WHO AM I?

- A qualitative study on high-skilled IT-consultants' identity work in a triangular relationship with employer and client

Ellen Karlsson & Felicia Niklasson

Essay/Thesis:	30 HP
Program and course:	Master's Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations / PV2500
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester and year:	Spring 2022
Supervisor:	Monica Andersson Bäck
Examiner:	xx

Abstract

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Purpose: This study aims to increase the understanding of how high-skilled IT-consultants are involved in identity work when being in a triangular relationship with an employing firm and a client firm, but also how temporary agency work in this context differs from previous research on the topic. The study also aims to identify factors that impact the direction of IT-consultants’ identity.

Theory: Social identity theory as well as the concepts of identity and identity work have been used to elaborate and analyse the empirical findings. Moreover, research on the triangular relationship was used to support the study.

Method: The study’s approach is based on a qualitative research design, and 14 semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted with IT-consultants at a Swedish consulting company. A thematic analysis method has been used to analyse the empirical data.

Result: High-skilled IT-consultants differ from low-skilled temporary agency workers in terms of status and there are different reasons behind the pressure to perform. Thus, the study empirically provides knowledge of identity work in a context where the employee possesses greater power. The result showed that IT-consultants use sensemaking to understand the context and how to behave in it, and attachment is increased or decreased through the four modes of identity work. Moreover, the consultant role implies a need for identity work, and factors impacting the direction are professional seniority, liminality and ambiguity, assignment and work tasks, challenging situations, and gaps between present and future. Other motives are to establish a valued identity, both internally and externally.

Foreword

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Introduction

A question often asked by individuals is “Who am I?”. It is a complex question that is hard to find an answer to, especially in relation to the organisational context where the individual usually has various identities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Brown & Coupland 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Levay & Andersson Bäck, 2021). However, the question can be eased by identity work, in which an individual clarifies the definition of the self (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018b). Yet, it can be a challenge for individuals possessing a role as a temporary agency worker (TAW), contractor, or consultant, which are all various definitions of the same kind of work arrangement (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012).

It is a fact that the nature of work has changed and it is now common for an organisation to have a combination of permanent employees and temporary employees in the labour force (Woldman, Wesselink, Runhaar & Mulder, 2018). Distinctive for TAWs are that they are part of a triangular relationship between the employing firm, the client firm and the individual (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015; Håkansson, Pulignano, Isidorsson & Doerflinger, 2020; Sobral, Ng, Castanheira, Chambel & Koene, 2020; Woldman et al., 2018). Previous research on temporary agency work shows that this work arrangement is often characterised by uncertainty and exclusion, both in relation to the employing firm and the client firm (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Håkansson, Isidorsson & Strauss-Raats, 2013b; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015), but also individual feelings of marginalisation (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018). As a result of this, temporary work is often considered the “second choice” in the aspiration to get permanent employment (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015), although permanent contracts at the employing firm are common for TAWs in Sweden (Alsos & Evans, 2018). Even though there is a large breadth of research on the topic of temporary agency work, much of the current research is focused on low-skilled TAWs which indicates a gap in terms of high-skilled TAWs (Cardone, Tümpel & Huber, 2021). Additionally, previous research has not yet substantially covered the subject of how high-skilled TAWs identify and position themselves in relation to the employing firm (Bryant and McKeown, 2016). There is also a lack of focus on identity work in specific contexts and how organisational practices might impact the process (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

The distinguished research gaps indicate a need to further investigate identity work in relation to different contexts, and more specifically, how an employee is an active agent in the crafting process of the self and behaviours in an organisational setting. With this in mind, the focus of this study will be upon high-skilled IT-consultants who are part of a knowledge intensive firm, occupying knowledge and skills that are of shortage and highly sought after in society. The "product" of a consulting company is the knowledge of the consultants and the employees are thus the most important resource. This enhances the need to not only attract human capital, but also to retain it. Knowledge intensive firms are also exposed to the risk of employees terminating their employment with the purpose of continuing their work with the client firm in other employment constellations. The risk increases when consultants begin to identify more with the client firm than their employing firm, which is possible during prolonged assignments. Therefore, it is of high importance for consulting companies to facilitate identity work directed towards the employing firm, as it is essential for building allegiance and organisational commitment as to retain the high-skilled professionals within the company (Alvesson 2000; Alvesson, 2012).

The present study contributes with relevant knowledge within the research field that could be of utility for professionals working within strategic human resource management, as well as managers at employing firms and client firms. By engaging in identity work, task performance of employees can be improved and the commitment towards the employing firm increases (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Additionally, the loyalty towards the organisation might get enhanced (Alvesson, 2000), and increased identification might also reduce employee turnover and hence the economic costs (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

1.1. The IT sector in Sweden

IT-consulting companies are part of the broader IT sector (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d.), which in Sweden suffers a great shortage of competence. The digitalization has naturally impacted the needed number of people who possess IT competence, and the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need further. For an organisation to get hold of this competence, it could be a necessity to complement the workforce with high-skilled IT-consultants. Zetterberg and Fors (2020) has estimated that by 2024, 70 000 more people are needed within the sector to ensure the pace of Swedish innovation. The shortage concerns particularly software developer positions.

IT competence is of high importance for Sweden as it is relevant in multiple areas which are crucial for the society, such as in health care, education and infrastructure. Additionally, IT competence is essential for many businesses, which are important for the Swedish economy (Zetterberg & Fors, 2020). As consultants within IT possess competence that are highly sought after in general, the dependence is more on the part of the employing firm rather than contrariwise (Alvesson, 2012). The focus on identity work is of relevance for the sector as it is an eventuality of struggle for the employing firm to ensure the quality and the quantity of workforce within IT.

1.2. Aim and research questions

The purpose of the study is to investigate the identity work of high-skilled temporary agency workers in a Swedish IT-consulting company. As high-skilled consultants are part of a triangular relationship, the study aims to create a better understanding of how they are active agents in their identity work when operating in different organisational contexts, but also how this relationship differs from the current knowledge of low-skilled temporary agency workers. Moreover, the study aims to increase the understanding of what factors that impact the direction of identity; either towards the client firm, the employing firm, or the profession in itself.

To direct the aim of the study, the following research questions have been conducted:

1) In what ways are high-skilled IT-consultants involved in identity work when being a part of a triangular relationship with an employer and a client?
2) What factors impact the direction of IT-consultants' identity?
3) In what ways do high-skilled temporary agency workers differ from previous research on temporary agency workers?

2. Previous research

The chapter will elaborate on previous research that is of relevance for the aim of the study. First, research connected to temporary agency work, and then more specifically in a Swedish context, will be explained. Moreover, research on low-skilled as well as high-skilled TAWs will be presented. The second part of the chapter will dig deeper into previous research on identity, and the third part will clarify the concept of identity work.

2.1. Temporary agency work

It is now common for an organisation to complement the permanent workforce with labour from temporary work agencies (Woldman et al., 2018) and it is possible to distinguish that the overall nature of work has changed over recent decades (Sobral et al., 2020). Today, the organisational workforce often consists of multiple employment relationships (Hill & Carley, 2008), and according to Caza, Moss and Vough (2018a), this enables for the individual to occupy multiple roles at the same time. This work arrangement is characterised by a triangular relationship; an employment relationship between the employee and the employing firm, a management relationship between the employee and the client firm, and a business relationship between the client firm and the employing firm (Håkansson et al., 2020; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015; Sobral et al., 2020; Woldman et al., 2018). This constellation might also have an impact on how the employee identifies with both firms (Alvesson, 2000).

Research implies that there are various reasons for why an organisation chooses to hire TAWs, but three of these are to reduce labour costs, to achieve greater flexibility (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012), and to manage knowledge in a more effective way (Barley & Kunda, 2004). There is a lack of competence within the IT-sector (Zetterberg & Fors, 2020) which implies that organisations hire beyond the permanent workforce as a way to get hold of important competence (Barley & Kunda, 2004). TAWs can thus be used both in a short-term perspective as well as in a long-term perspective (Hill & Carley, 2008) as a means to secure a reasonable level of competence, costs and flexibility within the organisation. However, the use of TAWs is sensitive to economic fluctuations of the society as a whole. A clear example of this is during the financial crisis in 2008 where one could distinguish a sharp decrease in the use of TAWs due to economic impacts on the labour market. Hence, one can see a correlation between the societal context and the use of workers not directly employed at the organisation (Håkansson et al., 2013b).

The relationship between the employing firm and the client firm is often characterised by imbalance as the client firm sets the overall conditions (Håkansson et al., 2013b; Håkansson, Isidorsson & Kantelius, 2013a). The main decision to expand the workforce as well as who to hire is ultimately in the hands of the client firm, and the job security might thus be weaker for TAWs compared to permanent employees (Håkansson et al., 2013b).

2.1.1. Temporary agency work in a Swedish context

Before 1993, it was illegal for an organisation in Sweden to run a work agency with the aim of making profit. Minor adjustments of the regulations were made in 1991, but the stipulation of the Agency Work Act (SFS 2012:854) in 1993 distinctly clarified the new conditions related to the Swedish labour market. The industry grew rapidly after this (Alsos & Evans, 2018; Håkansson et al., 2013a; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015) and discussions were held in terms of how the matter should be regulated in the best way, and a working group was assigned to study the subject (Håkansson et al., 2013b). Although various suggestions were put forward, the main responsibility was given to the social partners to regulate it in collective agreements (Håkansson et al., 2013a; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015). This is still the contemporary arrangement, which illustrates the important role that collective agreements have had to legitimise the business that had previously been considered exploitative and to evade regulation from the state (Alsos & Evans, 2018).

The level of regulation in relation to the industry of temporary agency work is low in Sweden compared to other countries in Europe, which goes in line with the Swedish Model (Håkansson et al., 2013b). Sweden is widely known as one of the countries with the best prerequisites regarding equal treatment of TAWs and the Swedish labour laws and regulations are covering all employees, irrespective of form of employment (Håkansson et al., 2013a; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015). The Agency Work Act (SFS 2012:854) stresses that a TAW is to be treated equivalent and have the same conditions as permanent employees at the client firm. Thus, the whole organisational workforce has the same fundamental rights (Håkansson et al., 2013a; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015).

In the Swedish context, it is more common for a TAW to have a long-term contract. The regulations in terms of when a position becomes permanent are more stringent when it comes to this work arrangement, and it has been agreed through collective agreements that fixed-term contracts may continue for a maximum of six months (Håkansson et al., 2013b). For those who are not TAWs, the duration of a fixed-term contract is a maximum of two years according to the Employment Protection Act (SFS 1982:80).

2.1.2. High-skilled and low-skilled temporary agency workers

There are various definitions of TAWs, brought into the organisation by virtue of an agency. In Sweden, TAWs are usually equated with consultants and no differentiation between the two designations is made (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012). Previous research has mainly focused on TAWs in low-skilled jobs (Cardone et al., 2021), which might have had an impact on how temporary work has formerly been portrayed. In short, this work arrangement consists of a triangular relationship, and is characterised by exclusion from the client firm (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015), precarious working conditions, low autonomy within the work (Bryant & McKeown, 2016), marginalisation, and non-recognition (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018). According to Håkansson et al. (2013b), it is common for a TAW to experience job insecurity, which in turn might have an impact on the level of job satisfaction and the individual's psychosocial health. The individual might also experience confusion in relation to the job and the role within the organisations (Håkansson et al., 2013a).

In a study by Håkansson and Isidorsson (2012), it was found that work tasks executed by TAWs within low-skilled jobs, such as blue collar employees within logistics, are usually uncomplicated and easy to manage. Moreover, such employees were not expected to take their own initiatives in their daily work. When investigating client firms within IT, they found that the required qualifications of TAWs were higher. Additionally, the TAWs worked alongside permanent employees at the client firm, and they were well integrated into the team as well as the client firm. The work tasks are usually of a more complicated nature, and employees are to a higher degree working on different tasks and projects at the same time. This indicates that high-skilled TAWs might be integrated into the core part of the organisation to a higher degree (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012).

