rewards and the colleagues they encountered in the two organisations before, during and after the merger. Through their responses we hoped to gain insights about the organisational culture. This is a similar approach to that used by Alvesson & Kärreman (2007) in their examination of human resource systems from a cultural perspective at a large, international management consultancy.

Basic Findings

"How would you describe a typical Prestige or BigTech person?" This was a question asked to all of our research participants. The participants' answers highlighted two very different identities: the slick, cufflink-wearing Prestige consultant and the geeky BigTech employee (often sporting socks-and-sandals). They were differentiated by their appearance, working style and career progression. Our findings were surprising and led us to concentrate our research focus more on identity and less on culture.

Cufflinks

According to most research participants, a typical Prestige consultant is a young professional who wears a suit and cufflinks to work. Having to work long hours and working away from home is accepted because typical Prestige consultants are ambitious to progress in their careers. The drive to achieve their goals makes them work hard. They are dedicated to increasing their abilities and knowledge in order to thrive within the industry as well as to ensure continued association with an elite consulting firm. At Prestige, a similar educational background is shared among the consultants - most of them were recruited from high-status or well-known universities. In general, they are described as high achievers with the will to challenge themselves to become even better at what they do.

Socks-and-Sandals

At BigTech, on the other hand, typical employees are said to be older and wear socks-and-sandals to work. They are described as technologically brilliant or, more disparagingly, as geeks or techies. Career progression is not their primary goal and they are seen as highly family-oriented. BigTech employees are comfortable with their nine-to-five jobs and enjoy the safety and security their company offers them. They do not need or seek challenges in order to prove themselves – being good is good enough. In contrast to Prestige, BigTech has tried to cut costs wherever possible and cancelled most social budgets. According to many participants this is the reason for a reduced feeling of acknowledgement by management and lower level of camaraderie among BigTechers.

Development of Research Question

During our interviews we found that the contrasting "socks-and-sandals" and "cufflinks" metaphors - or similar metaphors regarding the appearance, working styles and career progression of BigTech employees compared to Prestige employees - was mentioned by almost all interviewees. These metaphors seemed to epitomise the enduring identity differences within the new BigTech. Even though the takeover happened nine years previously, ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech, still draw on the Prestige organisational identity to construct their individual work-identities. They identify at the individual level with the prototypical Prestige person – which represents their values – and seem to perceive the typical BigTech person as an anti-identity that is being forced upon them. Although they suggest that BigTech is a successful company and a leader in technology, their image is not one with which they wish to identify. Many do not realise

that while they see themselves as a work-hard-play-hard Prestige-type consultant they also describe work behaviours that fit the prototype BigTech employee. They enjoy the possibility of working nine-to-five, travelling less, going home every night and spending more time with their families. BigTech offers security and a safe workplace that does not require the employees to constantly challenge themselves. Therefore we assumed that the Prestige identities reflect some element of fantasy (in that they contradict with apparent behaviour).

This assumption led us to formulate a more specific research question: *Why do some BigTech employees cling to their Prestige identities after nine years of 'integration' when their ways of working no longer reflect these identities?*

Outline of Thesis

Method & Methodology

We begin with a detailed *Method & Methodology* section, which positions our research at the interpretative end of the continuum. We believe reality is socially constructed and that facts and truth are subjective so our research focuses on participants' feeling, thoughts, understandings and sense-making activities. In order to elicit this information we performed qualitative interviews and observations and consulted secondary sources. The empirical material generated in this research process is analysed in terms of authenticity, bias, distance and dependence. Due to the subjective nature of the research in the interpretative paradigm, this is the only way to assess its credibility (it cannot be assessed by objective means). Our analysis too is subjective but in a reflexive way, which we hope makes it relevant and interesting. Our empirical material is analysed with a hermeneutical reading. We look for themes that revealed something beyond the surface meanings and consult existing literature throughout the circular process.

Literature Review

During the circular analysis process we consult literature on individual identity, organisational identity, elite identities in management consultancies, clan control and fantasy in various forms. In the *Literature Review* we present a summary of – and highlight our position in regard to - each of these subject areas. Individual identities, it is argued, are multiple and fluid and require constant recreation in what is known as identity work. Individual identities may reflect organisational

identities and may also be intentionally influenced by organisations through the use of discourse. Discourse that constructs employees' identities as members of a family or clan is particularly useful in management consultancies where more direct forms of control are less practical. Using discourse to construct the organisation as a family helps to create loyal and dedicated workers. Encouraging identification with an organisational identity also means that employees experience the successes and failures of the organisation as their own. Efforts to construct elite organisational identities enhance identification among consultants, who are typically insecure and crave status to boost their self-esteem.

Protecting self-esteem is one explanation in literature for the presence of fantasy in identity construction. Fantasy may also allow employees to psychologically resist colonisation of their interior selves by the organisation (without actively resisting). While some authors consider fantasies to be dysfunctional or problematic, fantasy may also be a positive source of employee identification (i.e. one that benefits the organisation). For example, corporate visions are fantasies that motivate employees. We question then whether fantasy is necessarily problematic and whether social constructionists can differentiate at all between real and fantasy if everything – including reality itself – is a construction.

Case Analysis

In the *Case Analysis* we highlight the differences between Prestige's aristocratic elite organisational identity and BigTech's – which is analogised as an intelligent and responsible dad, a moderated version of Alvesson and Robertson's (2006) entrepreneurial band. This helps to explain why ex-Prestige consultants did not perceive BigTech's organisational identity as elite or self-esteem enhancing. We also give more details about the contrasting prototypes we heard about: the slick, cufflink-wearing Prestige consultants and their geeky sock- and sandal-wearing BigTech counterparts. We highlight that ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech behave differently at work now than they used to before the takeover (according to their own accounts). However, they still identify strongly with the Prestige organisational identity and describe themselves similarly to the Prestige prototype. We suggest that some elements of the consultants' identity work are therefore fantastical, due to the apparent contradictions between described behaviours and described values.

Discussion

In the *Discussion* section, we consider why the former Prestige consultants continue to describe themselves as ambitious and extremely career-focused (like the Prestige prototype) while acting in a more family-focused way (like the BigTech prototype). We suggest that the consultants have two separate selves which each fulfils a different need: the flesh-and-blood-family-oriented (BigTech) self allows the consultants to belong to a non-work group or family; and the work-hard-play-hard (Prestige) self allows the consultants to feel elite and distinct from their BigTech colleagues, which enhances their self-esteem. We explain that the idea of employees having separate selves is not new but that that the context of our case differs from existing literature on the subject. In our case, the consultants perceive the work self – which is strongly linked to Prestige's organisational identity – as more authentic and exhibit cynicism towards the non-work self – which is linked to BigTech's organisational identity. The strong prototypes of BigTech and Prestige employees help to maintain the distinction between the selves and protect the perceived authentic work self.

Conclusion

In the *Conclusion* we summarise our findings and their implications for theory and practice. We highlight the limitations of our research and how various further research could overcome them. Namely we suggest that a more lengthy study on the current recruitment, selection and training of consultants at BigTech would provide interesting insights into the socialisation that occurs; that exploration of changes in perceptions of elitism in the consulting industry since the 'Golden Age' may be illuminating; that the consequences of removing a clan or organisation-as-family discourse from an organisation deserve further development; and that it could be fruitful to examine other contexts where employees are presumed to play a role at work, perhaps there may be other examples of the work self being perceived as more authentic than the non-work self.

Method & Methodology

This chapter's objective is to inform the readers about the ontological and epistemological considerations of the chosen research approach. It will outline the research process, providing information about the collection of empirical material and the analysis process. Furthermore, issues regarding the research's credibility and reflexivity will be discussed and analysed.

Ontological and Epistemological Framework

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2002, p.31) "methodology is a combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation" and is defined by ontological and epistemological considerations. The ontological considerations of a research process are concerned with the assumptions that are made about the nature of being and existence of reality. How is the world understood? (Taminiaux & Gendre 1991) The epistemological considerations, in contrast, are related to the theory of knowledge. What is knowledge? How is knowledge created? And how do we know what we know? (Fumerton 2006) Various methodologies suggest how social science research should be conducted. They can be envisioned on a continuum between positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002).

The positivist approach assumes that the "social world exists externally [and] that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition" (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002, p.28). This implies that ontologically, reality is objective and external while epistemologically, knowledge is based on observation and interpretation of this objective reality. During the last few decades, however, this paradigm has been challenged by the rise of the social constructionist approach.

The key idea of the social constructionist approach, which is often referred to as an interpretive method, is that reality is not objective. Instead, it is subjective and given meaning by people (Sandberg & Targama 2007).

> "People's understanding of reality is based upon (1) their own experience and the considerations and reflections they give rise to and (2) other people's influence, either by uncritically adopting their views of reality or by comparing one's own

experience with those of others and discussing how they should be interpreted"
(Sandberg & Targama 2007, pp.29-30).

This suggests that ontologically, reality is determined subjectively by people's meaning construction instead of being objective and proven with facts (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002). Epistemologically, knowledge is socially constructed and interpreted by individuals.

In accordance with Alvesson and Sköldberg (2010), who support the fundamental understanding of reality as being socially constructed, we also believe that there are no objective facts and hence follow an interpretive approach in our research. "Focus should be on what people, individually and collectively, are thinking and feeling, and attention should be paid on the ways they communicate [...], whether verbally or non-verbally" (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002, p.30).

In order to attain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' feelings, emotions, beliefs and sense-making processes about their own experiences, we employed qualitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews. In addition we undertook basic observations, complemented with secondary data. Observations were a minor part of the data collection in comparison to the interviews but helped to provide us with first-hand impressions of the metaphors and symbols described by the interviewees. Secondary sources (news articles, BigTech and Prestige press releases regarding the merger as well as internal pamphlets on career paths) were also examined. Due to the fact that secondary sources do not reveal individuals' understanding and sense-making processes, they mainly helped us to gain further background information on the companies as well as the official/public story of the takeover. This information was not taken at face value; we did not necessarily consider the official data as more 'authentic' than our research findings. Instead it was interpreted, using a hermeneutical reading. Each of these methods developed different data (empirical material), which we have analysed using an interpretive approach (the collection and analysis of the empirical data will be discussed in detail below).

Research Process

Collection of Empirical Material
We interviewed fourteen people in total: three females and eleven males. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. We conducted two follow-up interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes

each. There was no official contact with BigTech regarding our research. The interviewees were either known personally to Carys or were referred by someone known to her (the implications of this are discussed later in this chapter). The interviewees were all current or former employees of BigTech and worked in the Business Consulting Services subdivision of the Global Services division. Some were originally BigTech employees; some were recruited to Prestige as graduates and acquired by BigTech in the merger; some were acquired by Prestige in previous mergers and subsequently acquired by BigTech. We presumed that the differing backgrounds, hierarchical positions, ages and genders of the respondents would mean diverse pre-understandings leading to differing perceptions of the merger. We believed that this would allow for interesting and varied interpretations of the research phenomenon.

Interviews were conducted in person, where possible. When in-person meetings were impractical, interviews were conducted via Skype video call or via conference telephone call. In-person interviews were conducted in neutral places such as cafes, rather than at the work place, with the hope of making interviewees feel at ease and more likely to be open. One interview was conducted at a BigTech office, where we also performed observations. In this case, a private meeting room was employed in the hope that the interviewee would not feel the need to be guarded in his responses. For the video-call interviews, the respondents were in their own homes where they were generally free from interruption and also at ease. Video-call interviews have a disadvantage compared to in-person interviews in that they do not allow direct interaction. There is a chance that meaning is distorted by the noise of the communication medium (Palmer et al. 2009). However, the nature of consulting work meant that in-person interviews were not always feasible and we considered it was preferable to risk some *noise* rather than miss the opportunity to interview certain participants at all. In addition, many consultants commonly use conference and video-calls in their daily work, so it can be considered a fairly comfortable medium for them.

We used a semi-structured interview plan with themes rather than many specific questions, which enabled an open approach to questioning. It allowed us to frame the questions according to the responses of the respondent and explore topics as they arose (Ellen 1984). Culture exists in hearts and minds (Geertz 1973) rather than heads so it is difficult to question it directly; it is contextual and hard to externalise - you cannot ask the goldfish to describe the water that he swims in (Rehn 2010). However, culture is inextricably linked to language (Spradley 1979) so we attempted to

elicit respondents' stories and narratives in their own words and to interpret the significance of their words (explained in more detail in Analysis section). We found that the interview questions changed as the research process progressed; we asked different types of questions during the follow-up interviews. During the first interviews our focus was on eliciting the respondents' own stories but during the follow-up interviews we often "confronted" respondents with their previous answers or contradictions and asked them to explain them, if possible.

Analysis of Empirical Material

As mentioned above, the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was to attain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' feelings, emotions, beliefs and sense-making processes as related to their own experiences. These experiences are articulated "via the medium of language" and not explained through external stimuli or causal connections (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002, p.29; Sandberg & Targama 2007). Therefore, to preserve the respondents' own meanings rather than our interpretations, we attempted to transcribe the interviews verbatim.

"Rather than a straightforward codifying of empirical material, [we tried] to go beyond the surface and look for something less obvious, or less easily revealed in a (quick) coding process" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010, p.713). To do this, a hermeneutic reading was employed. We examined our transcriptions and looked for common themes that would be interesting for further analysis. (For example, the metaphors describing typical BigTech and Prestige employees.) We then read the transcripts more closely, highlighting parts that referred to each theme. After listing the themes on a whiteboard, we created mind maps of links, connections and potential underlying meanings for participants' stories. To see if our explanations were theoretically interesting or novel, we consulted existing literature. We did not limit ourselves to the original themes and were open to new ones that arose when we consulted the literature. Therefore the analysis process was circular in nature.
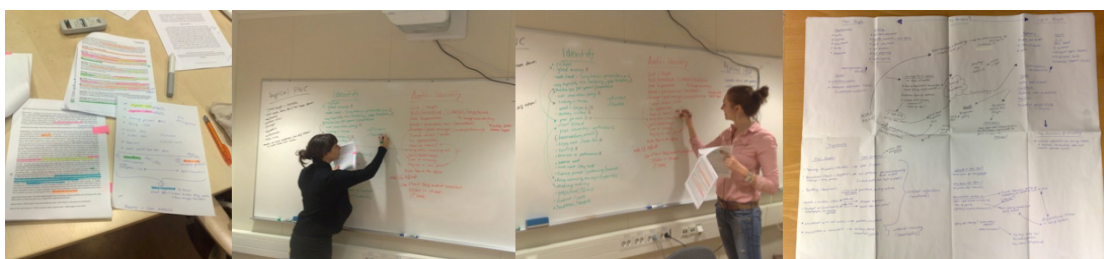
Using objective hermeneutics helped us not to take interview statements purely at face value. We treated them subjectively and within their contexts by iterating between part and whole. We believe that this dialectic interpretation of the part and whole is important. One can only understand part of an interview in reference to the whole interview and wider personal and organisational context and vice versa. Therefore, when examining responses, we considered the interview setting (where the interview took place, who asked the questions) as well as the respondent's current employer and so on. For example, one respondent still worked for BigTech and had been promoted on the day of the interview; this obviously influenced his attitude to BigTech and therefore his responses.

