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Being professional in a nonprofit organisation

- a case study of nonprofit workers at IM

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ABSTRACT

Title:	Being professional in a nonprofit organisation
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Authors:	Ingrid Appelberg, Emilia Bobeck Leulier, and Erik Pålsson
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Keywords:	Identity, nonprofit, NPO, professional, identification, understanding
Thesis purpose:	The purpose of this study is to explore how professionals in a NPO understand and relate to their work. The aim is not to empirically generalise but to provide deep insights and understanding of how individuals in a particular NPO view this.
Methodology:	This study is of explorative character, taking an interpretive perspective to research. A qualitative case study is conducted with an abductive approach.
Theoretical perspective:	Previous, relevant research concerning the marketization and professionalization of the nonprofit sector and NPOs. Also, identity theory with emphasis on Social Identity Theory and Professional Identity form our theoretical lens.
Empirical foundation:	The unit of analysis in this case study are nonprofit workers at IM. The empirical material consists of nine semi-structured interviews with nonprofit workers in managerial positions. Documents and observations were used as a complement in the collection of empirical material.
Conclusion:	Professionals in NPOs are exposed to contradictory demands due to the marketization and professionalization. However, by categorizing themselves and defining who they are, the navigation between business discourse and meeting philanthropic objectives is facilitated.

Acknowledgement

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The last twenty-five years have provided a remarkable expansion of philanthropy, volunteering and nonprofit organisations (NPOs) throughout the world (Salamon, 2010). Academic research and public attention to the nonprofit sector have increased considerably, together with the variety of activities and services provided by NPOs and the public awareness of their impact on and importance in society (Powell, 1987). In Sweden only, close to 70 per cent of the population conduct some sort of nonprofit work, corresponding to a total of 400 000 full time positions per year. Similar levels of engagement can only be found in the U.S., Norway and Holland. (Svedberg, Essen and Jegermalm, 2010)

The purpose of a NPO is to fill gaps in society, which the public sector and the market sector have difficulties or are reluctant to address. This is done by conducting work within areas such as healthcare, education, welfare, religion and culture (Powell, 1987; Wijkström and Einarsson, 2011). The core mission of a NPO is not profit maximisation, but rather to fulfil social missions in order to create and maintain a strong civil society, emphasising democracy and citizenship (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Civil society as a concept concerns answers to questions about our purpose, conduct and what is the common good (Elshtain, 1999). Salamon (2010) argues that NPOs may enhance civil society through acting as builders of social capital (defined as the essential ties of trust and reciprocity for a democratic society), value guardians and service providers.

Further, Villadsen (2009) discusses how NPOs contribute to civil society by operating through a more informal, spontaneous and flexible approach compared to other types of organisations. Moreover, he writes about a continuous emphasis on NPOs in social policies, and how this may provide a promise for a more authentic, more 'human' meeting for people, which is less likely to be achieved in many other, more formal and bureaucratic structures. However, Villadsen (2009) questions how this 'human'

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promise can be kept, as NPOs cannot be separated from a wider social context in which entities constantly are influenced.

However, although the nonprofit sector seems to have a well-established role in society, organisational practice and recent literature account for changes in conditions. Simultaneously to the growth of the nonprofit sector, traditional boundaries of the nonprofit sector, the market sector and the public sector have started to blur (Dees and Anderson, 2003; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Organisations from different sectors are moving into new fields of approaches, activities and relationships, blurring the previously distinctive boundaries and starting to operate in the same areas. Hence, NPOs are increasingly adapting business methods and structures, usually associated with for-profit organisations, as a way to try and achieve higher cost-effectiveness and sustainability in their approach to tackle social problems and deliver social services (Dees and Anderson, 2003).

This blurring of boundaries is defined as sector bending by Dees and Anderson (2003) which, for NPOs, involves i) embracing business strategies, ii) interacting with other organisations as competitors, contractors and collaborators, iii) creating hybrid organisations and iiii) emerging into new industries together with for-profit- and hybrid organisations. As all organisations are dependent on their environment, they are forced to interact with the actors who control the needed resources. Furthermore, organisations are embedded within political systems, industries and communities, and thus must 'play the game' and obey the rules and requirements of the institutional environment, in order to gain legitimacy. Hence, environmental influences and constraints put pressure on NPOs to adopt business methods and values, taking on market trends such as revenue generation, competition for contracts, an inflow of new donors and social entrepreneurship. This way for NPOs to adopt the approaches, values, discourses and practices of the market sector is labelled as the marketization of the nonprofit sector (Sanders, 2012).

Sanders (2012) stresses how this process of marketization forces NPOs to play the game by other sectors' rules by relying on certain standards and internal processes within financial and quality management, environmental policies etc. Wijkström and Einarsson (2011) account for how this in turn intensifies the dependence on

professional staff and their competence, thus less on volunteers, and has given rise to what often is referred to as a process of professionalization within the nonprofit sector. Further, the authors bring up that stakeholders now put higher demands on NPOs and their staff to act more professionally, providing legitimacy and accountability for the organisation through transparency and extensive performance measurements. Traditionally, NPOs' work has been associated with amateurism and democracy, while public and for-profit work is more associated with professional management (Leopold, 2006). The number of individuals working professionally in this sector, that is as paid workers, has increased remarkably during the last decades.

There are many existing definitions of what it means to be a professional. Both paid and un-paid workers can be professionals as the term often is related to holding a certain education and expertise. However, following Cheney and Ashcraft (2007), paid workers are often more associated with professionalism due to their connection to salary and regular presence at work. Thus, for this study, it is of particular interest to explore the understandings of the paid workers in an NPO as they are more exposed to the effects of the marketization and professionalization.

1.2 Problem discussion

The increasing use of business discourse and practice is a respond to the need of providing sustainable solutions to social problems within a market economy (Sanders, 2012). According to Dees and Anderson (2003), there are a variety of potential benefits of sector bending. The resource allocation may become more effective and appropriate as NPOs generate earned income, more sustainable solutions, increased accountability and greater financial strength and capacity. With the professionalization, the group of professionals in the sector has increased, as mentioned due to higher demands for competence. Professional staff is brought in to NPOs as a way to reduce amateurism and increase efficiency with business processes.

Conversely, it is argued that the trends represent a threat to the nonprofit sector's unique role in society and to NPOs' effects on civil society, democracy and citizenship (see for example Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Sanders, 2012). Critics fear that taking on entrepreneurial values move attention from collective responses to

social problems and onto rather market-based solutions (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Dempsey and Sanders, 2010). The highlighting of entrepreneurialism and the logics of supply and demand is seen as intimidating the principles of fairness, justice, equity and democratic responsibility (Chetkovich and Frumkin, 2003). Gibbon (2011) argues that the high demands on performance measurements put on NPOs by stakeholders, especially from governments, may restrain actions and characteristics distinctive for NPOs' actions and identity, such as being innovative, trust, integrity and benevolence. Critics are also concerned with how control is transferred to the experts in the organisation at the expense of the members/volunteers power and influence. Additionally, critics fear that the increased number of professionals and internal management processes leads to increased standardisation, hence reducing flexibility and threatening the informal character particular for NPOs.

Sanders (2012) states that NPOs have a tension filled and contradictory position in society as their goal is to fulfil social missions in market economies. He further argues that nonprofits must compromise somehow, either by decreasing the integrity of the nonprofits' endeavour or through violating the responsibility to remain financially viable to stakeholders. The marketization of NPOs seems to be recognised as an unavoidable trend, although the opinions on the effects it brings are divided. As Sanders (2012) views it, marketization should not be seen as a trend to overcome but rather as a tension that needs to be understood and managed. Acknowledging this, we are concerned with illuminating how professionals understand and make sense of this contradictory context that is particular for NPOs.

Extensive literature exists concerning the impact and effects of marketization and professionalization on NPOs (see for example, Dees and Anderson, 2003; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Sanders, 2012), thus debating their ability to survive competition while fulfilling their social missions. If the main outcomes of marketization and professionalization are reduced flexibility, spontaneity and increased standardisation, this would mean that the particular 'human' dimension, which the literature frames as extraordinary for NPOs, is lost. This is put forward quite drastically, and it lies outside the scope of our study. However, it evokes a strong argument for looking into how individuals in the sector understand and manage this dilemma. The level of analysis in this research area is predominantly set to sector level and organisational

level (see for example Dees and Anderson, 2003; Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Salamon, 2010). In our attempt to study 'what is going on' in NPOs, we thus believe that analysis on an individual level, and more specifically how professionals in NPOs make sense of the contradictory demands, could be fruitful. In doing this, we seek to grasp how individuals understand their work in NPOs by drawing upon identity theory. How organisations function and how their members relate to work and surrounding environments are both fundamentally related to their respective identities (Alvesson, 2004; Pratt, 2006). Due to the marketization and professionalization, the context in NPOs are likely to be characterised by contradictory discourses, which may impose various identities on the professionals. We emphasise a focus on the growing group of professionals in the sector, and argue for addressing a research gap here, as very little research about this group has been conducted. Exploring people's understanding call for an interpretive perspective to our research, as we are interested in how individuals experience and interact with their social world and what meaning it has for them (Merriam, 2002). Given our aim to provide new insights in the area, we have chosen to conduct an in-depth case study of Individuell Människohjälp (IM), a Swedish nonprofit organisation based in Lund. IM's aim is to fight and raise the visibility of poverty and exclusion. Founded back in 1938, the organisation has over time tried to maintain their core values. During the last two decades, work has been conducted in order to modernise and professionalise the organisation's structure and processes.

1.3   Research purpose

Given that individuals and their subjective understandings are at focus in our study, the purpose is to explore how professionals in a NPO understand and relate to their work, which is likely to be affected by contradictory elements of simultaneously meeting demands of efficiency and preserving focus on social mission. Our aim is not to empirically generalise but to provide deep insights and understanding of how individuals in a particular NPO view this.

1.4 Research question

Having defined the purpose of the study, the following guiding question is:

- How do professionals in a NPO understand, relate to, and manage the tension between marketization and philanthropy, which is characteristic for their work context?

Additionally, two more specific questions were formulated during the research process in order to focus more on salient aspects.

- How do the professionals' define themselves as well as others?
- Considering the effects of marketization, what do the professionals find frustrating about their work context, and how do they relate to these frustrations?

The professionals at IM seems to acknowledge the nonprofit logic and thus do not identify with the professional label. Consequently, they manage the contradictory demands by ascribing and embodying organisational values such as being open and humane. Furthermore, by categorising themselves in a salient group which they made clear by simultaneously emphasising similarities and differences of other groups, they manage to navigate in their work context and meet demands both from the increased marketization and philanthropy objectives. As marketization has increased the specialisation at IM, the professionals now strive to maintain an overall picture of the organisations work. They thus acknowledge storytelling and social interaction throughout the organisation as important in order to better understand and make sense of their work.

1.5 Disposition

In chapter two, our assumptions guiding our methodological choices are addressed. We account for which methodological perspective we take and how the research is conducted. Additionally, our method of collecting empirical material is described in detail Lastly, we discuss our study's trustworthiness.

In chapter three, an overview of the NPO context is presented, offering the reader some useful insight in the field. Furthermore, identity theory and how it can provide a theoretical frame for the study is accounted for.

In chapter four, the case organisation, IM, is presented followed by a rich description of how the interviewees talk about and understand their work, roles and workplace. The empirical material constitutes concrete examples derived from the interviews and observations.

In chapter five, we present a discussion of the empirical material by drawing from the theories presented in chapter three. Our main findings are accounted for and suggestions for further research conclude the chapter.

In chapter six, a brief review of the study is presented. Further, we provide the reader with a summary of our main findings.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we present and discuss our methodological choices for our research process. Firstly, we describe our underlying assumptions for our chosen research strategy, followed by a presentation of our research method. We continue by describing the collection of our empirical material and how we processed the material. Lastly, we discuss the trustworthiness and limitations of our research.

