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To Which We Belong: Understanding Tradition
in Inter-Organizational Relations

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To Which We Belong: Understanding Tradition in Inter-Organizational Relations

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In this article, we explore tradition in the context of collaboration. We take a view of tradition as rooted in reference groups, which are conceptually distinct from membership groups. Through research in two particular collaborations supporting technology business development in the UK, we find that tradition, as a potential cause of failure or inertia, is inter-organizationally significant. We argue that insight into the nature of tradition—in particular its dynamic interplay with culture in the formation of identity—allows participants to develop some useful language that supports more effective reflective practice in collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we begin to explore the role of tradition in shaping inter-organizational collaborations, and reflect upon what an understanding of this role might imply in practice situations. Tradition is relatively under-researched in the field of interorganizational collaboration—and in organization studies as a whole—and yet since it has an important role in linking the ordinary events of daily life with longer term, more enduring social practices and relationships (Giddens, 1984: 200) we expect it to have a significant role in collaboration situations, where understandings, practices and structures may clash.

We approach this by defining collaboration, and then exploring what is meant by tradition itself. Following this we examine the kinds of things that tradition does as a process by drawing upon the work of a number of authors such as Boyer (1990) and Giddens (2002). By progressing from a general conception of tradition to examples of (the traces of) tradition in the work of authors addressing interorganizational collaboration (such as Chikudate, 1999 and Sydow and Staber, 2002), we develop some initial conceptual lenses that support engagement with data collected through a partial ethnographic (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) approach. This engagement—concerning two collaborative groups concerned with technology business development in the UK—is focussed upon both the level of events within the research situations and broader structural observations, and the interpretive mediation

between these levels. In this way it connects with these two key elements of the conceptualisation of the interpretive process of tradition developed from the literature.

INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION

A useful and inclusive definition of collaboration has been offered by Everett and Jamal (2004: 57): «Stakeholders engaging in an interactive process to act or decide on issues related to a problem domain». Making the inclusiveness a little more explicit, Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) underline the potential for both horizontal and vertical forms of interorganizational interactions to be encompassed in collaboration; we favour this inclusive approach rather than definitions which restrict the term collaboration to non-profit initiatives (for example, Mattesich, Murray Close and Monsey, 2001).

However inclusive the definition, collaboration has been characterised as a problem which is more likely to result in failure or inertia than collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen, 2005)—and that the inertia has been observed in studies within and between sectors (Gray, 1989; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Thinking about collaboration as a process, therefore, we consider that the problems and opportunities involve common issues, which apply to all forms of partnership, alliance and network involving multiple organizations from one or many sectors. The issue that we particularly seek to explore here is the kind of problems that may be associated with differences in the traditions of the participants in interorganizational situations.

TRADITION

In this part of the article we outline what tradition is, means and does, in order to then connect with its relevance to interorganizational collaboration. Tradition has been described as a type of truth, which is constructed through the interpretation of the past into the future (Giddens, 1984, 2002; West Turner, 1997). This kind of rhetorical construction is similar to those discussed by Best (1987), regarding justifications for cherished positions.

Tradition differs from other types of truth in that its validity is anchored in events rather than theories (Boyer, 1990). Since the events need not be real events but rationalized myths (Sewell, 2001), and the original events may be reinterpreted, redescribed and adapted over time in engagement with reality (Friedrich, 1972; Dobel, 2001), as answers are adapted to new problems, this anchoring essentially means that all traditions are invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Thompson, 1990; Giddens, 2002).

So, for example, at the end of the eighteenth century when Irish Dissenting Protestants and Catholics were, in many places, in common alliance, the centenary of the Battle of the Boyne was celebrated by

progressives as a victory of a non-sectarian, reforming King William over an absolutist and incompetent King James. By the end of the nineteenth century, the victory was appropriated by sectarian interests claiming it as the victory of a Protestant king over a Catholic one (Bryan, 2000). Unpalatable truths such as papal support for William are edited out of this telling of history, as they would interfere with the function of this tradition in the present.