With reference to alethic hermeneutics, we took both the interviewees' and our own pre-understanding into consideration. The interviewees' pre-understanding influences the way in which they present their stories. Our own pre-understanding influences the way in which we understand those stories. We develop new understanding through the analysis and interpretation of our data, which in turn affects our existing pre-understandings (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010)

Credibility & Reflexivity

In the interpretative paradigm, subjectivity is pervasive. There can be no objective truth to be uncovered and all research is therefore interpretation. However, the credibility of research can be assessed by criticising its sources. Sources can be evaluated according to authenticity, bias, distance and dependence (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010).

In the *criticism of authenticity*, researchers are reminded to consider whether data are likely to be genuine sources. We presume that none of our interviewees took part in the research with the aim of expressly misinforming us and manipulating our data. Therefore, we can fairly safely assume our interviewees to be genuine sources. Talking about genuine sources and authenticity, however, is somewhat problematic within the interpretive paradigm; if reality is subjective then against what is 'authenticity' judged? If our research participants hold identities that are inconsistent, or seem to be inconsistent with their behaviour, we refer to them as fantasy identities. We do not suggest that either the fantasy or 'real' identity is more genuine because social constructionists believe that truth and reality are subjective. Yet, we agree with Brakel who

states that one can differentiate fantasy from *real* because "[f]antasies [...] can admit of contradictions" (2001, p.368).

The ***criticism of bias*** can be applied to both the informant and the researcher in qualitative research but is most commonly applied to the informant. When the topic of discussion is oneself (as in our research) there is some encouragement to represent oneself favourably. This could be considered a source of bias from the informant and it is for this reason that we take a hermeneutical approach. This means that we look for underlying meanings rather than surface responses. It is pertinent that several of our interviewees were known personally to one of the researchers, Carys. Social convention may therefore encourage them to say what they think the researcher wants to hear so as not to upset the relationship. This was a big risk for our research and to help overcome it, Julia (who was not known personally to any of the interviewees) asked the majority of the questions during the interviews. In this way it was hoped that the interviewees would not just say what they thought was appropriate. It also forced them to explain themselves more explicitly (as Julia's lack of shared understanding meant that she would not be able to assume the context of their stories). There are also positive effects of interviewing people already known to the researcher: trust is already established and there should be less suspicion regarding the researchers' motives; shared pre-understanding may also allow for deeper understanding of the interviewees' stories.

Bias may also come from the researchers themselves and the effect of their pre-understandings or ideologies on their interpretations. Alvesson coined the phrase "I see it when I believe it" (2011) to explain the inherent conservatism of the hermeneutic circle. He means that the researcher is more likely to perceive things as she expects (according to existing pre-understanding) than to accept deviations or surprises as 'real' rather than anomalies. This was particularly important for our research as Carys has worked for both Prestige and BigTech and necessarily has pre-existing ideas about them and about the merger. To further counter the researchers' possible bias, Julia deliberately adopted a slightly pro-BigTech position during our discussion. It is important to remember however, that no researcher has a *tabula rasa* from which to work, which means that both the researchers as well as interviewees are not free from preconceptions and pre-understandings inherited from past experiences, preconceived meanings (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010). We have the advantage of being more aware than many of this limitation in our research.

The ***criticism of distance*** "refers to the fact that the more remote the source is from the event in time and space, the less value it has" (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010, pp.112-3) while the ***criticism of dependence*** "refers to the number of hands the information has passed through from the source in question" *(ibid 2010, p.113)*. In our research, dependence is low due to the fact that we are talking directly to the sources in question about their own experiences (primary data). Distance could be considered somewhat high since some of the experiences we asked participants to recall occurred up to twelve years ago. The merger itself took place in 2002.

One additional factor to consider when critically assessing our data is that we did not get official sanction from BigTech to conduct the research but instead used a personal network of former colleagues to gain access. This may contribute to the credibility of the research in that we were free to examine whatever we felt was interesting and relevant instead of what the organisation wanted us to investigate. There would probably have been less suspicion from respondents regarding our motives, which also has a positive effect on credibility; if we were reporting our findings to their employer, we may have expected more inhibition from our participants. It may also have negatively affected the credibility of the research since we did not have as much opportunity as we would have liked to perform observations.

Reflexivity means paying attention to the object being constructed, the subject doing the construction and the social context that constructs both the subject *and* the researcher (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010, p.269). Trivial construction occurs when the researcher reserves the notion of social construction for the object of her research while considering herself outside constructing and able to objectively portray those constructions (*ibid*, p269). Being reflexive, interpreting one's own interpretations and "avoiding empiricism, narcissism and different varieties of social and linguistic reductionism" (*ibid*, p269) should contribute to greater reflexivity and avoidance of trivial construction. This is the approach we have attempted to emulate in our research and analysis, thus we hope that our research can be considered credible and interesting.

Literature Review

This chapter's objective is to inform the reader about existing literature on identity, elite identities in management consulting, normative control, and fantasy. Our position with regard to each subject area is highlighted.

Several authors have discussed the recent trend for organisations to attempt to govern not only the body (as in Fordism) but also the soul of employees (Legge 2007; Willmott 1993; Kunda 2006; Kunda & Meiskins 1992). This trend is notable in the management consulting industry. In the absence of tangible and measurable results, consultancies trade on their status and reputation (Kipping 1999), which are built on the quality of their staff. This implicitly means that consultants must be encouraged to work harder and for longer than the competition and must also project a convincing and coherent corporate image. A corporate image is a product of how employees appear and behave in everyday situations, which is in turn motivated in part by their own individual identities – their own sense of who they are (Alvesson 2004). Therefore, management consultancies must concern themselves with the individual identities of their employees. Aside from the effect on corporate image, consultancies may attempt to manage consultants' identities as a means of control (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). Creating a strong organisational identity to which employees relate binds their individual identity to that of the organisation and encourages them to act in the best interests of the organisation. Management consultancies may attempt to produce an organisational identity that is considered elite (Alvesson & Robertson 2006). If successful, the effects are two-fold: the elite organisational identity, as reflected to employees, encourages their association with the organisation and increases elitism in their own individual identities; the elite organisational identity and the elite individual identities both contribute to an elite corporate image, which boosts the consultancy's all-important reputation (Hatch & Schultz 2002). Hence identity is an important source of control in management consultancies. Identity is also central to clan control, which is also prevalent in management consultancies and other knowledge-intensive firms (Alvesson 2004). Through various processes, including socialisation (Ashforth & Mael 1989) the organisation disseminates discourses that promote the organisation-as-family and a sense of belonging, thus encouraging loyalty and commitment (Ouchi 1980).

The subjects touched on in this brief introduction – individual identity, organisational identity, identity control, elite identity management and clan control are covered in more detail in the following sections. We also examine how fantasy is currently represented in literature. We suggest that fantasy, as related to identity, is somewhat misrepresented in literature and propose how we will identify and discuss it throughout our thesis.

Identity

Individual identity "concerns how a person constructs a particular version of him- or herself and can be seen as the response to the question 'Who am I?'" (Alvesson 2004, p.188).

"Identity is […] best understood as something that is not monolithic and robust. […] Identities are multiple and contextual, therefore they must be constructed and secured" (Alvesson 2000, p.1105). Here, Alvesson explains that one person may have multiple identities. For example, one person may see herself as an uncompromising manager at work as well as a green-fingered gardener at home. Therefore "[c]ontemporary theorizing [on identity] encourages us to think in pluralistic and non-essentialist terms" (Alvesson 2000, p.1105). In addition, Alvesson explains (above) that the way in which people understand and define themselves is not fixed but is fluid and constantly changing. "Identity is, like social life in general, constructed" and individuals constantly engage in identity construction to "achieve the feeling of a coherent and strong self as well as a basis for social relations" (Alvesson 2004, p.190). This concept is echoed by Giddens when he explains that identity must be "routinely created and sustained" by the individual (1991, p.52) in social interactions with others (Weick 1995; Weick & O'Connell 1998). This ongoing process of negotiating and renegotiating coherent individual identities is known as "identity work" (Alvesson & Willmott 2002, p.627).

Organisational Identity

If individual identity concerns questions of 'who am I', then organisational identity can be conceptualised as the shared answers to the questions "Who are we as an organization?" and "How do we work?" (Alvesson & Empson 2008, p.13). Whetten explains organisational identity as "the central and enduring attributes of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations" (2006, p.220), thus suggesting that organisational identity is stable. We ascribe to a contrasting view proposed by Gioia et al, who contend that, "contrary to most treatments of it in

the literature, [organisational identity] is actually relatively dynamic" (2000, p.63). Gioia et al. suggest that the durability of organisational identity is an illusion; that identity labels may be static but the meaning attached to those labels by organisational members is frequently renegotiated. We believe that organisational identity, like individual identity is fluid and manageable.

At this point we believe that a detailed explanation of the different levels of identity may be useful. Diagram 1 shows our understanding, based on existing literature, of the relationship between identity at the level of the individual, the group and society. The organisation is one of several group identities that may influence individual identity work to a greater or lesser degree. It is important to note that, for simplicity, our model only shows the relationship between one group and one individual. However, we believe that every individual has many identities and each of those individual identities may be associated with one or more group identities.

Regarding our unit of analysis in the following thesis, we will concentrate on both individual and organisational identities but above all, on the relationship between the two.
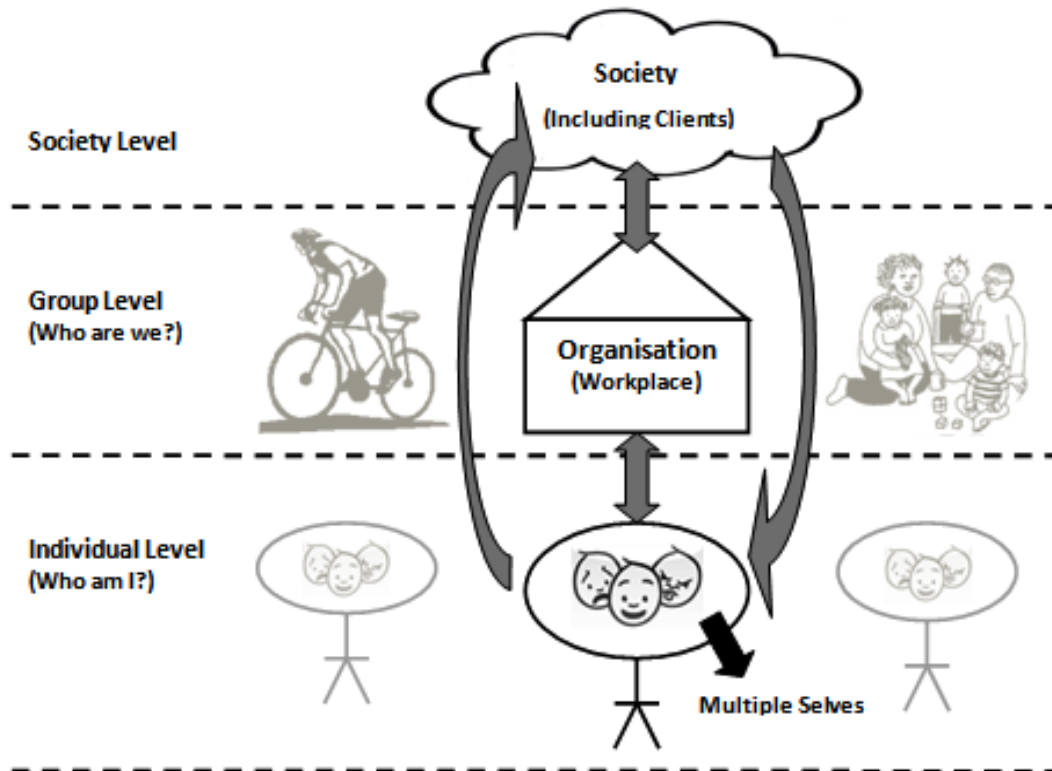
Diagram 1: Levels of Identity

Hatch and Shultz (2002) describe two different processes by which organisational identity develops: mirroring, where identity is reflected in a metaphorical mirror made of the opinions and views of external others; and reflection, where identity develops based on internal self-perception. In organisations where reflection occurs, symbols and discourses that help to construct the organisational identity are often displayed internally (for and through individuals), they are then reflected upon as part of individuals' identity work and may be internalised. In this way, individual identities "become closely associated with the [organisational] identity" (Hatch & Schultz 2002, p.1000). Meanwhile in mirroring, the symbols and discourses that represent organisational identity are displayed externally (for clients, customers, shareholders and society in general). These are observed and mirrored back to the individuals inside the organisation. (The two methods are illustrated in Diagram 2.)

Mirroring:
Organisational identity is reflected in a metaphorical mirror made of the opinions and views of external others.

Reflection:
Organisational identity developed based on internal self-perception
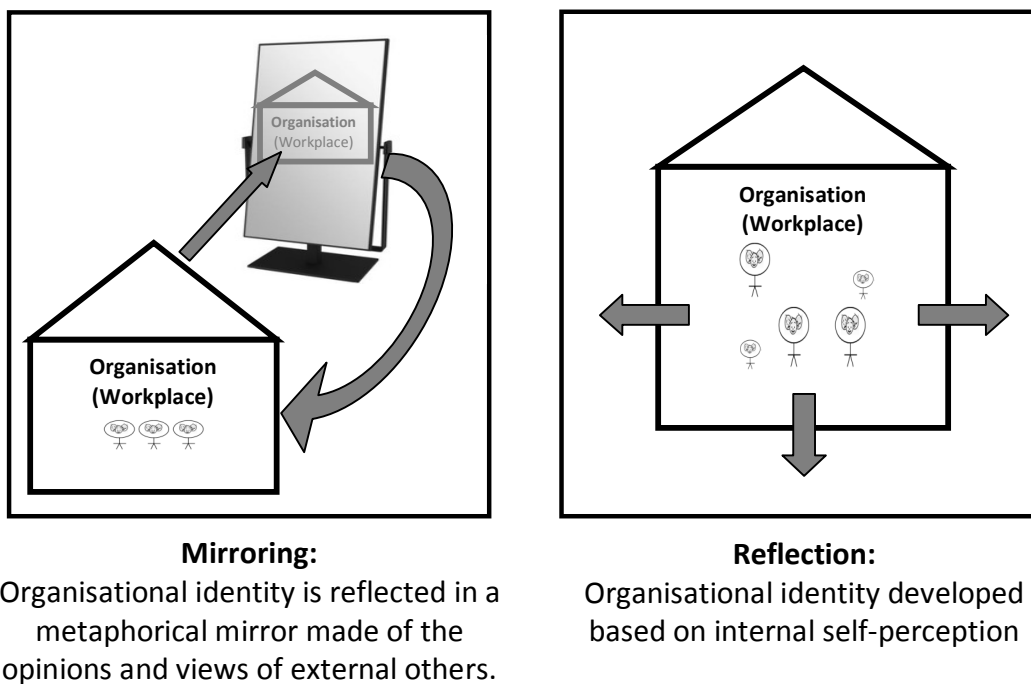
Diagram 2: Organisational Identity Construction: Mirroring and Reflecting

Mirroring may not link the organisational identity with individual identities in such a strong way as reflecting does. Neither does it include organisational members to the same extent in the process of constructing organisational identity. In the reflecting process there is a focus on individual employees as carriers and co-constructors of the organisational identity and as creators of the corporate image. During mirroring, individual employees merely receive the constructed image and incorporate this into their own identity (or not). They are passive recipients.