2.1 Guiding assumptions

Methodology is inherently linked to a researcher's philosophical worldview, which creates a base for and informs the style of research, with the focus on appropriate ways for gaining knowledge about the world (Jupp, 2006). Our methodological choices for our research are hence guided by our assumptions about reality and knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2007). It is our belief that people construct their own reality through their subjective thoughts and experiences. Our research strategy is thus influenced by our own view of reality as being socially constructed. Considering our purpose to study how individuals understand their work, this implies that what we aim to study is produced and reproduced by individuals interacting with each other in social contexts (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). This perspective of reality entails the assumption that constructions and interpretations of reality are various and constantly changing (Merriam, 2002).

Guided by this assumption and due to the explorative character of this study, we have taken an interpretive perspective. The counterpart to this perspective would be a positivist one, from which it is believed that the social world can be studied according to the same principles as the natural sciences and that truth can be discovered by systematic observations (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). A positivist perspective thus entails seeking to explain individuals' behaviour, whereas from an interpretive perspective, the concern is rather about seeking to understand individuals' meanings, which also inform their actions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Sandberg and Targama (2007) claim that an objective perspective to knowledge may have limitations for deepening the understanding of individuals. Hence, as understanding of work is socially constructed, the appropriate way to make sense of it is by trying to understand individuals' subjective meanings and understandings.

This search for understanding, which involves interpretations, calls for a hermeneutical approach to our research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The fundamental idea within the hermeneutical approach is that 'the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 92). Thus, we acknowledge that both the researchers' and the interviewees' pre-understandings and understandings influence each other. Where we as researchers originate from, will have an impact on how we interpret our empirical material and how we come to understand and make sense of it.

2.2   Research method

Bryman and Bell (2007) emphasise a qualitative research method if researchers seek a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon and its context. Hence, we argue for a qualitative case study as an appropriate method for our research. A qualitative research method implies emphasis on the qualities of social entities and on processes, meanings and words rather than the examination and measurement in terms of quantity, amount etc. (Lincoln, 2005).

According to Merriam (2006), the decision to conduct a case study is common when researchers are interested in rich descriptions and analysis of a phenomenon, thus our choice. The case study provided us with the possibility to gain deep insight in the phenomenon of how professionals in an NPO understand and make sense of their work and context. The choice of conducting a qualitative case study often generates questions concerning the issues of transferability and contribution. It is not our aim to provide findings from this case study, which can be applied more generally to other cases. It is more so an attempt to produce rich descriptions, in order to provide insight and a deeper understanding of what is going on in this specific case. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a rich description provides a basis for others to make their own judgements on the transferability of our findings. Our aim is to contribute to existing literature on NPOs by providing a new perspective on individuals' understanding of a contradictory context, influenced by the two logics of marketization and nonprofit discourse.

The unit of analysis in a case study can be of different kinds, such as an individual, a group, an institution, a location, a specific event, a concept etc. (Merriam 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2007). In this study, the case unit consists of a group of professionals in a professionalised NPO. Hence, it is not the actual organisation IM that represents the unit of analysis. Rather, the organisation provides us with a highly relevant context for what we aim to explore. The organisational context of IM will be further introduced in chapter four.

2.3   Collection of Empirical Material

Bryman and Bell (2007) present multiple ways on how one can collect empirical material in qualitative studies, such as through ethnography, observations, interviews, documents, language analysis, qualitative data analysis etc. However, the notion 'collection of empirical material' deserves some attention. Due to the constructive character guiding our research, we acknowledge in line with Alvesson and Kärreman (2007), that empirical material is not something that is collected. Rather, empirical material is constructed by our own interpretations and pre-understandings through the interaction with what we study. Hence, in interpretive research, the researcher always does something with the material. This is to be kept in mind when we use the term 'collection', which has a more positivist touch to it.

In order to find relevant empirical material to our research, we chose to conduct interviews due to a few specific reasons discussed in the next section. While conducting the interviews, observations were also made. Additionally, secondary material in terms of organisational documents served as a complement to our collection of empirical material.

2.3.1   Documents

Some documents were selected to form a part of our empirical material as they provided us with relevant information. The chosen documents were of organisational character, including material such as IM's website, their strategic platform, personnel policy and recruitment policy. Certain things are stressed by Merriam (2006) as important to consider when using documents as sources. Firstly, these documents were produced for other purposes then for our study. Secondly, the documents

consisted of a lot of excessive information from the point of view of our study. Hence, the selection of relevant information deserved careful attention. Thirdly, important to keep in mind was the fact that the documents were a secondary source, thus likely to be influenced by the author's own interpretations and understandings of the information. However, we found that some of the documents were valuable in terms of providing us with important background information about the organisation. Moreover, they provided us with information around what values and behaviours the organisation seemed to emphasis. The strategic platform which we had access to was put together by a group of professionals in the organisation. Hence, this document was of particular interest for us. The documents mainly served as a starting point for the creation of our interview guide, which will be further discussed below.

2.3.2 Interviews

According to Merriam (2006), interviews make it possible for the researcher to find material on things that have already happened by having them described by the interviewee. For example, we were interested in how the interviewees ended up at IM and how they understood their work in relation to previous work related experiences. Merriam (2006) further explains how an interview work as a tool for the researcher to gain information about things that cannot be observed, and provide the possibility to have another individual's perspective put forward. We were seeking to explore how the interviewees understood their work, how they thought about it, felt about it and what they meant by it. Based on this, we found the choice of interviews, as primary sources for our empirical material, to be appropriate. This is the most common method for collection of empirical material within qualitative studies, due to the flexibility it provides (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Interviews can be structured in various ways depending on what one seeks to explore.

Our interviews were of semi-structured character, 'whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale, 1996, p. 5-6). This type of interview was suitable for us as we sought to explore individuals' personal experiences, perspectives and reflections (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Additionally, as emphasised by Bryman and Bell (2007), semi-structured interviews gave us flexibility, due to the

opportunity to dig deeper and ask follow-up questions, letting the interviewees speak and associate openly to different themes etc. Prior to the interviews, a guide was set up with interview questions divided into specific themes we sought to address. The interview guide concerned themes such as the interviewees' background, roles in the organisation and their view of their work and context. All the interviews started off with the question:

- Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came here to IM?

We found this to be a good point of departure in the interview as it quite quickly gave us ideas for follow-up questions. Presented below are some examples of other questions we asked.

- What are the reactions you get when you tell other people that you work in an NPO?
- Could you describe your role in the organisation?
- Suppose you were to recruit someone to a position in the organisation, what type of person would you be looking for?
- What kind of person fits in here/do not fit in here? How would you help someone to fit in?

Due to the semi-structured character of our interviews, these types of questions allowed for us to pick up on interesting things the interviewees said and to dig deeper into these. For example, the first question often led to follow-up questions around why or why not they emphasised with these reactions.

When approaching the HR manager face-to-face at the head office of IM in Lund with our research proposal, it was our aim to find interviewees who worked professionally within the organisation, that is, as paid workers. To find individuals from this group in the organisation was necessary for our research purpose. Our inquiry of conducting interviews with members of the organisation was brought up at the weekly top management team meeting. The seven members of the management team agreed on interviews as well as two voluntary coordinators on middle management level. The interviewees were of different background, age and gender. Furthermore, the time

employed in the organisation differed as well as their departmental and hierarchical position.

The nine interviews took place face-to-face during two weeks in April, each with an average of 70 minutes. Seven of the interviews took place at the IM headquarters in Lund whereas one was conducted at the IM local office in Malmö and the last one at the IM Fair Trade office in Lund. The setting for the interviews was fairly informal, often starting off with general chitchat over a coffee.

The interviews were all conducted in Swedish; hence all citations in this thesis are our own translations. Omission or deceptive translation of a word or phrase may have significant impact on data interpretation and meaning construction, hence affecting the actual presentation of the interviewees' realities (see for example Xian, 2008; Wong and Poon, 2010). Thus, the translations have been done through discussions in order to minimise ambiguities.

2.3.3 Observations

As a complement to the interviews, we saw our time at the IM offices as opportunities to observe what was going on. The observations were not extensive or structured in advance, however they provided us with impressions about the interviewees, other people at the office and their interactions with each other. Moreover, it provided us with impressions about their working environment. Our observations resulted in a research diary consisting of our field notes that were taken during the time spent at the IM offices. The research diary was mainly used as a provider of memories, helping us to think back on what had been going on during the interviews and our time at the offices.

2.4 Processing the material

To create a structured and rich basis for analysis of the empirical material, all the interviews were recorded while conducted and transcribed afterwards. This routine provided us with the possibility to reflect over each interview and make improvements for the following interviews. It entailed some changes in our interview guide during the process. For example, as we noticed that some questions asked in the

beginning of the process did not encourage narrative answers, we reformulated those questions into being more open-ended. In some cases, we found it sufficient to change only one or two words. For example, along the way we changed the question '*How* is the ideal professional here?' to 'Could you please *describe* the ideal professional here?'. Additionally, we also made some changes to a few questions that we found to be of leading character. Overall, this process helped us to continuously develop our understanding of the context involved around the interviews. Poland (1995), argues around the difficulty of capturing body language and nonverbal cues in written language. Hence, as an attempt to somehow reduce the risk of not capturing these pieces of information and strive for a fuller description of the existing context, notes of laughter, pauses, sighs, interruptions, overlapping etc. were put down while transcribing. Furthermore, notes around the interviewees' intonation of voices were put down in the transcript record after discussions among the interviewers and their perceptions. Doing the transcriptions soon after each interview, when still fresh in mind, made it easier to remember body language and write this down in the transcripts.

The process of analysing data started with the researchers analysing and commenting individually on all the transcripts. Furthermore, group discussions about the transcripts took place. The transcripts were colour-coded into categories about things of interest that came up during the interviews. As a starting point for this, we used techniques specifically recommended for our type of empirical material by Ryan and Bernard (2003), involving looking for repetitions, similarities and differences, indigenous categories, transitions, metaphors etc.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) define a deductive approach to research as having its point of departure in theory and an inductive approach in empirical material. An abductive approach to research has elements of the previous both, but provides more space for understanding as it allows for a process of alternation between theory and empirical material, in which they can be 'reinterpreted in the light of each other' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 4). This approach served to be fruitful for us as it allowed us to go back and forth between theory and empirical material, and make adjustments along the way in both our theoretical stance and of what empirical material we were interested in. For example, the literature on professionalization

suggests that the interviewees in this study are professionals. Along our process of collecting empirical material, we realised that this notion was not without complications. Hence, in order to make sense of what we found in the interviews, we had to read into new theory and reinterpret this together with our empirical material.

2.5 Trustworthiness and limitations

Bryman and Bell (2007) discuss how different criteria should be used when evaluating quantitative research or qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) discuss how quantitative research can be evaluated through its reliability and validity, whereas qualitative research rather should be assessed by its trustworthiness. The criteria for trustworthiness involve issues of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility concerns issues around whether one is really studying what one claims to be studying. The technique of triangulation, which means being more than one researcher, using different methods or using several sources for empirical material, can be used in order to reduce bias and enhance the credibility of a study (Merriam, 2006). Using interviews, documents and observations as sources for collecting empirical material, as well as the involvement of three researchers, has thus been a way for us to give credibility to our research. During the interviews we improved our ability to catch up on interesting things and ask relevant follow-up question. Furthermore, it enhanced our level of interpretation due to different backgrounds and pre-understandings. It also reduced the risk of explicitly letting personal values affect our interpretations, which is what the criteria of confirmability addresses.

Transferability as a term has been touched upon previously in this chapter. Again, we emphasise that it is not our intention to provide findings that are to be generally applied to other cases. It is rather our intention to provide rich descriptions of experiences, and leave it up to others to assess whether it is knowledge to be transferred to other cases or not (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Dependability concerns issues around the reliability of the research. This chapter has accounted for a presentation of our methodology, providing the reader with concrete

information about our course of action in this study. Hence, this transparency is a way to show the dependability of the study.