Tradition is centrally about *interpretation*; arguments about whether traditions are ultimately true or false are therefore spurious (West Turner, 1997). We can see traditions as methods of dealing with problems, developed by communities over time (Dobel, 2001); they have meaning as an *authoritative* mode of complex theorising that is yet, as Friedrich (1972: 18) noted, *consensual* in nature. It differs then from scientific modes of theorising (Boyer, 1990), in that while some communities may claim universal truth for their traditions, they are not falsifiable. Instead tradition is based on a *communally* agreed interpretation and reinterpretation of both events and the social structures by which people tend to live their lives. In this way, the continuity of traditions is argued as being dependant upon a cyclical interpretation of socio-historical contexts.

There is an implication that community understandings of events (however historically distant) must somehow be internalised by members if there is to be an individual recognition of types of authority (Friedrich, 1972; Weber, 1978). From a social psychological perspective Boyer (1990) supports this, suggesting that traditional authority is in turn the basis of the salience of structures which in their explication help to define identities, power relations and other social contextual elements (West Turner, 1997); in particular, it gives enduring meaning to institutions (Molotch, Freudenburg and Paulsen, 2000). Tradition has for this reason been described as the reproductive mechanism of societies (West Turner, 1997) and this mechanism is consistent with the cultural/cognitive underpinning of institutions (Scott, 2001).

For us, the connection with community understandings both partially supports and problematises the notion of tradition as a reproductive mechanism. In particular, considering traditions as structures rooted in individuals reference groups (Kelley, 1952) —perhaps a more helpful notion than community— highlights the cultural complexity at play here. In thinking of traditions as structures we mean those normative rules of social behaviour and signification of meaning that are the medium and outcome of individuals actions and interactions (Giddens, 1984). In considering this it is important to note that Kelley draws the distinction between reference and membership groups. A reference group is a group that is psychologically significant for one's behaviour and attitudes (for empirical examples, see McCabe and Dutton, 1993; Jones and Ryan, 1997; Tinson and Ensor, 2001). This may be, amongst other things, a community, a religion, family or a football team. A membership group is a group to which one belongs by some objective external criterion, such as being an employee of a business. Reference groups may be the same as membership groups but are not necessarily so (Ryan and Ciavarella, 2002). So while some traditions

may be the reproductive mechanisms for *some* societies, we would argue that it is also significant that most societies are in fact a patchwork quilt of communities all with their own particular traditions, some of which may be in conflict with each other, or indeed with society as a whole.

Tradition can therefore be argued to be a source of «referent power» (French and Raven, 1959: 161) in social groups. Consequently, we argue that tradition is intimately associated with interpretation, in two ways. Firstly, there is the internalised aspect of referent authority (Carson, Carson, Roe, Birkenmeier and Phillips, 1999) —prejudgements (McCarthy, 1994; Gadamer, 1998) and habits of understanding that are difficult to explicate, for those within the tradition, without losing their value. Attempts to fully explicate and critically examine this tacit element may result in the destruction of its meaning: «unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters. Scrutinize closely the particulars of a comprehensive entity and their meaning is effaced, our conception of the entity is destroyed.» (Polanyi, 1966: 18). Secondly, there are explicable elements that are open to description (and therefore to redescription and challenge).

We consider that the role of tradition is perhaps as a way of *knowing*, having an irreducible tacit element associated with its persistence and explicable elements which admit adaptation. Given this basis of discussion about the nature of tradition and its meaning, we can begin to outline what it does.

As we have already argued tradition is embodied in the agent as tacit, inexplicable elements and as explicit elements. These are derived from events that an individual may not have participated in, but which have so influenced the social context with which she engages that they lead to further internal interpretive events (a realisation) in relation to the agent's engagement with other social contexts. This resultant referent authority, the internalised truth of the past, becomes an intrinsic aspect of the agent's identity and is manifested in structures, which are the medium and outcome of the agents' interactions.

TRADITION , CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN —AND BETWEEN— ORGANIZATIONS

Tradition contrasts with the idea of organizational culture, which is often cited as source of conflict or difficulty in interorganizational relationships (Harris, 2004; Smith and Zane, 2004; Gadman and Cooper, 2005). Common definitions of organizational culture often relate to Schein's view —for example his definition that organizational culture is the «basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and define in basic taken-for-granted fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment] (Schein, 1997: 6). Although broader artefactual conceptualizations have also been proposed to challenge and extend this ideational view (for example, Alvesson, 2002) in general cultural conceptualizations do not acknowledge the challenge that tradition makes to the temporal

and conceptual boundaries of the organization. That is, the idea of tradition allows insight into matters that may be organizationally significant despite arising beyond the reified boundaries of the organization. Traditions, for our discussion, arise external to the organization though their sources may be in other organizations. This is, obviously, a significant consideration in collaboration, whether we are concerned with a few partnering organizations or an extensive network.