One can also distinguish classifications of TAWs in previous literature, defining low-skilled TAWs as "helpers" and high-skilled TAWs as "specialists". In this classification, the main difference between these groups is the requirement of completed vocational training in order to satisfyingly perform the job (Cardone et al., 2021). This is further emphasised by Barley and Kunda (2004), meaning that the use of high-skilled TAWs is to gain access to expert knowledge that is hard to find within current manpower. Hence, this arrangement is not only about securing the right amount of human resources, but also to gain specific expertise. The human capital is the most important resource in high-skilled consulting firms, which entails that the employing firm is more dependent on the consultants than the other way around. This enhances the power of the high-skilled TAWs in comparison to low-skilled TAWs (Alvesson, 2012).

2.2. The concept of identity

The second part of the chapter will elucidate previous research on identity. First, the concept of identity will be introduced, followed by research on identity in an organisational context. Finally, different identities in an organisational context will be elaborated on.

2.2.1. Introducing "identity"

The commonly thought question of "Who am I?" (Brown & Coupland 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Levay & Andersson Bäck, 2021) is of importance as it is fundamental for an individual to have a situated identity providing a sense of who the person is in a specific context in order to function properly (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015). There is a need for the individual to have an underlying understanding of how the self fits the context, for example in relation to the job title, the objectives of the organisation as well as the team. This facilitates for the individual to establish a situated identity, which in turn acts as a guiding source for behaviours and actions. Hence, one can say that identity in its essence is related to the individual's self-definition (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Some researchers assume that an individual possesses an inner core that is the authentic self. This results in challenges of having a consistent authenticity while juggling multiple identities and relationships simultaneously (Brown, 2015). Beech (2011) stresses that an individual's inner self is influenced by social identities, and Caza, Moss and Vough (2018a) investigated authenticity in relation to individuals who self-choicely occupied several jobs simultaneously. They found that when having several work-related identities, authenticity struggles might arise in relation both to the context-specific roles, but also the broader work selves. This is relevant as it is more common for the contemporary employee to hold a bunch of roles, and each of these might be threatening or constraining towards the individual's authentic self.

Furthermore, there are diversified views on if an identity is stable and fixed or fluid and shifting. Most researchers agree that an individual aspires to create a somewhat stable identity in order to function properly in a specific context (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015). However, even though the individual is an active agent in the process of identity work, both contexts and preferences alter. This means that the individual might need to for example switch, acquire or modify one or several identities. This is one reason why research on identity usually emphasises that identities are rarely continuous, but often unstable (Brown, 2015; Brown & Coupland, 2015).

Additionally, an identity can be either, or simultaneously, positive or negative. A positive identity is often characterised by favourable characteristics and are thus viewed as valuable and beneficial. On the other hand, an individual might use coping strategies to reframe a negative identity or to refocus it from the inner self in order to secure a positive self-meaning (Brown, 2015). Typically, the individual aims for the establishment of a positive identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

2.2.2. Identity in an organisational context

The organisational context is characterised by complexity and fluctuation (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The notion of identity is highly relevant in this context as it covers aspects such as who the individual was before, is in the present as well as desire to become in the future (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012). The organisational culture, the social context and the specific individual have an impact on identity (Alvesson, 2012; Coupland & Brown, 2012). Additionally, an individual's identity is often most salient and malleable during the first period of entering an organisation (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The new organisational context is a space in which the individual is able to evolve identities in relation to existing structures, with its tensions and opportunities (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

The occupation of an individual is often a great part of the social identity, although this can depend on how the individual views the occupation (Alvesson, 2012; Brown & Coupland, 2015). The occupation is less crucial in relation to the individual's identities if it is viewed mainly as a way to earn an income. It is also less common for an individual to base the core self on organisational membership, even though it is seldom totally decoupled from it (Alvesson, 2012). For high-skilled professionals, the social identity connected to the profession is likely to be stronger than the social identity connected to the organisation, meaning that individuals might see themselves primarily as for example software developers and secondary as a member of the company they work for. Accordingly, the high-skilled professionals become more independent and are more likely to put their individual career objectives first (Alvesson, 2000).

According to Alvesson (2012), it is important to examine identity in the context of a consulting firm as it is an instrument for the organisation to achieve control, loyalty and retention. For the organisational identity to be established, the members within the organisation must have some form of agreement of the features that are distinctive, for example connected to decisions and actions. Additionally, it can be used to minimise uncertainty by providing employees with a sense of direction in a complex context, and to enhance the employee's self-confidence and self-esteem (Alvesson, 2012). Thus, it provides the employees with a tangible identity, serving as a tool for managing ambiguity in work, providing a clearer sense of "who am I" (Alvesson, 2012; Coupland & Brown, 2012). The risk of an employee leaving the company unaccompanied is increased when identification with the profession or the client firm is stronger than the identification to the employing firm and decreased when the identification with the team is strong. However, great team identification increases the risk of the whole team leaving the employer together. Hence, the management of the employing firm must work primarily on the identification with the company as a whole. Increasing loyalty through identification can be done through creating a company image that the employees can be proud of and through supporting the social relations within the company. An example of such efforts is to develop a unique organisational culture (Alvesson, 2000).

There are identity problems related to consulting firms. The relationships to different actors within the triangular relationship might cause ambiguity, vulnerability and liminality, which can be explained as a feeling of in-betweenness. There is a need for the individual to be able to adapt to different groups, and it can be a challenge overall to be a part of a varied social context. Therefore, the notion of identity, both individual and organisational, as well as identity work are key issues to address in a consulting firm (Alvesson, 2012). When Winkler and Mahmood (2018) studied TAWs in Denmark, they found that identity work is difficult, both towards the employing firm and the client firm. Therefore, TAWs tend to develop individual goals and paths. Another part of the TAWs' identity is the feeling of being subordinate. Therefore, they must constantly prove that they are important for the client firm through performance and flexibility, which in turn affects their self-perception as hard working, skilled and opportunity seeking (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018).

Consultants might encounter issues related to identity and loyalty as they often execute their daily work at the client film's workplace, and often for as long as a year or more. Previous research has shown that IT-consultants sometimes felt more familiar with the client firm than with the employing firm. Additionally, their work includes complex assignments which requires them to be involved with the client firm to a large extent. Low identification with the employing firm can not only cause disloyalty that results in the employees leaving the company, but also that they might put the client firm's priorities over the agency's (Alvesson, 2000).

2.2.3. Different identities in an organisational context

There is a general agreement within previous research that an individual has multiple identities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Caza et al., 2018b; Coupland & Brown, 2012). Beech (2011) makes a division in self identities and social identities. Self identities are internal views of the self that are directed towards remaining a particular image of the self, and social identities are identities subject to external forces. Ashforth and Schinoff (2016), Brown (2015) and Coupland and Brown (2012) explains that an individual has social identities grounded on collectives such as work groups, a profession or a whole organisation, but also personal identities based on unique individual attributes. In terms of social identities, the individual possesses an identity that connects the person to a certain group, and the person thus might act as a prototype for the "good member". Moreover, the level of institutionalisation of the collective has an impact and therefore, the associated prototype or standards might be more or less fuzzy. Personal identities are less clear and might partially be decoupled from contexts in which they do not fit in (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Coupland & Brown, 2012). The connection and tension between different identities are dynamic, and while it is important for an individual to be a part of a larger collective, it is also important to distinguish oneself from the group to remain unique (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). According to Alvesson (2000), social identities are most pertinent within an organisational context.

2.3. The concept of identity work

The third part of the chapter will clarify the concept of identity work, beginning with an introduction of the concept and ending with a section on identity work in the consultant role.

2.3.1. Introducing "identity work"

The notion of identity work has gained increased interest as a way to understand the multidimensional and dynamic concept of identity on a deeper level. There are different definitions of the same phenomenon, for example identity work (Caza et al., 2018b) and identity construction (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Both cover the process in which the self-definition of the individual is clarified. According to Ashforth and Schinoff (2016), the concept of identity work has mainly been used in relation to the individual level, and identity construction has been used in relation to a long-term perspective. However, the concepts are usually seen as synonyms of the same phenomenon.

Identity work was first presented by authors such as Snow and Andersson (1987), Alvesson and Willmott (2002), Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) and Watson (2008). A great similarity between often applied definitions is the emphasis on activities that can be related to identity work, ranging from retention and revision of current identities to forming of new ones. In this study, the following definition presented by Caza et al. (2018b) will be used, as it broadly covers the concept.

"Identity work in occupations and organisations consists of the cognitive, discursive, physical and behavioural activities that individuals undertake with the goal of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, revising or rejecting collective, role and personal self-meanings within the boundaries of their social contexts." (Caza et al., 2018b: 895)

The individual is an active agent in the crafting process of the self as well as what the person does at work. However, the process of identity work is also affected by organisational inspired discourses (Coupland & Brown, 2012), the social context and interpersonal connections (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Beech, 2011; Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018a; Caza et al., 2018b). Identity work is overall related to the establishment of who an individual is, but also who the individual is not (Beech, 2011). Based on this, the process of identity work is of relevance in an organisational setting, and particularly in relation to consulting firms (Alvesson, 2012).

2.3.2. Identity work of consultants

Identity work is notable within high-skilled consultancy as it is more complex and ambiguous, lacking clarity in both assignments and work outcomes. This can lead to feelings of angst and self-questioning as well as lower self-esteem. Through identity work, the consultants handle tension between the different social identities available for them and might construct hybrid identities as they acquire features from different, sometimes conflicting, social identities (Brown, 2015; Galwa & Vogel, 2021). Additionally, organisations are changing at a rapid pace which makes identities increasingly insecure and differentiated (Coupland & Brown, 2012), further indicating the need for identity work.

To exercise control over consultants who are working at a client firm, the employing firm can either let the client firm have the daily supervisor role, or the main supervising responsibility remains at the employing firm (Alvesson, 2012). However, low levels of interaction and supervision can make the employee separated from the workplace norms. Additionally, high-skilled professionals' social identities might draw upon the occupation and meanings attached to the occupation to a larger extent than others do. They often interpret one of the attached meanings as a tendency to work more than what is common in other occupations and accordingly do so. Hence, they continue to reproduce the norms of a high-skilled professional (Alvesson, 2000).

3. Theoretical framework

The chapter will elaborate on the chosen theoretical framework, and will be divided into three parts. Firstly, social identity theory will be introduced. The second part will elaborate on how identity work within social identity theory is executed. The chapter will end with a section explaining the how, when and why of identity work.

3.1. Social identity theory

The main theory chosen for this study is social identity theory (SIT). SIT was defined in 1986 by Tajfel and Turner and describes how being a part of a group forms the perception of one's own identity (Brown, 2000). To understand SIT, group identification must also be mentioned. People feel belonging to different groups, which could be as small as a work group or as large as a gender (Alvesson, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the context of this study, the respondents might identify themselves as for example consultants, software developers, a member of the employing firm, a member of the client firm, or specific divisions of the client firm. Each identity varies in salience, depending on the context (Alvesson, 2000). The level of identification with a group is dependent on how much a person feels psychologically related to the group as well as its future. This implies that from the outside one can be perceived as belonging to a certain group, for example a company, simultaneously as the individual self does not (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Different theories suggest different driving forces which direct the process of constructing or changing an identity. Within SIT, that implies getting closer or further away from a group, and the main motive for identity formation or identity change is self-enhancement. The motives can both consciously and unconsciously guide an individual to develop in certain directions (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). As the main incentive behind identification with a group within SIT is to gain self-esteem, people can accordingly distance themselves from their group and seek identification with other groups that are perceived as "better" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000).

Since people are members of multiple collectives, social identities can take different shapes. Different members of a group who share a common social identity connected to the collective can perform their identity in different manners because of their additional personal and social identities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Social identities originate both from the institutional logics of a group and from the group members who uphold them (Galwa & Vogel, 2021).

Adopting a collective identity does not necessarily imply that sentiments, notions and beliefs are adopted as well, although it is likely. The sentiments, notions and beliefs are, additionally, a usual reason for adopting a social identity when they appear attractive to an individual. Accordingly, joining a collective identity can affect the behaviour of an employee, making the behaviour more compliant with organisational norms (Alvesson, 2000).