2.5.1 Limitations

As this study is concentrated to the exploration of how professionals in an NPO understand their work and work context, the search around how well they perform falls outside of the scope. It has nor in anyway been our intent to evaluate their performance, neither to seek an understanding of the outcomes or results of the professionals' work.

Due to time constraints, the depth and breadth of our research was limited to some extent. Additional time and resources would have provided us with the possibility to conduct a larger number of interviews, perhaps leading to increased understanding of the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, observations of formal and informal meetings could have added to our empirical material. A methodological option for this study could also have been to conduct participant observations. Bryman and Bell (2007), describe this alternative as fruitful for exploring social phenomenon in-depth as it puts the researcher in the social life of what is studied. However, this alternative is time-consuming and was thus not a suitable choice for us.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter starts of with an overview of NPOs and their context in order to provide the reader with some insight in the field. Theory related to professionalization and marketization associated with these concepts is then presented. Following, existing theory concerning identity and social identity theory (SIT) will be reviewed. We discuss these theories and frame how the theories can be fruitful for us in our study in order to gain deep understanding of how the professionals understand the particular demands imposed on them by the NPO context.

3.1 The nonprofit context

An insight of the NPOs' context and what is characteristic for it is fundamental to our study. First an introduction will be provided, describing the NPOs role in society and following it, a presentation of the concepts professionalization and marketization.

3.1.1 NPOs

An extended definition to the one introduced in chapter one of NPOs has been made by Powell (1987), in which he argues that the purpose of a NPO is to either perform public tasks delegated by the state, to perform public tasks that neither the state nor for-profit organisations can or want to fulfil, or lastly, to influence policies set by the public sector, the market sector or by other NPOs in the nonprofit sector. It is argued that by building social capital in society, act as value guardians and service providers, NPOs can enhance civil society (Salamon, 2010).

Firstly, although all types of organisations may be able to create social capital, Backman and Smith (2000) are of the opinion that NPOs may be more subject to this creation, due to their voluntary character and social motives. Secondly, NPOs have an important position as value guardians in society as they '…empower the disadvantaged and bring unaddressed problems to public attention…give expression to artistic, religious, cultural, ethnic, social and recreational impulses…' (Salamon, 2010, p. 168-169). Important to note though is that due to this underlying value, NPOs represent the public interest and must consider not only what is legal but also what is looked upon as right in society (Hodgkin, 1993), stressing the importance for NPOs to focus on their organisational, thus social missions. Thirdly, due to the sphere

NPOs care for, they provide an arena for moving attention to and stressing social problems, delivering services where needed.

3.1.2 Professionalization and marketization

Despite the seemingly clear role of NPOs, their characteristics and boundaries have started to blur with the market sector and the public sector. For the NPOs, this means adopting business practices and structures with an increased focus on cost-efficiency (Dees and Anderson, 2003). The authors define this blurring of boundaries as sector bending consisting of a variety of behaviours such as imitation, interaction, intermingling and industry creation. Firstly, the behaviour of imitation revolves around NPOs embracing business strategies such as hiring marketers and consultants, segmenting customers, using tool such as Porter's Five Forces and balanced scorecards etc. Secondly, organisations are increasingly interacting with each other as competitors, contractors and collaborators. Thirdly, the behaviour of intermingling is a form of sector bending, in which organisational structures are mixed and hybrid organisations are created. These are formal organisations or networks, which have both nonprofit and for-profit elements. Lastly, industry creation as a form of sector bending revolves around emerging industries such as eco-tourism, charter schools, community development, alternative energy production etc. that are filled with nonprofit, for-profit and hybrid organisations. Of particular interest in this study is imitation where the NPOs, and its members, adopt business practices as this is likely to affect how work is conducted and the members respond to various demands.

According to Eikenberry and Kluver (2004), the professionalization and marketization can also be explained from both resource-dependency theory and institutional theory. From a resource-dependent perspective, it is assumed that organisations need resources to be able to survive and are due to this, forced to interact with the actors who control the needed resources. Thus, all organisations are dependent on their environment and forced to interact with other kind of organisations that influence their processes and how work is conducted. Furthermore, exploring this based on the assumption of institutional theory, in which organisations are embedded within political systems, industries and communities, organisations must 'play the game' and obey the rules and requirements of the institutional environment, in order

to gain legitimacy. Hence, environmental influences and constraints put pressure on NPOs to adopt business methods and values, taking on market trends such as revenue generation, competition for contracts, an inflow of new donors and social entrepreneurship. This way for NPOs to adopt the approaches and values of the market sector is what Salamon (2012) labels as the marketization of the nonprofit sector. The author explains the term as a process in which NPOs adapt to market discourse and practices. Furthermore, this pressure for professionalization does not only come from the institutional context NPOs exist in, it is also a trend within the areas of activities that NPOs operate in. Accordingly, it has been emphasised in the nonprofit sector itself, due to private funders' expectations on sound financial management (Powell, 1987), increasing the demands on reporting and transparency. These effects on the NPOs are not our main concern in this study; rather, we are interested in the impact it has on the members of the organisation, as it is likely to create contradictory context and demands in which they are forced to manoeuvre.

Hence, identity theory will be drawn upon as it can help us frame what is going on and make sense of it from an identity perspective. As will be made clear, identity and in particular social identity is important to pay attention to in any social context because identities of organisational members are constantly affected and shaped through interaction with others in a social context.

3.2 Identity

Identity is often of relevance in organisations as it is central to how organisations function and how their members relate to their work and surrounding environments (Alvesson, 2004). Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006), stress identity as crucial for how individuals make sense of their environment. Some authors (Chia, 1994; Ford and Harding, 2004) argue that in order to understand an organisation, it is necessary to have knowledge of the subjectivities of the members that constitutes the organisation. In literature, identity is a broad concept often studied at several levels: individual, social, organisational and professional (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson 2004). The process in which individuals construct and shape their respective identity is often referred to as identity work (see for example Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Alvesson, 2004) or identity customisation (Pratt, Rockmann and

Kaufmann, 2006). Through identity customisation, Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) concluded that professional identity changes followed from perceived mismatches between who one is and what one does.

A trend in the literature on identity is the move from a more static view on identity to a processual view (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). What many authors (see for example Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Schultz, and Corley, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson, 2004) seem to agree on is that identities are best viewed as something that is constantly in movement, rather than something fixed and stable. Through social interaction identities are "… constituted, negotiated, reproduced and threatened…" (Alvesson, 2004, p. 190). Furthermore, this body of literature often emphasises that individuals have several co-existing identities. Pratt and Foreman (2000) explain this by arguing that the questions like "Who am I?" or "Who are we?" seldom can be answered with one single answer. Mead (1934), in Pratt and Foreman (2000), for example, suggests that "a parliament of selves" exists within each person creating an array of selves in all individuals. Following, for our purpose, we view identity as continuously moving and multiple in its nature. The NPO context is highly volatile as marketization and professionalization continuously imposes new practices and processes. Thus, arguably, the professionals at IM are likely to be considerably affected by this and are apt to constantly shape and shift between their palettes of identities.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, two main discourses are prominent in NPOs and multiple discourses may be difficult to choose between. According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), continuous shaping of identities is thus called for. The tension between the business discourse and the nonprofit discourse is a setting in which the professionals at IM manoeuvre. In this navigation, these different identities all play significant however different roles.

3.2.1   Identity in NPOs

Some literature on identity in nonprofit organisations can be found, although most is concentrated to organisational identity (see for example Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997; Young, 2001; Teram, 2010) and considerably less has been written on the

individual level within this context. One study of nonprofit leaders described these as not identifying highly with ego, as opposed to leaders in for profits, and more concerned of the well being of others (Gibbon, 2011). However, individual identity is useful to acknowledge in nonprofits, as the scene for members often is multidiscursive in its character and normative demands in different discourses of how to behave forms and influences individual identity to some extent (Kenny, 2010). Furthermore, the identities of individual actors are important as they help maintaining the essence of what is valuable within the nonprofit sector as argued by Gibbon (2011). This emphasises the need for well thought through recruitments as the individuals' identities are of interest in maintaining the social mission for NPOs.

3.2.2   Identification

One branch of literature concerns identification, that is, the individuals' identification with an organisational or social context. Or to cite Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) 'Organisational identification is the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organisation.' (p. 239) Kenny (2010) concludes that organisational discourses are useful to pay attention to in understanding individuals' identities and identification processes. For the author, it is important to treat identification processes as intertwined with discourses, rather than as separate entities and to acknowledge that workplace discourses are upheld through the identification of organisational members. As these identify with organisational discourses, the discourses are thus confirmed and sustained (similar approach as above by Gibbon, 2011). Symbols and social interaction are cues for the members to remind them of their identification with the organisation and thus strengthen it. Additionally, the members of the organisation may reinforce their identification with the organisation as they increasingly have contact with the organisation and feel involved. This is due to the fact that they gradually perceive the organisational identity as more and more attractive. (Dutton, Dukrerich and Harquail, 1994)

Individuals strive towards identification because the desire for recognition is powerful (Butler, 1993, as cited in Hodgson, 2005). This will be further elaborated on later in this chapter when identification with subgroups within an organisation is discussed. Identification is thus valuable for the individual while the abjection that people may

experience, due to a perceived alienation of what existing norms prescribes, often is painful (Ford and Harding, 2004). For example, a man might find it painful when others accentuate his feminine traits or when he finds himself outside of the 'masculine norm' Alvesson (2004).

3.2.3 Disidentification

Closely related to the concept of identification is that of disidentification. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) describe it as a separation between individual and organisational identity related to a negative perceived relation between characteristics of oneself and the organisation. Not surprisingly, this relates to identification as disidentification is triggered by the individuals' desire for positive recognition and avoidance of negative association. The authors view this concept as concerning a reaction from organisational members, who do not feel congruence with organisational values.

Organisational members' different roles within an organisation constitute different identities, deriving from the view that individual identity is multiple in nature and the individual's willingness to acknowledge these will arguably vary according to inhibited perceptions of self. Furthermore, Alvesson (2004) argues that members of an organisation can take a role and act within it with little resistance because it can be disconnected from identity and viewed as something temporary. Following, one cannot distance oneself from one's own identity (Alvesson, 2004). However, as mentioned, one can have multiple identities and therefore employ different when needed.

3.3 Professionals

The term professional has often been taken for granted and rarely totally understood as people tend to trivialise it and not fully recognise the ambiguous, multiple and often contradictory meaning. In recent time, the term has been less associated with just managers in organisations and more frequently associated with other groups such as employees, and blue-collar workers. (Cheney and Ashcraft, 2007) However, the term is often associated with paid individuals (although Chaney and Ashcraft, 2007, argues that unpaid workers too can be professionals) that have specific education and expertise connected to a certain profession (Wijkström and Einarsson, 2011). Moreover, organisational membership is an expression for where you work and has

little to do with what you do. For professionals, on the other hand, the actual work tasks and title have more impact on how they are defined by others. (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006) Additionally, how an individual sees him- or herself in an organisation could have a large impact of how he or she relates to work and colleagues as Alvesson (2004) explains:

> If one defines oneself as primarily a professional working in a specific company or as an organisational member doing a particular job this means rather different identities even though the 'objective' work situation is the same. The professional may be somewhat less inclined to follow the instructions of management while the organisational member may be more inclined to take the firm's best interest into account (p.189).

What is common for the professionals in our study is that they all are in managerial positions in a NPO and could thus be collectively understood as belonging to the same profession, namely as having management as a profession. By assigning them to this profession we can thus henceforth think of them as a group, making it meaningful to apply professional and social identity.