Identity Control

For management consultancies, image and reputation are particularly important. They usually sell knowledge and expertise rather than more tangible products and, as clients cannot see the products that they buy, they must rely on somewhat subjective evaluations of success (Alvesson 2004). The reputation and image of the organisation highly affect clients' evaluations, which in turn affect the reputation and image of the organisation. Corporate image is also a product of how employees appear and behave in everyday situations - particularly true when the consultants themselves are effectively what is being bought and sold. Consultants' appearance, behaviour and talk have a large impact on client perceptions of value and therefore, highly affect the image and reputation of the organisation. The way in which consultants behave is motivated in part by their own individual identities – their own sense of who they are (Alvesson 2004). Therefore, it is important for corporate image and reputation that management consultancies try to manage employees' individual identities. This is usually done by influencing employees' identity work (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). Employees should perceive themselves as "the best and the brightest" in order to project a desirable image (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.195).

Identity control is not only desirable for its effects on corporate image and reputation. It is also a means to control employees' behaviour so that they work hard and in the best interests of the organisation (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Brewer 1991; Alvesson et al. 2008; Alvesson & Willmott 2002). More direct forms of employee control are often difficult to effect in knowledge-intensive firms due to the ambiguous nature of the work and of the measures of results (Alvesson 2004). In addition, management consultants often work at a physical and psychological distance from their office and managers. If consultancies can sufficiently influence the identity construction of their employees so that individual identities are linked to the organisational identity, they do not need to worry about the lack of direct control. Employees will instinctively act in the best interests of the organisation, as they will directly or vicariously experience its successes and failures as their own (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Tracy & Trethewey 2005). Employees will therefore work longer and harder for an organisation with which they identify than one with which they do not (Meriläinen et al. 2004).

Control of identity can be considered more or less explicit in different organisations. Some organisations explicitly disseminate discourses with the intention of influencing identity work

(Alvesson & Willmott 2002). Others may simply try to engender a spirit of teamwork, or present the organisation as elite (for example), which results in individuals linking their individual identities with that of the team and organisation (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003; Alvesson & Robertson 2006).

Elite Identities in Consulting

Organisational identity can be a more or less salient influence on the identity work of employed individuals (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Gioia et al. 2000). It is more likely to be influential if it is seen as a desirable association. For example, if being seen as belonging to the organisation enhances an employee's self-esteem or feeling of importance or distinctiveness (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Brewer 1991).

Until recently it was thought that an elite identity could only apply to some part of an organisation, usually the top management (in comparison with more 'regular' employees working beneath them). However, Alvesson and Robertson (2006) observed several consulting firms where the notion of being "the best and the brightest" was applied to all employees. Alvesson and Robertson suggest that elite identity construction in management consultancies encourages and facilitates: (a) self-discipline and high performance standards among consultants; (b) attraction and retention of employees; (c) a positive image to attract clients and (d) a certain amount of ontological security, enabling consultants "to function effectively in high-ambiguity and somewhat sceptical […] work contexts" (2006, p.194). This is not very different from claims regarding identity control in general. However, social identity theory suggests that individuals identify with social categories (organisations, for example) "partly to enhance self-esteem" (Ashforth & Mael 1989, p.22). Belonging to an exclusive, distinctive or elite group is therefore likely to generate a higher degree of identification and a resulting higher self-esteem (Brewer 1991; Alvesson & Robertson 2006). So the construction of an elite organisational identity should lead to more effective identity control.

One reason why elite identity control works so well for management consultancies is that they intentionally recruit graduates who are insecure over-achievers (Ebbinghaus 2010; Alvesson 2004). Over-achievers, who are used to being top of the class, can rarely conceive of failing and will therefore work as many hours as is necessary to complete a task successfully. Being

surrounded by equally successful people means that they must continually strive to be the best of the best. Being insecure means that they crave recognition, as most individuals do. In the consulting industry recognition is not commonly received from clients so it must be sought from above and from peers. This motivates them to achieve and makes them willing and able to subsume their identities to the organisation (Ebbinghaus 2010; Muhr Forthcoming). They can be shaped by the organisation through a process known as socialisation (Ashforth & Mael 1989).

During socialisation, undesirable aspects of identity are discouraged and the expectations, norms, and values of the new organisation are understood and internalised by new employees (McGuire 2010). Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest that to facilitate divestiture and reconstruction of their identities and values, new hires may be isolated from external contact. For example, employees may be sent abroad and/or to purpose-built training facilities. New symbols of identity and discourses are prescribed and employees are rewarded for adopting them (Alvesson 2004; Ashforth & Mael 1989). In return for subsuming their identities in this way, consultants receive the praise and recognition they crave as well as the status of being associated with an elite organisation; one that recruits and retains the best and the brightest.

> I know that I was recruited to an elite and that I am still considered to be worthy of an organization that recruits the best students, has the best clients, and makes a lot of money. We hire one out of hundred who apply for work here. We have long and trying tests and evaluations and I have passed them all (Consultant, cited in Alvesson & Kärreman 2007, p.719).

As highlighted in the above quote, the notion of elitism is highly influenced by the symbolism in which the organisation engages. Alvesson and Robertson (2006) highlight as pertinent symbols: location and distinctiveness of buildings, tough selection criteria and entrance tests, the size of the organisation, the availability of training and the lavishness of corporate events. Appearance, including clothing style, may also be an important signifier of elitism (Covaleski et al. 1998; Alvesson 2004).

Clan Control

Clan control is closely related to the idea of identity control. It is also a normative form of control that aims to make employees identify with the organisation and their colleagues in a familial way.

Ouchi (1979) suggests that, of the three main means of employee control available to organisations - market-like, bureaucratic and clan – clan is the most effective.

Market-like forms of control are concerned with measuring and rewarding individuals' contributions. "[B]ureaucracies rely […] upon a mixture of close evaluation and a socialized acceptance of common objectives" (Ouchi 1979, p.833). Both market-like and bureaucratic control are direct forms of control. According to Alvesson (2004), direct control only prompts employee compliance. Employees do only as much as they are rewarded for and are not encouraged to go 'the extra mile' or perform tasks that are outside job descriptions. As highlighted above, direct control is especially complicated in management consultancies due to the nature of consulting; work is often complex and consultants are often physically and psychologically distant from their supervisors when working at client sites (Alvesson 2000). Therefore, normative forms of control, which influence values, beliefs, understanding and identities, are more often employed (Alvesson 2004; Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Empson 2004; Robertson & Swan 2003; Muhr Forthcoming; Sandberg & Targama 2007).

Identity is central to clan control; as for clan control to be effective employees must define themselves as members of the clan or organisational family. Clan control promotes a non-contractual commitment towards work and colleagues and "outclasses the narrowness and instrumentality of market and bureaucratic forms of control" (Ouchi 1979; Alvesson 2004, p.132). "The glue which holds [the individuals] together is a shared vision of their needs, their goals and their sanctioned ways in which things should be done" and is accomplished through ritualised, ceremonial forms of control – for example, careful screening and selection of employees as well as socialisation (hazing) of individuals (Chan 1997, p.94). "The clan functions by socializing each member completely so that each merges individual goals with the organizational ones, thus providing them with the motivation to serve the organization" (Ouchi & Price 1993, p.64).

The reader may presume that control is somewhat more relaxed in a clan than in a bureaucratic situation. However, clan control works hand in hand with concertive control, which Barker (1993) describes as even tighter and more constraining than bureaucratic forms of control. As well as not wanting to let the family down, clan members should be concerned that no one else is letting down the clan. Therefore, they will implicitly monitor their colleagues' performance (as well as

their own). Thus clan control implies an all-encompassing and powerful "system of values-based normative rules that" control employees even more completely than" a bureaucracy (Barker 1993, p.408; Robertson & Swan 2003).

Discourses of Identification

On the question of *how* organisations can intentionally influence individuals' identity constructions, how they can be encouraged to think of the organisation as a clan or family; Alvesson and Willmott suggest that this is accomplished using discourse: "Management (and others) act, more or less strategically, to introduce, reproduce, influence and legitimize the presence/absence of particular discourses" (2002, p.628). Ouchi (1979) suggests that symbols and rituals are more salient than discourse. Czarniawska (2000), however suggests that we understand events by creating narratives about them; that we can conceive of organisations, and everything that happens within them *as language*. Therefore, this debate can be considered somewhat redundant. We consider discourse, as well as rituals and symbols (constituted in language), to be influential in identity construction and control, therefore relevant to our research.

Discourses regarding identification with the organisational clan/family are part of organisational socialisation. These processes begin even before individuals are employed - during the recruitment process and even earlier (Poulter & Land 2008) – but are intensified during periods of training and induction (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). Alvesson (2004) and Ebbinghaus (2010) point out that many management consultancies hire people based on personality and values as much as (if not more than) technical competence. Recruits that are most likely to be susceptible to moulding are preferred. During training, recruits are not only familiarised with formal, structured knowledge about the company, but are also taught to internalise discourse related to values, beliefs, identity and vision for the future (Ashforth & Mael 1989).

> Pivotal among the new organizational cultural practices and values are the metaphors of 'team' and 'family'. Many companies, from manufacturing operations and supermarket chains, to hospitals and airline companies, promote themselves […] to employees as caring, familial communities, inviting [them] to 'Come, join our family' through their involvement with the company (Casey 1999, p.156).

We believe that management consultancies use clan/family discourses to promote consultancy as a life rather than a job. "The repeated admonishment to be a good, familial, team-player [and] the

immediacy of the fear of team and family discipline […] allow few avenues of dissent and few places of retreat at work from work" (Casey 1999, pp.173-4). When newcomers are socialised into behavioural norms (Poulter & Land 2008, p.67) they are also taught to invest their hearts, minds and souls in their work and their colleagues. The family discourse is a powerful way to increase both employee loyalty to the family and hard work - to ensure success of the clan. According to Chan (1997) and Casey (1999), members of clan organisations are loathe to let down the team and are caring and supportive of one another rather than competitive. "Employees reported that they fear having their failings displayed in front of their peers and team leaders during meetings, and the repercussions of criticism or attack, more than they fear punishment for breaching some formal company regulations, which they can defy to some extent" (Casey 1999, p.173).

Fantasies

As highlighted above, the recent trend for organisations to attempt to govern not only the body (as in Fordism) but also the soul of employees (Legge 2007; Willmott 1993; Kunda 2006; Kunda & Meiskins 1992) may lead employees to feel that they have no escape from work (Casey 1999). One way of resisting the total colonisation of oneself is to imagine or construct separate selves (Contu 2008; Johnsen et al. 2009). Costas and Fleming (2009) theorise about the division of selves between work and non-work selves. The work self, conforms to organisational norms which the non-work self treats with cynicism and disdain. Thus the non-work self, which the individual perceives as authentic – the 'real' me – is protected.

Collinson too, suggests that employees in modern organisations have "become increasingly skilled manipulators of self, reputation and image in the eyes of 'significant others'" (2003, p.538), drawing on the idea of dramaturgical selves who perform at work. Poulter and Land (2008) studied training sessions of management consultants and concluded that the trainees were taught how to perform their jobs as if they were acting a role. "By adopting the mien of an actor and consciously performing in accordance with expected forms of behaviour, employees are able to project the appearance of a competent, enthusiastic and professional employee requisite for a successful career" (Poulter & Land 2008, p.67). Perhaps unsurprisingly, "self-identity in some [such] instances can become loosely connected to actual social interactions" and "assume characteristics of fantasy" (Sveningsson & Larsson 2006, p.207).

In some cases individuals use fantasy to protect against threatening aspects of actual social life. These aspects, which might otherwise cause some part of self-identity to be damaged or lost, can be disregarded, deflected or distorted with fantasy (Sveningsson & Larsson 2006). Brakel (2001) suggests that fantasy is dysfunctional or neurotic and Carroll and Levy (2008) that it is problematic. However other authors suggest that fantasies may be beneficial to the organisation. Benefits arise when fantasies (a) provide a positive source of identification (i.e. one that benefits the organisation); (b) protect the employee's self-esteem; (c) allow employees to resist colonisation of their interior selves without actively resisting.

Fantasy as a Positive Source of Identification

"A common source of [fantasy] imaginary is the extra-employment identities and values" (Costas & Fleming 2009, p.358) but work-based fantasies may be encouraged as a source of employee identification. "[T]he imaginary is not simply a personal invention. It is enacted through social scripts and institutions that reflect local relevancies and germane power relations" (*ibid).* For example, by generating "rhetorical visions" that describe "a symbolic reality" (Jackson 2000, p.194), organisations influence their members to construct and work towards a fantastical future. Using visions, narratives, organisations may actively encourage employees to link their individual identities with an organisational identity – which may be considered more or less 'real' (Sveningsson & Larsson 2006; Whetten 2006).

Fantasy to Protect Self-Esteem

Several authors have suggested the need to defend one's identity against external threats in order to protect self-esteem (Brown 1997; Alvesson 2004; Sveningsson & Larsson 2006). "Justifying what we 'are about' to ourselves and others is part of our maintaining our personal self-esteem which in turn is part of our making sense of our position in the world and thus achieving the sense of control which is essential to our sanity" (Watson 2001, p.60). The career ambiguity associated with working for a knowledge-intensive-firm may make this particularly important for management consultants (Fincham 2003; Alvesson & Johansson 2002; Alvesson 1995, Alvesson 2001, Alvesson 2004). Sveningsson & Larsson (2006) discuss how fantasies of leadership were used in the identity construction of their research subject. In their case study, a fantasy identity was constructed in preference to a self-esteem-diminishing anti-identity that was forced upon the subject.

Fantasy as Resistance

Fantasy may function as a type of "decaf resistance" (Contu 2008) that allows employees to cognitively or affectively resist subordination without resisting behaviourally (Palmer et al. 2009). "[E]mployees posit a distinction between a corporate self that complies with the organisational norm and an authentic self that is always considered something more than what is colonised by the organization" (Johnsen et al. 2009, p.203). "[P]rimary significance" is ascribed to "the 'real me' outside" work (Collinson 2003, p.537). This "[d]ecaf resistance, […like] decaf coffee, makes it possible for [employees] to enjoy without the costs and risks involved" (Contu 2008, p.374). Gabriel touched on the same idea when he described the "*unmanaged organization*, a kind of organizational dreamworld in which desires, anxieties and emotions find expressions in highly irrational constructions" including "stories, myths, jokes" and so on (1995, p.1 italics in original). He suggests that "fantasy offers a third possibility to organizational members, which amounts to neither conformity nor rebellion but to a grudging material acceptance accompanied by a symbolic refashioning of events and official stories" (Gabriel 1995, p.1). This cognitive resistance avoids the need for behavioural resistance, which could be disruptive to the organisation.