3.1.1. Identity work in social identity theory

Within SIT, identity work is viewed as the process when individuals change their own position in relation to a group, or when they change their perception of a group. The change of position in relation to a group can occur for example when the level of identification with a group changes and individuals actively try to come closer to the group or separate themselves from it. Change of perception occurs when group members change their own cognitive perception of the group and its status, perhaps to legitimise their membership (Caza et al., 2018b). The core of SIT is the comparison with other groups that might have higher or lower status (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000). Hence, identity work within SIT is to be expected when a group's connotation or perceived status are changed or jeopardised, and when comparisons between the group and the outside are inevitable. In SIT, motivating factors for identity work might be to enhance oneself, to increase one's distinctiveness or to fit in and belong to a collective (Caza et al., 2018b).

3.2. The three different parts of identity work

Following sections will further elaborate on the different parts of identity work as a concept. The how is connected to various processes that can be prominent in identity work, the when is related to aspects that might intensify the process and the why explains the underlying causes of identity work.

3.2.1. The "how": processes of identity work

Within SIT, two main processes are presented as fundamental to the how of identity work. The individual might either distance or enhance the attachment of the self to a specific group by engaging in identity work. An individual might also base the choice of organisation, occupation or role based on how well it is compatible with the self, or incorporate specific attributes as a way to increase self-understanding. The second process involves changing attributes and characteristics associated with the specific collective (Caza et al., 2018b).

Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) mentions sensebreaking, sensegiving and sensemaking as processes that underlies identity work. Sensebreaking is more prevalent in situations where the organisation employs an individual who perhaps possess undesirable characteristics, or as a way to force group cohesion. When the organisation exerts sensebreaking, the individual might lack a sense of belonging. Sensegiving can then be used as a way for the organisation to transfer desirable attributes and information about the organisation to facilitate the construction of an identity that conforms to the specific context. Sensegiving is notably prevalent during for example the onboarding process of newly employed individuals, but also during challenging events or changes. In short, sensebreaking can be used to transform or diminish unwanted aspects, and sensegiving can be used to influence the individual in the right direction (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Individuals also engage in sensemaking as a way to understand who they are. When new to an organisation or a role, unique personal characteristics are more prevalent as it is unclear for the individual how to act in the new social atmosphere. Previous experiences and the individual's characteristics are helpful when making sense of the situation. The individual can construct an identity that is fitting to not only the context but also the desired future self. Sensemaking is also prevalent in challenging situations, with the aim to enhance the understanding of the situation (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Caza et al. (2018) presents four different modes that aim to explain where identity work primarily occurs; the cognitive mode, the discursive mode, the physical mode and the behavioural mode. These modes are further emphasised by other researchers, for example Ashforth & Schinoff (2016) who mention the cognitive mode as well as the behavioural mode. Additionally, Brown and Coupland (2015) investigates the discursive mode in relation to identity work of a group of rugby players and the results showed that threats can be an important ingredient in the formation of one's self-perception. The different modes are interrelated with each other; however, one mode can act as the starting point before they are simultaneously active (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza et al., 2018b).

The cognitive mode includes identity work that is occurring in thoughts, and hence involves various mental efforts of the individual. That could be for example questioning of the self, or self-change. The discursive mode includes identity work that occurs orally, for example by the individual's own voice as well as language skills and different jargons (Caza et al., 2018b). Brown and Coupland (2015) describe discursive identity work as including different verbal practices through which the individual author self-narratives. Coupland and Brown (2012) also mention that identities are not just constructed by language and action, but also by the choice of silence or by being silenced by others. Additionally, organisational activities such as meetings and gatherings are occasions in which identity work occurs. The physical mode is related to physical materials and symbols in the surrounding, which could be anything from the individual self to actual objects. The final mode is the behavioural mode which occurs in action. As an example, the individual might mimic other individuals in the surrounding area to work on their own identity (Caza et al., 2018a). Ashforth & Schinoff (2016) explain that the behavioural aspects are connected to how the individual exercises the identity. If an individual to a high degree exhibits behaviours that are associated with a specific identity, that identity is also more likely to be internalised as a part of the core self.

3.2.2. The "when": intensification of identity work

Identity work is an ongoing process that occasionally might be triggered by situations and happenings, resulting in intensification of the process (Caza et al., 2018b). Such challenging situations might involve or lead to less desirable feelings such as self-doubt and confusion, further indicating the need for identity work (Brown, 2015). As an example, Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) mention the role of threats, surprises and critical events. Additionally, transitions and tensions between roles and identities can have an impact as well as the work environment; especially when including challenges (Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018b).

Identity work is also related to liminality, for example in a situation where a person is subject of a change when being in between two different roles, creating a sense of in-betweenness. This might lead to identity reconstruction, for example to establish a version of oneself that is more suitable to the context (Beech, 2011). Beech (2011) further emphasises that when not only the individual but also the organisation is changeful, the liminal experience might become voluminous and hard to resolve.

3.2.3. The "why": motives of identity work

There is not one solely specific motivation behind identity work, and previous research shows a rather fragmented picture including a plurality of probable motives (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Motives could be to reduce uncertainty or to align gaps between the individual's present situation and desired future (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), to reinforce the self, to increase the distinctiveness or belongingness, or as a way for self-verification by mediating the image of oneself to others as to align one's own perceptions of oneself with the perceptions of others

(Caza et al., 2018b). Brown (2015) stresses that the motivation behind identity work might be to increase the cohesion between inherent multiple identities, and specifically when they are contradictory. Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) makes a distinction in internally focused motives and externally focused motives. The internally focused motives include motives such as enhancement and continuity of the self, or to reduce perceived uncertainty. In an organisational context, it is important for the individual to possess an identity that is not only valued by the individual but also by the collective because it is the basis for socially related rewards and punishments. Externally focused motives are for example to establish self-presentation by mediating a desirable image of oneself to others in the surrounding.

4. Methodology

The chapter will explain the research strategy and design of the study, continuing with an elaboration of the sampling strategy, how the data has been collected and an explanation of the analysis approach. Moreover, trustworthiness will be discussed as well as limitations of the research method. Finally, ethical issues will be considered.

4.1. Research strategy and design

The study is of qualitative nature, and the ontological viewpoint is prominent. The world with its surroundings is seen as a social interface, and reality is continuously recreated by individuals through their assumptions and actions (Bryman, 2018). The study has a focus on the interactional perspective, where the IT-consultants work on their identities in interaction with others and the surrounding environment. This is also one main incentive to why semi-structured qualitative interviews were perceived as the most favourable method in accordance with Bryman's (2018) idea of qualitative studies. It would not have been possible to investigate the subject ethnographically by observations, where the researcher observes an individual or a group during a longer period of time (Bryman, 2018). This is due to the time frame and topic of the study, especially since identity work possibly could be hard to capture solely by observations, but also since the IT-consultants work at different destinations. A quantitative method, such as surveys that participants anonymously fill in (Bryman, 2018), would also not fit the study, as the topic is of descriptive character.

The action approach of the study is based on Bryman's (2018) description of the main steps included in a qualitative study. First, the researchers discussed the topic and relevant inquiries by reviewing literature to find potential gaps in previous research. Based on this review, the aim of the study and associated research questions were constructed with an objective to contribute to science. The aim and research questions were also essential for the choice of context. The study was realised at a small IT-consultant-company, and the participants were chosen based on their professional roles as IT-consultants. An interview guide was designed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The approach was iterative, meaning that there was an interplay between the formation of the theoretical framework and the collection of empirical data. Transcriptions of the interviews were made and the data was analysed through a thematic analysis method with the aim to find patterns in the empirical material. The result section was finalised and later analysed and discussed in relation to previous research and the theoretical framework. Finally, conclusions were attained and implications for practitioners and future research were illustrated.

4.2. Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy was a purposive sampling method. Participants were gathered mainly based on their characteristics (Bryman, 2018; Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant and Rahim, 2014), both to make sure that all interviewees were relevant in relation to the study's main objectives, but also to establish an acceptable diversity considering that the setting is male-dominated. More specifically, a critical case sampling method was used, meaning that the participants were chosen based on some specific criteria (Ritchie et al., 2014); they had to possess the role as IT-consultants at the target organisation, work at different client firms, and been employed for different lengths of time. However, the population of suitable participants was small. Requests to participate in the study were sent out to 16 IT-consultants who were considered most suitable, and all but two approved to partake. No one except from the researchers had an impact on who received a participation request.

As the setting of the study comes with restraints in terms of possible participants, sample saturation could not exceed the total number of employees at the target organisation. However, saturation in the empirical data was reached to some extent because of the fact that 70 percent of the employees at the organisation participated.

4.3. Data collection

As a means to collect primary data for this study, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who were perceived as relevant. This method was chosen mainly because of the aim of the study, which is to enhance the understanding of a specific topic. The method promotes the gathering of rich and detailed data by enabling the creation of a deeper interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Yeo, Legard, Keegan, Ward, McNaughton, Nicholls and Lewis, 2014). Moreover, the method combines an overall structure with some flexibility, allowing for the interviews to take different directions (Bryman, 2018; Yeo et al., 2014). An interview guide including seven themes was designed before the interviews were conducted, and pilot interviews were executed to assess the relevance and coverage of the questions, and also if they were understandable. The questions were open and formulated in relation to the target group, as a way to establish a reflective conversation. The interviews were conducted digitally or physically in a calm environment, without the presence of others. The subject's complex and possibly sensitive nature required the interviews to be rather long in order to make the interviewees comfortable, but also to capture nuances of identity work in the different contexts in the triangular relationship. Therefore, the duration of the interviews varied between 90-120 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed. Additionally, complementary notes were taken during each interview.

The interviews were conducted with a high level of flexibility. Although there was a template of questions available, the order of the questions was not fully determined and they were asked in different sequences depending on the specific interview situation. The main focus was upon letting the participant steer the direction depending on how the person interpreted the question as well as what was perceived as important. The aim was to get a better picture of the specific person's worldview. Additionally, the interview process was iterative, and questions were added, omitted or rephrased as needs of revision were discovered. Hence, no interview was completely the same, and the outcome of the interviews provided the researchers comprehensive information about the subject.

As a complement to the primary data, secondary data was collected from legitimate internet sources, physical books and from material gathered from the employing firm.

4.3.1. Setting

This study was executed at a small IT-consulting company in Sweden. An interview with a gatekeeper was conducted to receive complementary information about the culture and structure of the company. The gatekeeper described the culture as open, familiar and friendly as well as innovative and forgiving. The employees were encouraged to take initiatives and to try new things. The internal employees at the organisation rarely met the consultants in their everyday work, which the gatekeeper described as a challenge, and efforts were made to arrange activities after working hours as well as to send out for example Easter eggs during Easter or candy on Valentine's day. Moreover, the IT-consultants were expected to act as representatives of the employing firm, and were offered a bonus when recommending a candidate who gets employed.

The company had 20 high-skilled IT-consultants, and six employees working internally at the organisation. As the target organisation was a consulting company, the triangular relationship between the IT-consultants, the employing firm and the client firm was of importance.

Of the 14 interviewees, the sample consisted of three women and 11 men, hence 78,6% of the participants are males. This difference represents society as a whole, as software development is a male dominated field with 81% men in 2019 (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The respondents were between the age of 25 and 42, with a mean of 32 years. All but one respondent worked as IT-consultants within software development, and the last one worked as a consultant within IT-project management. The respondents have been employed at the employing firm for between four months and four years, three months. The mean of the employment period is one year, four months.

4.4. Data analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to systematically analyse the data, enabling for visualisation of patterns (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'connor and Barnard, 2014). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide was used to guide the coding process. The first step includes becoming familiar with the data. The second step is to create initial codes. The third step is to sort the initial codes according to themes emerging from the material. The fourth step is to evaluate the themes and codes. The fifth step is to define the themes clearly and descriptively. The final step was to align the different parts to a convincing analysis as it should be presented in the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The transcribing and coding began simultaneously as further data was collected, to be able to evaluate and revise the interview guide. The initial codes were short and accurate to the collected material, enabling exploration and openness to let the collected data guide the analysis, as recommended by Spencer et al. (2014) and Thornberg and Charmaz (2014). According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), this method facilitates an analysis less likely to be affected by bias and preconceptions. As the researchers became more familiar with the data collection and the codes, only material which was considered relevant for the purpose of the study was coded.