As noted above traditions are an authoritative mode of complex theorising that are yet consensual in nature. They are therefore potentially simplifying of the interpretation of the social situation encountered. So traditions can be usefully considered as a specify type of structure or institution because of the focus upon the agent and the agent's identity, the association with a particular mode of reasoning, and the centrality of interpretation based on referent groups beyond the reified boundaries of organizations are especially important in the case of tradition.

For example in a divided society, such as the north of Ireland, individuals may bring to the workplace dangerous prejudices that derive from traditions rooted in communities beyond the workplace. Such prejudices are unlikely ever to be overcome if they cannot be raised to the level of discursive consciousness where their nature and extent can be explored. Recent work by Hatch and Schultz (2002) and Fiol and O'Connor (2002) has highlighted the problems arising from differing and incomplete constructions of identity that do not fully consider the voice of the other. In an organizational context, Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) have argued that self identity is a fragile construction; in the collaborative context we can only expect this to be more tenuous.

The consideration of tradition allows for the exploration of the multiple interpretations of organizations derived from different reference groups, and makes us aware of their complex and mutable identities. For example women's perspectives on an organization may be very different from that of male colleagues; ethnic minorities may have different perspectives on organizations compared to those of majority community employees. Dialogue on potentially enriching interpretations of organization cannot be undertaken if only the common structures of the organization are considered. If conceptual space is not granted to questions of difference then it is unlikely that diversity can be properly explored. By arguing that organizational issues may arise based on referent rather than membership sources we add a further conceptual handle and useful language to help managers' thinking about organizing, and possibly, if carefully managed, allowing—through interaction with other traditions (Gadamer's [1998] fusion of horizons)—the possibility of change.

INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION AND TRADITION

There is little extant specific research on tradition in collaboration, although it can be argued to have relevance at many levels of interaction, from departments within organizations to entire societies (Molotch,

Freudenburg and Paulsen, 2000); in particular interacting organizations (or individuals) may have conflicting traditions (Couzens-Hoy, 1994; Poggio, 2002); evidence of differences at an explicit level may signify intractable differences at a tacit level. Alternatively, apparent similarity of structures at an explicit level may mask fundamental differences in traditions arising from the divergence of agents' internalised truths.

This is evident, for example, in Chikudate's (1999) research on a Japanese corporation developing partnerships with Western scientific institutions; the selection of individuals with advanced English language skills and Western business training did not help negotiations, but allowing senior scientists to interface directly was successful. Chikudate (1999) ascribes this not to problems with scientific language but to patterns of respect and communication amongst scientists; this tradition of networking or network spanning amongst scientists is also discussed by Staropoli (1998).

In a broader context, Lampel and Shamsie's (2000) discussion of dominant logic affecting the design of joint ventures has parallels with the role of authority in defining the structures of joint ventures with General Electric—they discuss dominant logic as «restricting interpretive freedom» (Lampel and Shamsie, 2000: 602); there are parallels here with the effects of dominant national social identities described by Salk and Shenkar (2001). Similarly, a link between interorganizational collaboration and the development of institutions is highlighted by Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) who refer to the role of unquestioned traditions (with other factors) in supporting institutional power and Sydow and Staber (2002) link institutions, traditions and tacit knowledge in explaining the uniqueness of certain networks.

