

**Institute of Management
Department of Organizational Behaviour**

THESIS SUMMARY

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Socialization process within multicultural organization

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I. RESEARCH MOTIVATION

Organisational socialisation is a continuously active research field, which has become a popular topic in organizational psychology and management literature, as it is apparent from the several literature reviews published recently (for example: Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Morrison & Callister, 1998; Moreland & Levine, 2000; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Ashforth, Sluss & Harrison, 2007). However, this increasing interest in socialization mostly resulted in quantitative research that “only scratches the surface of the individual’s phenomenological experience of the dynamic process of socialization” (Saks and Ashforth, 1997:270). The main reason could be that these studies were written within the framework of classical models of organizational socialization (stage models, socialization tactics, proactivity and learning) and have applied simplified assumptions regarding the nature of time and organizational context, as well as the direction and nature of the interaction between the individual and organization. The assumption was made that time is limited and linear (see stage models), the newcomers enter the organizational community defined by socialization tactics, and that there exists a one way relation between the individual and the organization (in the case of socialization tactics and stage models the direction is top-down, focusing on the organizational influences, but in proactivity and learning models the focus is on the opposite direction and concentrates on the initiatives of the individuals).

A more nuanced understanding of the socialization process was offered by qualitative studies that were written on the following basic assumptions: (1) Socialization is a *cyclic process evolving in real time*, along several turning points (Bullis and Bach, 1989; Bourassa and Ashforth, 1998). (2) Newcomers enter not only the organizational community, defined by the socialization tactics, but they enter as well an *unstructured context, not controlled by the management* (Hart and Miller, 2005), and thus they *enter several (sub)cultures* when join the organization (Bourassa and Ashforth, 1998; Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson, 2005; Ashforth, Sluss and Harrison, 2007). (3) Socialization occurs along the *individual-organization interaction*, where the organization structures and shapes the socialization process, while the individuals integrate, modify or neglect their experiences when entering, and play an

active role in their own socialization process, during which they have an influence on the other socialization actors (and in this way have an influence on the organization). Furthermore significant personal changes take place (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008).

The latest research based on the latter assumptions operationalize organizational socialization with the use of the identity concept (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2000; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Pratt et al., 2006; Ashforth, 2007; Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008). Two main directions of these researches can be differentiated: (1) Studies that stress the identity regulating impact of several organizational practices (e.g. orientation training, mentoring) (e.g. Pratt, 2000; Anderson-Gough Grey, and Robson, 2005, Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) and subcultures (e.g. diSanza, 1995; Bourassa and Ashforth, 1998). (2) Studies that focus on the identity work of the newcomers and assume a significant and continuous personal change during the process, where the individual plays an active role (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2007). In either option we can discover signs that are an indication for the interaction between the individual and organization, and in both cases they prove to be important for the development of the socialization process. The studies that focus on the identity work of the individual recognize the importance of social validation (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006, Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2007), and as possible resource for the identity work they mention several organizational characteristics (e.g. organizational artefacts, values) and practices (mentoring, orientation) (Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). The studies that focus on the identity regulation recognize (but do not investigate) that these organizational practices have an impact but do not define the identity work of the individual (Pratt, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Based on the above mentioned arguments, further research is needed, where: (1) the socialization process is operationalized as an interplay between identity regulation and identity work, mediating between the organization and individual; and (2) qualitative, longitudinal research methods are used, in order to capture real time, and explore the process along the different turning points.

The research planned along the above mentioned arguments required an organizational context, which itself may be seen as an „*extreme case*”: in this instance,

the processes to be examined were present much more saliently and were easier to describe (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The chosen BIG4 organization may be seen as an extreme case in that given its pyramid-like structure, it fosters an “up – or - out” system: under very strict time constraints, anyone who does not move up one level every 1 or 2 years tends to either leave of their own volition, or is asked to leave. Thus, the process of socialization becomes critically important both for the individual (the chance of a fast career) as well as for the organization (returns on recruitment and selection expenditures depend on it).

However, regarding socialization within BIG4 organization there are only a few qualitative, longitudinal researches and all of them were conducted in an Anglo-Saxon environment (e.g. Coffey, 1994; Anderson-Gough et al., 1998). These researches identified the essential elements of the professional identity of BIG4 assistants and consultants, the identity regulating practices that contribute to it (Coffey, 1994; Anderson-Gough et al., 1998), and some identity work tactics were also described (Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006). Furthermore, these researches have described the relationship between the organization and employee as ambivalent (Dirsmith and Covalleski, 1985; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006), and highlighted the importance of several subcultures (e.g. departmental, professional or gender) and different organizational characters in the socialization process (e.g. Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson, 2005). A serious restriction of these studies is, that they focused on identity regulation or identity work, and did not capture real time (explore the process along the different turning points).