Three levels of codes were created. Initial codes were coded in different colours and each interviewee was given a colour in order to simplify comparisons and connections of different initial codes. The initial codes were kept close to the transcriptions and examples were "not asking for help unnecessarily", "not feeling like a consultant" or "experiencing imposter syndrome". The initial codes were categorised in descriptive themes, for example "culture of the client firm", "organisational structure of the client firm", "previous perception of the client firm" and "current perception of the client firm". The themes were then sorted into broader categories, such as "the client company", "the profession" and "identity".

Finally, the different parts were aligned as presented in the report. Effort was put into evaluating and generalising both the result and the analysis once a first draft was finalised.

4.5. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity are more applicable compared to reliability and validity, considering the social nature of the studied phenomenon. Four criteria were considered; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2018).

The credibility of a study refers to if it has been conducted in a correct manner considering generally recognised regulations, but also if the study corresponds correctly with the social reality of the participants (Bryman, 2018). The fact that the study investigated a social phenomenon, and that the data has been collected through semi-structured interviews, might have an impact on the credibility. The transcriptions of the interviews have not been proofread by the participants, indicating a difficulty to ensure that the empirical material is fully correct. Additionally, all interviews were conducted with both researchers present, which heightens the credibility of the study. To further increase the credibility, the empirical material is presented with authentic quotations from the interviewees in coming sections.

The transferability of a study gives an indication of how well the reached conclusions can be transferred to other contexts (Bryman, 2018). This study has been limited to investigate one specific context, and therefore, it could entail difficulties with transferability. However, the study generally contributes to current research with the focus on temporary agency work and identity work in a triangular relationship. Additionally, the consultant role might have similar attributes in other industries, which increases the transferability of the present study.

In order to secure dependability of a study, the whole research process should be characterised by transparency (Bryman, 2018). The researchers of this study have provided comprehensive information of all stages in the process, for example by composing a complete method section that explains the procedure in detail. Additionally, the study is reviewed and inspected multiple times by classmates as well a supervisor to further secure a high reliability. Thus, the researchers considered thoughts and suggestions of objective parties several times during the research process.

Confirmability refers to the importance of maintaining an objective mind-set when executing a qualitative study. Within the field of social science, there is a general agreement of the difficulty to achieve complete objectivity when studying a specific phenomenon. However, there is still a requirement that researchers can confirm that personal values and experiences have not consciously impacted the study (Bryman, 2018). The researchers in this study have considered this during the whole research process, and more accurately when performing the data analysis. The researchers have also had a gatekeeper, that is, an independent party employed at the target organisation (Webster, Lewis & Brown, 2014) to further increase the confirmability. This person has however been superficially involved in the study, so the risk of the study getting affected by other agendas is considered low.

4.6. Limitations of the research method

According to Bryman (2018), there are limitations of qualitative approaches that must be considered. First of all, there is a tendency for qualitative research to become subjective. Researchers might have an impact on the overall investigation, either consciously or unconsciously. This is united with the fact that it could be hard for others to replicate the study due to the researcher having a major role in qualitative research. Not only does the researcher's own characteristics and values influence the process, but the study might take on different directions depending on interest, perceived importance and perceptions. Moreover, as this study was executed at a small organisation, it could be hard to generalise the results. The population was small and specific, and the study thus aimed to investigate a small part of a broader subject. Although the results might be hard to generalise, the aim is to enlighten relevant actors and to create a more nuanced picture of the subject in a specific context.

In relation to the specific study, it is important to mention that both researchers were employed at the target organisation. The researchers were rarely in contact with the participants and there was no power imbalance between the actors. However, this could have had an impact on the result as the subject is rather sensitive. Perchance participants were afraid to speak their mind and to be honest. However, the researchers made it clear to all participants that they were researchers in the case of this study. Additionally, the focus of the researchers has been to remain objective and not to get biased throughout the whole process.

More practical limitations of the present study include that the interviews have sometimes been executed through digital platforms. It could be beneficial for this study as the subject itself could be experienced as sensitive and difficult to talk about. Therefore, this is not considered as a major limitation. However, the identity work of the IT-consultants might have been impacted due to remote work. Another practical limitation is that all interviews have been carried through in Swedish. The researchers have been very careful during transcription as well as translation of the interviews, to lower the negative impact of this.

4.7. Ethical considerations

According to the Swedish Research Council (2018), there are four important principles to consider when conducting research: reliability, honesty, respect and responsibility. On the basis of these principles, the study was conducted with responsibility for the entire process and the potential consequences afterwards. Moreover, the research was conducted with reliable methods, such as thematic coding, to ensure the quality. The results were analysed and presented in an honest and objective manner and handled with respect towards the target organisation, the participants and the client firms.

Bryman (2018) emphasises the requirements of information and consent. No interviews were conducted without the respondent's approval and all participants received an information letter with information about confidentiality and access as well as how the data would be handled. The respondents were also informed that the participation was voluntary and that they could cancel the interview or reject certain questions if they wished.

The study has been conducted with the requirements of usage and confidentiality of data in regard (Bryman, 2018; Webster et al., 2014). Therefore, the material was solely for the purpose of this study and accordingly erased when the study was completed. The material was handled with confidentiality, and all respondents and company names as well as information that could be traced to certain employees were anonymised. Additionally, the material was only accessible to the researchers. No one else within the target organisation had access to the collected data or knew which employees who participated in the study.

5. Result

The chapter will elaborate on the empirical findings of the study, as a means to investigate the identity of high-skilled temporary agency workers in a Swedish IT-consulting company. By dividing the chapter into the following sections; background, the how of identity work, the when of identity work and the why of identity work; the result aims to increase the understanding of how high-skilled IT-consultants are involved in their identity work when being in a triangular relationship. The chapter also aims to develop the understanding of what factors that impact the direction of identity work.

5.1. Background

All 14 interviewees possess a consultant role, and are thus in a triangular relationship with an employing firm and a client firm. All respondents have a long-term assignment at the client firm, proceeding for one year or longer, and do not move around between assignments.

A clear division of IT-consultants could be discerned in the result, where five interviewees had over three years of experience within IT, while the rest were rather new into the field. The five interviewees with over three years of experience will in this study be entitled as senior IT-professionals, and the other 9 will be entitled as junior IT-professionals. The senior IT-consultants have been employed at the employing firm for between one and four years. All junior IT-consultants have been employed at the employing firm for less than one year, and for five of them, the purpose is for them to become permanent employees at the client firm after a period of approximately one year. Four of the junior IT-consultants will become permanent employees at the employing firm, continuing their work as IT-consultants.

The interviewees had different educations; approximately half from a university, and half from a vocational college. Interestingly, all interviewees that have attended a university mentioned their school by name, whereas the rest did not. Some respondents mentioned the fact that vocational college does not have the same status compared to a university. Interviewees with a less attractive education sometimes felt the need to defend their choice of not attending a university.

In general, most interviewees decided to begin their career within the field because of their long-term IT-interest. Other reasons for being in this profession were good benefits, that it is fun and creative, and that it is a high-status profession and important for the future. It was clear that IT-consultants are coveted within society, and four interviewees mentioned that they do not need to apply for jobs; jobs are coming their way. In general, IT-consultants can have higher demands, however, it is harder for junior IT-consultants who just need to get out on the labour market. The IT-consultants get more coveted the more senior they become. It is mentioned by several interviewees that consultants imply an extra cost for the client firm, compared to having a workforce consisting of solely permanent employees. However, one junior interviewee mentioned that as a junior, one is not worth the extra costs that it entails for the client firm to hire temporary workers.

Below is a table of the empirical data divided into three parts: the how, the when and the why of identity work, in order to illustrate IT-consultants' identity work.

Table 1. *An overview of distinguished themes in the collected empirical data*

Parts of identity work	**Findings in empirical data**
The how: processes	● *Faking competence and interest:* talking in a specific way, dodging particular subjects or avoiding asking questions. ● *Changing attributes:* changing own attributes to fit the collective, changing the perception of the client firm, or changing attitude towards it. ● *Workplace and team constellation:* the impact of continuous communication with the client firm and the employing firm.
The when: intensification	● *The consultant role in itself:* varied assignments or tasks, or role transitions. ● *Events and situations:* threat of losing the job, inconsistency between role description and work tasks, challenges and complications, relationship to both organisations, or role tensions.
The why: motives	● *Internally focused motives:* reinforcement of a positive self-image or to reduce uncertainty. ● *Externally focused motives:* establishment of

	desired external image or adjusting/not adjusting to group norms. ● *Gaps between present and future:* the gaps between the present and the desired future, as well as how to get there.

5.2. The "how": processes of identity work

The second part of the chapter elaborates on how high-skilled IT-consultants are involved in identity work in the context of a triangular relationship. The result showed that processes of identity work include faking competence and interest, and changing the collective's attributes.

5.2.1. Faking competence and interest to enhance oneself

Generally, most of the respondents expressed an image of themselves as stable and fixed, and not adapting to different contexts at the client firm and the employing firm. Nonetheless, almost everyone experienced pressure to act in certain ways, such as faking interest and acting professionally. However, they got more and more comfortable in their role over time, experiencing more genuine interest and professionalism. One of the senior IT-consultants explained that when you are a junior, you "fake it 'til you make it" (Interviewee 5) and interestingly, that was confirmed by the interviews with the junior IT-consultants. Imposter syndrome was a common concept brought up by the respondents, and the junior IT-consultants made an effort at the client firm to appear as more competent and capable than they were. There was a need to appear as having higher programming skills than they actually had, for example through avoiding conversations about subjects above their skill level or by avoiding asking questions. This behaviour originated from pressure at the client firm, for example through norms and feelings that everyone else is very highly skilled or very interested. These adjustments could of course be interpreted as naturally occurring at work, but interestingly, only three of the junior IT-consultants felt the need to perform at the employing firm. This further supports the result that many of the interviewees see the employing firm as a friend rather than an employer, elaborated on in the next section (5.2.2.).

"The thing is, some things you don't have a complete understanding of really, so you may have to fake interest in something until you understand what it's about… In the beginning, you might be just like: wow, cool, interesting. I don't really know exactly why… I think everyone puts themselves in such a position, to make an effort. To show extreme interest. Eh,

which then becomes more genuine as time goes on… If you hadn't shown any interest, I think that it would've been difficult to stay. Because like, if you don't show any interest, why are you working here? There's a risk as well… for oneself, it's to keep the assignment. Until you know what it actually is about." (Interviewee 2)

"You try to steer topics of conversation towards the things you know, instead of… just sitting and… acting, acting stupid. If you say that you don't know anything and then you just sit and keep quiet, you know, then you try to steer the conversation." (Interviewee 3)

5.2.2. Changing personal characteristics and collective's attributes

The assignment is of course always an important factor when the consultant accepts a job offer, because the assignment is decisive for what tasks, techniques or tools the work will include. Many of the respondents did not know about the employing firm before the recruitment process. A few of them recognized the client firms, although many did not. However, a majority of the respondents presented the employing firm's characteristics as important factors when deciding to accept their current job offers. Some chose their jobs solely based on the assignment at the client firm while others simply referred to good timing as the main reason behind their current employment.

All interviewees said that they got a good first impression of the employing firm and described it with words such as welcoming, friendly and flexible. Generally, the positive impression remained and the respondents described the employing firm as generous, employee focused, flexible, relaxed, friendly, familiar, helpful and thoughtful. The respondents had, though, got an extended picture of the employing firm and two IT-consultants described the employing firm as less structured than imagined and sometimes a bit too relaxed.

When comparing the respondents' first thoughts about the client firms with their current experience of the workplace and their assignment, the work situation turned out to be better than expected for half of the respondents. For example, the perception of the client firm could be altered from being a boring company with old employees, to becoming socially important and flexible, with a focus on cutting edge technology.