This leads us back to the tacit-explicit elements of tradition as a kind of knowing, and a concluding comment for this section from the work of Reason (1999: 83): «effective inter-professional collaboration is significantly an epistemological as well as an interpersonal issue that concerns the capacity of the group to support individual members' abilities to suspend attachment to their own frames and begin to peer into the frames of their colleagues.» Although, therefore, as alluded to at the start of this brief section there is little extant research on tradition in collaboration, there are enough individual overlaps for us to argue for the relevance of the earlier discussion.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this research, data were gathered during consultancy activity in the research situations, largely through participant observation, followed by offline analysis (Eden and Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2000a; Hibbert, 2003) —as opposed to the rather more participatory approaches (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000) which are often applied to this kind of intervention. Short-term observations have been applied elsewhere to the study of limited-lifetime groups (Fitch, 2001), including inter-organizational project teams (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) and organizations undergoing change (Cheng, 1998) —both of which

are relevant to the discussions that follow later. We find the term partial ethnography (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000) —in which a particular narrow cultural situation is examined from within— a useful description for this style of research.

The participant observations were supplemented with data from textual sources associated with collaborating organizations. The construction of inferences from the data collated in this way was similar to the emergent theory development process described by Eden and Huxham (1996), and focussed through conceptual lenses (Chikudate, 1999; Huxham and Vangen, 2000b). These lenses provided a focus on the role of tradition as we began the review of the data looking for examples of:

- *implicit* power relations, for example evidenced in unchallenged instances of domination;
- traces of the *authority* of tradition in the apparent ways in which participants construed events;
- *continuity* of practices, reasoning or values from the past despite changing circumstances;
- conflicts or difficulties associated with (perceptions of) *identity* — and differences amongst identities.

This kind of questioning of the data was a way of «knocking at the text» (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 98-99) rather than an excluding, filtering process. This semi-mergent theorising from the data was then supported through the development of conceptual maps using the mapping software Decision Explorer. Having collated relevant data items, clusters of related items were identified and a central interpretation concept identified, which provided a summary of the content of the cluster. An example cluster, which contains data relevant to the Spinout case presented in the findings, is presented **Figure 1**.

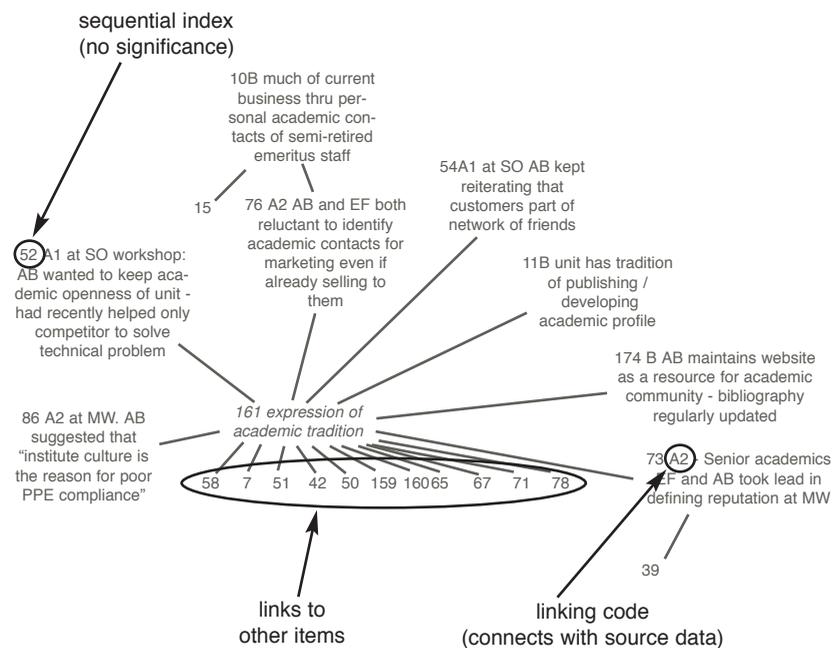


Figure 1. Example Data Cluster, Spinout Case

Conceptual connections between the clusters are then developed, to begin to develop patterns of relationships between them. This is perhaps most clearly explained by reference to another example. **Figure 2** illustrates three closely related clusters that inform the later discussion of establishment behaviours in the second of the cases, Conference.

As more cluster connections are identified, broader patterns are established which facilitate a more holistic understanding of the situation to be developed, as shown in **Figure 3**, which provides an overview of part of such a pattern. It relates to the discussion of the Conference case, which is presented later in the paper.

Through this process, the inferences that are developed can be seen to be initially and loosely guided by theory, but have a emergent quality in relation to patterns that are derived from the data. The output from the analyses are discussed below.