Therefore, further longitudinal, qualitative research is needed, *aiming a better understanding of individual socialization (seen as interplay of identity work and identity regulation) within a BIG4 organization (seen as multicultural context, formed by several subcultures), where real time is considered (process shaped by several turning points).*

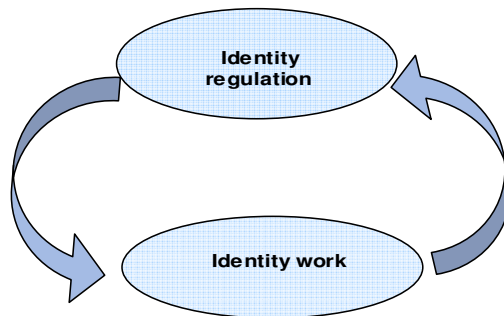
II. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

i. The conceptual framework of research

As I described above, the present research focuses on an area warranting further examination: *a process-oriented approach to the individual's socialization in a multicultural context.*

Organizational socialization is operationalised with the use of the identity concept, and defined as the *interplay of identity work and identity regulation, mediating between individual and organization.*

Fig. 1: The process of organizational socialization



The analysis of empirical data revealed that the interviewed individuals were struggling to (trans)form and realize their desired identities, so the above mentioned definition was further elaborated. Consequently, organizational *socialization is defined as desired identity realization process through the interplay of identity work and identity regulation, mediating between individual and organization, and through which the individual gains acceptance in the new group(s) (subcultures) and (trans)forms his/her desired identity.* With this definition I accept that the desired identity is a mechanism regulating the individual's identity work (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009).

Desired (or possible) *identity* is characterized as a defining aspect of the identity of the individual as pertaining to the future. Through desired identity the individual is able to answer questions like who s/he might become, who s/he wants to become, who s/he does not wish to become and what s/he fears (Markus and Nurius, 1986). In the

thesis the concept of desired identity and possible identity are used as synonyms, which is a frequent solution within the relevant literature (e.g. Ibarra, 1999). However, it is important to differentiate desired identity from true and ideal identities. As long as desired identity is open for continuous change through identity work, the concept of true identity assumes, in a very essentialist way, that a stable, core identity is fully formed by adulthood, which resides inside, at the core of our being, and the individual struggles to reveal it through identity work (Ibarra, 2003). Because of this important difference, the concept of desired identity will be used in the research, even though the individuals may perceive it as their true identity¹. The *ideal identity* refers to the identity expected, desired by the organization, and has an identity regulating function in the (trans)formation process of desired identity (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Wieland, 2010). In the literature we can also find the concept of *aspirational identity* (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009), which in this research will be considered as a specific type of desired identity: in case that desired identity can't be reached, and needs continuous identity development.

To take into consideration real time, and not time assumptions, like stage models do, I studied the process through turning points narratives of individuals (Bullis and Bach, 1989). Those events² were considered *turning points*, that were perceived by individual as threats (challenges) to desired identity realization, and that questioned the desired identity narrative continuity, leading to conscious identity work. We can talk about *identity threats* if the expression or (trans)formation of desired identity in the organization or work encounters difficulties (e.g. desired identity and work process/content are not reconcilable). In this case the individual struggles to transform or decrease identity threat through the use of different identity work tactics, then s/he formulates her/his conclusions, which can be identity development and/or defense, and integrates them into her/his personal narrative, in order to keep its continuity.

The events perceived as turning points have either taken place or are imagined (e.g. an event possible in the future, which the individual is afraid of), or may be ones related to the individual's recognition/„dawning”.

¹ The myth of true identity was described in detail in the article from Costas and Fleming (2009).

² These may be events which have either taken place or are imagined (e.g. an event possible in the future, which the individual is afraid of), or may be ones related to the individual's recognition/„dawning”.

In a following step I will interpret the turning points from an identity regulation perspective, in order to identify those organizational practices that induce conscious identity work. Special attention will be given to the ideal identity as an identity regulation mechanism.