"I had no picture of the company before I started, because I didn't know it existed… I thought it was a different age group who worked with this and… It was quite a bland first impression, actually. (...) In the beginning I almost went in with the attitude that this is just a

temporary gig again, for me. I will start at this project, learn everything I can, and then drop out and start on something more interesting. But ehm, it has gone from that to now being actually (...) I can be very proud to work at (client firm), because it… it feels important, what I'm doing." (Interviewee 4)

Others changed their approach to the client firms' characteristics rather than their actual perception of them. Although previous perceptions remained, negative perceptions were defended by the individual through explanations to why the organisation is as it is.

"They want to change, they want to succeed, they want it to be good, then there are many external factors that may make it difficult, because they are so many, it is so big and there are so many processes and they should intertwine as well, so many departments that need to cooperate and collaborate and such. So that makes it difficult as well, for that reason, but I do not feel that the feet are on the brake, which I might have had as expectation." (Interviewee 6)

For some respondents, the image of the client firm and their assignment had changed neither positively nor negatively. For other interviewees, the image of the client firm and the assignment deteriorated during the employment period, while the image of the employing firm remained positive. For example, one respondent had the perception that the client firm was innovative, growing and driven but now describes the company as a sinking ship. Another respondent thought that the client firm would be very structured and agile, whereas now describing it as chaotic.

The interviewees adjusted their personality in different ways. Common adjustments were topics of conversation, depending on which individual they talked to, if they were in the client firm or employing firm context or if the group consisted of high-skilled or low-skilled professionals. Some participants gradually became more socially comfortable and learned how to behave at the client firm. Other participants became more relaxed because of the slowness at the client firm or because of chaotic work situations that they have had to learn to accept. In terms of changing physical attributes, the respondents experienced mixed pressures. Some interviewees did not experience that they had to dress in a certain way at the workplace, but simultaneously felt that they could not dress however they wanted. Some respondents felt the need to dress more properly at the client firm. A respondent highlighted the difference in clothes depending on if the job is high-skilled or low-skilled, and mentioned that a goal was to be able to walk through the corridor with a shirt on and with a computer under the arm, and a proud feeling when that finally happened. That indicates that physical attributes are important parts of an individual's professional identity.

5.2.3. Workplace and team constellation

One of the respondents regularly worked from the employing firm's office and spent time there on a weekly basis. The majority of the respondents varied between working from the client firm's office and remotely from home. All respondents had regular contact with colleagues at the client firm, through weekly meetings and daily chat conversations. However, in terms of the employing firm, the respondents mainly visited the office and met other employees at the employing firm for non-work related activities such as office parties.

Almost half of the respondents worked with other IT-consultants from the employing firm in their assignment at the client firm. Some interviewees were sole IT-consultants within the team, and others worked with consultants from other consulting firms.

5.3. The "when": intensification of identity work

The third part of the chapter elaborates on the when of identity work, hence when the process might be intensified. First of all, the consultant role in itself implies an ongoing process of identity work. Additionally, various events and situations such as the risk of losing the job, inconsistency between role description and work tasks, the relationship to both organisations in the triangular relationship and role tensions might impact the direction of identity work.

5.3.1. The consultant role: an ongoing process of identity work

The result showed that all of the respondents believed that the consultant role requires certain characteristics, for example adaptability, openness, discipline and flexibility, as well as good social skills to "sell" oneself and the employing firm to the client firm. There were mixed beliefs in terms of whether the consultant role suits senior or junior IT-professionals better. Generally, senior IT-professionals seem to fit into the consultant role better because of their expertise, but the consultant role might support and educate junior IT-professionals when taking the first step out on the labour market.

The interviewees mentioned many benefits with the consultant role, such as flexibility, better compensation and benefits, larger room for negotiation, possibility to change assignments and to have more options in terms of client firms. In some cases, the employing firm was seen as an employment service, providing a high level of security. Thus, the employing firm was seen as a party to “fall back against” if necessary. It also emerged that some respondents felt that they were part of two different families, indicating two belongings which can potentially be in conflict.

Role transitions were mainly seen as positive by the respondents, but the uncertainty of the work arrangement was clearly present among the junior IT-consultants. The senior IT-consultants instead emphasised the lack of belongingness, fewer career opportunities at the client firm, cumbersome administrative processes as well as the high demand of expert skills as disadvantages. None of the interviewees were between two different assignments, or have ever been between two assignments during their employment at the employing firm.

The IT-consultants had varied assignments and work tasks. Half of the respondents worked with development of new features or systems, and in general, they perceived their assignment as cool, exciting, innovative, interesting and advanced. A majority of these respondents were satisfied with their current assignment, while one was actively looking for a new role. The other half worked with repair and maintenance of systems, and in general, the assignment was perceived as difficult, complex and stressful. Of those participants, the majority experienced their assignment as fun and exciting. However, some interviewees emphasised that they were not completely satisfied in their current role and mentioned that their tasks were rather dull.

Interestingly, the interviewees working with new systems or features tend to present themselves as working at the client firm, not even mentioning their employing firm. In terms of the participants working with repair and maintenance, three are presenting themselves as working at the employing firm, two are only presenting themselves by their professional role and two are presenting themselves as working at the client firm. The result indicates that the assignment and work tasks might have had an impact on how the IT-consultants perceive themselves in the triangular relationship. The development of new features or systems, which infer a role that is cooler and more interesting, might result in the IT-consultant identifying with the client firm to a higher degree.

5.3.2. Events and situations triggering identity work

A majority of the interviewees experienced an overall threat of losing their job at the client firm if not doing well or complementing the team. This was felt mainly by junior IT-consultants, while senior IT-consultants mentioned that they felt this earlier in their IT-career. Some interviewees felt the need to cater both firm’s needs, and more specifically in relation to the client firm where there was constant pressure to deliver and to have a fast learning pace. It could be hard to prioritise, and feelings of unfaithfulness were experienced towards either the employing firm or the client firm. Two participants also mentioned that there is a need to fight constantly to keep the job, because if the client firm does not want the person - then the person has nothing else to fall back to.

"(...) if you… need to change customer company, eh, quickly, then you need to be able to quickly come in and show that, if you thrive then… you actually have to, uh, fight a little harder for them to want to keep you. If I'd been employed at, at the company, or the customer company, then they would have, within quotation marks, had "more difficulties to get rid of me". If you are a consultant, you always have to prove yourself a little bit." (Interviewee 10)

The risk of losing the job might also be dependent on the economic conditions of the society. However, some interviewees still mentioned that IT-consultants in particular inherent competence and skills that are sought after within the society, and that this can result in higher employment security and better benefits.

"Sometimes it's easier to change to permanent employment rather than to change consultant assignment. And I think that goes in periods, eh, it has a lot to do with the industry and so on, economic conditions and stuff like that. Sometimes, eh, companies prefer to hire consultants. And then it's easier to change assignments and such. But, in some periods… Companies are investing more in hiring permanent employees instead." (Interviewee 5)

Another potential threat that arose during the interviews was inconsistency between the role description and the work tasks. Whether the change was experienced as positive or negative was subjective. However, it could be distinguished that increased responsibility resulted in greater satisfaction, while decreased responsibility resulted in lower satisfaction. Additionally, respondents experiencing a positive change grew both as individuals and in their professional roles, and it was also clear that those IT-consultants identified more with the client firm and their team. The assignment was also experienced as more interesting and fun. On the other hand, respondents experiencing a negative change identified less with the client firm and increasingly with the employing firm. The assignment was also perceived as difficult and non-crucial to the client firm.

Another finding was that problems and complications within the team at the client firm could result in intensification of identity work. From having positive perceptions of the client firm in the beginning, complications could result in a negatively changed image.

"(...) and then I got another interview and it was also very relaxed, you also feel when you go in there at (client firm) that everyone is very… very kind and relaxed and, and then you notice that the whole, like, the agile journey, that they have started on, you are in the middle of the journey, it is still kind of pure chaos and not everyone has come along and not everyone understands that processes have changed and for me it really has been since I started there, that the only constant has been chaos, changes and sometimes you also feel that it makes you become very kind of… sensitive to more changes, that you want kind of want to stick to that little… ordinary around you." (Interviewee 11)

Simultaneously, the identity towards the employing firm was strengthened by the employing firm's efforts to keep the IT-consultants satisfied.

"I really feel that they care about their employees, they really want to do their best so that you are in a good place, doing what you like. It has only gotten better and better, so I have a very positive type of connection to the company. (...) I really feel that if someone would ask "would you recommend your employer?", it's a full hearted sí, yes, ja, jajamän." (Interviewee 11)

Furthermore, the result showed that the general perception of the employing firm was that the culture was welcoming, open and helpful. The fact that it was a smaller consulting firm was mentioned as a positive attribute as it makes the company more flexible and efficient. The employees were given a high degree of independence and freedom, and there was no feeling of internal competition which goes hand in hand with the experience that one can take on a more relaxed role towards the employing firm. The employing firm was recognized as a large living room and a place to have fun with video games and coffee breaks. The employees rarely met the employing firm in a work context. Rather, the employees ordinarily met up at activities after working hours. Most interviewees had more of a friendly relationship with their employer, but with the support and benefits that comes with being hired. One interviewee mentioned that without the activities, there would be no real relationship towards the employing firm; it would be "just an administrative unit" (interviewee 13).

"At (client firm), it's more of a work feeling (...) I'm there to work. But at (employing firm) I've got the feeling that it's more fun. Eh, so it's weird to say but (employing firm) is, like, not my employer, I would say. Eh, I would say it's a great friend. (Interviewee 14)

The interviewees experienced the mix of two firms in different ways. The majority of the interviewees mentioned that they were representatives of the employing firm. Some respondents felt as if they were permanent employees at the client firm, however, they were not entirely decoupled from the employing firm's objectives. There was a general feeling of having to live up to the expectations that are put on a consultant and one interviewee mentioned that an IT-consultant is supposed to be "checked" already in terms of skills.

"So, I think as a permanent employee, you also have expectations of what, what you should be able to do and stuff like that, where you go through interview processes and so on (...) As a consultant (...) you are expected to have already gone through these processes and should have the knowledge of certain things. Eh… So, the expectation is there." (Interviewee 5)

Some respondents experienced having different roles connected to the employing firm and the client firm, and described it as having two belongings but not entirely belonging to neither or having to balance the interests of the two firms. Other respondents did not experience having different roles at all, and wanted to convey that they are always themselves in all situations. However, when digging deeper into the subject, the result showed that most of them had a different role connected to the employing firm than to the client firm. One interviewee experienced role tensions as a part of the work was to represent the client firm externally, while simultaneously being mainly loyal towards the employing firm, which resulted in fragmentations Another issue that emerged during the interviews was the difficulty with loyalty, as there was a need to cater for both the client firm's and the employing firm's needs. This resulted in prioritisation difficulties, and two interviewees explained it as the struggle to know "what hat to put on" (Interviewee 12), and another described it as having two relationships simultaneously and "being a bad partner towards one" (Interviewee 13).

5.4. The "why": the motives of identity work

The following part of the chapter presents the result which concerns the motives behind identity work. First, internally focused motives will be presented. Second, externally focused motives will be elaborated. Finally, the gaps between the respondents' present situation and their desired future will be described.

5.4.1. Internally focused motives

The majority of the interviewees defined themselves primarily in terms of their profession, while also presenting their profession with positive attributes. This indicates that the employees wish to positively enhance their self-perception by affirming and reinforcing their personal identity with the professional role. Two interviewees presented themselves in relation to the name of their client firm, and one of these described the self and the company in similar words, while the other respondent did not. Interestingly, the latter made an effort to fit in by for example diluting the social capacity. The result indicated that both interviewees made an effort to complement their identity to suit their client firm, which also indicated reinforcement of the individual's personal identity.

During the interviews, seven participants mentioned that the consultant role suits them and that they like the role and what it entails. Interestingly, six of these interviewees were permanent employees at the employing firm, and only one interviewee was supposed to become a permanent employee at the client firm after a period of one year, in accordance with that person's wish to become permanently employed at an organisation in the future. The fact that this interviewee still underlined that the consultant role fits the person might be to reduce uncertainty in a role that is perceived as principally including disadvantages. The result could possibly indicate that all employees possessing a consultant role also strengthened their identity as IT-consultants by explaining how well they fit into the role.