It may be assumed "that 'authenticity' always equates with non-work and inauthenticity with work" but this is not always the case (Costas & Fleming 2009, p.359). Muhr and Kirkegaard (Forthcoming) suggested that consultants' home-life fantasies (of leaving their jobs and living a dream life in the country) actually sustain them at work. Maintaining the fantasy that a 'real' or authentic self exists outside work enables them to keep working and performing the role required of the work self. A fantasised escape from the present can be beneficial to the organisation if it replaces an employee's need to actually escape from an undesirable work situation (Sveningsson & Larsson 2006, p.217). In our case study, we argue that the opposite seems to be true; the perceived authentic self seems to be a fantasy. Our consultants do not seem to be cynical about the work self, but rather about the non-work self that submits to the desires to have a family and spend time with them. This represents a departure from current representations in literature.

The Real/Fantasy Dichotomy

Some authors question whether the real/fantasy dichotomy - as related to identity or self - is relevant at all and whether the so-called 'real' identities are any more real than the fantasies (Tracy & Trethewey 2005). Brakel contends that "[f]antasies are quite different from beliefs-

proper" because in fantasies "there is no attempt to match the truth conditions of the propositions to what obtains in the world" (2001, p.368). Brakel thus assumes that beliefs-proper[1] are more 'real' or authentic and can be tested and proved true or false against an objective reality. If however, one accepts that reality is a social construction, then truth and reality are subjective. All reality (including fantasies and fantasy identities) is constructed in language and therefore what is fantasy and what is 'real' is more blurred (Czarniawska 2000). Knowledge about what is 'real' or 'authentic' "arises from processes more related to ideology, interests or power" than rational, objective truth (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2010, p.25). At the extreme, postmodernists may argue that there can be no 'real' self, as what is called real is nothing more than one of infinite possible images of the self (Tracy & Trethewey 2005).

Brakel suggests that one can differentiate fantasy from *real* because "[f]antasies, unlike beliefs-proper, can admit of contradictions" (2001, p.368). While we do not agree with her that beliefs-proper can be tested, we do share her view on fantasy and contradictions. Thus, if participants hold identities that are inconsistent, or seem to be inconsistent with their behaviour, we refer to them as fantasy identities in the following work. At the same time we concur with Tracy & Trethewey that "emotions and identity are more productively understood as neither real nor fake, but constructed and constrained through various discourses of power" (2005, p.175).

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[1] "[B]eliefs-proper are propositional attitudes that, in psychoanalytic terms, are examples of secondary process mentation; they are each grounded in a particular time and place, they are all reality tested, and they never admit of contradictions" (Brakel 2001, p.368).

Case Analysis

The objective of this chapter is to inform the reader about our research findings. First we discuss the different types of elite identity found at the two organisations (Prestige: the Professional Aristocracy versus BigTech: the Intelligent and Responsible Dads). Then we highlight the stereotypical differences between the slick, cufflink-wearing Prestige consultants and their geeky socks-and-sandal-wearing BigTech counterparts. Finally we highlight the fantasy elements of our respondents' identity constructions.

During our research, we asked our interviewees broad questions about their career paths, training, performance measures and rewards. We also asked them about the colleagues they encountered in the two organisations before, during and after the takeover. Our aim was to find out more about their own behavioural characteristics, beliefs, values, motivation and sense making processes. This helped us to form a picture of their individual self-identities as well as their perception of BigTech and Prestige's differing organisational identities. One of the themes that appeared salient in the respondents' narratives was the notion of elite organisational identity. This appeared to be linked to individuals' elite self-perceptions. As explored in the *Literature Review* an elite organisational identity is desired by many organisations and particularly useful for management consultancies, which trade heavily on image and reputation.

There are several different types of elite organisational identity according to Alvesson and Robertson (2006). Prestige and BigTech both appear to have elite organisational identities, yet the elitism of each is not necessarily recognised by the members of the other. Thus we surmised that they might have different types of elite organisational identity. The 'professional aristocracy' and the 'entrepreneurial band' are metaphors used by Alvesson and Robertson (2006) to describe two different elite organisational identities. During our analysis we noticed the similarities between these two metaphors and the organisations we were studying. Paramount, the professional aristocracy is a professional services firm, offering specialised consulting services. It recruits only the 'best and brightest'. For the professional aristocracy, symbols of their elitism - such as distinctive buildings, lavish events and a high performance culture – are extremely important. Universal, the entrepreneurial elite organisation, "has the feel of a highly respected university"

(Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.219) and is known for technological innovation. This is how it attracts employees. In order to succeed at this organisation, employees need a deep knowledge of or experience within science or IT.

In the following section we draw on Alvesson & Robertson's metaphors to describe Prestige as a professional aristocracy and BigTech as an entrepreneurial band. Finding something lacking in the BigTech analogy, we go on to suggest a new metaphor for BigTech's particular kind of elite organisational identity: Intelligent and Responsible Dad. Table 1 summarises the differences, which are later explained in detail.

Prestige The Professional Aristocracy	versus	BigTech Intelligent and Responsible Dad
Top consulting firm Smart over-achievers Slick Sports cars	Reputation	Well-known brand Technical geeks Highly intelligent Family cars
Good locations Impressive Outstanding	Buildings	Good locations Functional Nice surroundings
Lavish Frequent	Events	Less glamorous Rare
High pay Generous expenses Good hotels Business class travel	Financial	Lower pay Lower expenses More restrictions Responsibility to shareholders
High performance required Up-or-out Competitive	Performance	Not pushed to excel Lifers To plateau is okay
High achievers Best and the brightest Tough applications & interviews	Recruitment & Selection	Less prestigious academic qualifications Acquisitions from outsourcing
California Long duration Important	Training	Cellar Shorter duration Often cancelled or computer-based

Table 1: Prestige versus BigTech (elite organisational characteristics)

Prestige: The Professional Aristocracy

The Professional Aristocracy at Paramount is similar to what we observed and heard about Prestige. At Paramount "[s]ymbolism was relied upon heavily to reinforce notions of elitism. For example, the office location was very prestigious and only lavish hotels were used for weekend strategy meetings. Consultants had the use of a Chauffeur and Mercedes company car when

travelling" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.208). Prestige also relied on elite symbols to construct their organisational identity, according to our respondents. Former-Prestige consultants told us that they had worked in impressive buildings, stayed in nice hotels and enjoyed business class travel at Prestige. They told stories of corporate events where no expense was spared and the performance and dedication that were expected in return. They considered themselves to be the best and the brightest because tangible and intangible symbols of exclusivity were evident during recruitment, selection and training. One former-Prestige consultant even compared the cars driven by Prestige and BigTech partners as symbols of elitism.

> Prestige's belief in itself was that it was a top consulting firm and did difficult projects that no one else did and had a strong belief that its people were the best people that you can get (Mike, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> The cars are different […] The Maserati, who was complaining that at the Shell garage, the pumps would stop after he'd put in a hundred pounds of petrol. That was so Prestige. And the guy with the estate…okay he had six kids and other expenses but more worried about his pension than anything else (Andrew, Consultant, BigTech).

Prestige: Distinctive Buildings

"[I]n all cases, physical buildings and location were the most overt symbolic representation of elitism" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.212). We observed Prestige Consulting's former offices and considered them to be beautiful and imposing constructions with impressive views in expensive locations. This view was confirmed by our respondents, who also described how entering the buildings made them feel elite.

> It was a nice building, very good location and it makes you feel special when you walk in dressed in your suit (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> Excited. Really excited […] going into the Riverside office […] where it overlooked the river and the London Eye…I remember going in and thinking this is such a cool office. You were looking out over the river. You've got your laptop and it just felt good (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige: Lavish Events

Demonstrating access to the financial resources required to throw lavish events is another signifier of elitism according to Alvesson and Robertson (2006). The former-Prestige consultants told us about champagne receptions, Christmas balls and thank-you dinners, which were hosted

to celebrate particular occasions. They also described more regular social events that were funded by the company. Both of these types of events seem to have made the consultants feel valued and encouraged to work long-hours.

> There were a lot of social events, such as drinking and dinners that were paid by the company (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> There were budgets for night time (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> When the projects went well you had thank you dinners, a little bit further on in my time at Prestige we would have thank you weekends, where the whole project would go to another city for the weekend, and what else? At the end of each year, there would be a Christmas ball. […] And that would all be free (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> They used to put a grand behind that bar every week. […] And a grand? It's half a day rate for most of us so it was a pittance but you just felt valued (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige: Elite Financial Symbols

At Alvesson & Robertson's Paramount "another element of elitism was the high remuneration packages provided. There was an emphasis on instrumental rewards" (2006, p.208). This seems also to have been salient at Prestige.

> You're young and you don't have any ties, you're very well paid and you feel superior (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige was even described as financially generous with staff that they no longer required; demonstrating elitism with large redundancy payouts. This suggests that money was not only a motivator to staff but also a symbol to those outside the organisation.

> They would...lay them off but pay very handsomely to leave, so I know a lot of people who left with enormous pay-outs (John, Senior Consultant, BigTech).

Simon used the word "money" nine times in his interview, while Daniel used it twenty-four times (in answer to various questions about recruitment, training, past career choice, past project decisions, future career choice and the motivation behind the merger). We interpreted this as a sign that money is a strong motivator in their professional lives.

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Prestige: High Performance Culture

'Work hard, play hard' best describes the work ethos of Prestige consultants. Almost every interviewee mentioned that Prestige consultants are career driven, want to achieve their goals and get the job done. They work as long as it takes to finish projects even if that means working long hours and working away from home.

> The Prestige attitude was you work away from home, you work the hours that you need to do to get it done, work hard, play hard, ra ra ra, it's all good (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

At Alvesson & Robertson's Paramount, there was an expectation of performance: "I know that if you don't perform well and quickly you are out of this firm" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.209). This also seemed to be true at Prestige. All the former-Prestige consultants we spoke with denied the presence of an up-or-out culture when directly questioned about it. They claimed that there was no internal competition at Prestige and emphasised instead their familial care for each other.

When asked about internal competition during a period of redundancies at Prestige, Daisy responded:

> No, I didn't actually […] I just felt worried about everyone actually (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

However, answers to less direct questions about career, performance and promotion revealed a desire to succeed and a natural competitive urge. This produces an internalised up-or-out attitude.

> If you have a bunch of bright people around you then you are pushed to perform […] at least as well as your peers (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> I think you'll get to the point where you think maybe this is not the right organisation for me to progress further in at this time in which case I need to look somewhere else. But I would like to think that I would get promoted (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech employees also noticed this tendency in their new colleagues.

So they were all expecting to get promoted quite quickly; to climb through the career ranks faster. I don't know if that's just the way you did it in Prestige or what but certainly you were expecting to be higher levels at younger ages. I don't know what set that expectation but […] definitely there was an expectation there that they would be doing better or climbing the career ranks faster than would fit old BigTech (Pam, ex-Consultant, BigTech).

Prestige: Elite Recruitment, Selection and Training

Respondents also emphasised the elite organisational identity when describing recruitment, selection and training at Prestige. The best candidates, who had already demonstrated their aptitude to succeed, were recruited from high-profile universities. Applications and interviews were seen to be challenging so that only the best of the best candidates were seen to be accepted. Simon described how lists of prospective consultants who had made the cut were posted on the wall next to the elevator so that those rejected could be witnessed leaving (a visual representation of the downward turn that their career prospects had taken)! The overseas training programme (located at a custom-built global training facility in an enviable setting) screamed elite and the length of training attested to the quality of Prestige consultants' expertise.

The application forms […] were quite long. […] I felt like it was almost another subject in my post grad. […] It was a lot of work (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Then it went to an assessment centre which was psychometric testing and then a first round of interviews which was done at Cambridge and then second round of interviews which was in London. I had two interviews on that day, one with senior manager and one with a partner. So, it was […] pretty thorough (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Not everybody had a first class degree but everybody had achieved something: either they were semi-professional rugby players, or they had just come back from a year of living in South America with no Spanish […] Everybody had achieved something (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

10 weeks training in California with graduates from all over the world (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

It was out in California. At that point it was touted as a four-year graduate-training programme (Barry, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

It was a purpose-built facility and there was a training centre there. It was a very large building with a lot of lecture rooms and lab rooms as well. […] Part of the

entire complex was a large managed apartments thing. [...] They also gave us a hire-car to drive around in (Simon, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech vs Prestige

Ex-Prestige consultants told us that they received no integration training after the takeover. Most could only remember being given a new email address, a new head office and reduced expenses. Some though, said that even if they had been provided with training that they would not have been interested in learning more about their new company.

> I don't think they [gave us BigTech training]. Or if they did, I ignored it. So partly it's a function of being in a project, you pay very little attention to what else is going on around the firm, or at least I did (Mike, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> Literally nothing...I don't have memory of anything. I don't remember caring really. It was all like 'oh cool, I got a new email address' (Daniel, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech)

Even though Daniel and Mike state that no training was received, others told us that BigTech restructured their value system shortly after the takeover and all employees were asked to participate. Those that did recall the value restructuring said that they did not take part. They told us that they did not feel part of the company and did not perceive these values as important or applicable to them and their work. From the interviewees' responses, it seemed that none of the Prestige consultants was particular happy about being bought by BigTech, a technology company that they would never have considered applying to join.

> I remember at university when I was interviewing for jobs that I purposely didn't interview with BigTech. Therefore, I never wanted to work at that company. I never wanted to work for a big IT company. I wanted to work for a management consultancy; I wanted to work for one of the big professional services firms. And then suddenly you find yourself working for a company that you never wanted to work for (Mark, Partner, Prestige & BigTech).

Judged against their own aristocratic elite organisational identity, Prestige consultants found BigTech sadly lacking. They expressed an unwillingness to be associated their individual identities with the organisational identity, the brand and the "prototype" BigTech employee (Hogg & Terry 2000, p.123). They described how expense allowances were reduced, business class travel removed and pay rises cut. Just as financial symbols of elite organisational identity were important

at Alvesson and Robertson's aristocratic Paramount, so they were important at Prestige and the Prestige consultants did not feel a sense of identification or belonging at BigTech.

The performance expectations were judged to be extremely different at BigTech and Prestige (BigTech and Prestige employees both expressed this). Several respondents told us that many BigTech employees were happy with not advancing in their careers, to plateau or to plod along slowly. This in strict contrast to the fast progression and up-or-out attitude at Prestige; another symbol of elite organisational identity removed. Finally, several respondents (from both BigTech and Prestige) told us that BigTech recruited and selected employees that they perceived to be less elite and that the training was shorter in duration and appeared inferior.

> It didn't affect what I did day-to-day or how I felt about the people that I was with. It made me feel…saying that brand name made me feel less proud. It doesn't sound so good (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech vs Prestige: Distinctive Buildings?

Prestige Consulting's offices were located on the Thames and were fronted with glass so that consultants could take in the London skyline and landmarks. BigTech's offices are more often away from large cities. Respondents told us about the cricket pitch and sheep surrounding one such campus office. This was described as a nice environment to work in, but it did not seem to fit with Prestige consultants' self-identities as dynamic go-getters.