3.3.1 Professional identity

According to Schein (1979, as cited in Ibarra, 1999), professional identity is composed of values, beliefs, attributes, motives, and experiences. Further, the professional identity is defined as relatively stable and enduring and describes how people define themselves and others in a professional role. Alvesson (2000) emphasises that professional identity is about identification with a specific profession. He argues that this identification can become salient to the point that it overshadows the professionals' identification with the organisation. That is, a strong professional identity may influence a member of an organisation to identify more with their profession than with the organisation *per se*. However, as opposed to Schein (1979), Ibarra (1999) argues that professional identity is fluent and forms over time through interactions with others, posing a strong argument to view professional identity as largely interrelated with social identity and as something unstable and continuously changing. For example, Barge and Hackett (2003) argue that although NPOs adopt business practices of management, they might not fully adapt these practices and

uphold historically salient values of nonprofits such as hard work and supportive leadership. This implies that, a strong cultural identity within the organisation has effect through social identity on the professional identity and hence forms it to be less connected to the profession per se and thus contain aspects derived from the social identity. However, as Alvesson (2000) explains:

> Even if there are no conflicts between profession [occupation in original] and organisation, a strong professional identity may imply more independence of and disloyalty to employers, than characterizing workers that have no distinct extra-organisational reference groups and little symbolism reinforcing an organisation-independent social work identity.

In other words, the distinctiveness of profession-groups and the symbolism inherited in professions (for example accountants), might influence professionals to identify more with their profession than with their employer. Thus, following Jenkins (2000), all identities are social identities and the creation and shaping of the identity depends on how one defines it as well as on how others define it. Hence, if others do not identify you as an accountant (even though you are educated and work as one), you may not identify yourself as an accountant.

3.4 Social Identity

When individuals identify themselves, a definition of who they *are not*, simultaneously is (more or less deliberately) done. Who one *is*, is only meaningful in contrast to who one *is not,* and emphasis is put on similarities and differences. (Jenkins, 2000; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006) Thus, it is meaningful to talk about social identity because this would not be possible if one was not located in a social context, composed of other people and groups (Jenkins, 2000). The work environment is a social situation (for most people), enlightening the need for looking closer at social identity rather than individual identity. By categorising and ordering specific groups, the individual gets a perception of their belongingness to various groups. (Alvesson, 2000) The members of a group put emphasis on the similarities among each other by stressing their differences from others (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). Accordingly, one defines the self and the

group by emphasising what one *is not*. This process of categorising has been further described by Hogg and Terry (2000), and is closely related to social identity theory.

3.4.1 Social identity theory and self-categorization theory

As we in this study set out to explore how professionals in IM make sense of their work, we do so by treating them as an inseparable part of the NPO context. Jenkins (2008) argues that all identities are dependent on the social context and provide a good foundation for us when looking, not at the work specifically but rather at the work in the context.

Self-categorisation theory and social identity theory are interrelated to each other and self-categorisation theory is sometimes viewed as a component of social identity theory (Hogg and Terry, 2000). According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identity theory is associated with how individuals perceive their cohesion with a group. This perceived cohesion depends on how these individuals categorise themselves, how distinctive and prestigious the group (that they belong to) is and to what extent out-groups are made salient. Additionally, social categorisation refers to the placing of self and others into in-group and out-group respectively. In doing this, these groups function as benchmarks when assessing the perceived similarity of an identity. (Hogg and Terry, 2000) Oftentimes, stereotypical perceptions are produced of self and others as people add distinctiveness and make certain values more salient (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Adding to this, normative behaviour, positive in-group attitudes and cohesion, empathy, collective behaviour, and so on are said to be frequent effects (Hogg and Terry, 2000). The practical implications are that activities to some extent are determined by the identity and, furthermore, individuals tend to support institutions that represent a congruent identity. The organisation, as well as work groups, departments, unions and so on, may be sources from which the individuals draw from when constructing social identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Identities in an organisation can be more or less diverse (Albert and Whetten, 1985, as cited in Young, 2001) and strong common organisational values and beliefs could for example increase the probability that members of different subgroups display similar identities, although this is quite unusual since organisations are getting increasingly

complex (Ashforth and Mael, 1985). This concern all types of organisations, not least NPOs under influence of marketization and professionalization.

Newcomers who are eager to find their place in the organisation resolve uncertainties by symbolic interaction through verbal and nonverbal encounters with other organisational members. By interpreting responses of others in social encounters the individual defines him- or herself and social identity is thus influenced. (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Jenkins, 2000). It is further argued that it is of interest for newcomers to learn organisational policies, social norms and what are expected of them in their new role, in order to gain understanding of the organisation. Subgroups are likely to have a large impact on newcomers since tasks and interaction are more immediate within the group than across groups, which entail more interaction with subgroup members. However, all subgroup members (not only newcomers) are shaped by social identity from their groups. This can lead to implications for the superordinate group (the organisation as a whole) since members of the subgroups might perceive external pressures as an identity threat and thus identify even more with more distinctive subgroups. Hence, it is in the organisation's interest to ensure that subgroup and superordinate group identity are equally salient. (Hogg and Terry, 2000) The increased specialisation of NPOs entails more and clearer departments within the organisation. Thus, the effects of how subgroups influence organisational members' identities could have large impact on to what extent the organisation's main objective is maintained.

Brown (1969) concluded that specialisation is a result of task interdependency and the cohesion of the subunits, as organisational identification is less likely when this is prominent. That is, individuals will be less internalised and identify less with the organisation as whole and more with the subunits. More 'groupy' behaviour could derive from the phenomenon where individuals categorise their selves through assimilation to salient (and attractive) attributes of a subgroup. (Hogg and Terry, 2000) These attributes of the subgroup are described and prescribed by people who define stereotypical characteristics to create what Hogg and Terry (2000) name prototypes. This is done to make attributes of a group visible so that they can be distinguished from other groups. On a practical level, these prototypes could be depicted as role models or ideal types of traits. As mentioned above, individuals

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generally have a strong need to identify and feel as a part of something (e.g. a group) as this reduces uncertainty about their perceptions, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes. Through the process of self-categorisation, individuals may reduce uncertainty by incorporating their identities to a prototype, which offers support and consensual validation for their self-concept. Consequently, when the group is salient, by characterising the in-group prototype the in-group members often become more admirable. (Hogg and Terry, 2000)

Drawing from nonprofit as well as identity theory will be of importance as we move into the empirical material in the following chapter. In interpreting the interviewees' understandings of their work, attention to how they talk about their own as well as others' identities provides a useful approach to understand subtle and underlying meanings.

CHAPTER 4. EMPIRICAL MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

This chapter starts with a presentation of IM in order to provide the reader with an overview of the organisational context in which the interviewees are located. Following this, we present the empirical material and account for some concrete examples as we look into how interviewees talk about and understand their work, roles and workplace. The presentation of the empirical material below will account for agreements as well as contradictions, which we believe are of interest for our study.

4.1   The organisation – IM

> Our founder always said that we should provide the help at 'eye-level', we shall not view others from above, that we rather should help. Take the defeated by the hand and find the path together… - The secretary general

Founded in 1938, IM currently employs 223 people including 35 at the headquarters in Lund, Sweden. The activities are to a large extent carried out by some 2000 voluntary workers in Sweden, Africa, Asia, Central America, Europe and the Middle East. IM's activities abroad involve, for example, funding schools, helping people to become self-sufficient, developing home care services and supporting exposed groups. IM has four international regional offices for the regions South Asia, southern Africa, Central America and lastly, Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, the organisation is active through local offices in Nepal, Zimbabwe, Moldavia, Rumania, Palestine and Jordan. In Sweden, focus is directed towards issues of integration, involving activities to fight alienation and promote incorporation of people who are exposed. In addition to the headquarters in Lund, IM has four local offices in Gothenburg, Malmö, Stockholm and Vrigstad. Apart from projects concerning aid and development, IM runs a retail business named IM Fair Trade, with the aim to reach a break-even and become self-sufficient as a department. IM's turnover (donations, grants, sales etc.) reached 72 664 tkr (thousand Swedish Kronor) in 2010. Most of the IM's revenue comes from private donors. Adding to that are donations from institutional donors and grants from external funders. This spread of funds provides IM with the flexibility to dispose their capital without being dependent or governed by any particular funder. (IM's annual report, 2010)

Since the beginning of 2000, IM has deliberately made efforts to become more professionalized. Bo was recruited as secretary general in 2003 as a part of a strategic move to make IM more business like. - "When I came to here, the board told me to modernise and professionalize IM". Kjell, with past experiences as an entrepreneur in the healthcare industry, was offered the position as vice secretary general and head of the Sweden department at IM.

> I was contacted by IM and asked if I wanted to work here… they wanted to change the structure of the activities that were conducted at the time and become a bit more strategic [offensive in original]. – Kjell

The former organisational structure was perceived as inappropriate for a growing organisation, lacking an efficient hierarchical structure. Bo describes the actions that he took soon after joining with IM:

> When I came here the organisational chart consisted of two circles. There were co-ordinators and it was very divided between these two groups [Sweden and abroad]. My assignment from the board was to consolidate that, and I conducted a traditional organisational chart, I established three lines of departments and one managerial function… It [the old structure] was not efficient and no one really had mandate, there was no manager who had responsibility over budget and personnel… I thought it was impossible with this kind of structure for an organisation, which had the aim to grow. – Bo

Even though many things have changed within the organisation in order to marketalize it, Kjell emphasises the need for IM to work further with its development and become more business like in order to increase its status.

IM's retail department sells Fair Trade products in nine stores, through a web shop, and through catalogues. The purpose of fair trade is that the products should contribute to welfare for the producers of the products. The main goal is to make sure that they receive reasonable pay for their work and that it can lead to increased education, healthcare and accommodation. As a member of WFTO, World Fair Trade Organisation, IM Fair Trade conducts their activities following the ten international principles for fair trade meaning for example that safe products are produced and that

child-labour is prohibited (IM Fair Trade homepage). IM Fair Trade as a business unit is struggling with profitability and need to increase their efficiency. Gabriella, who has a long corporate background, was appointed head of the department with the purpose of commercialising it and to reach a break-even. The purpose, according to Gabriella, is not to finance other departments with surplus from the Fair Trade, but rather work with producer development. The aim is to strengthen producers (mainly in India) in order to help them become self-sufficient and gain market shares in Europe with their products.

4.2   Themes

The empirical material largely revolves around how the interviewees talk about how they define themselves by comparing themselves with other salient groups. This is presented as two main themes that are reciprocally interrelated to each other, meaning that the interviewees describe who they *are* and who they *are not* as a group. A third theme is presented as frustrations in which the interviewees' reactions to the context in which they find themselves are made explicit. These three themes stems from what is most salient in the empirical material and thus reflect how the interviewees talk about their work and the NPO context.

4.3   Who are we?

We start off by presenting how the interviewees talk about who they *are* and who they *are not* respectively. A description will be put forth of how they describe group-belongingness, that is, which groups they *do* identify with and which they *do not* identify with.

4.3.1   Being professional at IM

All the interviewees have done nonprofit work at some point prior to their employment at IM. Most of them talk about their previous nonprofit engagements as long-term commitments and emphasise engagement as a common denominator for the group of professionals at IM.

> It is probably not a coincidence that many [of us] have been volunteers… it is seen as a strength to feel engagement in these issues and to be interested in people and

> encounters [between humans]. ... we are looking for engagement, not just in paperwork but also in humans" – Ulrika

When Ulrika started as a volunteer in 1995 she felt that the voluntary work changed her life and woke her interest for aid and Eastern Europe. Other interviewees, for example Bo, also emphasise inherent engagement and interest for aid.

> I had a lot with me from my childhood [engagement in aid]. My parents were very active in a church... I was always fascinated by all the stories and the work that was conducted. I was sort of born into this engagement – Bo

Engagement seems to be deeply rooted in the interviewees, providing meaningfulness to the work they conduct at IM.