The definition of organizational socialization given above assumes the impact of identity work not only on the personal narratives, but on the identity regulation tactics too, consequently on the organization too. However, in the thesis I am not going to study this process, or the possible organizational changes caused by it.

As a last step of the conceptual framework is important to formulate the organizational theory assumed in the research. Taking into consideration the definition of organizational socialization given above, the assumptions regarding the nature of the process, and the research goals and questions, the empirical research is conducted within the interpretative paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). According to this the individuals, embedded in local contexts, actively shape their socialization process, and struggle to understand what is going on within and around them (Weick, 1979). The individuals' turning point narratives correspond to the "storied resources" approach (Smith and Sparkes, 2008), which assumes that the identity narratives are shaped by individual and social influences and investigates how the individual is considering or neglecting these influences while (trans)forming his/her identity narrative. Consequently, the identity is not only a cognitive, internal process, but a social interaction too (Taylor and Littleton, 2006).

ii. The research question

The research question is the central element of Maxwell's (1996) interactive research model, which maps out both the topic and methodology of the research, and it is closely linked to the research goals described above.

The central research question is the following:

"How do newcomers at one of the BIG4 audit firms experience the process of socialization?"

At this point, I will proceed to break down the broad research question described above into sub-questions. The goal is to make it possible to examine the central question more closely as well as to discover my own presuppositions of the topics (in other words, these are not the interview questions of the research project).

The first research sub-question laid out in the thesis proposal was the following: *What identity work are newcomers performing during this process?* A closer examination revealed that individuals participating in the study strived to realize their desired identities in the process, similarly to the research conclusions presented by Ibarra (1999) and Grey (2004). The nature of desired identities and the newcomers efforts to (trans)form and protect them differed (partly), however, from those described in the studies mentioned. Therefore the first sub-question was modified:

1. *How do newcomers struggle to realize their desired identity?*

The question is aimed at a process oriented examination of socialization; in its focus, explicitly, is the identity work of the individual. I will attempt to examine this through the identity work performed to realize, transform or defend the desired identity. Answering the questions allows us to identify the turning points which shape the process and the identity work tactics employed by the individual; it also becomes possible to determine their transformation over time.

Thus, answering this question actually assumes answering the following sub-questions as well: (1) *“what identity threats perceives the individual in the process?”*; (2) *“what type of identity work is the individual performing?”*; and (3) *“does the desired identity change over the course of the process – and if so, how?”*.

By seeking to answer this last question, I am also interested in exploring how the individual links their desired identity with the organization and/or their profession or their work. Additionally, it becomes possible to examine personal changes, as well: by analyzing the nature of the identity work, as well as its impact, it will become clear whether the individual is focusing on identity development (growth) and/or on protection (survival). I believe this is an important step, because the literature tends to deal with one aspect or another of the process, and examines them separately

2. *What individuals or organizational phenomena play a defining role during the desired identity transformation process, and why?*

This question seeks to answer what resources the individual relies on during their socialization, with a special focus on identity work. Factors covered by the literature might be relevant here: direct supervisors, experienced colleagues as role models; various artifacts (e.g. organizational stories, code of ethics, dress code) or

various socialization tactics employed by the organization (e.g. orientation). These also make it possible to determine what it is that a newcomer pays special attention to: i.e. which elements of the organizational context are relevant as far as the process is concerned (e.g. which subcultures). It will also be possible to determine which organizational context the individual pays attention within the different types of turning point narratives (identity development and/or protection); in other words, we will be able to analyze the process of socialization over time from the perspective of the relevant organizational context. The point of departure for answering this question is the set of identity threats identified earlier: the organizational phenomena and actors they represent are critical as far as the process is concerned. We will thus be able to track their evolution over time.

iii. Research methodology

In accordance with my central research question's nature ('How do newcomers...') I collect and analyse the data based on the guidelines of the case study method with narrative interviews. Yin (2003) also suggests applying this method. He claims that case study strategy is mostly appropriate for (1) how (or why) questions, (2) when the research focuses on contemporary events (3) if the investigator has little or no control over the actual behavioural events (Yin, 2003:9). Additional reason for choosing case study as research method is that my research concentrates on a topic which needs further exploration, and is longitudinal (Stake, 2000).

Before moving on, it is important to clarify what exactly I mean by case in the framework of this specific project. In view of the goals of the research – exploring and understanding the experiences of newcomers during the process of socialization – I will present individual cases, where the unit of research will be the individual's efforts. The methodology applied is similar to the one multi case definition (Maaloe, 2010).