> It's quite a big office in a very little village about six miles south of Winchester. It's a very nice little campus (Barry, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> Shurville has its own cricket field actually on the BigTech site with a proper pavilion (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech's London office is located a stone's throw from one of the former Prestige Consulting offices but is located on (what is considered by many to be) the less prestigious side of the river. It struck us as having a more functional appearance than the Prestige offices. The building is squat in comparison and is predominantly made of grey concrete.

BigTech vs Prestige: Lavish Events?

> So, can I make any money in having a Christmas party…no…therefore, no Christmas party! (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

In the above quote, John sums up what many former-Prestige consultants told us about BigTech's attitude to social events. Many, used to having free reign with the corporate credit card, were shocked. Providing social events and thank you parties seems to have been an important way that Prestige made its consultants feel valued and rewarded. The lavish social events also conveyed high status. Without them the consultants seem to have felt not only less valued but also less glamorous or elite.

> [Prestige] used to put a grand behind that bar every week. […] BigTech, the amount of signatures you have to get to get that amount of money behind the bar once a year is ridiculous. Christmas dos aren't there. You just feel like you're completely…God, I think I'm going to leave! You have to work hard to find an excuse for it (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> The parties that they did have were relatively naff. […It was] everyone down to the cricket pavilion, we'll buy you a pint of beer. So it was a bit more low key generally (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech vs Prestige: Elite Financial Symbols?

From almost all of our respondents we heard a narrative that depicts BigTech as a public company with a responsibility to its shareholders. They told us that management must be careful to spend wisely, practice what they preach regarding costs and put shareholders first. We also heard a lot of contradictions regarding financial matters, which suggests that doublethink may be in use. "Doublethink provides a means of containing contradiction such that it is neither acknowledged as contradiction nor experienced as uncomfortable" (El-Sawad & Cohen 2004, p.1179). The same respondents told us – at different points in their interviews – that BigTech could not afford to provide training, events or pay-rises as well as telling us that "they've got loads of money in the bank" (Daniel, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech). Farazmand (1999) highlights that power is important in the distribution of resources. Those with more power (the elite) have more access to scarce resources. As consultants perceive that BigTech prioritises shareholders over employees in distribution of resources we (and they) may conclude that shareholders are more valued than employees. Shareholders therefore seem to hold a more elite position than employees at BigTech.

Feeling valued and feeling elite are important sources of self-esteem and former-Prestige consultants expressed the loss of this symbol strongly.

> The expenses were bollocks and they wanted you to do the same long hours and give the same dedication for none of the perks (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> Suddenly a lot of the flexible benefits that we had were taken away (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> You get tiny little percentage pay rises. Very rare you get the same scale job that you would have received in Prestige (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> They were expecting us to do the same jobs as before with the same people but for lower expenses and lower wages (Isaac, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> The immediate impact was cost cutting; the immediate impacts were no more business class, not so nice expenses (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> BigTech was world class at cost cutting….absolutely world class. Christmas parties gone, pay rises miserable (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Respondent's comparisons between Prestige days and the present may be somewhat influenced by the fact that their Prestige training and work-life largely coincided with the 'golden age' of consulting – when fees were higher and budgets more generous. Nevertheless, many interviewees seem to have felt that one of the implicit rewards had been removed.

> There was almost an unspoken commitment that you work really hard on projects but as a result you were rewarded pretty well (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech vs Prestige: High Performance Culture?

The working style of BigTech employees has been characterised very differently from that of Prestige consultants by our respondents (both ex-Prestige and BigTech). The BigTech approach is described as much more nine-to-five with employees generally only working their contracted 40 hours per week.

> The BigTech attitude was a bit more nine-to-five. It was a bit more "I work for BigTech because it means I only have half an hour to travel to work every day. It

> means I can leave at five o'clock and go and look after my kids (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> BigTech is slightly on the 'hippier' side. You know, I work nine to six at BigTech. I never work more than that (Daniel, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Consultants, such as Daniel, who worked at Prestige before and after the takeover, were able to give us their opinions on the difference in working styles. For example, at Prestige, consultants were supposed to arrive before and leave after the client. In contrast, we were told that if BigTechers worked on a client site, they would travel during work hours.

> [...] You would leave home 8am on a Monday morning and you would get there when you get there. And you would leave on a Friday afternoon at 1pm or 2pm and you would get home by like 6pm (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> It's five past five. I know there's an emergency but it's five past five. I need to go (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige consultants expressed surprise at the career progression and performance expectations that they encountered at BigTech. At Prestige, consultants seem to have felt elite partly because they were constantly pushed to move upwards. New graduates were frequently recruited and promotions were regular; presumably feeding their need for approval and boosting their self-esteem. Respondents told us that at BigTech employees frequently stayed at the same grade for their whole careers; getting an "okay" rating was acceptable and management would not push employees to do better. In comparison with their new BigTech colleagues' drive and enthusiasm, Prestige consultants expressed feelings of superiority. However, association with the typical BigTecher may have been perceived as a threat to their perceived elite individual identities.

> So, BigTech is filled with people who are sat…and they're never going to get promoted. Equally, they're not going to get fired (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> There are lots of people who will do their entire career at BigTech, and will sit in the middle of a band and will just sit there. And that wasn't an option at Prestige, you move up. And you were expected to do more each year (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> My Dad actually worked for BigTech virtually all his career (Pam, ex-Consultant, BigTech).

> You can quite happily at BigTech get to a certain level and sit there for the rest of your career. As long as you continue to perform well, nobody will push you to be promoted and be up there (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> [Prestige] was good fun but they are quite literally up-or-out. Whereas BigTech is the place to plateau if you want (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige vs BigTech: Recruitment, Selection and Training

Where Prestige is said to have intentionally recruited motivated candidates from elite universities, respondents told us that BigTech's selection requirements were considerably less stringent. While some staff were selected through a comparative interview process to that employed at Prestige, others were acquired in mergers or even outsourcing deals. Some respondents implied that this was a factor in the perception of the organisation as less elite than Prestige.

> BigTech does not attract the same university graduates as Prestige did and as Prestige still does […] not with the same academic credentials (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> I dropped out of school and ended up getting a trainee job with BigTech and never left. So 15 years later, here I still am (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech).

> I remember somebody told me a statistic: more than half the people that work at BigTech didn't join BigTech, they joined somebody else and got bought or outsourced. Those are the people we wouldn't have chosen to hire into BigTech but that was the deal. We got them (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech).

Training in general is perceived as less available, less intense and shorter in duration at BigTech than it was at Prestige. Both BigTech and former-Prestige consultants expressed frustration about that. Respondents told us that BigTech's training is often computer based and thus perceived as less serious or important. It does not seem therefore to contribute to an elite organisational identity.

> It would have been some fairly wishy-washy computer-based training thing, which you listen to and it goes in one ear and out the other (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

At BigTech, according to our respondents, training is often cancelled due to budgetary requirements. Again, this may contribute to feeling less valued than the elite shareholders.

> Virtual training. You sit on your laptop, probably at work, for an hour at the end of the day. And that got cancelled…crikey (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech operates a five-week graduate training programme, with apparently similar content to the graduate training that used to be offered at Prestige. The Prestige programme is perceived as having been more elite and somewhat more effective though, due to its duration and (Californian) location. Ex-Prestige consultants (some of whom are involved with running BigTech's current graduate training) expressed concern that the current BigTech scheme may not be long enough to create the kind of expertise required to work as an elite consultant.

> It's five weeks and the theory is that it's more on-project training. They just ran out of money basically (Daniel, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> Now, rather than twelve weeks we do three. […] We fought to maintain three weeks of consulting specific training [outside of the standard BigTech training]. In which we attempt to do what we can. So, it's three and not twelve. And we have to fight for these three (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> At one point at Prestige, we were flying people to California for twelve weeks and now we put people in the basement for three weeks (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech: Intelligent and Responsible Dads

Prestige consultants do not describe BigTech as elite and claim that they did not identify with its organisational identity. Nevertheless, they frequently conceded that BigTech was a "good company" for reasons related to their innovation skills, technological prowess and long heritage. This represents a different type of elite organisational identity from Prestige's professional aristocracy and therefore, one that the former Prestige consultants did not identify with or even understand as elite. BigTech's organisational identity is not important or "accessible" to them (Hogg & Terry 2000, p.124; Alvesson & Robertson 2006). Therefore, for most, it is not a desirable influence on individual identity.

> BigTech is an interesting company that has a very long history. There isn't another technology company in the world that is as old. […] So, it's quite a special organisation to work for and it would have been better if we'd been educated in

why it is a special organisation to work for (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech is still number one in the market for consultancy and a million other markets: in terms of patents, master inventors all those sort of things (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

We are the second most recognised brand on the planet I think (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

The brand is really, really strong. It is one of the most recognisable brands in the world, but it is not recognised for business consulting. It is recognised for technology leadership and being ahead of the game in technology, but selling technology (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech is still an elite, or wins prizes for being the best recruiter because…I don't know how they win that, but I think it's because of training and salary and stuff (Daniel, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech fits Alvesson and Robertson's description of "the entrepreneurial band" to a certain extent because it has "always profiled itself as highly innovative and entrepreneurial" and it "is considered to be somewhere other scientists and technologists aspire to work" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.203). BigTech "has the feel of a highly respected university where people perceive themselves to be better than 'others' working in similar technologically-orientated consultancies" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.219). Clothes emphasise the relaxed university feeling and BigTech employees seem to like the idea that content is more important than form (or that technical ability is more important than personal appearance). Somewhat ironically, dressing in the uniform of a person who appears to care less about his appearance is perceived as important. Thus the socks-and-sandals or jeans and t-shirts (in opposition to the suits worn by the "slick consultants" or the "crusty old farts" in sales) are a symbol of elite status too.

I think it was quite exciting really. It fitted. […] I thought great. I can turn up to work looking like I do all the rest of the time. I didn't have to put any effort into that. It was all about what I do, not what I look like at that time (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech).

However, there are many elements of the "entrepreneurial band" description that do not seem to fit with BigTech's corporate identity. For example, BigTech is **not** described as an "adhocracy that support[s] autonomy, where consultants have considerable freedom" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.203). Rather it is described as a bureaucracy with tight controls and procedures. BigTech

does **not** make available "generous resources […] in terms of time and money for self-development" (*ibid*) but prioritises its responsibilities to shareholders ahead of spending on employees. Finally BigTech does **not** necessarily focus on recruiting and retaining the very best people. Some people are recruited merely out of convenience or necessity. The lack of up-or-out culture means that employees are not driven to be the best they can be. Therefore, we would like to describe BigTech as another kind of elite organisation: Intelligent and Responsible Dad. This organisational identity metaphor suggests a reputation for brilliant innovation and enviable technical skills as well as low-key and sensible values. Many of our respondents described BigTech's organisational identity in similar terms to this. The organisation does not take on risky projects and is always concerned with its financial responsibility to the shareholders. One could envisage a responsible dad worrying about the future and about being able to provide for his dependents.

The individual identity of a typical BigTech employee is said to be closely linked to the intelligent and responsible dad organisational identity. The employees are said to be family focused and responsible too. They apparently have good pension plans, drive family cars rather than Maseratis and dress to be comfortable rather than to impress. This prototype is explored in more detail below.

Contrasting Prototypes

Hogg and Terry explain how people construct "prototypes" as "exemplary members" or "ideal types" to "represent the defining and stereotypical attributes of groups" (2000, p.123). When we asked respondents to describe typical Prestige and BigTech people, we gained insight about the context-dependent prototypes that they imagined for each both groups. Their answers seemed to epitomise two contrasting prototypes: a) the slick, driven, cufflink-wearing Prestige consultant and b) the geeky, socks-and-sandals wearing BigTech employee. The different appearances, working styles and career aspirations they described not only told us about the 'other' in question but also emphasised those things that they valued in themselves and their own group. Thus we were able to gain insights into their identity constructions at the individual and organisational level. Their descriptions are outlined below.

Appearance		
Cufflinks	versus	Socks-and-Sandals
Suits and cufflinks Young, professional Slick, smooth		Socks-and-sandals, jeans and t-shirts Older Comfortable
Control		
Clan/Family	versus	Contract
Team, family, camaraderie, love Obligatory social events (alcohol) Strong socialisation (California training) Do not let team down		Nine-to-five Cost cutters (no social budget) Shorter non-residential training No reward for killing yourself
Career		
Challenge	versus	Security
Risk takers Challenges Success-driven		Risk averse (quarterly reports) Pension and kids Stability-motivated

Table 2: Prestige versus BigTech Prototypes (appearance, control and career)

Appearance - Cufflinks versus Socks-and-Sandals

Cufflinks

During our research process, we regularly encountered the "socks-and-sandals versus cufflinks" metaphor (or similar metaphors highlighting differences in the appearance of BigTech and Prestige employees). In almost all interviews, participants highlighted differences in the employees' styles of dress. The typical Prestige consultant is described as a young professional who wears a full suit, tie and cufflinks to work.

The people with the Prestige background would be smarter […], would be better dressed…would have a suit that was fitted, and shirts that had cufflinks I would say (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

A lot of the [Prestige] partners that I met came across as generally slicker, smoother individuals (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech)

He was in full suit; tie up, cufflinks on (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

We looked nice. It was part of the job; we had to be presentable (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech)

Research participants suggested that being dressed smartly was perceived as important at Prestige – especially as consultants would almost always work in client-facing roles. They also suggested that being dressed "nicely" would make them appear professional. In the absence of a recognised profession, symbolic or material "markers of professionalism" such as clothing or uniform are often used to suggest competence or expertise (Sullivan 2010). Therefore we believe that feeling professional was important in ex-Prestige consultants' individual identity constructions, because of the career and ontological ambiguity inherent in management consulting. Dressing in a certain way could also be considered a badge or uniform of a social or group identity. Thus dressing differently from their BigTech counterparts could mark the ex-Prestige consultants as a distinctive and elite group.

Socks-and-Sandals

In contrast, most interviewees described a typical BigTech person as someone older who enjoys wearing comfortable clothes (socks-and-sandals) to work. During the face-to-face interview with John, an ex-Prestige consultant who currently holds a senior position at BigTech, we were told that one can still see the difference in looks today.

> As you walk around [the BigTech office], you see a lot of people in grey trousers, not particularly nice shoes, shirts, maybe jumpers, maybe a jacket but probably not. And the people in suits in this building will either be Sales, who are out seeing clients, or they'll be consultants who were probably from Prestige (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> They all seemed to dress like they were going to the park on a weekend so they'd have jeans, they'd have [...] t-shirts. They'd wear socks-and-sandals and they'd wear shorts in winter (Barry, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> It was so obvious who was Prestige and who was BigTech because everyone who was Prestige was wearing a suit, everyone who was BigTech was walking around in shorts and sandals (Simon, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

In the narratives they used to describing a typical BigTech employee, many of our respondents used precisely the same – or very similar – language and metaphors. Carys also described her former colleagues using the socks-and-sandals metaphor but when pressed, could not recall a specific observation of the mythical footwear! We did observe BigTech employees wearing 'less smart' business attire, yet no one in the stereotypical socks-and-sandals. Likewise, we did not observe any ex-Prestige consultants who precisely matched the described stereotype. Each of

these characters – or identities – can therefore be considered a prototype that represents the "beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors" of the group; one that maximize similarities within and differences between groups, thus defining groups as distinct entities" (Hogg & Terry 2000, pp.123-4).