5.4.2. Externally focused motives

The general perception among the interviewees was that the profession is positively associated in society, although they emphasised different characteristics such as cool, engineering work, complex, difficult and requires intelligence. When presenting themselves and their occupation to others, the majority of the interviewees primarily announced their profession before mentioning the client firm, the employing firm or the consultant role. The few who did not put any positively associated words into their descriptions of the profession did not present themselves mentioning the occupation first, but instead the client firm, the employing firm or the consultant role.

Among the respondents, there were similarities between how they described the atmosphere at the client firm workplace and how they described themselves or how they behaved to fit in. The descriptions are not entirely identical, but overlaps. For example, one person described the self as a driven team player with high ethical and moral standards and expressed that they all work towards the same objectives at the client firm, and they all had the same values and strive to make society better. The person has also changed the perception of the client firm to be more driven. Interestingly, respondents who worked at the same client firm described themselves similarly as they described the client firm, although with different attributes.

In the few cases where respondents described themselves differently than the client firm, the IT-consultants either tried to fit in - or did not. For the interviewees trying to fit in, customisation of personalities could be seen, for example by making efforts to get out and socialise, or to lower the personal energy to adjust it to the team. Three respondents' definitions of themselves were more aligned with the initial impressions of the client firms than their current perceptions. Additionally, all of them had deteriorated perceptions of the client firms and their assignments.

5.4.3. Gaps between present and future

The result shows that the majority of the interviewees ended up in their current role as IT-consultants by chance. For all but five IT-consultants, the purpose was for them to continue working as IT-consultants in their current assignments. The other respondents were supposed to become permanent employees at their current client firm. Moreover, all respondents strived to develop further in their professional role, for example by taking on more responsibility than they currently have.

The majority of the respondents were open to either working as a consultant or as a permanent employee at an organisation. All but one emphasised the benefits with the consultant role. In general, it seemed like the choice of work arrangement mainly depends on the assignment and offer with its supplementary compensations, rather than what kind of work arrangement it is.

Some interviewees wished to become permanent employees in the near future. All these emphasised the disadvantages with the consultant role, such as uncertainty, precarious working conditions and fragmentation between the roles within the triangular relationship. Few benefits emerged during these interviews. Some participants experienced anxiety in terms of whether they would get to keep the job at the client firm.

The experience of the two firms also affected what the IT-consultant wished to do in the future. An example is one respondent who at first was not attracted to the consultant role, but as the perception of the client firm deteriorated simultaneously as the perception of the employing firm was enhanced, the consultant role became more attractive.

5.5. Direction of identity work

Generally, most of the respondents saw the client firm as their employer, and many of them even forgot that they were IT-consultants and employed by the employing firm. However, three of the participants stuck out with a stronger bond towards the employing firm. They described their relationship to the employing firm as more important than the relationship to the client firm, or presented themselves as employees at the employing firm. The common denominators for these three participants were that their perception of the client firm and the assignment deteriorated simultaneously as their perception of the employing firm remained positive or even improved. Moreover, all of them had additional contact with the employing firm besides office parties or administrative errands. One worked from the employing firm's office, one helped the employing firm with recruitment and one had a problematic work situation at the client firm and received support from the employing firm. Hence, when the identity towards one party decreases, the identity towards the other party increases.

6. Analysis and discussion

In the following chapter, the result will be analysed and discussed in regard to previous research and the theoretical framework with a structure based on the how, when and why of identity work. The result showed that the IT-consultants were involved in identity work through various processes, and a number of factors impacting the direction of the consultants' identity work were distinguished. Generally, the consultants identified more with the client firms than the employing firm, but mostly with the profession. However, there were three exceptional respondents who could be distinguished as identifying more with the employing firm. It was also clear that the triangular relationship differs in some aspects between high-skilled and low-skilled TAWs.

6.1. The processes of high-skilled IT-consultants' identity work

The section analyses and discusses the first research question of this study, namely "in what ways are high-skilled IT-consultants involved in identity work when being a part of a triangular relationship?". The focus is upon the how of identity work, hence, the processes which could be distinguished in the result.

6.1.1. Sensebreaking, sensegiving and sensemaking at the workplaces

Sensebreaking, sensegiving and sensemaking are important factors in identity work. Sensebreaking is when a collective pressures an individual to get rid of unwanted behaviour or characteristics to become more similar to the rest of the collective. Sensebreaking is more prominent in the beginning of employment (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), which could explain why this was not particularly noticeable in the empirical data. However, sensebreaking could have occurred in the beginning of the respondents' assignments at the client firms. For example, as certain respondents have changed their behaviour according to the group. Sensebreaking could also have been a driving force behind the respondents' experienced need to appear as more competent and interested than they actually were. The client firm could have exercised sensebreaking in order to force the individual to conform to the collective. However, there is no result specifically pointing at that, so no conclusions can be made regarding it.

Through sensegiving, an organisation influences the members' identity work and the members understand the signs they receive through sensemaking (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). A part of the explanation for why the respondents' identity work was more directed towards the client firm is sensegiving. According to Alvesson (2012), the employing firm can let the client firm have the daily supervisor role and that was clearly the case for almost all of the IT-consultants. Activities at work, such as meetings, are common forums for identity work (Caza et al., 2018a). As nearly all respondents were considerably more in contact with the client firm compared to the employing firm, the client firm's opportunities to provide sensegiving were considerably greater. Additionally, the result aligned with previous research on high-skilled TAWs within IT (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012), and because of the complicated work tasks they were very integrated in their teams and the client firms. As a result of this, the respondents received daily sensegiving from the client firm, about the client firm's work ways, systems, tools, techniques and culture, and they gathered more clues from the client firm to make sense of. Hence, continuous interaction is important to make the individual a part of the norms in the workplace (Alvesson, 2000).

The team constellations could possibly affect the sensegiving and sensemaking. Some respondents worked in teams with other IT-consultants from the same employing firm, whereas others worked only with permanent employees or with consultants from other consulting companies. It is not completely evident how much impact the team constellation has on the outcome of the respondents' identity work, but a common phenomenon among the respondents who did not work with employees from the same employer is that they did not feel like IT-consultants and even forgot that they were. That could be a result of less presence of the employing firm in their daily work.

The respondents mainly visited the employing firm's office for office parties or were in contact with the employing firm for employment related issues. Accordingly, the sensegiving provided by the employing firm was either very relaxed and festive at parties or administrative, flexible and solution oriented. As a result, the respondents' sensemaking of the employing firm was generally that their employer was a relaxed and nice friend, but also an administrative unit which could serve them with new assignments when they wanted a change or if their current assignment would not be prolonged.

There were three exceptional respondents who identified more with the employing firm than their client firms. Neither of them had adapted their personality in accordance with the client firm. All of them had regular contact with the employing firm for work related matters, and presumably received more sensegiving from the employing firm. The result showed that the individual's identity towards the employing firm can be enhanced by for example spending work hours at the employing firm's office, being involved in the employer's objectives or when experiencing challenges at the client firm, making the employing firm appear as the better group in comparison. It was clear that the employing firm had a prominent role in the identity work, for example by continuously communicating beyond administrative issues, offering support and help in difficult situations and involving the employees in organisational objectives, operations and culture. This is in accordance with Alvesson (2012), emphasising that it is important for employing firms to establish some form of coherence in organisational matters in order to achieve loyalty and retention. Thus, increasing the IT-consultants' involvement in the employing firm.

6.1.2. Changing personal characteristics and the collective's attributes

The two major processes within SIT, to either increase the attachment to the group or to distance oneself from it (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), were evidently present among the respondents. There were signs that the respondents changed both their own and the collective's attributes to increase the attachment.

Generally, the respondents' perceptions of the employing firm remained good throughout the employment time and for some, it even improved. Rather, the respondents changed the client firm's attributes to a larger extent. Only a few respondents described that their perception of the client firm was unchanged, and for the rest, the perception of the client firm had either improved or deteriorated. The change of perception indicated a change in perceived status and affected whether the respondents wanted to stay at their assignment or not, which are important incentives for identity work within SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000). It could also be a form of coping strategy, as a way to legitimise being part of the specific group (Caza et al., 2018b)

The respondents also changed their own attributes to fit into the group, for example by making an effort to be more outgoing or to be more reserved. The result showed that the majority of the respondents described their own personality in similar words as they described their current experience of their team or client firm. Many of them did not know much about the client firm in the beginning and it is unlikely a coincidence as it appeared for the majority of the respondents. This indicates that they have changed their personal attributes when working at the client firm and thereby have undergone identity work. The attributes have over time been internalised through continuous execution (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016) and the IT-consultants now describe them as parts of their core self. The fact that IT-consultants who worked at the same client firm perceived the firm differently and accordingly internalised different attributes confirms that an individual's additional personal and social identities affect how they perform their identity towards a specific collective (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Additionally, a few respondents did not describe themselves and the client firm in similar characteristics, but made efforts to change to fit in, which shows that identity work is occurring.

The respondents who described a deteriorated view of the client firm also did not describe themselves similarly as they described the client firm and some of them made no efforts to decrease that gap. Rather, they were more similar to their previous perceptions of their client firm, which indicates that the distance between them has increased.

Finally, the respondents also changed their attributes both in their physical appearance and how they talked and behaved, which will be further discussed in the section about the four modes (6.1.3.).

6.1.3 The four modes of identity work

When becoming a member of a collective, and adopting the collective's social identity, the behaviour can change towards more compliance with the norms of the group (Alvesson, 2000). The result showed that identity work occurred in all modes presented by Caza et al. (2018). In the following section, the cognitive, discursive, physical and behavioural mode will be discussed in regard to the result.

The most prominent aspect of identity work connected to the cognitive mode included self-questioning (Caza et al., 2018b). Since the current employment was the first job within this profession for many of the respondents, feelings of self-doubt and precariousness about whether they would be able to execute the work they were employed to do arose, especially in the beginning of the employment (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Self-change (Caza et al., 2018b) was also a way which the respondents' identity work occurred. As self-doubt was mostly prominent in the beginning of employment, self-change was more of an ongoing process. The IT-consultants grew in their roles and accordingly started to think of themselves as more competent, and realised that they could actually execute their work. Additionally, they described their own personality in ways which were similar to how they described the client firm. That indicates possible self-change towards becoming more akin with the group, hence, adopting the group's social identity (Alvesson, 2000).

The identity work in the discursive mode was clearly prominent. For example, the respondents felt that they could make jokes differently at the client firm, where they were slightly more restricted compared to the employing firm, where they were more relaxed. The discursive mode was also connected to the feeling of pressure to perform and appear as competent, and respondents chose to be quiet and to not talk or ask questions about subjects they did not have knowledge in (Caza et al., 2018b; Coupland & Brown, 2012). The respondents also adjusted to the topics of conversation, which could differ both between different individuals, different companies and between high-skilled and low-skilled contexts.

The physical mode includes physical symbols (Caza et al., 2018b), and clothes were important symbols for high-skilled professions. For example, a respondent mentioned that one goal was to be able to walk in the corridor with a shirt on, carrying a computer and when that finally happened, the person felt proud. Clothes as a symbol was an interesting subject, as it was perceived differently by the respondents. Some interviewees felt the need to dress more properly, whereas others felt that there was no such pressure at all.

The results showed many examples of identity work in the behavioural mode (Caza et al., 2018b). Respondents changed their behaviour both to become more outgoing and the opposite. They used mimicking to work on their own identity (Caza et al., 2018a). One respondent adapted the behaviour towards acting more interested, as a result of the rest of the group's behaviour, which had similar characteristics. The respondent additionally explained that the interest gradually became more genuine, and accordingly internalised the exhibited behaviour to a part of the core self (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

6.1.4. Faking competence and interest to enhance oneself

In general, the junior IT-consultants were more concerned with their appearance in their work and put more effort into presenting themselves as competent and committed. There are several possible reasons underlying that behaviour, which are likely intertwined. Firstly, the juniors had been employed for less than a year, and the identity is more pliable in the beginning of an employment (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Secondly, individuals use previous experience to understand the new context that they enter (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), and the juniors lacked previous experience from work within the IT-profession and were therefore more susceptible to sensegiving. Additionally, as high-skilled professionals, they base their social identity on their profession to a larger extent and often inherit meanings attached to it, which often are performance related (Alvesson, 2000). Collective identities are also continuously reproduced by the group members (Galwa & Vogel, 2021).