I have chosen a multinational audit firm as my research field (hereinafter referred to as the ORGANIZATION); right now, the company is the most dynamically growing BIG4 in Hungary.

The choice of research field is justified by the following findings:

The research goal – a process-based examination of socialization; i.e. the exploration of possible background mechanisms (focusing especially on the identity work performed during the process) – required a *context* which itself may be seen as an “*extreme case*”: in this instance, the processes to be examined were present much more saliently and were easier to describe (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The ORGANIZATION may be seen as an extreme case in that given its pyramid-like structure, it fosters an “up – or - out” system: under very strict time constraints, anyone who does not move up one level every 2 or 3 years tends to either leave of their own volition, or is asked to leave. Thus, the process of socialization becomes critically important both for the individual (the chance of a fast career) as well as for the organization (returns on recruitment and selection expenditures depend on it). Furthermore, the organization hires some 35-40 new employees each year (as junior employees). Most of them join the audit and tax consultancy department. It therefore became possible for me to track several newcomers during the critical first year of their career. By having access to two departments (audit and tax), it will also become possible to compare the findings.

In the *literature*, only a few studies deal with socialization within audit firms; and all of these studies had been conducted in an Anglo-Saxon context (see, for instance, Anderson – Gough et al., 2001; Anderson-Gough et al., 2005).

An overwhelming majority (80%) of *recent graduates of economics* – who are the focus of my research, given my personal goals – know of the BIG4, and believe these firms would be attractive places to work. They are attracted by a dynamically progressing career path, as well as by the salaries associated with this career (with the salaries verifiably increasing faster than the labor market average). According to AIESEC’s “Most Attractive Workplace” study, members of the BIG4 have consistently been among the top five workplaces listed in recent years. This may indicate a lasting interest on the part of young graduates to work for one of these companies; this is especially true if we consider the research of Bokor and Radácsi (2007). They found that this generation is admittedly very much interested in money matters, strives to get ahead and struggles primarily for their personal and financial goals. When selecting a workplace, the salary and benefits offered is one of their most important considerations, along with career and personal development opportunities.

Following the selection of the organization to serve as my research field, the next important step was determining the sample. In keeping with the traditions of qualitative research, the sample was compiled using not a statistical approach, but a theoretical one; the sample is deliberately small and contextually embedded (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bokor, 2000; Gelei, 2002).

For the reasons above, I decided to examine a sample of newcomers working at two different departments of the ORGANIZATION (auditors and tax consultants). My decision to examine two different departments within the same organization was intended to support a study of the role of different (sub)cultures in the process of socialization. When compiling the sample, I considered the diversity of personal characteristics, with the aim to increase the possibility of appearance of other (sub)cultures too (e.g. gender based). Based on an interview with the HR director, I defined three important individual characteristics - gender, level of education (university vs. college) previous place of residence (countryside vs. Budapest) – along which I tried to diversify the sample. Additionally, I requested the help of HR generalists working in both departments to provide me with interviewees whose performance evaluations varied (good vs. less good)³.

Since I conducted a longitudinal qualitative research, data collection and analysis occurred in parallel with each other, in an iterative way (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The main method of **data collection** is narrative interview (Riessman, 2008) which was done with newcomers in the two departments mentioned above. I followed seven newcomers (four from the audit -, and three from the tax department) in their first critical year in the ORGANISATION and conducted interviews with them three times. The interview dates were settled after a discussion with the HR manager and are to follow the newcomers' working cycle, indicating also the milestones of the first year (after three months, six months and one year). Even though I modified the interview protocols during each wave of data collection in order to capture the emergent themes, I kept common to each set of interviews, questions about the newcomers' experiences

regarding his or her: (1) daily work experiences, with stories regarding the critical incidents; (2) professional identity(-ies), organizational identity, and their relationship; (3) relationships (with their colleagues, other newcomers, mentors, managers, etc.) and (4) the dynamics between their individual and organizational and/or professional identities.

To familiarize myself with the ORGANIZATION I also conducted open-ended interviews with the HR manager and the HR generalists of the two departments, and the newcomers' project managers and mentors. My goal with the HR professionals was to elicit the main success and failure factors for junior employees during the first year, the orientation, performance appraisal and career development practices in the company. These interviewees also facilitated the selection of newcomers in order to have the most diverse sample along the identified factors (e.g. gender, professional background). The interviews with the newcomers' project managers explored on the one hand their role in the newcomers' socialisation, on the other hand reflected on their own first year experience, this way giving me a different perspective on the process.