Control - Clan versus Contract

Clan

During the interviews and analysis, we noticed that teamwork was an important theme for former Prestige consultants. They used words like family and love when talking about their teams and colleagues. Team support and loyalty was the explanation for many of their described behaviours: they worked long hours so they would not let down their colleagues; they remained with the organisation even when they felt bored with their work because they liked the people. One might question how this clan spirit forms and how it is maintained in a company where consultants rarely work on the same project or with the same colleagues for long.

Ex-Prestige employees talked about being socialised into Prestige's value system during the graduate training programme at the beginning of their employment. Most new hires were able to enjoy twelve weeks of training in California – far away from their old family and friends. This separation may have helped to facilitate divestiture and reconstruction of their individual identities and values (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Some likened it to "brainwashing" or "getting chipped" (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech). During the graduate training, Prestige employees learnt the importance of teamwork as well as more practical, technical lessons. Although most participants stated that the training was hard work with long hours and included 'boring' tasks such as coding and programming, the team and social aspects were remembered fondly. It appears that the social aspects of this training program were even more salient than the technical ones. Respondents told us that they were encouraged to help each other during training tasks and to socialise after work. By the end of the twelve-week period, many felt that they had made friends for life and some described their team-mates using words like "love" and "family".

> You were encouraged from the very start to work as a team. You sat on tables of four or five and you worked as a group throughout the twelve weeks…and also a lot

of social events, so you're encouraged to go to the pub together, have lunch together (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

I've met some of my best friends there. And I was the best man of somebody's wedding and I've been to the wedding of a couple of others and one of the guys is gonna be my best man this year. So a strong social bond was formed in those weeks (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

I loved the people. Absolutely loved the people […] I mean we weren't risking lives but you would do anything for the team (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

After the graduate training, during normal project work, social events continued to be important. Respondents told us that the social aspect of project work made the hard work worthwhile and even motivated their long hours (they did not want to let down their colleagues by leaving early. Daisy told us that she even had risked her health by working too hard and long; rather than letting her team down, she burnt-out more than once.

Typically, there is very much a sense of camaraderie among the people on a project. […] after work people go out and have dinner. […] Chew the fat and get everything off their chest about why the client has been an idiot and go back tomorrow and then deal with it all again. Personally, I think it is a fundamental part of making a successful team (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

[While we worked on a project]...there were times when we were working until ten or eleven o'clock a few nights of the week and then on Thursday night we'd basically go out and enjoy ourselves a bit more, have some food, go drinking, go to a club, that kind of thing and then show up for work feeling a bit worse for wear on a Friday. But those kinds of things helped you get to know people quite well. You had fun together and it became you know a good fun part of the job. So those kinds of things were all quite rewarding (Barry, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

So you're on the project, you've developed friendships with the people you work for, everybody else is chipping in so to be the only one that says "this is ridiculous, I'm going home and I'm going to watch Eastenders" is not really quite playing your part is it? (Simon, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

While the graduate training may not have been deliberately designed in order to facilitate clan control, it had the effect of enabling clan control within Prestige. As outlined in the *Literature Review*, clan control promotes a non-contractual commitment towards work and colleagues (Ouchi 1979). Careful screening of potential employees ensures that the most susceptible are hired and socialisation into the family is often likened to hazing - especially when much alcohol is involved. Many employees continued to live together after the graduate training and most stayed

together with their colleagues and team mates in hotels when working at client sites. Thus the conditions for ongoing socialisation – and clan control - were perfect.

> They made an effort to have these social events that were drilled into you from the training course that you go out together, you get hammered together, you work 88 hours together (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> Prestige had instigated a part of their culture, which was that Thursday night was the night when everyone was supposed to go out with their team. And that was a very strong feeling. […] You worked really, really hard […] but then you go out for a drink, dinner and hang out together in the evening. We were very tight knit like a little family really (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> Pub after work, pub lunch on Fridays, it very much revolved around alcohol. If you were not drinking the shots that were bought for you, you were a pussy, and you would not last very long in the company, I think (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> Probably for my first four or five years every single project I've been on was a case of…because it was away from home you would go out and work long hours but then every Wednesday or Thursday night get utterly shit-faced (Simon, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

There is a lot of talk about work–life balance in modern organisations but at Prestige the clan control means that a work-life circle is a more descriptive (as outlined in Diagram 3). The diagram illustrates the narrative that we interpreted about life at Prestige. Requirements on management consultants to play hard as well as work hard with their colleagues (long hours) results in them having little time for a social life outside work. This leads to them constructing their colleagues as close friends and family. They want to work hard so that they do not let down the team (the clan) thus they devote more effort and spend more time at work. Thus we return to the beginning of the circle.
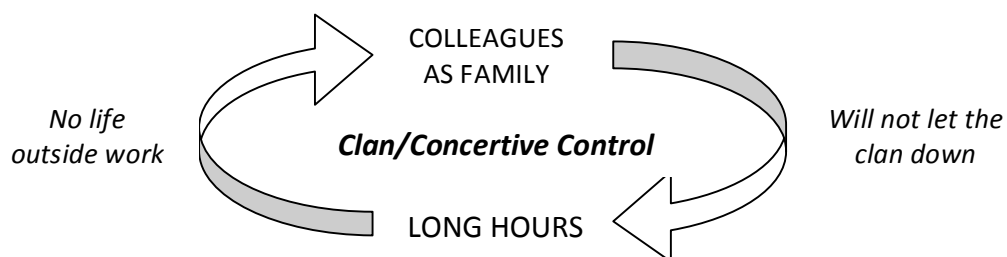

Diagram 3: The Work-life Circle at Prestige

Contract

We did not perceive the team spirit or camaraderie among BigTech employees to be very strong. Neither ex-Prestige consultants, nor those who were originally hired to BigTech described their experiences with the organisation using words like "love" or "family". There was much less talk about "teams" or "friendships" as motivators. As BigTech does not seem to use clan control, social events do not play the same role as they did at Prestige. Respondents told us that BigTech has cut costs wherever possible and cancelled social budgets for consultants. Employees said that they were rewarded for their hard work with implicit or informal rewards - such as social events - at Prestige but that this does not happen at BigTech. They do not express as much motivation to work hard for their team as they did at Prestige. Working according to contract is much more common than working for the success of the team at all costs. In summary, it appears that the organisation-as-family discourse is not present at BigTech as it was at Prestige.

> There's no reward in BigTech for killing yourself working (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> With BigTech, very much have a look at your contract and see what you're supposed to do (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Nevertheless, BigTech employees, including the former Prestige consultants seem to be fairly loyal (with the exception of those who left shortly after the takeover). Many expressed an unwillingness to leave the organisation. This was largely expressed as a fear of the unknown or a disinclination to leave the security and comfort at BigTech.

Career - Challenge versus Security

Challenge

As mentioned above, the typical Prestige person is characterised as a hard working, ambitious individual that is driven to succeed within his or her career. They are dedicated to increasing their abilities and knowledge in order to thrive within the industry as well as to ensure continued association with an elite consulting firm. Respondents described Prestige's reputation as a dynamic, flexible organisation that was not opposed to taking risks.

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> Prestige is a partnership and so partners had a certain amount of individual power that they could wield, which enabled them to make decisions very quickly. You could work at risk relatively easily. So they could kind of sail a bit closer to the wind than BigTech could (Hugh, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Prestige was a privately owned firm, which means that the company partners had the power to decide which projects to take on and could easily sign off work. It seems that this is one reason why challenges were welcomed at Prestige. Partners did not have to worry about quarterly statements or satisfying shareholders. Not having this external pressure was said to have enabled Prestige's management to take on 'riskier' projects, which would challenge the consultants. In the attitude towards risk and challenge we see evidence of the reciprocal relationship between individual and organisational identities. According to John, Prestige consultants always try to challenge and push themselves both in and outside of work. To illustrate this, he told us that he had biked the route of the 'Tour de France'. He also challenges himself in other sporting arenas and pits himself against much more experienced friends.

> I would feel that the people I worked with from Prestige would be…they would certainly be harder working, they'd be more ambitious and they'd be keener to be successful (Barry, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> The ideal consultant always challenges, and that's of the heart of it all [...] so the people who are successful are those who challenge [...]. They always try to change something. People who are […] really successful are the ones who [...] haven't just settled for the easy life (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

Security

Due to the size of BigTech and the associated hierarchy, BigTech consultants do not seem to be as flexible as Prestige consultants were. They told us that they have to go through more processes to get work approved. One consultant said that she felt that they were "tiny pieces in a huge machine" (Karen, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech). Because they are a publicly quoted company, BigTech has to report quarterly figures to its shareholders. This is one reason why the company is less likely to take on risky projects. According to some research participants (ex-Prestige and BigTech employees), the less risky projects seem to be more boring and less challenging.

> Everything is very rigid and there's a lot of reporting and a lot of management that goes behind that (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech).

> All the BigTech projects are all a bit more boring (Daniel, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> Well, you've got to tick your boxes and jump through your hoops […] they are quite rigid in that. […] If you don't like to work in a specific way and tick your boxes, it's quite rigid I think (Polly, ex-Consultant, BigTech).

BigTech employees seem to be less focused on career progression. They do not seem to seek out challenges in order to prove themselves – being good is good enough. It was suggested that most enjoy their comfortable nine-to-five jobs (as mentioned above) and enjoy the safety and security their company offers them.

> [They are] not very ambitious...reasonably intelligent but not wanting to set the world on fire (Daisy, ex-Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> So there's probably a lot more people [at BigTech] who were just happy where they were. Happy to plod along, as it were. Probably had family commitments or whatever. They were just doing their jobs and they were happy enough (Pam, Consultant, BigTech).

> BigTech is the place to plateau if you want (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> I always think it would be very hard to get fired at BigTech generally (Ralph, Consultant, BigTech)

> The fact that it is safe and that BigTech doesn't fire people very often, is also a comforting thing (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

BigTech is described as a safe and accommodating organisation because work is more flexible than it was at Prestige. BigTech is willing to fit work around its people. BigTechers are able to work from home and enjoy good maternity, holiday and pension privileges. These privileges are important to BigTechers, because their focus is more on the life side of the work-life balance. They tend to have families and are less interested in working hard and playing hard than the typical Prestige employee used to be. This does not only include original BigTechers but also the ex-Prestige consultants that stayed at BigTech. They are now more interested in spending time with their families and being at home than working long hours at a client site.

> I was young, with no responsibilities at Prestige and talking about BigTech now, got two kids, very grounded and see it very differently. I don't want to spend all day and all night at the office (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

> I have two kids now, […] so that was a point that made me start to think […] I guess that are those life-change points that make you think again (Mark, Partner, Prestige & BigTech).

A different version of the work-life circle (from Diagram 3) could be constructed for BigTech employees – old and new. Consultants told us that the more stable work-life available at BigTech meant that they were now able to have families. However, the presence of a dependent family was given as a reason why they are afraid to leave BigTech. They require BigTech for financial security and also because they cannot be sure to get the work-life stability elsewhere. Where the circle starts and finishes is not clear. Did consultants have families because they had a better work-life balance or vice-versa? Either way, the outcome for BigTech is employee loyalty. The work-life circle at BigTech is illustrated in Diagram 4.
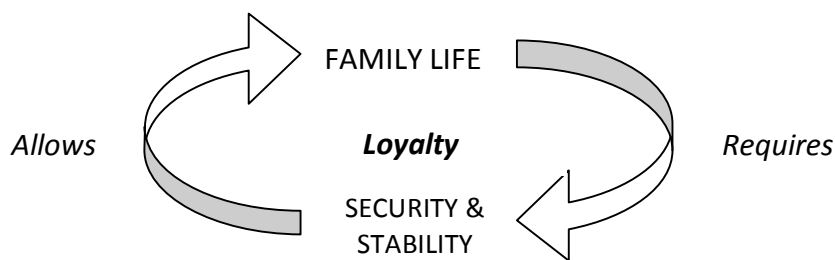
FAMILY LIFE

Allows   **Loyalty**   *Requires*

SECURITY & STABILITY

Diagram 4: The Work-life Circle at BigTech

Fantasy

During the course of our interviews we noticed that each of the former-Prestige consultants that had continued working at BigTech expressed a very similar contradiction. Their own work identity (as described to us) was strongly likened to the Prestige prototype – driven to work hard and play hard. However, their work behaviour (as described to us) was linked to the BigTech prototype – preferring to get home to their families.

> I liked the steady income […] It's been great. We got married, went on honeymoon, came back, got a project in Brighton, ten miles from where I live. I then had two kids and I've been around for the whole time (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> I got comfortable. The last couple of years I was able to go home every night (John, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> I've got a new [baby] in my life with [whom] I want to spend as much time as possible, so I don't know what will happen. Certainly within BigTech it is easier to be a parent […] than it was in Prestige (Jason, Senior Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).
>
> My next project is loads of European travel, which would have been great for my first project but not now (Andrew, Consultant, Prestige & BigTech).

We initially assumed that, since their behaviour did not match their identity constructions, the ex-Prestige consultants were describing fantasy identities to us. The situation is not quite that straightforward though. Possible reasons for the fantasy elements in the identity work are explored in more detail in the *Discussion* section.

Discussion

In this section we will discuss several possible answers to our research question: *Why do some BigTech employees cling to their Prestige identities after nine years of 'integration' when their ways of working no longer reflect these identities?*

The ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech behave differently at work now than they used to before the takeover (according to their own accounts). These days they focus more on their flesh-and-blood (actual) families than their organisational clan. They suggest that they value stability and security more than challenges and status. Being able to work close to home and travel less seems to be important. However, they still identify strongly with the Prestige organisational identity and describe themselves similarly to the Prestige prototype.

Why do the former Prestige consultants continue to describe themselves as ambitious and extremely career-focused (like the Prestige prototype) while acting in a more family-focused way (like the BigTech prototype)? We suggest that these two separate selves each fulfil a different need for the consultants. The flesh-and-blood-family-oriented (BigTech) self allows the consultants to **belong** to a non-work group or family. Meanwhile, the work-hard-play-hard (Prestige) self allows the consultants to feel elite and distinct from their BigTech colleagues, which enhances their **self-esteem**.

The BigTech Self for Belonging

Individuals told us that the Prestige clan used to make them feel that they belonged in the organisational family. This discourse seems to have disappeared after the takeover. We suggest that this absence allowed the emergence of the flesh-and-blood family as a replacement source of belongingness. BigTech offers security and flexibility, which allows consultants the opportunity to be part of – belong to - their own flesh-and-blood families.