> ... it is your hobby that has become your job. I had been a volunteer for many years and then I started to work with it instead. This is what you are passionate about and find interesting. – Hanna

Bo believes he perhaps belongs to the old people-movement persons, meaning that he has always had a big engagement in social issues. He does not see his work as a sacrifice and does not think he will be able to manage without being engaged in some kind of voluntary work after retirement.

> It [just devoting himself to music and reading when retiring] will not be sufficient, voluntary efforts are something I always will do. - Bo, when asked about his retirement plans

Although coming from a corporate working background, Anette conducted voluntary work during an extensive period of time during and after her university studies. However, as her family life started to take place, she found it difficult to combine 'conventional' work with voluntary commitment. When she left the private sector and entered the nonprofit sector, her friends and family did not find this surprising at all. "... - 'we knew that this is what you wanted'. In some way, she has always been looking to engage in voluntary work and contribute to something meaningful. This

engagement in IM's work the interviewees talk about is a consistent subject throughout the interviews and their view of it is congruent.

> … I think we that work here are a particular kind of people that, if you were to generalise, that we may be here for a reason – Dick

Prior experience of voluntary work or engagement in nonprofit work seems to be an important component of what constitutes an individual that will fit in this type of organisation.

> … we ask whether they [candidates in recruitment processes] have had any prior voluntary engagement. We believe it is easier to understand if one have been a volunteer or has been engaged in a nonprofit organisation or similar… We believe it adds value - Bo

Dick believes it is important for candidates to understand what the work in this type of organisation is about. He thinks experience from similar organisations may facilitate this understanding.

> Engagement is important and you look at what this individual has done, have they been engaged in any organisations?... It is both about the knowledge and the understanding of what we are. Things like these are required…then you will understand what [kind of organisation] you have come to. - Dick

When asked about what constitutes an ideal employee, the interviewees put emphasis on the need of being open-minded. This concerns being open in relation to colleagues as well as maintaining an unprejudiced approach towards all humans.

> I believe that IM is a good organisation to come to [for new employees]. People are open and welcoming. They are passionate about their work and eager to share [about the work and the organisation]. – Dick when asked about how newcomers are received at IM

> … it is important for you [as an employee at IM] to be open-minded and feel comfortable [amongst religious groups etc.]. One could for example be invited to lecture at a congregation where you start by singing a psalm. - Ingrid

> … that we do not stand above anyone, the Swedish approach to collaborate and meet people at eye-level and be open, clear and respectful - Ulrika

These are values that the participants put emphasis on and what they describe demonstrates similarities between personal and organisational values.

4.3.2 Affiliation

It seems important for the interviewees to identify with organisational values at IM and they emphasise belongingness to a community and the importance of feeling as a part of the whole. Looking at the organisation's recruitment policy document, some distinctive principles are emphasised as values to be communicated to all recruits. These are: compassion, help to self-help, and closeness/belongingness.

> I think it is important [to agree with IM's view of values and principles], otherwise I do not think that you will like it here. - Gabriella

Gabriella believes it is of importance to agree with these values, as it might be difficult for one to fit in to the organisational context if one does not. Due to the interviewees previous experience of voluntary work they have a certain understanding of the NPO context. Ingrid believes the right competence or expertise is important but emphasises how specific understanding and certain values might help a person to fit in to the organisation. It is seen as important to share the vision, as in any other non- or for-profit organisation. However, what is emphasised is that an inherent desire to help other people is important.

> What is different [about being a leader at IM compared with being a leader in a for-profit] is that in this organisation we have a vision. When we hire a person, let us say a IT-technician, we need a person who is competent in that area but we also need a person who can function in this organisation, one who can concur with our vision and believe in what we are working for… it is not sufficient to be interested solely in one task of you are not interested in the others [tasks]. - Ingrid

Seemingly, it is their perception that competence is not sufficient to fit in the organisation. Belief in, and passion about engagement in aid is a highly requested quality. Amongst others, Dick talks about belongingness and being a part of a group at IM. It is the common missions and goals that tie the individuals together in the community, and large engagement is the driver for affiliation.

> I think it is easier to feel some sort of social belongingness if you feel that you have a mission that you share with others… Most of us who work here have a large engagement [to aid issues]. – Dick

The common goals and missions are viewed as important to communicate in order to strengthen a sense of belongingness. By sharing it with others, people identify with the team or group, thus acquiring a broader perspective of the whole organisation's mission of making a difference in society.

> It is very important to successfully involve them [regional managers and managers abroad], and make them feel as part of the community. Where we are going, our mutual goals, so that they do not feel that they are working alone but rather that they are a part of something bigger and that we are in this together… the challenge is to make us feel as a team. – Ulrika

At the headquarters of IM, it was our impression that the sense of community was quite strong and we as researchers felt a humbleness in the encounters with the professionals. During the interviews, a humane and humble tone was always present. The way the interviewees acted during our time at the headquarters seemed congruent with how they describe themselves in the steering documents as well as in other documents, and Hanna put emphasis on the importance of being open minded and humane. In other words, employees were 'walking the talk'.

> Our ambition is for everyone to fit in to the organisation. Especially in organisations like IM everyone has something to contribute with. I hope it is possible for everyone to become a part of the group… we work for people [in general] to be accepted for who they are and that you always should have the same possibilities. Therefore, you have to have it in our organisation as well. Otherwise it would be strange. - Hanna

The organisation also seems to be perceived as warm and humane by the interviewees. Thus, IM too seems to 'walk the talk'.

> Both Erik and me have small children and I think it is a eulogy for IM that they recruit people that they know will have to stay home occasionally with their ill children. - Ulrika

4.3.3   We are not do-gooders, nor are we corporate

By not identifying with business discourse, the 'greater value' or the 'social mission' can be emphasised as below. This is how they *do not* see themselves, which creates space for elaborating more on how they *do* se themselves and thus make it more salient. The interviewees explicitly describe two groups, as they talk about 'business people' on the one hand, being efficient and result oriented, and 'volunteers' on the other, described as the do-gooders or Samaritans.

> … this tough, financial logic that has become more pronounced and perhaps people do not want to recognise it. We want to feel unbounded, and under the 'financial whip' we feel a bit bounded. We kind of rise above the financial logic and work with values that are greater. - Dick

> It is very stimulating to meet people whom still are interested in learning and do things and who are not only interested in the latest round of golf or whatever… - Kjell

By using a more cynical tone, one can show disidentification with certain context. As shown above, the interviewee emphasise the mission of the IM employees as being more about doing something (as in something important), rather than just being interested in (unimportant) things like golf.

Many of the interviewees are reluctant to identify with the image others associate them with. It seems hard for them to accept that others sometimes see them as do-gooders and more or less deliberately downplay this image.

> To tell them [people in general] that you sometimes watch Eurovision song contest
> and football, it feels quite good sometimes and I think that I sometimes
> overemphasise it because I have problem with being this 'do-gooder'. Yah! - Erik

Diverse backgrounds can have an impact in how people within the organisation
perceive each other. An employee without prior experience of voluntary work or
engagement in aid organisations might experience difficulties with credibility.

> If you do not have organisational background [meaning that you have engaged in
> nonprofit work] at all you might find it more difficult to make your voice heard…If
> you come straight from business… it might be harder – Dick

> If you come from business and economics and is only interested in looking at
> numbers, key figures and efficiency you might quickly be reminded by others that it
> is about more than that – Dick

Most of the interviewees describe the out-group as business people, stereotypes of
business people whilst some see people with belongingness to this group as a
complement to their department. The IM Fair Trade department struggles with
profitability and strives to reach break-even. Thus, the IM board felt the need to
develop this department and increase efficiency. Gabriella was employed as head of
the department to develop the business. She has prior experience from the private
sector, which is perceived as a helpful complement in the department. Too much
corporate orientation could however cause implications for individuals as the
organisational structure and work processes at IM differ to some extent from for-
profit organisations.

> … if someone were very, if you excuse the generalisation, very corporate, and had a
> tough corporate style. I would have been a bit doubtful because of the clash. I do not
> think that you would like it with us if you expect that type of organisational setting -
> Erik

As Erik sees it, potential frustrations, related to how work is conducted, could emerge
for an individual in this context. This elucidates why the interviewees put emphasis

on the need for new recruits to have experience from previous NPOs or voluntary work.

The demography at IM's headquarter seems to have an analogy to what kind of personal traits and values the suitable employee possesses. Ulrika stresses the employees' engagement when asked about the typical IM employee.

> …I believe that you do not just go to work and becomes an 'aid worker', rather it is about engagement for the organisation that is bigger then normal. I think that one think it feels meaningful…it is oftentimes a woman [the typical IM employee]…men are not as interested in working with these issues as women…Men are more impassive (laughter) – Ulrika

The underlying meaning here might not be about men and women *per se* but rather the interviewee emphasises that IM employees need to be emotional and caring in order to understand the context and organisational values, and thus fit in.

What most of the interviewees seem to agree on is that they primarily are there to serve the organisation and not the target group directly. They describe their roles as facilitators, helping others to reach objectives or 'being the oil in the machinery'.

> … you get a lot of cred, social cred from people around you. Socially, people kind of assume that you are a good person when you tell them that you work at IM. I think it is a little frustrating… since I do not think that I personally contribute to making the world better but rather happens to have a job where I can do it on working-hours. - Dick

Dick expresses frustration about how he perceives others' view of him and his work. Further elaboration one these frustrations will be made when accounting for how people within IM disidentify with how others perceive them. The interviewees downplay these perceptions and delimit the role to be more of practical importance.

4.3.3.1 Serving IM as an employer

When asked about the difference of being a volunteer and employed at IM, Hanna redirects focus away from herself as a do-gooder and rather describes herself as someone who is there to serve the volunteers, doing 'boring tasks'.

> I am not the engine in the organisation, I am not the important person here, rather it is the volunteers that are important. My job is to do the sort of boring tasks, the tasks that needs to be done for their voluntary work to function. – Hanna

Kjell's view is congruent with Hanna's: "Our [the professionals] primary responsibility is to serve IM as an employer". Ingrid's view of the organisation is that it is composed of members and volunteers and that she is there to support them.

> Our job is to conduct this work in the best possible way, what we want to achieve. You could say that we serve them to form a better functioning organisation…we are the experts and have a pedagogical task to educate them [the volunteers] so that we together can find the right track

What is congruent in how the interviewees view their roles is that they put emphasis on the volunteers as the ones who does the 'important' work and that themselves are there to facilitate the volunteers' job. Furthermore, as mentioned, they are reluctant to view themselves as Samaritans or do-gooders and often diminish their work to day-to-day activities concerning administrative deeds.

> I am not personally aiming to save the world, not at all… I make posters and update homepages so to say. I do not save the world. IM as whole saves the world in a way and I am a part of that and think that it is really cool. I can also feel that I have done a lot of hands on things before and that I do not need that conformation right now – Hanna

Hanna implies that she has an inherent need of making a difference. Although, in her current position, she feels that she contributes to such activities but has accepted that she does not have to do the 'on site' work. She sees her job as any other office job.

> I do not think that we think of ourselves as Samaritans. You cannot do that in a working situation… I do not think we are that either, rather it is our volunteers that are that. We conduct an office job like any other so to say. - Hanna

However, the interviewees seems to agree that certain traits and attributes are needed in order to fit in as professionals and identify with the organisation and the particular context in which they work. When asked about the typical IM employee, Gabriella described them (including herself) as individuals who are

> … devoted to do good, devoted to IM's core values, to fight poverty and that the world should be more equal and sustainable. It might be more about how you are as a person than what kind of education and experience you have – Gabriella

4.4   Frustrations due to tension-filled context

Due to contradictory demands, stemming from the marketization and professionalization of the organisation, the interviewees expressed some frustrations. Following, we account for how they talked about becoming more specialised, meeting increased external demands and finally how they emphasise the need for more interaction within the organisation.