I have chosen the narrative interview method, because it can reveal the interviewees thoughts, explicit knowledge on the topic and the participants can also express their feelings (Kvale, 1996). Since I conducted a longitudinal research I had the opportunity to return to an interviewee and ask for missing information and clarification.

The data collected through interviews was complemented with additional ones through document analysis (e.g. orientation booklet, documentation of the performance appraisal, news articles on the organization). These secondary data provided me with a richer context for understanding the identity regulation practices used by the ORGANIZATION.

In the present qualitative research, the first step in terms of data analysis was the narrative analysis of the transcripts of the interviews conducted with newcomers to the company (Szokolczyk, 2004; Riessman, 2008); which also provided the opportunity to

³ I asked the HR generalists not to share with me this information, because I did not want to be influenced

write up the individual socialization cases (Mishler, 1996). I decided to use the following two steps for the practical development and analysis of the individual socialization cases: (1) identifying the narratives in the transcript of the interviews; and (2) analyzing the narratives.

During the first phase, identifying the narratives, I considered those parts of the transcripts to be narratives which displayed the following characteristics: (1) there is a clear plot (Pentland, 1999; Riesmann, 2008), with a beginning, a middle and an end (Denzin, 1989); (2) there is a clear sequence of events and a consequence (Riesmann, 2008); and (3) the story carries meaning for the narrator (Denzin, 1989). Based on the narratives, I prepared a new transcript, according to Riessman's (2008) guidelines, which later served as the foundations for narrative analysis.

During the second phase, for my narrative analysis, I relied on the steps described as the *holistic-content approach* proposed by Lieblich et al. (1998)

The quality assurance and validity of the qualitative studies can be approached through the authenticity of the research (Szokolszky, 2004). Authenticity, in this case, was ensured by the continued reflection on questions related to the validity, reliability and generalizability of the research. This was in keeping with the interpretative/qualitative approach (as discussed in detail by Gelei [2002] and Bokor [2000]) and the research strategy chosen (case studies based on turning points narratives - for a more detailed discussion of the latter, see Maaloe [2010]).

To succeed, I took multiple angles in view of the nature of the challenges encountered during the research. I ensured *reliability* using the following processes (Szokolszky, 2004):

- (1) *Staying true to the text* – I recorded the interviews using a tape recorder; and then prepared a verbatim transcript of the text, to ensure that the analysis would not be based on reconstruction or personal impressions.
- (2) *Consistent data management* – I documented and made transparent each of my decisions related to the handling of interview transcripts.
- (3) *Full documentation, transparency*: each step of the research was documented in a research journal, and strived to present each of these steps, in detail, in the relevant methodological chapters, to ensure that the process be clear and valid for my readers. To that end, ensuring the transparency of my fundamental theoretical

by it during the interviews.

assumptions is also important. This was an important consideration for me while writing the theoretical chapters and when clarifying the conceptual framework.

As far as the *validity* of the research is concerned, ensuring the transparency of the process is very important. The continued reflection on my own role as researcher was intended to help ensure as much (based on Gelei, 2000): I mapped out my own presuppositions and their impact on the process of research. To further support the validity of the research, I included two colleagues of mine in the analysis phase who are experienced in narrative analysis methodology, and we discussed my interpretations. Additionally, I presented the methodology I used during the research, as well as initial findings of my analysis, at several international conferences. I used the feedback received there to fine-tune the analysis of the cases.

III. RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION

i. Results based on literature review

- I reviewed the relevant organizational socialization studies and organized them according to the organizational-cultural frame defined in the thesis. I defined the main dimensions, along which we need a new interpretation of the process: the nature of time (cyclical vs. linear), the nature of organizational context and the role of the individual within his/her socialization process.
- I proved that we need to change our assumptions along all the three dimensions, in order to be able to understand socialization from a process perspective.
- Above the classical theoretical models of socialization I integrated those theoretical concepts (identity regulation and identity work), which can help us to achieve the former goal (understanding socialization from a process perspective)

ii. Results based on empirical research

Based on the comparison of the empirical results of the study with the relevant literature, I will describe the most important theoretical and practical implications of the dissertation.