The Importance of Belonging

A sense of belonging is important for individuals. Social identity theory suggests that social identification "is a perception of oneness with a group of persons" (Ashforth & Mael 1989, p.20).

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The sense of belonging to a group affects "the satisfaction of the individual" (*ibid)*. More specifically, "social classification [- belonging to a group -] enables the individual to locate or define him- or herself in the social environment" (Ashforth & Mael 1989, p. 21). Hence, belonging to a group provides the individual with a sense of ontological security, which enables individuals to experience feelings of order and continuity. It helps to provide meaning and stability and to avoid feelings of chaos and anxiety (Giddens 1991).

Removal of the Clan Discourse

As mentioned in the *Case Analysis*, consultants told us that they felt part of an organisational clan at Prestige. They used words like family and love when talking about their colleagues. These clan discourses seem to have been internalised by individuals at Prestige during the graduate training and throughout their careers. Chan (1997) and Ashforth & Mael (1989) refer to this internalisation of values, norms and discourses as socialisation. Although it may not have been their explicit intent, the clan discourse seems to have been a powerful way in which Prestige's management exerted control over the consultants. "The clan functions by socializing each member completely so that each merges individual goals with the organizational ones, thus providing them with the motivation to serve the organization" (Ouchi & Price 1993, p.64). We heard loyalty and service to the team as explanations for many of the Prestige consultants' behaviours. For example, they worked long hours so they would not let down their colleagues and they remained with the organisation even when they were bored with their work because they liked the people. As a consequence they had little time for a life outside of work or a flesh-and-blood family. This was illustrated in Diagram 3: The work-life circle at Prestige.

At BigTech, on the other hand, management control seems to have been achieved more through the use of bureaucratic than clan methods. Neither ex-Prestige consultants, nor those who were originally hired to BigTech described their experiences with the organisation using words like "love" or "family". There was much less talk about "teams" or "friendships" as motivators. Consequently we did not perceive the same sort of team spirit or camaraderie among employees. In summary, it appears that the organisation-as-family discourse is not present at BigTech as it was at Prestige. We suggest that this contributed to the perception of not belonging at BigTech that we heard from the ex-Prestige consultants.

Consequences of the Removal of the Clan Discourse

We find little information in existing literature about what might happen when clan or organisation-as-family discourses are removed from an organisation. In the absence of existing theories we suggest, based on our own observations and interpretations, that if one source of self-definition is removed, another may take its place. Although we do not necessarily wish to imply a causal relationship, we believe it is pertinent that most of the ex-Prestige respondents who stayed at BigTech after the takeover now have a flesh-and-blood family (a spouse and children). In contrast, for those that did not stay, families are the exception. This could be explained by the postulation that, when ex-Prestige consultants realised that they were no longer part of an organisational family, they sought something new with which to define themselves in order to re-establish a sense of belonging and an associated sense of ontological security.

We believe that Bagger et al. lend credence to our argument with their theory that individuals have a "fixed pool of resources such as time and energy" (2008, p.188) to be divided between their various life domains. Those who define themselves primarily in terms of their (flesh-and-blood) families tend to dedicate less time to work and resent the interference of work with family time. On the other hand, those who define themselves primarily in terms of their work, dedicate more time to work and resent the interference of (flesh-and-blood) family with their work. Prestige consultants used to define themselves primarily by their work, their team and their organisation. They were often physically and psychologically distant from their flesh-and-blood friends and families, which seldom interfered with their work lives. Now the organisation-as-family discourse has disappeared. Following the above postulation, this would have left an opening for a new object of self-definition to re-establish belongingness. Some consultants left the organisation and found new organisational families with which to identify. Those that stayed seem to have filled the void by defining themselves in terms of their flesh-and-blood families, just like the prototype BigTecher. Now, they perceive work as something that potentially interferes with their home and family life but by conforming to the BigTech behavioural norms they are afforded the flexibility to spend time with their flesh-and-blood families; thus the sense of belonging is achieved.

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The Prestige Self for Self-Esteem

The most effective sources of social – or group - identification provide both a sense of belonging and a sense of distinctiveness (Brewer 1991). The BigTech self provides the consultants with a space to belong to their flesh-and-blood families. Meanwhile, we suggest that maintaining the Prestige self - which is perceived as elite – allows the former Prestige consultants to feel distinct from other BigTech employees. Feeling elite and distinctive enhances self-esteem, which is even more important for management consultants than other individuals (Alvesson 2004).

The Importance of Self-Esteem

"All people […] have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (Maslow 1943, p.382). According to literature, knowledge-workers need frequent reinforcement of their self-esteem because it is challenged by the kind of work in which they engage. Organisational life is said to be ambiguous; evaluations and opinions of others "somewhat arbitrary" – because of the intangible and immeasurable nature of results; and clients are sceptical – often questioning consultants' integrity (Alvesson 2001, p.877, Alvesson 2004). Therefore, "compared to workers whose competence and results are more materially grounded […] many knowledge-intensive workers must struggle more" to maintain their identity and sense of worth (*ibid*). Management consultants may feel this even more keenly than other knowledge-workers as management consultancies intentionally recruit graduates who are insecure over-achievers (Ebbinghaus 2010; Alvesson 2004). This should not suggest that consultants are less than capable or doubt their own abilities. Indeed they are commonly experts in their field and are confident in their abilities – or at least have perfected the art of appearing so in front of clients (Poulter & Land 2008). The moniker of an insecure over-achiever rather highlights that those recruited to perceived-elite consultancies tend to have been top of their class. Once surrounded by work colleagues with the same background they must try so much harder to achieve the same status, hence they are characterised as constantly trying to over-achieve. Consultants are also used to constant appraisal at work. As the results of their work are intangible and clients often doubt their value, feedback from peers and superiors is an important source of recognition and validation. Thus they are labelled as insecure. Consultancies require people who fit this description because they are mouldable and will adapt themselves – behaviour, values and identity - in order to receive approval and feel that they are achieving (Poulter & Land 2008; Ebbinghaus 2010). If management consultancies recruited people

who were more independent and self-assured, clan control and identity control would be less effective.

Identification to Enhance Self-Esteem

According to social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael 1989) and as highlighted in Diagram 1, organisational identities - and other salient group identities - are influential in the construction of individual identity. That is to say that individuals draw on organisational identities with which they associate – or identify – in their individual identity work. Brewer suggests that *"*social identity is viewed as a reconciliation of opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation from others [...so that s]ocial identity and group loyalty are […] strongest for those self-categorizations that simultaneously provide for a sense of belonging and a sense of distinctiveness" (1991, p.475). In other words, individuals will identify more strongly with a group or organisation that has a distinctive organisational identity. By association, the individual can define him- or herself as distinctive and special too. Being elite is one example of distinctiveness. Therefore, an organisation that is perceived to have an elite organisational identity is likely to be a desirable source of identification – and one on which individuals are more likely to base their individual identities. In addition "[i]t is likely that an organizational identity grounded in elitism might well imbue individuals with a significant sense of self-esteem" (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.199). Therefore, for individuals that feel the need to reinforce their self-esteem, association with an elite organisational identity may be very important. Their individual identity work (Alvesson & Willmott 2002) may be heavily reliant on association with the elite organisational identity so that individuals construct themselves as elite individuals by association (Robertson & Swan 2003). Discontinuation of that association is, therefore a threat to individual identity. For example, if an individual works for an organisation that (s)he perceives only recruits the best and the brightest, (s)he - by association – must be one of the best and the brightest and thus both elite and distinctive. If, however, the same person is made redundant by the perceived elite organisation, (s)he may struggle to maintain the elite individual identity and may struggle to describe him- or herself as distinctive.

Dis-Identification to Protect Self-Esteem

Organisational dis-identification, as described by Elsbach and Bhattacharya is "self-perception based on […] a cognitive separation between one's identity and the organization's identity [or] a

negative relational categorization of oneself and the organization" (as rivals or enemies, for example) (2001, p.393). In other words, there is a disconnection in the relationship between the individual level and the organisational level of identity. The individual does not draw on the organisational identity in his/her individual identity work. Instead, (s)he works to construct an individual identity that is in opposition or excludes it.

As discussed in the *Case Analysis*, both BigTech and Prestige have distinctive elite organisational identities. Prestige fits the description of the professional aristocracy (Alvesson & Robertson 2006) while BigTech is more like an intelligent and responsible dad. These differences seem to mean that the differing organisational identities are not recognised as elite by the members of the other organisation. For example, the ex-Prestige consultants do not observe elite financial symbolism, distinctive buildings, lavish parties (or any of the elite symbols that they are used to) at BigTech; therefore they do not perceive it to have an elite organisational identity. As such, there seems to be no incentive for ex-Prestige consultants to engage in identity work that links their individual identities to the BigTech organisational identity. It does not appear to enhance their self-esteem.

Dis-identification may also occur at the individual level; when individuals dis-identify with their perceptions of other individuals or organisational stereotypes (Alvesson et al. 2008). In this case the individuals seek to affirm a positive distinction from what they perceive to be negative or anti-identities (Elsbach & Bhattacharya 2001, p.393). The concept of anti-identity is commonly used to express a "not-me" feeling according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). In their study, the subject perceives prescribed managerial roles as those of an anti-identity. The anti-identity concept is exemplified by the appearance metaphors that we heard from our respondents. The ex-Prestige consultants described themselves as slick, cufflink-wearing professionals while the BigTech employees were constructed as strong anti-identity: geeks in socks-and-sandals!

Both anti-identity and dis-identification are associated with something lacking, according to Carol and Levey (2008). In our case the something lacking could be the self-esteem linked to the feeling of being elite and distinctive. The ex-Prestige consultants have constructed their individual identities as successful, elite consultants, distinct from their technical BigTech colleagues. Identification with the Prestige organisational identity supports this identity work because they perceived Prestige to be an elite organisation that recruited only the best and the brightest. Thus,

their elitism and distinctiveness – and thus self-esteem - is enhanced. On the other hand, identification with an organisational identity that is perceived as non-elite – BigTech's – would contribute to the creation of a non-elite, non-distinctive individual identity; decreasing self-esteem. Therefore, dis-identification, rather than identification, with the BigTech organisational identity occurs.

Sveningsson and Larsson's (2006)subject constructs a fantasy leadership identity, to disassociate with an anti-identity that he feels threatens his self-esteem. It could be argued that the former Prestige consultants' continued identification with the Prestige organisational identity is a fantasy. Especially as they describe their own behaviour as contradicting this individual identity. However, it is more useful to imagine the separate selves as having different purposes rather than one being real and one being a fantasy. The Prestige self maintains distinctiveness and elitism and enhances self-esteem while the BigTech self allows the consultants a sense of belonging.

Separate Selves

Contu suggests that maintaining separate selves can be seen as "decaf resistance" which, like "decaf coffee, makes it possible for us to enjoy without the costs and risks involved" (2008, p.378). "[E]mployees posit a distinction between a corporate self that complies with organisational norms [Foucault's conformist self] and an authentic self that is always considered something more than what is colonised by the organization" (Johnsen et al. 2009, p.203). Normally "primary significance" is ascribed to "the 'real me'" or the perceived authentic self that exists outside work (Collinson 2003, p.537) while the submissive 'fake' self yields to organisational norms without feeling the need to resist. In this way the employee can feel that (s)he is staying true to his/her real self and not betraying his/her values while playing the role of the ideal employee (Collinson 2003). This is illustrated in Diagram 5. Costas and Fleming explain that cynicism may be used to maintain the separation and protect the perceived authentic self; with employees claiming that they are just playing a part at work, going along with the "corporate bullshit" (2009, p.358). Costas and Fleming (*ibid*) use the metaphor of a mask to suggest that the perceived authentic self can be left intact when the conformist work self is removed at the end of the workday.
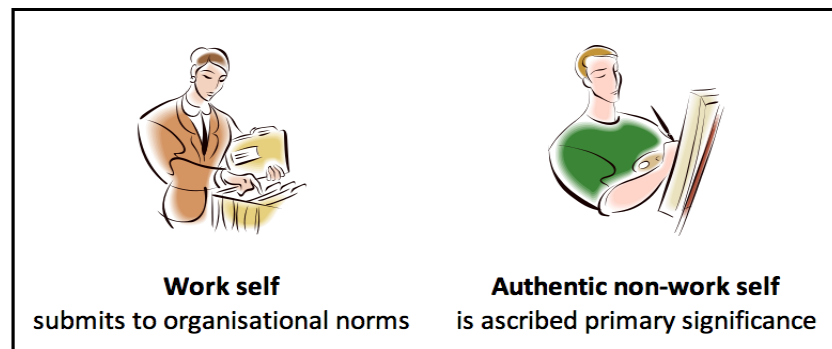
Work self
submits to organisational norms

Authentic non-work self
is ascribed primary significance

Diagram 5: Work Self versus Perceived Authentic Non-Work Self

Work Self as the Perceived Authentic Self

In our case we observed what we interpret as the opposite effect. The ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech seem to perceive the career-focused Prestige self as the authentic self. They are cynical towards the BigTech self, which is perceived as less authentic. Just like Costas and Fleming's consultants deriding the corporate bullshit, our ex-Prestige consultants disparage the BigTech prototype that – to a certain extent -represents their BigTech self. They suggest that by adopting of BigTech values and behaviours – working less and being at home more – they are merely playing along with the organisation's behavioural norms temporarily. Some employees told us that they would be more career-focused again once the kids started school, for example. We have not identified another example in literature where, like this, the work self is perceived as more authentic than the self that is defined more in terms of the flesh-and-blood family. Therefore, here we outline our own suggestions of how and why this has occurred at BigTech.

The desire for success and progress appears to be perceived as natural to consultants who were recruited by Prestige. In the late modern age individuals are exposed to – and internalise - discourses and accepted norms about the importance of career, self-determination and wealth as measures of success at school and university and in society in general (Giddens 1991; Poulter & Land 2008). During the socialisation at Prestige, consultants further internalised elements of the organisational identity and culture. As highlighted in the *Case Analysis* - the organisational culture seems to have conformed to the up-or-out stereotype that is typical in management consulting (Alvesson 2004; Johnsen et al. 2009; Poulter & Land 2008; Alvesson & Karreman 2007; Alvesson & Robertson 2006). We assume that the Prestige self was constructed while the consultants were employed at Prestige. We also assume that it was not perceived as inauthentic or fake because (a) the discourses and norms regarding career and success – including the up-or-out discourse - were

effectively internalised; (b) the organisation-as-family discourse was prevalent and highly enacted; (c) most Prestige consultants were young and did not have a flesh-and-blood family to moderate the effects of the organisation-as-family discourse (see again Diagram 3 – the work-life circle at Prestige). Thus, it seems that work was life for the young Prestige consultants and that there was no non-work self that could be considered more authentic. We did not observe much cynicism as related to the Prestige organisational identity or culture, which further supports our interpretation of the Prestige self as perceived authentic.