4.4.1   Tug-of-war

Due to the professionalization of the organisation, increasing the division of labour, some interviewees talk about how, depending on the professionals' differing backgrounds and roles, they have different interests at heart. Ingrid describes how people in communications are more creative and those in the financial department are more thorough. - "Sometimes there will be tensions between for example these groups. However, I think it is a lot better now". Furthermore, people with corporate backgrounds might have a more process-oriented view on work while those from nonprofit backgrounds may have the organisation's social mission as a main objective. In the collaboration between the employees, strong engagement seems to impede the efficiency in many work processes concerning the day-to-day activities.

> One consequence of the strong engagement is visible in the teams, there is a lot of wills… This can make processes at IM quite heavy… – Dick

Although, strong engagements seem to help in order to fit in the organisation and it does have an impact on practical work processes. As Dick explains it, many individuals with strong engagement within a group create constant negotiation and debates. Thus, engagement can be seen as a paradox in this context since it is necessary in order to manage the context, yet it stifles efficiency due to never-ending discussions.

> Here, debates are more permitted… I think debates of what to do are more frequent here. I would say that it is more difficult to work here and it might relate to the lack of guiding principles. We always have to create them ourselves, which leads to never ending discussions – Kjell when asked about the differences from working in legislated organisations, e.g. municipalities and in social services

> It is probably always partly true, but I especially do not think that this type of organisation can rid itself from [internal] conflicts. Because people care, often deeply. I do not think that you can change [the people within] an *engagement enterprise* to become puppets and who says 'yes boss', 'no boss'. - Erik

IM as an organisation differs considerably from governmental institutions in that they lack of clear set of rules that guides the activities. It is more flexible and open. Accordingly, as Kjell points out above, there is room for extensive debates and discussions about how to conduct work at IM. Engagement and commitment to issues and projects is more prominent in a NPO (in comparison to for-profits), since many of the employees connect strong feelings to objectives and projects.

> People cannot let things be. You do not choose your battles and you cannot accept a renouncing. If you do not agree with the decision, you fight for it. It is very difficult to be manager in this context, as I have noticed I cannot any longer ignore the conflicts… I feel that I would sometimes actually like that people recognised that 'it is just a job'. Do not fight every fight! Let it lie! – Erik

> You have a larger personal commitment [in comparison to his former job at a for-profit corporation] in every little issue, you feel that 'this is something I really believe in'…It is always a tug-of-war going on about how it should be done – Dick

This paradox seems to affect the professionals who constantly are exposed to discussions, creating tensions through power and politics within the organisation.

Conversely, too much focus on profit and efficiency correspondingly creates frustrations. In equivalence with the critique of nonprofits' focus on social missions being lost through marketization, a profit oriented view of work might put emphasis on short-term goals with the result of people loosing contact with the long-term mission which should guide the activities in IM and remain their main objective.

> … they [hired consultants] said in their feedback that we have too heavy demands on reports and too little flexibility both concerning projects and in the daily activities… I would really like to make us more flexible and focus more on the daily activities and less on conducting reports – Ulrika

> I think about it a lot… My assignment was to professionalize and go from being mainly about heart. Now I can wonder: have we become too much brain. Is the balance right, or have we ended up in the other ditch? – Bo

Erik has a similar perception of the effects of professionalization. He justifies the modernisation of the organisation and sees it as something necessary. However, he is aware of the risk of becoming too bureaucratised. '… our organisation must maintain this spirit and the engagement'. It is not just important to maintain the engagement among the professionals but clearly too much focus on reports stifles the creativity and have impact on the projects. Furthermore, Ulrika shows frustration, as she would like to interact more with colleagues and feels that administrational demands takes up too much of her time, resulting in lost focus on discussing important issues.

> … I think I might be too efficient during the days when I am here [at IM HQ] to take time to drink coffee with the others… I just came back from Palestine and many here has worked with Palestine for many years and would like to know how the process is going, but I just go into my office [implying that she does not have time to sit in the coffee room]. – Ulrika

What Ulrika is implying here relates to the concept of storytelling as we will elaborate on further later in this chapter.

4.4.2   Loosing sight of the target?

One implication of this specialisation is the loss of some overview of the broader organisational activities. As people get more focused on single tasks the closeness to the overall missions and values of IM seems to become more remote.

> We have changed. We have increased the number of employees and become bigger…
> It has become more professionalized and marketizised, specialisation so that we are more separated from each other now. When I started [at IM] everyone was engaged in each other's assignments. We had meetings every Monday and everyone at the office was briefed about what to do the upcoming week. It is unthinkable in an organisation that looks as it [IM] does today… In my department, five or six of us hade the same title… Now we have very specialised roles… I have realised that we have changed since we now have reached a level where people do not feel that 'the entire organisation is their job', but rather that they constitute a fragment of IM. – Erik

By moving further away from each other's departments the professionals' ability to grasp the whole picture is at stake. It is in the organisations' interest to bring the departments closer to each other so that a common goal is achieved.

> When we become more professionalized there is a risk that we move further away from each other's departments due to the fact that we are more educated and have more experience in our special task in the organisation. I think it can be a challenge for the organisation to hold this together, that we stand on common ground and have a similar viewpoint – Ulrika

Group divisions also lead to some tensions between groups as they have different views of what and how things should be done.

As emphasised by the interviewees, a more business like model of the organisation demands more structure. Changes made in IM concerns for example a different organisational structure, clearer roles and more specific titles.

> Volunteer co-ordinator and department manager is really the same thing… It did not use to be referred to as department manager but apparently one has decided that it should – Dick

As a consequence of the modernisation, Dick was bestowed with a new title. He remained in the same position and got more managerial responsibility although doing similar tasks. However, this new title carried some symbolic value of manager or leader. This symbolism might have had an impact in how people relate to each other and work. Many of the interviewees emphasise this and does elaborate further on the important symbolic value of sharing stories and experiences.

4.4.3 Storytelling

The interviewees frequently refer to storytelling and it is used by them in several ways. It is an important tool to use in gaining credibility from donors and external partners. The professionals also feel that they need it to feel institutionalised in the organisation and, perhaps most importantly: storytelling can provide a strong reminder of what the main objective in the organisations is and should be. Some of the interviewees tell us how they became interested in aid and support and previous encounters and their stories seem to have influenced them to some extent.

> … before I started my economic education I was in U.S. for one year and met a woman who I worked for as an au pair. She was responsible for Botswana for UN's account and I thought it [her story] was very exiting. - Anette

> We often had visits by missionaries and I was always fascinated by the stories and the extensive amount of work that was done… - Bo

Quite frequently volunteers and professionals share their experience with colleagues at the headquarters. This storytelling is on-going and is seen as important at the headquarters.

> If you compare the discussions we have here compared with those I had before [working in an FPO] they are a lot more ideological, concerning why and how you do

> things… already [Anette started at IM about a month before the interview] two or three [employees] have told us about what they have seen and done. People are constantly abroad and they tell stories of the projects that they have seen… - Anette

> That must be engaging? - Interviewer

> I believe so, I really do. It seems really important… - Anette

However, the increased workload on the professionals gives little time and space for storytelling and for some it is frustrating.

> I just came back from Palestine. Many here have worked with Palestine for several years and would like to hear how the process is progressing, but I do not have time [to sit down and tell them about it] and have to go into my office [instead of joining the coffee table] – Ulrika

The sharing of experiences is not something that is scheduled but rather the storytellers engage in these during coffee breaks and in other informal occasions. Additionally, it provides input for the people who work in-house and provides an image for them about what is going on in the projects 'out there'. This seems to be important for the professionals at the headquarters in order to maintain a sense of what the real objective of their work is.

> … we who work a little bit more in-house, need some more input on what is going on out on the field. We are trying to promote such things by providing seminars during the semesters. We also try to get those who have been out on the field to come home and tell us about their trip… This way we get some of this closeness, a sense of what we really are working towards… one need a reminder - Ingrid

> I have good understanding of how they [managers at regional offices abroad] view things and does not only get the headquarters perspective… it is also important to travel and see how things are abroad… you will forget with time and it is easy to just identify with the headquarters… [it is important] to be reminded and can gain insight in their situation… it is important to change roles, it is good for the organisation that you can see both perspectives. - Ulrika

There is an immediate risk of loosing contact with the field and Ulrika emphasises that one should not only have the perspective of the headquarters as one could identify strongly with it and forget what is going on 'out there'. The stories are a helpful reminder.

> I personally think it is very important, because it is why I work here. Otherwise, I could just as well work anywhere else and 'just' be an economist… - Anette

For Anette, the stories provide two important inputs: she is reminded about the purpose of the organisation *and* she gets an understanding of how the funds are spent. Hence, the employees may develop a deeper understanding of their tasks. Furthermore, the stories are important for IM in order to validate for the donors how their money is being used, as a way of letting them know that it is making a difference.

> These stories are very important in clarifying for the donors [when we meet them] what difference the money does. - Bo

> I believe this kind of events or stories are very good to see with own eyes because it makes it possible for you to transmit them to donors in Sweden and to the board. - Bo

> We talk a lot of the stories and the things we do in our projects since it is this information we give to our donors, both existing and when we recruit new ones. -Erik

> When I explain what we do to our donors I cannot talk about rights and obligations. We need to tell stories about people of flesh and blood and how we support them. - Erik

Erik explains that the stories need to be vividly told and that pictures and other artefacts can be useful in providing depth in the stories. Bo also put emphasis on the need to see events with your own eyes because it makes it possible to narrate these stories to the donors and justify the use of their money. Additionally, the stories seem to be important for the employees as they help them to make sense of their work and remember the important mission they should pursue. By remembering this, their work could be more meaningful for them and be a useful motivation factor.

4.4.4 Heavy reporting

This section aims to describe the increasing demands and how the interviewees talk about this. It is representing the 'business' side of the contradictory context within IM and clearly gives rise to some frustrations among the interviewees. Due to increased demands on NPO's to increase transparency and to work more professionally, the administration takes more of the employees' time. Although, the board's guidelines do state that the organisation must limit administration costs to 20 per cent of total turnover. With increasing demands on writing reports, the interviewees inevitably are forced to pay less attention to the original core activities such as setting up aid projects in Sweden and abroad.

> … we have extreme demands in evaluate things that most of the time is not possible to evaluate. We produce enormous amounts of papers and reports… To me it is contraindicating, as it is the meeting [between humans] that is the important. – Kjell

The interviewees agree that the reporting is extensive and often hinders flexibility and creates obstacles in many projects. However, they simultaneously emphasise the need for transparency and some report writing and articulate that it can be justified in most cases.

> It is very good that we have so much focus on showing results and transparency… But it can also…have the effect that you put so much focus on result-control and the evaluation of the results, that you spend a lot of resources and that it does not fill any function… The balance is important – Ulrika

> I think that it is justified because we depend on people who are willing to donate to our activities and it is very good with control, insight and transparency. Of course, this leads to administration… which is a pity, but I understand the purpose. - Gabriella

Bo stresses that the demands on IM can be justified. However, many projects are impossible to realise as the demands also effect the small partner organisations that are subject to IM's projects. Evidently, some projects that were made possible some

years ago are no longer achievable since these small organisations simply cannot manage to meet these demands.

> I think it [the external demands on reporting] is a bit too extensive. Because, we do activities, in environments that are underprivileged, with small organisations, and we have to demand professional reports from them…I think it has gone too far in that sense… It might have been too vague demands before, but things [projects] might have happened then that does not happened today – Bo

As a result of extensive report writing and increasing amount of bureaucracy, IM is sometimes obliged to overlook some potential projects.