FINDINGS AND INFERENCE

In this part of the article each of the two collaborations is discussed in turn. The first was a relatively discrete collaboration with a well-specified project, whereas the second was a broader, developmental network;

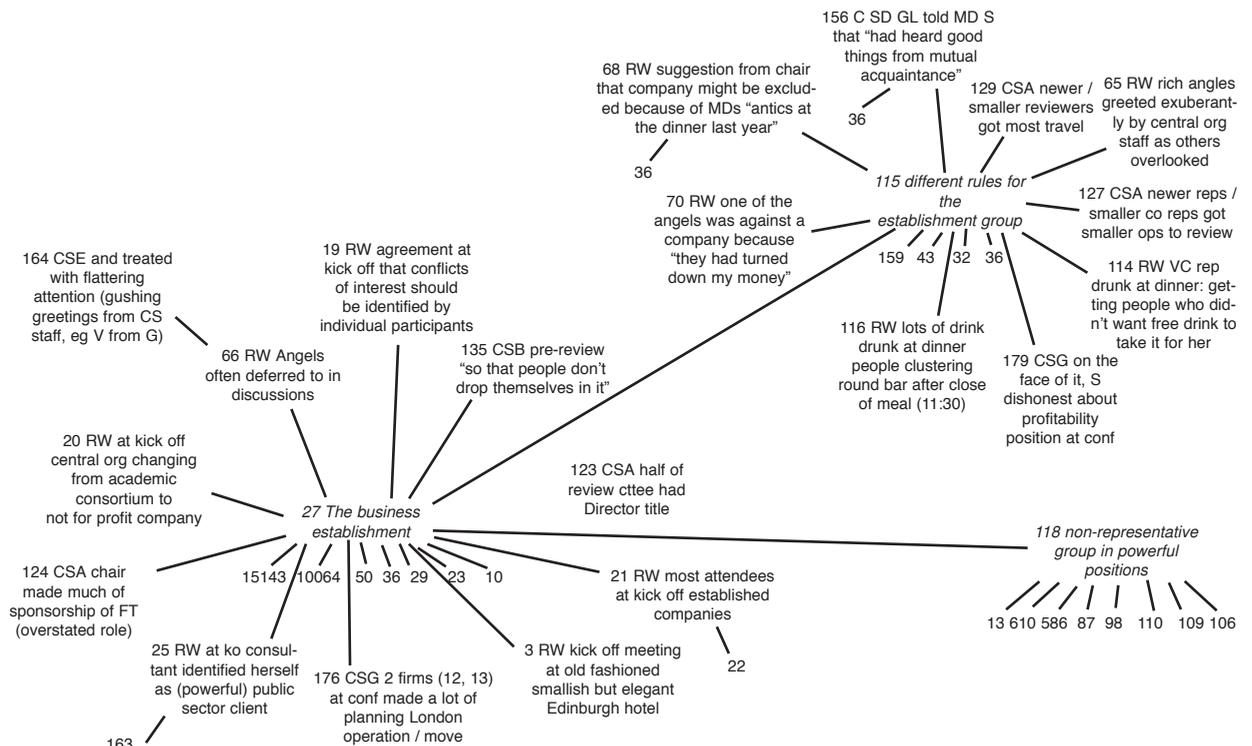


Figure 2. Example Data Clusters, Conference Case

however, both were concerned with supporting small and nascent technology businesses. For reasons of confidentiality these situations are described as Spinout and Conference in this paper. These cases are presented because they relate to the same area of practice whilst allowing us to explore differences relating to scale and complexity that give some feeling for the role of tradition in organisations and collaborations that may be more generally relevant. Here we are thinking particularly of the implications of the presence of traditions rather than the content of particular traditions or organisational contexts.

The Spinout situation was concerned with the collaboration between a commercial consultancy, a regional development agency and a small scientific service group within an academic institution, formed to investigate whether the service group could approach full commercial independence, and develop a business plan to support this. We particularly focus on elements in the data related to conflicts and differences related to identity; reflecting differences between the commercial language and orientation of the development agency, and the strong academic tradition within the scientific group.