According to our analysis, organisational norms at BigTech include being more family-focused and less career-focused (where family refers to flesh-and-blood family rather than organisational family). These do not match the values that consultants seem to have internalised while at Prestige and beforehand: that being successful is important, that promotion and progression equate to success, that if one is not going up, one should be getting out! Since we have already assumed that these norms and values - internalised at Prestige - represent a perceived authentic self, we may also assume that the appearance of an alternative – BigTech – self that conformed to BigTech behavioural norms may have been considered by the consultants to be an inauthentic, fake or conformist self. The idea that conforming to BigTech's norms is temporary – expressed by several consultants - certainly invokes similarities to Costas and Fleming's idea of putting on a submissive mask until the end of the workday.

Diagram 6 illustrates the reverse context that we observed in our case study. Here, instead of the primary significance being attached to the perceived authentic non-work self, it is attached to the career-focused Prestige self – the work self. The BigTech self - the non-work self because of its association with the flesh-and-blood family - submits to the organisational norms of working away from home less and spending more time with flesh-and-blood family, is posited as temporary and inauthentic. Although the consultants seem to enjoy spending time with their flesh-and-blood families, they may feel that they are not living up to their internalised norms and societal expectations – i.e. striving for career progression.

Authentic work-self
is ascribed primary significance
(*Work-hard-play-hard*)

Non-work self
submits to organisational norms
(*Nine-to-five, family-focused*)

Diagram 6: Perceived Authentic Work Self versus Non-Work Self

Protecting the Perceived Authentic Self

Some authors suggest that having different selves is dysfunctional in some way, that it represents a break with reality (Brakel 2001). However, this position assumes that some beliefs or identities are more 'real' or authentic than others as measured against an objective reality. If however, one accepts that reality is a social construction, then truth and reality are subjective constructions. Collinson explains that multiple identities "may be in tension, mutually contradictory and even incompatible […] thus reinforc[ing] ambiguity and insecurity" (2003, p.534). However, he also explains that different parts of oneself may interact in complex, and possibly complementary ways. We concur. The two selves, exhibited by ex-Prestige consultants, work in harmony – with each identity fulfilling a different need for the consultants. In the following quote, Mark suggests that he is quite happy having two selves with different sources of identification.

> I always thought that if I ever left BigTech I would go back to Prestige […] or one of the big professional services firms. […] but then […] I am sort of very passionate about this now. So, I am completely schizophrenic (Mark, Partner, Prestige & BigTech).

Costas and Fleming talk about the concept of self-alienation, where research subjects feel that their authentic non-work selves are swallowed up or strangled by the work selves. In the above quotation, Mark implies that the work self that he perceives as authentic has already changed. His dreams of the future have already been affected by the BigTech norms and values. On some level, Mark seems to know that his Prestige self may be seen as less than realistic. Indeed his own description of his behaviour is in conflict with the 'fantasy' Prestige self. When the perceived

authentic self is somewhat fantastical, a challenge to it can be seen as problematic. If sufficient maintenance-work to reinforce the Prestige self does not take place it threatens to disintegrate completely. This is one explanation for the strong and heavily differentiated prototypes that were constructed by the respondents in our study. Describing the Prestige-self as very distinct from the BigTech other could be seen as a way to maintain the separation and protect the perceived authentic self. Continuing to dress differently – and highlight the appearance differences – may also serve to preserve the difference.

The Authentic/Fake Dichotomy

Although common in literature (Tracy & Trethewey 2005), the authentic/fake - or real/fantasy - dichotomy does not really resonate in the social constructionist paradigm, especially when it is related to identity. If "[i]dentities are multiple and contextual, [and] must be constructed and secured" (Alvesson 2000, p.1105) how can one be judged to be real while another is fantastical? If one accepts that all reality is constructed, that truth and reality are subjective, how can one identity be more authentic than another?

Due to the limited nature of the observational component of our research we rely on what our research participants tell us regarding their behaviour. We cannot tell how they 'really' act. This could be considered a limitation of our research but it could also be considered an advantage. Had we the time to undertake a longitudinal study, we could have established whether participants' descriptions of their own behaviour bore relations to our own understanding of reality. We could have spoken to their family members and judged whether they 'really' do work less than they used to; whether they 'really' do come home every night and whether they 'really' do focus on their families more than their careers. However, as interpretative researchers with less time available, our advantage is that we avoid this trap and focus largely on what we are told by participants. This does not mean that our findings are less real or important. A consultant might tell us that she feels less dedicated to her organisation, while her husband tells us that she works just as hard as ever. Which opinion is 'right', 'true' or more accurately represents reality is irrelevant. Both people are telling us something about their perception of themselves and their environments. Likewise, of the two identities or selves that the ex-Prestige consultants described to us, neither is 'real' or 'authentic' and neither is 'fantasy' or 'inauthentic'. Both exist in discourse and are therefore as relevant as any other stories or interpretations.

We suggest that rather than being a fantasy identity, the Prestige identity – or self – exists to fulfil a need for ex-Prestige consultants, as does the BigTech self. Each self fulfils a different need: The flesh-and-blood-family-oriented (BigTech) self allows the consultants to belong to a non-work group or family. Meanwhile, the work-hard-play-hard (Prestige) self allows the consultants to be elite and distinct from their BigTech colleagues, which enhances their self-esteem.

Conclusion

In this section we summarise our research process and findings and discuss the practical implications and theoretical contributions of our work. We also reflect on the research process, discussing its limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

At the outset of our research, we had not formulated a specific research question. We set out to understand how employees from both Prestige Consulting and BigTech in the United Kingdom viewed the merger and subsequent integration of the two organisations. We did not aim to create empirical generalisations but rather interesting theoretical and practical insights. We tried not to have pre-conceived notions about what we would find. However, Carys' personal experience of the merger led us to believe that the two organisations had different cultures, which might have contributed to integration problems. Therefore, we began by listening to employees' stories about the merger and analysing them for clues about culture.

During the course of our research we found that our respondents used metaphors that epitomised the enduring identity differences within the new BigTech - the cufflinks and the socks-and-sandals. Therefore, we reframed our research to focus more on identity than culture. A more specific research question eventually emerged because of some interesting contradictions we observed among one group of respondents. The former-Prestige consultants who remained at BigTech described their work identities in somewhat different terms than they described their behaviour. This led us to concentrate our analysis on this group and on our final research question: *Why do some BigTech employees cling to their Prestige identities after nine years of 'integration' when their ways of working no longer reflect these identities?*

In the following pages we summarise our main findings, practical implications and theoretical contributions. We then reflect on our research process and its limitations and suggest possible future research directions.

Main Findings

Separate Selves

Ex-Prestige consultants at BigTech seem to have constructed two separate selves. When they describe how they see themselves and what they value they describe a self that closely matches the Prestige prototype – the cufflinks. However, when they describe their ways of working and their motivation they describe a self that closely matches the BigTech prototype – the socks-and-sandals. We suggest that these two separate selves each fulfil a different need for the consultants. The flesh-and-blood-family-oriented (BigTech) self lets the consultants **belong** to a non-work group or family. Meanwhile, the work-hard-play-hard (Prestige) self lets the consultants feel elite and distinct from their BigTech colleagues, which enhances their **self-esteem**.

Removal of the Clan Discourse

Based on our observations and interpretations, we theorised that if one source of self-definition is removed, another might take its place. We suggested that when ex-Prestige consultants realised that they were no longer part of an organisational family, they sought something new with which to define themselves and re-establish a sense of belonging. Some consultants left the organisation and found new organisational families while some stayed and filled the void by defining themselves in terms of their flesh-and-blood families. Now, they seem to perceive work as something that interferes with their home and family life but by conforming to BigTech behavioural norms they are able to spend time with their flesh-and-blood families. In other words, the existence of the BigTech self enables the consultants to feel a sense of belonging to a non-work group.

Dis-identification & Identification

BigTech and Prestige exhibit differing elite organisational identities. The ex-Prestige consultants do not recognise BigTech's (intelligent and responsible dad) organisational identity as elite or distinctive and they do not seem to perceive association with it as a source of self-esteem. As such, they dis-identify with The BigTech organisational identity and do not engage in identity work that links their individual identities to it. The ex-Prestige consultants also dis-identify with BigTech at the individual level; the prototypical BigTech employee is constructed as an anti-identity - the geek in socks-and-sandals! The Prestige prototype however, is constructed to epitomise their

values. A strong identification with this prototype, and the Prestige organisational identity, seems to make them feel elite and distinct from their BigTech colleagues, enhancing their self-esteem.

Theoretical Contributions

Work self as the Perceived Authentic Self

The idea of employees having separate selves has been previously explored (Johnsen et al. 2009; Collinson 2003; Contu 2008; Costas & Fleming 2009; Poulter & Land 2008) but in existing literature the self that is perceived as being authentic tends to be the non-work self. In our case we observed the opposite. The ex-Prestige consultants seem to perceive the career-focused Prestige self as authentic while the BigTech self is adopted to perform the role of conforming to behavioural norms at work. Meanwhile, as the norms at BigTech are described as contradicting these internalised values, the BigTech self is perceived as inauthentic.

As we have no reference in existing literature to explain this novel situation we proposed our own explanations for the phenomenon. We theorised that the internalisation of the clan discourse and the up-or-out norms at Prestige contributed to the perception of the Prestige self as authentic. Meanwhile, the norms at BigTech are described as contradicting these internalised values; hence we suggest that the BigTech self is perceived as inauthentic.

Johnsen et al. (2009) suggest that the cynicism often expressed by consultants in relation to their work self is important. While seemingly protecting the non-work self, it actually serves to preserve energy for the work self. In our own context, the cynicism and dis-identification with the BigTech self has actually allowed consultants to enjoy the benefits of working for BigTech while feeling as though they are superior to the other BigTech employees. Our own case confirms the significance of cynicism in protecting the perceived authentic self - thus adding weight to existing arguments - while simultaneously adding depth to the debate through the addition of a differing context.

Practical Implications

Image & Value

The perception that some BigTech consultants exhibit different selves could be regarded as a sign of failed integration of corporate cultures or organisational identities. However, the ex-Prestige consultants' different selves appear to exist in harmony and fulfil different needs for them, as highlighted above. In the *Discussion* we described how Mark seems to begin to perceive the influence of the BigTech norms and values on his work self. If this were to continue, there is a risk that the Prestige selves could disintegrate completely (Costas & Fleming 2009). This has practical implications for BigTech in terms of the image and perceived value of its consultants.

Because tangible and measurable results are often absent from management consulting work, consultancies trade on their status and reputation (Kipping 1999). These are built on the quality of consulting staff. This means that consultants must not only work harder and for longer, they must also project a corporate image that implies that they are more capable than clients and competitors. A corporate image is a product of how clients perceive employees appearing and behaving in everyday situations, which is in turn motivated, in part, by their own individual identities - their own sense of who they are (Alvesson 2004). Therefore, management consultancies must concern themselves with the individual identities of their employees. Employees should perceive themselves as "the best and the brightest" in order to project a desirable image (Alvesson & Robertson 2006, p.195). This is what sets them apart from their competition and makes them desirable as consultants. It also makes them desirable employers for high-performing individuals. Thus a cycle of high-performance is set in motion.

The Prestige selves seem to enable ex-Prestige consultants to keep feeling as though they are "the best and the brightest". If the Prestige selves were to disappear and the ex-Prestige consultants no longer perceived themselves as the best and the brightest, they would have difficulty in projecting this image. Therefore, the continuation of the Prestige selves should be in BigTech's interest and BigTech should be concerned with how their consultants' different selves correspond to - and are impacted by – their perceptions of the organisational identity. Apart from the

perception that their people are better and brighter than their clients' people and the competition, what do consultancies have to offer?

Loyalty & Control

The potential disintegration of the Prestige-selves also poses a potential threat to organisational loyalty. Distinctiveness and self-esteem enhancement are important factors in social identification (Brewer 1991; Ashforth & Mael 1989; Alvesson & Robertson 2006). The ex-Prestige consultants gain distinctiveness and self-esteem enhancement from association with the perceived elite Prestige organisational identity. If the Prestige selves disintegrate, this association will also disappear. In that case, the ex-Prestige consultants may seek a new group with which to identify – this could be a new organisation or the flesh-and-blood families.

The consultants are already somewhat less dedicated to the organisational family than they used to be because of the identification with the new group represented by their flesh-and-blood families. If the Prestige selves disappeared and the Prestige organisational identity were no longer available as a source of identification, the flesh-and-blood family would fully replace the organisational family as the main source of self-definition. Thus BigTech would forfeit a powerful means of employee control – clan control.

Future Mergers

Organisations tend to focus more on the acquisition phase of a merger or takeover and less on the integration phase (Empson 2000). However, a better understanding of the relationship between individual and organisational identity in both the parent and the target organisations may help avoid some of the challenges of integration. Particular consideration might be recommended if one or both of the organisational identities is perceived to be elite, as in our case. Care may be required if the organisations wish to effectively communicate their particular type of elitism. If they are proud to associate with the new organisational identity and it enhances their self-esteem employees are more likely to identify with it and experience the organisation's successes and failures as their own (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Thus they will work hard to ensure the organisation's success.

Reflections and Further Research

Context and Duration

The context and duration of our research could be seen as limitations. We were only able to consider a small group of consultants based in the United Kingdom in our case study. If time were no obstacle, we would have conducted more lengthy observations, focusing on recruitment, selection and training. We think this may have provided more insights into the socialisation processes at work.

The End of the Golden Age

The period leading up to and following the BigTech-Prestige merger was characterised by a slowdown in the rate of growth in the management consulting industry (O'Mahoney 2010). Consulting firms' margins and bottom lines have also been impacted by the rise of procurement departments and the trend for off-shoring, which – along with other factors – have encouraged lower fees in the industry (O'Mahoney 2010). This has meant that there is less money available for lavish events, extensive training and the other symbols of elitism favoured by the aristocratic elite consultancies (Alvesson & Robertson 2006). Some of our respondents suggested that Prestige would have not been able to continue operating as it used to, given the changes in the industry. They referred to the end of the 'Golden Age' of consulting and claimed that this was the explanation for many of the changes that consultants attributed to the takeover (for example, the end of the lavish parties). This is not something we were able to fully consider in our research; hence further research in this area might be interesting. The ability of other consultancies to maintain an elite image after the 'Golden Age' could be a point of departure.

Removal of the Clan Discourse

During our research we found several areas of theory that were under-represented in literature. We drew on existing work to postulate our own theories but believe that these areas may deserve further research. For example, we found limited existing literature regarding the consequences of removing a clan or organisation-as-family discourse from an organisation. We suggested that the removal of one source of self-definition might allow another to take its place. However, we believe that this concept and the process by which it might occur deserves further development.

Work Self as the Perceived Authentic Self

As mentioned above, literature regarding selves at work seems to suggest that it is the non-work self that is typically perceived as authentic. Our case study highlights the possibility that the opposite may occur in certain contexts. The work self seems to be perceived as more authentic while the non-work self is adopted to perform the role of conforming to organisational norms. It could be fruitful to pursue research in other professional service firms to see whether our case is an anomaly or is indicative of a wider phenomenon. We suggest that other organisations that construct elite organisational identities or those where an organisation-as-family discourse is present could be an interesting place to start. It is possible that in these types of organisation employees may also regard a work self as more authentic than a non-work self.

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