> … we discuss a lot that we say no to financing of projects because we think 'we are not prepared to take this bureaucracy', it interferes with the organisation too much – Kjell

4.4.5   Meaningful work

The strong emphasis of engagement among the interviewees is often related to how they view their work and the objective of IM. Less pay and long working hours is seemingly acceptable for the interviewees due to the sense that they are contributing to something meaningful and view their work as such.

> It is a cool thing to think about, that you do activities with a value…you get a value in what you do… if I were to quit at IM, I think I would miss this value rather soon. The knowledge about all the change and development that takes place through our activities, people change because of what we do. - Erik

The visibility of a job and the fact that it makes a difference is a motivator for these interviewees. When they talk about it, they are rather passionate about it (using words like cool, amazing, inspiring, fascinating) and connect feelings to it (using words like feeling frustrated). It is connected to a great deal of emotion and engagement.

> I would have said that it is amazing to feel that you are contributing to something. That you actually see that it [the work] leads to sustainable development in the world – Gabriella when asked about why one should work at IM

> … I find it very satisfying to work at IM… you can visit [projects abroad] and see if there has been an improvement for these people and the projects. It is very satisfying with such quick feedback. – Ulrika

The engagement in their work entails more than just doing a good job. It is not sufficient just to show good results and help the business grow, rather, the engagement is connected to being engaged in order to achieve an important objective.

> … I feel that I make a difference every day. You really do. It is not about developing and selling products to gain increased dividends for the stockowners… here it helps to increase the welfare for the producer groups. That is amazing. - Gabriella

> You might be irritated [of increasing profit goals in for-profits] and wonder where the money is going… but it is not like that here. It is important, not because you want to raise the dividends but rather to contribute to the operations… [within IM]. – Anette

> I believe that people see this as a job that entails an added value, that you feel that you come to work and contributes to something, you do not produce plastic pellets but rather come here and feel that you do something that makes sense, something that one builds one's identity from. - Dick

The business discourse is disconnected from what is perceived as meaningful work. Concepts that relate to business such as efficiency and profitability are downplayed in this sense and the 'greater objective' is stressed as more important.

> The organisation gives me energy from the work we do, both here in Sweden and abroad. – Ingrid

However, IM has become more marketizised and roles are becoming more specialised. Thus, as Dick explains, people are starting to view their job as regular jobs.

> Many [employees] thinks it contributes to something to work at IM. But I think that more employees now than before tries to view it as a job [regular job]. That IM has moved in that direction, and I think it is good. - Dick

Throughout the chapter, we have accounted for what we see as the most salient and interesting themes. A great deal of the empirical material shows how the interviewees talked about their work and the NPO context. What is prominent is how they very specifically define themselves and others in an interrelated way. Additional attention has been directed towards the frustrations that were narrated by the interviewees as they discussed how different view of work, increasing demands and increased specialisation affects them and their work. Identity theory has helped us in making sense and understanding what the interviewees has provided us with. In the following chapter, we will, from an identity theory perspective, discuss the empirical material.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter we provide the reader with a discussion around our empirical material through our theoretical lens of identity and identification. Our main findings are accounted for in four sections: being a professional in a NPO, in-group and out-group, specialisation and division of labour and lastly, storytelling. Following this, we pay some attention to side findings and make suggestions for further research.

5.1   Main findings

In our study, we have explored how a group of professionals in a NPO understand their work and the tension-filled, contradictory context they conduct their work in. Interesting findings around how they understand and define themselves and their roles in the organisation, as well as how they relate to their work and the organisation, has provided us with in-sight of their view of being professionals in this context and how they manage it. Certain contradictions while navigating within the NPO context, characterised by both the logic of marketization and the logic of philanthropy, appeared to be a recurring topic among the interviewees in our study.

The professionals we have interviewed are what we would like to define as navigators in a tension-filled and contradictory work context, balancing as line-dancers between various pressures and demands from their environment. This navigation and the consequential frustrations take form through multiple ways, providing us with cues, which can be seen as signs of on-going identity work. From the conducted interviews it is noticeable that the interviewees have various social categories that they classify themselves in. Not only do they categorise themselves into categories based on gender, age, family constellations and so forth, but also based on their type of education and expertise. Furthermore, they categorise themselves as being professionals at IM, which is the social identity in focus for this discussion. This social identity is created in a context with high uncertainty due to the on-going changes in the non-profit sector and the tension between business discourse and non-profit discourse. Thus, the present condition of uncertainty increases the need for distinctive identification and delimitation between in- and out-group. Interestingly though, they do not seem to struggle so much with it, rather they see a challenge in accommodating themselves to it.

5.1.1 Being a NPO professional

From our empirical material, we identified on-going identity work around being professionals within the group of professionals. These individuals navigate in a contradictory context, labelled by others and by themselves as 'professionals'. According to Cheney and Ashcraft (2007), the term 'professional' is used in everyday talk without being deeply understood. Further on, they argue for the term as a rather 'hard' term, deriving from business discourse. Hence, this label places the professionals at IM on the more professional/business side of the organisation, making them more associated with the processes of marketization and professionalization.

However, from what we have found in our study, we see that these professionals do not completely identify with this label and the generic meaning that is associated with it. It is more complex than that. From our interviews, we see great emphasis and identification with the non-profit discourse and logic. We interpret this from *what* the interviewees put emphasis on when they talk about their work and work context and *how* the interviewees talk about their work and work context. With their strong ties to the non-profit discourse, we see another kind of professional, not so tightly connected to the business discourse. When describing how one should be in order to be a good professional in the non-profit context, that is being competent/doing a good job, and how one should be in order to fit in, they do not describe a 'professional' as it is used in business discourse. It is emphasised that the expertise needed is not only related to specific roles or work tasks, rather it revolves around a certain understanding of the non-profit context. Additionally, a certain approach to work is demanded which is not linked to a certain expertise but rather to humanity. This approach includes openness, acceptance and meeting humans from diverse backgrounds at eye level. Thus, these professionals are labelled as belonging to business discourse, however they are inspired by the non-profit logic in how they understand their work and context. They define a good professional as having the right expertise but also stress the need for being able to adopt and identify with the human logic of the non-profit identity.

5.1.2   In-group and out-group

5.1.2.1   Everything is relative

From our interpretations of the empirical material, we see contradictions in how interviewees understand their work and how they understand the organisation. They define IM's goals and missions as some of the main reasons for working in the organisation, and emphasise how striving to fulfil them adds meaningfulness to their work. Simultaneously, as they stress the importance of the organisation as a do-gooder, they strictly disapprove when people around them label *them* as such. They argue that the volunteers are the ones doing the 'real work', while their role is to support the volunteers and act as organisers. Applying Ashforth and Mael (1989), the relational and comparative dimension of self-categorising can provide an explanation for this contradiction. When people in society, with no strong connection to non-profit work, relate to the professionals at IM, many normally view them as do-gooders. However, as all of the interviewees have a background doing nonprofit work, later changing to positions as employed by NPOs, they do not define themselves as do-gooders in comparison to the current volunteers. It could be argued that the interviewees indeed too are do-gooders, although it is always relative. By using the volunteers as a benchmark, arguably and not surprisingly, they do not depict themselves as do-gooders. Consequently, this may be a reason to why the professionals find it difficult to identify with the image of being do-gooders.

5.1.2.2   Defining in- and out-group

Although a definition of an identity is never clear-cut, our empirical material on how the interviewees are describing who they *are* and who they *are not* respectively, is of interest when seeking to understand their meanings of work. Our empirical material provides us with a rich description of how they talk about in-group and out-group (as described by, for example Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar, 2010). These groups are described rather saliently and made distinctive as follows.

Emphasised throughout the empirical material is engagement in social mission and humanity, describing the in-group and thus placing it within the nonprofit discourse.

A prototype of the group could be said to describe attributes such as doing good, being devoted and passionate to social mission, humanity and being open-minded towards humans and culture. Indeed, both the organisation as well as the ideal professional at IM is described as being warm, open-minded and engaged in humans. Furthermore, they describe the in-group as a function serving the organisation, rather than executing the actual 'good work'. Interestingly, descriptions of stereotypes are frequent in the material as the interviewees describe their connection to the in-group and distance themselves from the out-group. In depicting the out-group(s), these can be seen as divided in two camps. Firstly, the empirical material suggests an out-group that describes the ones that actually do the 'good work', i.e. the volunteers, clearly positioned within the nonprofit discourse. This group's salient attributes consist of good deeds, being Samaritans, who selflessly engage in nonprofit work. Additionally, important individuals contributing to a better world and adding to sustainability make up the group. Hence, this group is placed in the logic of philanthropy. Secondly, we see that the other camp constitute attributes associated with business discourse and putting interest in 'unimportant' matters (such as golf) rather than 'important' matters (such as contributing to something meaningful). Emphasis on 'hard' terms such as efficiency, finance, and overall describing this group as 'very corporate', is persistent in the empirical material. As opposed to the in-group and the other out-group, this group is described as colder and associated with the marketization logic. Furthermore, the interviewees provided us with signs of frustration when they talked about how other people generally viewed them, signalling dissent with being associated with an out-group.

Following Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, (2006), by doing these clear distinctions of in- and out-group, the interviewees identify themselves by describing the in-group as something they *are* simultaneously as defining the out-group as something they *are not*. They are somewhere in between the two out-groups, the 'pure' nonprofit discourse and the business discourse. Categorising and ordering the three groups thus help them achieve and maintain a sense of belongingness through social categorisation. In order to make these groups as distinctive as possible, stereotypical perceptions are often produced of in- and out-group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In the empirical material we have seen them label themselves as engaged citizens, the volunteers as do-gooders or Samaritans, and the 'business' out-group as golfers or as

being very corporate. As suggested by Jenkins (2008), the stereotyping of groups and their members is explained by cognitive simplification, needed to manage information overload usually occurring in complex contexts.

In manoeuvring in this tension-filled context that characterises NPOs, clear groups help the professionals to determine who they *are* and who they *are not*. Consequently, by identifying with the in-group, they reduce some of the uncertainty and ambiguity that arises from the tug-or-war between the logic of marketization and the logic of philanthropy. Following Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994), the interviewees showed congruence between their own values and those of the organisation, which implies a strong identification with the organisation as a whole. For the professionals, this process of making in- and out-groups distinct is seemingly helpful in managing the tension between marketization and philanthropy.

Developing a good understanding of the whole organisation and what is going on, both inside and outside of it, was emphasised as important by the interviewees. Constant reminders through stories, interaction with others and symbolism, seems to facilitate the processes of organisational identification.

5.1.3   Specialisation and division of labour

Our empirical material provided us with further interesting contradictions. We found it interesting how the professionals defined their work as 'just any other job' at the same time as they find their work meaningful. In one way, they identify with the organisation, the whole, and emphasise meaningful work. On the other hand, they do not see their specific work tasks as different to what they would have done in any other type of organisation. This implies a tension between different sources of identification. It does not necessarily mean that they are struggling, rather that they are applying various identities in order to manage the tension.

Due to the marketization and professionalization of the nonprofit sector, specialisation and the division of labour have increased. Drawing from Ashforth and Mael (1989), an increasing number of departments mean more intra- rather than intergroup interactions. The proximity as well as the similarity of tasks within a department

entails more interaction with group peers and thus less interaction with other departments. Different departments are nested together by the organisation's social mission but the interviewees describe how interests and view of work varies across departments and render some work processes rather heavy. Furthermore, it is clear that individuals at IM previously had, what Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) define as a more holographic view of IM and were more engaged in each other's work. Being a member of the organisation was seen as one social identity, hence it was the source of organisational identification.