The senior IT-consultants' previous experience from the profession helped them understand what they were expected to perform and were more confident in their skills, in contrast to the junior IT-consultants. The pressure that juniors felt to perform was rarely outspoken, it often came from within themselves. This indicates that their sensemaking of the context and the colleagues' behaviour and performance affected their behaviour. Low self-esteem and self-questioning are common features within high-skilled work (Galwa & Vogel,

2021) and imposter syndrome was common among the IT-consultants. Their fear of being caught as not competent enough also describes their understanding of the context as if everyone else is very competent, and that they need to perform to fit in the group. One could understand this behaviour as using a form of mimicking (Caza et al., 2018a) to increase the attachment to the group (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016) as getting caught with not being competent enough would not make them a "good member" of the group, which in this case was undesired (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016; Coupland and Brown, 2012).

Naturally, another reason behind this behaviour is that junior IT-professionals experience higher uncertainty, which will be discussed in the section of factors impacting IT-consultants' sense of identification (6.2.).

6.2. Factors impacting high-skilled IT-consultants' sense of identification

The section will analyse and discuss the second question of this study, namely ''What factors impact the direction of IT-consultants' identity?". The focus will be upon the when and why of identity work, where the when is related to aspects that engender identity work, and the how is related to the motives behind the process. Continuing in this section, distinguished factors impacting IT-consultants' sense of identification will be elucidated.

6.2.1. The consultant role: an ongoing process of identity work

Individuals are constantly working on their identities in order to establish a moderately stable identity (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015). IT-consultants are no exception, but rather a good example of individuals in a complex work arrangement that usually requires ongoing identity work (Alvesson, 2012). The result showed that the IT-consultants do have different identities towards the employer firm and the client firm, although this was not always conscious. Generally, the employees demonstrated a desire to convince themselves that their self was the same towards all parties in the triangular relationship. However, it was clear that the roles towards the client firm were more thoughtful and professional.

In line with previous research of Alvesson (2012) and Coupland and Brown (2012), the result showed that not only is the individual an active agent in this process of identity work, but the social context as well as the organisational culture in both firms have an impact on the direction of identity work. Moreover, the consultant role in itself might imply negative conditions such as heightened uncertainty and weaker job security (Håkansson et al., 2013b). Here, the employing firm has a role to play in minimising this by giving a sense of direction (Alvesson, 2012). This was prominent in the result as the IT-consultants had an increasingly relaxed role towards their employer. It is likely that this is a strategy of the employing firm to balance the employee's uncertainty of the consultant role as well as the requirement for professionalism towards the client firm. Additionally, the result showed that the organisational culture at the employing firm was considerably unique which goes in line with previous research emphasising the need to work with identification towards the whole company (Alvesson, 2000). Throughout, the IT-consultants had the same image of the employing firm.

Another factor that could be distinguished was the IT-consultant’s seniority. Consultants are part of a triangular relationship (Håkansson et al., 2020; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015; Sobral et al., 2020; Woldman et al., 2018) in which the power balance can differ. In general, IT-consultants possess important knowledge and are the primary resource of a consulting firm, making the employer the dependent actor in the relationship (Alvesson, 2012). Yet, the power has been shown to depend on the factor of professional seniority as senior IT-consultants have more developed and mighty coveted skills. Senior IT-consultants are more in a position to set higher demands compared to junior IT-consultants, although skills of IT-professionals in general are highly sought after in society (Alvesson, 2012). The result showed a prevalent feeling of insecurity when being a junior IT-consultant, and this aspect was mentioned regardless of whether the respondent was senior or junior in the role. It is clear that the individual’s confidence is growing in step with the development of skills, and there is an awareness of the fact that their employability will increase as they become more senior in their professional role. This indicates a tendency of the employee’s dependence within the triangular relationship getting weaker, resulting in the power ending up in the hands of the IT-consultant. This can explain why IT-consultants identify with the professional role rather than with the employing firm or the client firm, as that identity is the most obvious and safest. Based on SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), IT-consultants psychologically relate to the group of IT-professionals because that is their recognizable future. This is also harmonious with previous research emphasising that the occupation is often a great part of an individual’s social identity, especially when the occupation is perceived as more than just a way of earning an income (Alvesson, 2012; Brown & Coupland, 2015). Many participants had a far-reaching interest in IT, and their choice of profession was not mainly based on the benefits coming with it.

Moreover, TAWs hold multiple identities that potentially might cause ambiguity and liminality, which is why TAWs ought to be able to adapt and adjust to varying contexts (Alvesson, 2012). This has previously been portrayed as a negative feature of temporary agency work, but the result in this study showed that IT-consultants in general perceive that the possibility to change assignment is beneficial. However, negative features could also be distinguished, for example distance to colleagues and lack of a solid ground. Junior IT-consultants experienced uncertainty although all IT-consultants did have a solid assignment with no plan of changing employing firm, client firm or assignment in near future. So, liminality in terms of in-betweenness in assignments were not present here. However, as previously mentioned, ambiguity between roles within the triangular relationship was seemingly existent. Identity work can be explained as a way for IT-consultants to ease this ambiguity.

The result showed that most IT-consultants were satisfied with their assignment and the associated work tasks. The assignments were either connected to the development of new systems or features, which was positively perceived, or to the maintenance of current systems, which was to some degree negatively perceived. Interesting and cool work tasks resulted in higher identification towards the client firm, while the only interviewees actually identifying with the employing firm had negative associations towards their assignment. This indicates that the assignment in itself is an important factor in terms of the direction of identification. This is similar to previous research, stressing the fact that high-skilled IT-consultants usually identify with the client firm to a higher degree; both because of their involvement in complex tasks as well as the fact that they usually spend their time there (Alvesson, 2000). This is further in accordance with SIT (Brown, 2000), as IT-consultants' direction of identity work may be due to the level of status accredited to a specific group. Development of new systems or features might be perceived as better, which then can be a motive for identity work in order to increase one's self-enhancement (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2000).

6.2.2. Events and situations triggering identity work

A number of events and situations triggering identity work of the IT-consultants were distinguished in the result of this study. Many of these situations were accompanied by less desirable feelings for the individual, which is in accordance with previous research that stresses the role of identity work in challenging contexts (Brown, 2015).

TAWs can be used by a client firm in either a long-term or a short-term perspective (Hill & Carley, 2008), and even though TAWs in Sweden have the same fundamental rights as permanent employees (Håkansson et al., 2013a; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2015) they are more reliant on the societal context (Håkansson et al., 2013b). Therefore, there is an inherent uncertainty within the consultant role. However, as high-skilled IT-consultants to a higher degree are integrated into the core of the client firm (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012), and are the main resource for the employing firm (Alvesson, 2012), this uncertainty might not be quite as apparent in the case of this study. Additionally, there are stringent regulations in terms of temporary agency work in Sweden (Håkansson et al., 2013b). The result showed that the risk of losing the job was prominent, yet mainly when it comes to junior IT-consultants. In general, there was a sense of necessity to complement the team and to perform at the client firm, but also to cater the needs of the employing firm. Additionally, the employing firm was in some cases seen as a supporting pillar in terms of finding new assignments, while in other cases the employee felt a feeling of loneliness in relation to the process of finding a new job. With support in SIT (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), uncertainty towards the client firm resulted in a closer attachment towards the employing firm as a separation from the insecure party was established. This was clear in the case of the three employees identifying more with the employing firm.

Moreover, inconsistency between the role description and the work tasks might indicate a challenging situation creating confusion and self-doubt (Brown, 2015). The result showed that when work tasks were changed in a positive manner, it was perceived as favourable by the IT-consultants. It could be distinguished that increased responsibility and power in the role enhanced the confidence and satisfaction of the employee, and the identity as an IT-professional was reinforced. Hence, some level of confusion could be seen, but no self-doubt. However, when work tasks were changed to be more disadvantageous, it had the opposite effect. The confidence of the employee sank and the self-doubt increased. The identity work took another direction, and the identity towards the employing firm was heightened while the identity towards the client firm weakened. In accordance with SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000), this could be due to the strive of achieving increased status and increased self-esteem.

Furthermore, abrupt challenges and problems might trigger identity work (Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018b). For example, chaos within the team at the client firm reduced the identity towards the client firm while the identity towards the employing firm was heightened. This can be explained by the fact that the employing firm was seen as the safer party in the triangular relationship. Based on SIT, the challenging situation might also have had an impact on the sense of future at the client firm. The level of identification with a part is very much based on the feeling of a potential future scenario with that specific group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Finally, role tensions have an impact on identity work (Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018b). The result showed a tendency of IT-consultants to have different roles towards the employing firm and the client firm, although this was often unconscious. The employing firm's office was seen as a large living room and the relationship was more of a friendly nature, however, it was evident that there was an employment relationship. Simultaneously, the IT-consultants felt a need to act professionally at the client firm and there was generally high identification towards that party. Role tensions were clearly occurring and the triangular relationship comes with an intrinsic difficulty with loyalty. Identification towards the client firm shows higher loyalty towards the client firm, which indicates a risk of employee turnover for the employing firm. Low identification with the employing firm might also result in a situation where the client firm's interests are prioritised (Alvesson, 2000). However, when creating a unique culture that supports the social relationships within the employing firm, the employees are retained (Alvesson, 2012). A clear factor of identity work is the tension between various roles and the problem with loyalty, hence "what hat to put on" and "who to be a good partner towards". Potentially, the employing firm can establish some form of control by increasing the employee's identity towards their employer, as this would create a higher threshold for leaving.

6.2.3. Internally focused motives

The establishment of an identity is not only related to a social collective, but also an important part of the creation of an identity that is valued by the individual self (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). The result showed a tendency of IT-consultants to present their profession in positive terms while also identifying with the profession to a high degree. This can be understood as a way of the individual to enhance the self by reinforcing the personal identity with the profession, securing a positive identity (Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012). This was also seen in the cases where the IT-consultants mainly identified with the client firm, where it was clear that the same expressions were used both to present the client firm as well as the self. It was distinct that some participants complemented their identity in order to suit the client firm. Moreover, a majority of those expressing how well the consultant role was suitable for the person were also permanent employees at the employing firm. This is an example of how individuals in consultant roles might strengthen their roles by explaining how well it suits them.

Furthermore, many respondents were unconscious of various roles they had towards the different organisations. The reason behind them expressing that they are "always themselves" could be a result of either that they have not reflected upon their behaviour and role in different situations or because of the will to increase cohesion between identities, thus creating a consistent authenticity (Brown, 2015). This is also an example of a situation where identity is something fluid, and where consultants thrive to create a consistent identity

(Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015). There is also a need for individuals to have an underlying understanding of how the self actually fits the context, which facilitates for the individual to establish a situated identity that acts as a guiding source in a specific environment (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

6.2.4. Externally focused motives

The most prominent external motive for identity work was that it is important for individuals to present a desirable image of themselves (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012), and therefore it was of importance how the respondents presented themselves when talking to others. When IT-consultants construct the extrinsic picture of themselves, they put emphasis on their profession rather than either of the firms in the triangular relationship. Many of them did not know about neither the client firm nor the employing firm prior to the recruitment process, indicating that neither companies possessed a particularly great status in society. However, they all described society's view of the profession as possessing high status. Their perception of the profession is an expected incentive for their emphasis on belonging to that group, since the core of SIT is the comparison between different groups and the strive to gain status through belonging to high status groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000). Typically, for IT-consultants, emphasising the profession within IT is an easy way to establish a desirable image of oneself towards others in the surrounding (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012).

Additionally, a few respondents presented themselves as workers at the client firm, and they all worked in well-established, big organisations. In other words, collectives that society is familiar with. It is possible to assume that well-known, big organisations possess higher status compared to unrecognised organisations. The only person whose self-presentation firstly involved being employed at the employing firm also made sense of the client firm as chaotic and additionally did not put any particular status in association with the profession. Naturally, for that respondent, the employing firm was the most positively associated group of the three and therefore contained the most desirable image.