The present research project fits within the research stream, which operationalize socialization process with the use of desired identity concept, and point to the *desired identity as a mechanism regulating identity work* (see Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). In the section below, I will place the results of my own research in the framework of previous studies, according to the following steps: (1) a comparison of assumptions related to the nature of the desired identity; (2) a comparison of the desired identity' (trans)formation processes; and (3) reflections on the role of organizational context. I have summarized the steps of this review in the table below (see table 15). In the column "Research results," I used the color gray to indicate where the results complement the findings of relevant socialization studies. In the column "Relevant literature," I used different color to indicate when I used results from studies not dealing with socialization, thereby complementing previous findings from socialization research.

Table 1: Research results in the framework of previous studies

	Research results	Relevant literature
Nature of desired identity	Career focused vs. open	Ibarra (1999); Grey (2004), Pratt et al., (2006); Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007)
Socialization: (trans)formation of desired identities	Nature of identity threat: difference between desired identity and work content/process, and/or difference between desired identity and ideal identity	Ibarra (1999); Beyer and Hannah (2002); Pratt et al., (2006); Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007);
	<i>How to transform desired identity or the factors threatening its realization?</i> Experimentation and defense narratives	Ibarra (1999); Beyer and Hannah (2002); Grey (2004); Pratt et al., (2006); Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007) Kreiner and Sheep, 2009
	Recognition: desired identity becomes impossible self	Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007)
	<i>How can resist (mitigate) the influences threatening desired identity or its realization?</i> Defense narratives	<i>Ibarra (1999^d), Pratt et al. (2006), Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007)</i> Ybema, 2004; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006;
Role of organizational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational practices; • Characteristics of ideal identity; • Relevant subcultures and organizational characters; 	Anderson-Gough et al., 1998; 2002; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006; Thornborrow and Brown 2009

As far as the nature of desired identity is concerned, the study complements the findings of the literature, because: (1) they are focused not just on professional (Ibarra, 1999, Pratt et al., 2006) or organizational (Grey, 2004) career; and (2) they become conscious already when the newcomer joins the organization, yet they are not well defined in every case, as Grey (2004) had supposed. Pratt et al., in their 2006 study, differentiated between well defined and embryonic desired identities, but did so based on the level of the individual’s identification with their profession, and assumed that the embryonic desired identity would be transformed during the process of socialization, and that by the end of the process, each individual would develop a detailed desired identity, completed with professional (and organizational) aspects. I would not list the seeking and drifting identities defined in the present research project among embryonic desired identities: I believe these are types which complement the desired identities identified already (career focused or aspirational identities).

The struggle to establish and shape the various desired identities *differed partly* from what is described in the relevant literature, for the following reasons:

⁴ I wrote with italics those literatures, which assume, but do not make explicit the defense role of identity work tactics.

- (1) Regarding *nature of the identity threat* the results of this study reinforces other findings. Two types of identity threats were identified – difference between the desired identity and nature/process of work, as well as difference between the desired and ideal identity – and both have already been explored in the literature (Ibarra, 1999; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Pratt et al., 2006).
- (2) When striving to transform identity threats, the individual comes up with *experimentation narratives*. The identity work tactics listed here are either known already from relevant socialization literature (e.g. complementing, enriching – Pratt et al., 2006) or from other identity research studies (e.g. Kreiner and Sheep, 2009). Thus, I complemented the experimentation narratives described in the socialization literature already. Another important recognition was that individuals described not than just experimentation narratives, but also defensive narratives. Previous socialization studies did not integrate these explicitly. In every case, a narrative different in nature than the ones described earlier is featured: the *recognition narrative*. This is when the individual recognizes that they are unable to realize their desired identity within the organization. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007) describe cases when the individual comes to this realization, and attributes it to the lack of role models, but does not examine how the individual moves on from here. The described cases pointed to other possible reasons: the individual is confronted with their feared identity, or comes to accept that the desired and ideal identities cannot be reconciled. Following the recognition narrative, the individual no longer describes experimentation narratives, but strives to accept the contradictions recognized previously and which seem to be irreconcilable; they tell defense narratives which are all realized through different identity work tactics. When interpreting the defense narratives, I referenced tactics encountered in the literature of identity work (jouissance and nostalgia), thereby contributing to the set of identity work tactics referred to in the relevant socialization literature. Another important contribution is that the relevant socialization studies listed in the table focused on identity development, and did not deal explicitly with defense narratives. I believe it is important to differentiate between experimentation and defense narratives, as the former involved identity development, whereas the latter can make development possible, but do not realize it – it is more about the maintenance of the

desired identity. I defined various types of defense narratives depending on what kinds of identity work tactics the individual employed. There is one important difference: we encounter hidden resistance in the case of those using the *jouissance* (Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006) and *postalgia* (Ybema, 2004) tactics, while those using the *true to self* tactic resort to open resistance. As a result, the research study provides a glimpse into what follows the recognition narrative.