However, the social identity in the organisation today seems to comprise multiple contrasting, loosely tied identities. As argued by Ashforth and Mael (1989), individuals are likely to develop different identities depending on which department they are in and thus whom they mostly interact with. It seems that the professionals at IM create their social identity not only by deriving from the organisation as a whole but also from their particular work group or department. Ashforth and Mael (1989) further argue that how one defines the self is affected by symbolic interaction with others through a process of interpreting the responses of others in social interactions. Arguably, who these others are have influence on which responses one gets. For example, if a subunit becomes dominated by business discourse, its members will become affected by each other and collectively develop identities more influenced by business discourse. As mentioned, due to the marketization, the professionals' now have clearer, more defined roles than previously. This entails the consequence of a move away from being IM workers to stronger feelings of belongingness to subunits. The members of a subgroup draw from the social identity of the respective groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Hence, this implies a risk of loosing focus on the main objective (social mission) of IM. This could be problematic since the subunits might have more focus on meeting short-term outcomes and goals.

By making core values and aspects of the wider IM social identity more salient, it could be maintained as the most prominent source for social identification. Following Hogg and Terry (2000), self-concept describes how the self is defined by group membership and how group membership has impact on self-definition resulting in 'groupy' behaviour. Hypothetically, implications for the professionals in IM could be that they see themselves as belonging to a 'professional department' within IM, and

thus through social cognitive processes act more as business people and less as IM people. This is, however, *not* something that we are able to see in the empirical material as the interviewees seems to embrace the core values of the organisation. Nevertheless, increased specialisation and division of labour is in the present and the risk of 'groupy' behaviour is immediate. Therefore, as suggested by Hogg and Terry (2000), by maintaining subgroup and superordinate group identity equally salient the intersubgroup relations could be efficiently managed. The lack of congruence between the ways to achieve the goals may impede joint identification between the different departments. This conflict of identities between the social identities of being a professional at IM and of being a professional in one's work group complicates the organisational identification process.

For the professionals themselves it is of importance to interact between the groups and keep in mind that they are all 'IM people' rather than defining themselves as being a part of some department. We argue that through interaction across the departments, one single congruent identity across the organisation's professionals is more likely to be obtained. As the professionals suggests themselves, telling stories and exchanging experiences through face-to-face interaction, could facilitate this or at least keep them from losing sight of the overall objective.

5.1.4 Storytelling

In the previous two sections, we have discussed how the interviewees put emphasis on the need for social interaction with others in the organisation, and just not within their specific workgroup or department. What seems to be salient in how they talk about these issues is the call for field stories. It is of importance for them to hear from other professionals and from volunteers about what is happening 'out there'. They talk about how spending all their time at the headquarters without this input from the field and/or other departments make them develop frustrations. These feelings of frustration seem connected to the concern of maintaining the view of the whole. Lacking reminders about what activities IM contribute to, make it easier to loose sight of IM's main objective (and also their own main objective for working in this context). Hence, the symbolic interactions Ashforth and Mael (1989) stress as important for newcomers in the organisation, are thus also very important for the

professionals in the this particular context. This implies that organisational identification is an on-going process, breeding the constant need for reminders. Additionally, this is likely to, as further argued by the authors; result in increased identification with the organisation. According to Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, and Swan (2002), storytelling implies an efficient way to make facts more personal and to create and/or reinforce a social identity. As discussed, the interviewees seem to acknowledge storytelling as useful and an important tool in navigating in and managing the contradictory context. However, the need for more stories is emphasised but difficult to achieve due to lack of time and resources.

The stories and storytelling have several important contributions for the professionals and IM as an organisation. Storytelling contributes by:

- *Bringing* the field and the activities to the headquarters. Having scarce resources makes it difficult for the professionals themselves to experience and review IM's work (especially abroad).
- *Justifying* the work and effort that the professionals put into the work. This is related to providing information about how the resources are being spent. Additionally, it has impact on how the professionals see their work and can add meaningfulness to it.
- *Providing* a deeper understanding of the professionals' work as it offer insights in how their specific work tasks have impact on the overall objectives.
- *Adding* credibility towards donors and external members of the organisation. Vividly told stories and clearly communicated reports add transparency and trustworthiness to the organisation.
- *Institutionalising* the professionals in IM. Helping the professionals to see themselves as a part of IM.

Apart from these main findings, we have come across some interesting side findings, which will be accounted for in the following section as they lay outside of the scope for this study but could be interesting suggestions for further research.

5.2 Further research

The purpose of this paper has been to explore how professionals in a NPO experience and make sense of their work. The study has resulted in some main findings around how these individuals understand their work context, which is composed of both elements of marketization and philanthropy, and how they navigate in this. However, during our research process, some side findings have emerged which we see as interesting suggestions for further research.

Based on the material collected, how the professionals understand their situation at this specific point in time was revealed, but created no clear picture of what developments over time looked like in the organisation. As NPOs are moving towards increasingly professionalized and results-oriented ways of working, it would be desirable to conduct a study which spans over a longer period of time. This would also provide the possibility to observe how this development affects the professionals and their ways of talking about their work and themselves and how it differs over time. A more comparative study could possibly extend the picture of the individual's identity work and how identity is adopted to environment and situations.

The professionals that were subject to our study all held managerial positions. However, we refrained from viewing them as managers as we were more interested in how they were generally affected by the marketization and professionalization themselves. Thus, we did not delve into how their leadership and management practices can be understood. We did however attain some insight in how the interviewees talked about leadership and how they understood their positions as managers in a NPO. Some topics concerning how leadership style might be different from for-profit organisation and how time and resource constraints had effect on it were recurring. A similar case study could be of interest to conduct in order to gain insight of how the marketization and professionalization might affect leadership in NPOs. By drawing upon identity theory, interesting contributions to the phenomenon possibly could be obtained.

Furthermore, as discussed throughout this study, storytelling seems to be of particular importance in NPOs. Further research could be conducted in a similar NPO in order

to study how managers use this as a managerial tool. The concept of storytelling might be an efficient way of conducting leadership and management since, as we have seen in our study, strong and influential leadership is needed with much emphasis on engaging and motivating employees and volunteers. Managing and leading volunteers simultaneously as professionals seem to be a fairly complex task as they have quite different interests at heart. The lack of an 'instrument of power' over the volunteers means a different view of leadership in comparison to leading employees (paid staff).

Lastly, by drawing from the literature on professionalism, some contributions to the field might be added by conducting research on how professionals in NPOs can be seen as professionals, that is, belonging to a shared salient profession. Who is and who is not a professional is quite debated in literature and new views on the matter are constantly evolving. What qualifies as professional varies and a clear definition is debatable. However, we call for a possibility to assign these NPO professionals to one, common professional label. As the NPO sector is constantly growing, the interest for this could arguably increase. By having a clear profession, these professionals could perhaps easier identify with their work through a professional identity and thus manage the contradictory context with more ease.

In this chapter, we discussed our main findings, which are based on what we found particularly interesting and from what have been most salient in our empirical material. We have interpreted the empirical material by drawing on identity theory in order to frame and make sense of what we see in this specific NPO context. Furthermore, some suggestions for further research have been presented. In the following chapter, we will briefly present our findings and account for our theoretical contribution.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This last chapter starts off with a brief review of our study, in order to provide the reader with a reminder of what has been done. Further, we account for our main findings that have been revealed from our empirical material and discussed in the previous chapter. Lastly, we present the theoretical contributions of this study.

6.1 Brief review of the study

The purpose of this study was to, from an interpretive perspective, explore how professionals in a NPO understand and relate to their work in a context characterised by contradictions due to marketization and professionalization. Through a qualitative case study consisting of semi-structured interviews as our primary source of empirical material, we used identity theory to make sense of the phenomenon. Our aim was not to provide general implications, but rather to provide deep insight and understanding of what is going on in the professionals' context.

6.2 Main findings

Using identity theory as our theoretical lens, we noticed several interesting themes in our empirical material. However, some findings were particularly salient and were therefore brought into discussion in chapter five.

Being a professional in a NPO – how they understand the context
How the professionals talked about their work and role signals on-going identity work in how they understand their role as professionals. The term professional is loaded with symbolism and business discourse, which consequently, would place the professionals at the business side of the organisational context. However, how they talk about their work suggests a strong identification with the nonprofit discourse. They seem to, with ease, acknowledge the nonprofit logic and thus, they do not identify with the label professional from a business perspective. The professionals ascribe strong focus on the importance for professionals to understand the nonprofit context and thus embody certain traits and attributes such as openness and acceptance towards humans. By adopting the organisational ground values, the professionals can thus distance themselves from the marketized part of NPO and identify more with the human logic of the nonprofit identity.

In-group and out-group

In the empirical material, contradictions in how the professionals understand their work is recurring. It is obvious that they see the organisation as doing good and contributing to important objectives. However, they are reluctant to recognise themselves as do-gooders. Simultaneously, when they talk about people belonging to the business discourse they often distance themselves from how these are described. The relational and comparative dimension of self-categorising suggests that everything is relative and that the professionals constantly categorise themselves in comparison to other groups (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) For them, the volunteers clearly are the do-gooders in this context, which means that the professionals cannot share this label. By assigning prototypes to in- and out-group these are made salient by making noticeable attributes distinctive. By using these out-groups as benchmarks, the professionals are able to describe what they are. The in-group they describe and subscribe to, is placed somewhere in between of the two out-groups, meaning that they are not do-gooders, nor are they identifying with business discourse. Thus, in navigating through the contradictory demands of marketization and philanthropy, the professionals has designed a group to which they identify, helping them to make sense of and understand the context.

Specialisation and division of labour

One effect of marketization and professionalization is specialisation and division of labour. As demands of increased efficiency, combined with more business practices enter the NPO, the professionals becomes more focused in departments and subgroups. This division of labour entails more interaction within the department and less between departments. In identifying more with a specific group, the professionals develop different views of work and some tension arises through this, as they have different interests at heart. Another issue that comes from subgroup identification is increased focus on short-term goals aiming to meet specific demands. Hence, the risk of loosing sight of the social mission is immediate. This 'groupy' behaviour could, according to Hogg and Terry (2000), be avoided by making sure that the organisational identity is equally salient to the group identities. In the empirical material, we see frequent examples of how the professionals talk about the need for intragroup interaction and input from other departments. It seems important for the

professionals to maintain the picture of the whole and to identify with the organisational identity. In becoming increasingly marketized, demands of efficiency and focus on business practices threats to separate the professionals from the philanthropic objective of IM. However, they appear to be able to manage this and maintain focus on the social mission by identifying strongly with the organisation's values and vision.

Storytelling

The interviewees frequently expressed the need for and importance of field stories to get a better comprehension of what is happening 'out there'. These stories could be provided by volunteers as well as by the professionals themselves. Not only the contents of the stories were emphasised as important but also the social interaction in sharing these was understood as offering a broader picture of the organisation. As argued by Ashforth and Mael (1989), social interactions are likely to lead to increased identification with the organisation. Being far away from the field or being limited to work at the headquarters seemingly created frustrations for the professionals as they experienced lost overall view of the organisation. The storytelling as such make facts more personal and vivid and thus has a capacity to reinforce identification with the organisation (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, and Swan, 2002). By identifying with the organisation, the organisational values and objectives are brought closer to the professionals and thus help them in acknowledging the social mission. Hence, the feared effects of marketization and professionalization are likely to have less impact.

The contributions of storytelling in a NPO are manifold. Firstly, it brings the field and the activities to the headquarters and provides important reminders of what is going on 'out there' for the professionals. Secondly, it helps the professionals to see their work as justified as they get a sense of how the resources are being spent. Thirdly, the professionals can develop a deeper understanding of their work as they get a better idea of what their specific tasks results in. Fourthly, a sense of community is strengthened and helps the professionals to feel as a part of the whole organisation. Fifthly, it adds credibility in IM's activities towards donors and external members of the organisation.

In conclusion, with these main findings from our study, we provide some insights from a new perspective on how professionals in a professionalised NPO understand and manage their contradictory context. By putting individuals and their subjective understandings at the focus in our research and draw upon identity theory as a way to make sense of and frame our empirical material, we provide a useful way of obtaining understanding of the phenomenon.

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