To summarise, the respondents presented themselves with emphasis on the collective which they perceived as the most desirable, which for most of them was the group of IT-professionals. According to previous research, identifying more with the client firm than the employing firm is not surprising during long-term assignments. This could additionally increase the risk of the IT-consultant leaving the employing firm to continue working with the client firm, or prioritising the client firm's objectives over the employing firm's (Alvesson 2000; Alvesson, 2012).

6.2.5. Gaps between present and future

Finally, the experience of gaps between present and future are a factor impacting an IT-consultant's sense of identification. The present as well as the future are aspects of an individual's identity (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012) and act as a motivational force for identity work (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The result showed that all IT-consultants have the wish to further develop in their professional role. This is an example of how their psychologically intertwined future was more related to the professional role rather than towards the client firm or the employing firm, further illustrated by the fact that the majority of the IT-consultants present themselves as software developers rather than employees at the employing firm or the client firm. This means that the IT-consultants develop individual goals and paths as a result of the complexity within the triangular relationship (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018), or because their profession is highly connected to their personal identity (Alvesson, 2000). While much is unclear, the profession in itself provides the IT-consultants with a sense of who the person is (Alvesson, 2012; Coupland & Brown, 2012).

The identification with the client firm was also present, but to a lower degree and without pronounced plans to stay at either the employing firm or the client firm in a future scenario. A reason for this might be that the affiliation towards the professional role gives the IT-consultant increasingly positive sentiments as well as higher status. Additionally, the result showed that the majority of IT-consultants were open for either working as consultants or permanent employees in the future. In general, there were positive or neutral associations towards the consultant role. However, there were also a number of IT-consultants who strived to get permanent employment, thus leaving the consultant role. All these respondents had a main focus on the negative aspects of the consultant role, and anxiety over the future was noticeable. A permanent employment can be viewed as a safer settlement for the future for individuals emphasising the negative aspects of the consultant role. Consequently, the attitude towards the consultant role had an impact on the desired future.

6.3. The triangular relationship of high-skilled temporary agency workers

This section analyses and discusses the third question, namely "In what ways do high-skilled temporary agency workers differ from previous research on temporary agency workers?". This section aims to give a more nuanced picture of the triangular relationship and the consultant role, complementing the current view with its focus on low-skilled TAWs.

The fact that there are differences in the triangular relationship between high-skilled and low-skilled TAWs is essential. To understand high-skilled IT-consultant's identity work, it is important to understand the setting in which they operate, since the work constellation possibly impacts the identity work of the individual (Alvesson, 2000).

The triangular relationship, of which high-skilled TAWs are part, differed from previous studies on low-skilled TAWs. High-skilled TAWs were regarded as specialists, which aligns with previous research (Cardone et al., 2021). Thus, the client firms did not primarily use high-skilled IT-consultants to reduce costs or to achieve flexibility (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012) but rather to gain the competence which they need (Barley & Kunda, 2004). The competence scarcity within the IT-sector (Zetterberg & Fors, 2020) further intensified their incentives, and the client firms needed to purchase IT-consultants since they faced difficulties to get hold of the knowledge on their own. As a result of this, the power dynamics within the triangular relationship connected to high-skilled consultancy appeared differently than the relationship presented in previous research of low-skilled TAWs. Junior high-skilled IT-consultants were more similar to low-skilled TAWs, but the more senior they became, the more power they acquired in the triangular relationship. Since the demand for IT-competence is higher than the supply (Zetterberg & Fors, 2020), particularly senior high-skilled TAWs were put in a position where they were able to pick and choose between different job offers and thereby were able to make demands. This made them the most powerful party in the triangular relationship.

While low-skilled TAWs felt excluded and strived towards being a part of the permanent employees at the client firm (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015), high-skilled TAWs were equal or superior to the permanent employees. Generally, the high-skilled IT-consultants did not experience that they were excluded (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015), that they lacked autonomy in their work (Bryant & McKeown, 2016) or were not recognised as a part of the group (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018). Rather, they had high requirements and were very integrated at the client firm, in accordance with research on high-skilled TAWs within IT (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012).

Uncertainty and job insecurity are common within low-skilled temporary agency work (Håkansson et al., 2013b), and there were similarities with junior high-skilled IT-consultants who sensed that they had to perform to keep their assignment. For senior high-skilled IT-consultants, however, the insecurity was absent as they could easily pick another employer or assignment.

Both high-skilled and low-skilled TAWs experienced pressure to perform. For low-skilled TAWs the pressure to perform came from their strive to become permanently employed by the client firm (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018; Winkler & Mahmood, 2015) whereas the high-skilled TAWs did not feel that temporary work was just a way to get permanently employed. Instead, they felt pressure to perform because of expectations, norms and inherited attached meanings connected to both being a high-skilled professional (Alvesson, 2000) and a consultant (Cardone et al., 2021). The high-skilled IT-consultants were well aware that it is more expensive to purchase consultants than to pay salary to permanent employees, and there was a feeling of having to be “worth the money”.

According to Winkler and Mahmood (2018), low-skilled TAWs develop individual goals and paths because of the ambiguity they experience in the triangular relationship. The high-skilled IT-consultants likewise developed individual goals and paths, but not because of ambiguity, which was rare among the respondents. For many of the IT-consultants, programming had also been a hobby for many years, and not just a way to earn an income. The profession also had higher status than the organisations which they were tied to, which made it a more attractive group to belong to (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000). Therefore, the profession became a bigger part of the individuals’ identity (Alvesson, 2012; Brown & Coupland, 2015) and their future was more intertwined with the profession than the workplaces.

7. Conclusion

This chapter summarises the conclusions drawn from the study, and the research questions are answered. Furthermore, this section illustrates the study's contribution to the field of research as well as practical implications for identity work within a triangular relationship. The chapter ends with some implications for future research.

7.1. Summary of findings

The question of "Who am I" is not commonly asked by high-skilled IT-consultants. However, when being asked, the answer is often connected to the profession.

First of all, in what ways are high-skilled IT-consultants involved in identity work when being a part of a triangular relationship with an employer and a client? High-skilled IT-consultants use sensemaking to understand the context and how they should behave. In the triangular relationship, one of the organisations has more room to exert sensegiving, which accordingly gives the employee more information to make sense of and thus have more identity work to execute. IT-consultants increase or decrease attachment through the four modes of identity work; through cognition, talk, behaviour and physical entities.

Secondly, what factors impact the direction of IT-consultants' identity? It is clear that the typical IT-consultant is unconscious of having various identities. The consultant role in itself implies a need for identity work, and related factors are professional seniority, liminality and ambiguity, and assignment and work tasks. Additionally, events and situations such as the risk of losing the job, inconsistency between role description and actual work tasks, abrupt challenges and role tensions are other factors impacting the direction of identity work. Naturally, an individual has internally focused motives to create an identity valued by the self, but also externally focused motives to establish a desirable image of the self presented to others. Finally, gaps between present and desirable future act as a factor for identity work. In this context, most IT-consultants worked their identity towards the client, certain IT-consultants stayed loyal to the employer, but all tended to identify with the profession.

Thirdly, in what ways do high-skilled temporary agency workers differ from previous research on temporary agency workers? The greatest difference concerns status, and while low-skilled TAWs often feel inferior to permanent employees at the client firm, high-skilled TAWs felt equal or superior. There are different reasons for the pressure to perform; for low-skilled TAWs, it was to achieve permanent employment, whereas for high-skilled TAWs it originates from experienced expectations, group norms and having to be worth the cost. High-skilled TAWs have more power in the triangular relationship, which increases alongside their seniority. This is especially true for IT-professionals, as the demand for competence is higher than the supply on the labour market.

7.2. Contributions to previous research

The contributions to previous research are threefold. First of all, the study has complemented current work on temporary agency work by its focus on high-skilled TAWs. It has been shown that the current understanding of the subject is one-sided, lacking information about the situation for high-skilled TAWs. Secondly, these insights have also resulted in an increasingly nuanced picture of the triangular relationship, and of how high-skilled TAWs identify in relation to the profession, the employing firm and the client firm. Thirdly, with the focus on consultants within IT, a contribution in terms of identity work in a specific context has been made.

7.3. Implications for practice and future research

The most important practical implication is the value of creating an organisational culture that the employees are proud of, want to be associated with and stay in. Additionally, the study shows the importance of consistent communication with employees in order not to lag behind the other party in the triangular relationship in exertion of sensegiving.

There are many different tracks to explore in relation to the subject. Suggestions for future research are to execute a study including both high-skilled and low-skilled TAWs or to investigate high-skilled TAWs in another context, for example in another cultural environment. Another implication is to execute a longitudinal study to go deeper into continuous identity work over time.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. Background

1.1. Would you like to tell us more about yourself?

1.1.1. How old are you, where do you come from?

1.2. How would you describe yourself?

1.3. Would you like to tell us more about what you work with?

1.3.1. Could you describe your role and your work tasks?

1.3.2. Do you work at the client firm’s office, the employing firm’s office, remote - or perhaps a combination?

1.3.3. How do you describe yourself in terms of your professional role?

1.3.4. How do you think others define you in terms of your professional role?

1.4. What did you do before you began working at the employing firm?

1.4.1. For how long have you been working at the employing firm?

1.4.2. For how long have you worked as a consultant?

1.4.3. For how long have you worked within IT?

1.4.4. What other jobs have you had before you started working within IT?

1.5. What kind of education do you have?

1.5.1. In what ways do you feel that your education has shaped you in relation to your current role?

2. The consultant role

2.1. What was your perception of the consultant role before you became a consultant yourself?

2.2. Can you tell us more about how you came to be a consultant?

2.3. What is your current experience of the consultant role?

2.3.1. What advantages do you experience with the consultant role?

2.3.2. What disadvantages do you experience with the consultant role?

2.3.3. Are you proud of being a consultant?

2.4. What challenges do you see connected to the consultant role?

2.4.1. In what ways do you experience that you have different roles in relation to the client firm and the employing firm?

2.4.2. In what ways can you experience conflicts between your various roles?

2.4.3. In what ways do you feel that you are being influenced by other groups, such as groups of friends, your team at the client firm etcetera?

2.5 In what ways do you feel a need to adjust yourself in order to fit the consultant role?

3. Employing firm

3.1. How did you end up at the employing firm?

3.1.1. How was your perception of the employing firm at that time?

3.2. What is your current perception of the employing firm?

3.3. How would you describe the organisational culture at the employing firm? E.g. in relation to expectations, norms etcetera.

3.4. In what ways does your employment at the employing firm affect how you perceive yourself as a professional?

3.4.1. How do you sense that your employment at the employing firm affects your job?

3.5. Have you ever felt that you need to be or act in a certain way to fit in at the employing firm?

4. Client firm

4.1. How was your perception of the client firm before you started your assignment?

4.2. What is your current perception of the client firm?

4.3. What were your thoughts about what kind of people who worked at the client firm before starting your assignment?

4.4. What is your perception of the employees at the client firm now?

4.5. How would you describe the organisational culture at the client firm? E.g. in relation to expectations, norms etcetera.

4.6. Have you ever felt that you need to be or act in a certain way to fit in at the client firm?

5. Team

5.1. What were your thoughts about the team at the client firm in the beginning of your assignment?

5.2. What is your current perception of the team at the client firm?

5.3. How do you experience the team's status within the organisation?

5.4. How many employees from your employer do you have in your current team at the client firm?

5.5. How many of your team members at the client firm are consultants?

5.6 Have you ever felt that you need to be or act in a certain way to fit into the team at the client firm?

6. Profession

6.1. What was your perception of your profession before you became an IT-professional yourself?

6.2. What do you think others' image of the profession is?

6.3. What is your opinion of the profession now?

7. The future

7.1. In what kind of role do you see yourself in 5 years? E.g. the consultant role, a permanent employee, the same industry or another industry?

7.1.1. How do you plan to get there?

7.1.2. How can your current situation help you get there?

7.2. How has your perception of yourself changed:

7.3.1. Since you began working in this profession?

7.3.2. Since you began working at the employing firm?

7.3.3. Since you started your assignment at the client firm?

7.3.4. Since you became part of your current team at the client firm?

Extra questions

How do you describe yourself to someone else professionally?

Is there anything you want to add that is significant in relation to your image of yourself?