Previously, it was the identity work of the individual that was in the focus; to achieve a greater understanding of the process, however, it is important to reflect on the influence of the organizational context, thereby integrating socialization research which focused on identity regulation (Bourassa and Ashforth, 1998; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Thus, I identified *key organizational practices* along the turning point narratives (entry, work distribution, performance evaluation, and dismissal) as well as the *characteristics of the ideal identity* they determine. The organization strove to regulate the individual's desired identity along these lines. Research subjects spoke of conflicting experiences as far as the characteristics of the ideal identity were concerned: individuals thus gradually became distanced from the organization (disidentifying), but also used it as an opportunity to realize and/or defend their desired identity. Thus, my study confirms the results of studies where the desired identity is the tool used to resist the identity regulating efforts of the organization (Bourassa and Ashforth, 1998). Although the individual disidentifies with the organization, they also identify with various subcultures, accepting and maintaining the inequalities and tensions within.

Along these lines, and in the framework of relevant socialization studies, the most important theoretical implications of the present study are the following:

- It *enriched* the known *types of desired identities* (career, aspirational) with an additional one: the open desired identity.
- It *confirms a lesser known function of the desired identity*: a tool to resist the identity regulation efforts of the organization. In previous research, the desired identity was one tool of identity regulation, because it was assumed that the ideal identity can be reconciled with the desired identity (see Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006 or Thornborrow and Brown, 2009).
- It *added* another element to the *set of identity work tactics* known from relevant socialization studies (Ibarra, 1999; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Pratt et al., 2006):

the temporary desired identity⁵, where the individual describes a desired identity linked to the organization and valid for a set period of time, and where the individual strives to realize their original desired identity in their personal life during this period.

- It added the recognition and defense narratives to the experimentation narrative known from socialization research studies assuming less painful and positive processes, also identifying several sub-types.

Additionally, it enriched our understanding of socialization in the BIG4 organizations, by placing the role of the desired identity in the focus, alongside an identification of organizational practices aimed at regulating that identity. The characteristics of the ideal identity identified during the project confirmed earlier research findings (see Coffey, 1994; Anderson-Gough et al., 1998, 2001; 2002).

As far as the practical implications of the research study are concerned, it may be concluded that – in accordance with my personal goal – the findings of the present study also serve to support more conscious career planning and organizational socialization of young graduates. It points to the significance of desired identities and helps individuals identify their own desired identities. Once this has been accomplished, the case studies presented can serve as a good point of departure in preparing for identity threats, and can also help newcomers to an organization be more conscious and proactive during the process of joining the organization.

The study also hopes to support HR specialists in gaining a deeper understanding of organizational socialization processes, along several lines: which HR practices contribute most to the shaping of individuals' desired identities, and how – by avoiding the contradictions uncovered – can the individual be aided in better identifying with the organization. Additionally, by understanding the process of how desired identities evolve and transform, they can work with the realization that person-organization fit is not a state, but rather a process, in which both parties participate, and whose outcome

⁵ The splinting tactic explored by Pratt et al. (2006) in their study also assumes the creation of a temporary identity; in that case, however, the individual uses an earlier positive work identity (e.g. university student) instead of creating a new one linked to the organization and/or profession, as is the case in the present study.

depends heavily on the nature of the ideal and the desired identities and their reconcilability.

iii. Summary of research results

The main results and conclusions of the research are:

- Review of the relevant organizational socialization literature, which was not available till now in hungarian.
- The individual cases describing in detail the socialization process, assuming an active individual, real time and a multicultural organizational context (e.g. profession, hierarchy and informal groups).
- The use of narrative methods for data collection and analysis, which made possible to preserve the real time and the detailed contextual embeddedness of the process.
- The description of the cyclical nature of socialization process along the different types of desired identity.
- The description of the relevant contextual elements according to the used identity regulation practices, with special emphasis on the role of ideal identity and different (sub)cultures.

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