The academic tradition of the scientific group was manifested in a number of ways, as shown in the example data cluster provided earlier as Figure 1, for example:

- a strong desire to continue to publish in academic journals (particularly expressed by senior members of the group);
- providing extensive free technical help on the telephone to third party that was known to be their only significant competitor, for the same range of very specialist services;
- expressing a wish to not formally record customer contact details, or to send marketing information to them, because they were also friends within their research networks;
- prominence given to publications and a library of academic references on the group's website, rather than to the commercial services that were provided.

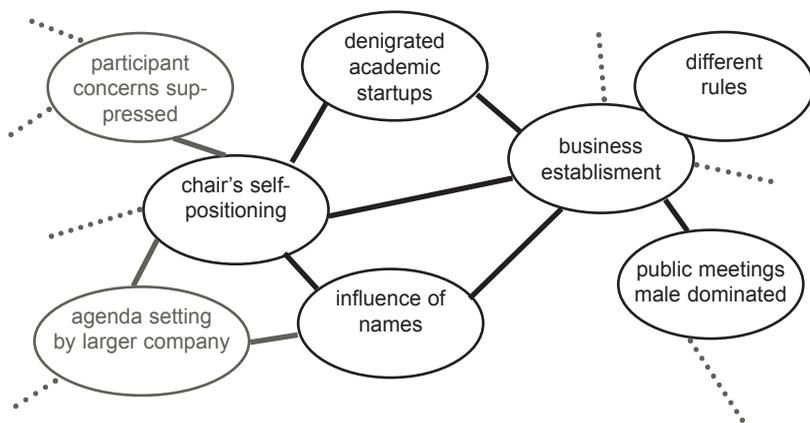


Figure 3. Emerging Pattern of Clusters, Conference Case

All of these features would not be problematic, it might be argued, were it not for the fact that the group was dependant upon commercial income for its existence, and was intended to become independent and therefore fully exposed to business risks. From the perspective of the development agency the group was unsustainable, and was not protecting its intellectual property. For the agency, this was not just a philanthropic interest —it was a government performance criteria for the agency to help develop and grow new and emerging businesses. From this we might draw two inferences: firstly, at an early stage the perspective of what the scientific group was and should be differed in relation to the views of the collaborating parties; secondly, the practices of the scientific group suggested an unchallenged continuity of reasoning from the past.

It should be stressed that the scientific group did have an excellent academic record and the team were at the time the leading specialists in their particular niche; this reasoning and academic identity could be connected to a substantial history in the field. As the project continued, there was evidence of changed views as some members of the scientific group began to take a commercial perspective in line with the development agency, whilst on the other hand some wished to re-integrate the group into its erstwhile academic parent. Some individuals seemed to become increasingly isolated, as they remained committed to what seemed to be insupportable positions. We see this polarisation as being symptomatic of the authority and non-falsifiable nature of tradition (discussed earlier); if the situation is perceived to be incompatible with the agent's tradition, it is either abandoned (for an alternative, more useful tradition?) or the individual retreats into a kind of fundamentalism —as Giddens (2002: 41) has put it, «for someone following a traditional practice, questions don't have to be asked about alternatives.»

There were also patterns in the data that suggested implicit power relations and unchallenged instances of 'domination' in the different levels of influence seemingly exerted by the two representatives of the development agency. The member most involved with the project (A) contributed throughout, and was supportively both challenged and challenging. Her colleague (B) however emerged unexpectedly at the last meeting of the collaboration, criticized liberally, sought to impose faster deadlines and specified more demanding targets —and was not challenged by the other participants. Whilst the development agency had a funding role (an obvious source of power), and this applied to A as well as B, the previous funding of the group was signed off by B, who was more senior than A.

There may also have been a gender issue; in the scientific group, all of the junior (front-line, service providing) staff were female, and the senior (advisory/consultant) staff were male —echoing the gender division in the development agency representation. However, we do not wish to assert these options as explanations, but merely to raise them as possibilities, in relation to the inferred power differences and different potential views about the reference groups connected to these differences.

The second case, Conference, involved twenty-four collaborating commercial organizations. These organizations were the sponsors of a not-for-profit company, which administered a network in which the sponsors participated. The network was intended to help emerging technology companies —startups, in the main— to prepare for engagement with commercial venture capitalists, most particularly at a major investment conference. As with the Spinout situation (above), some of the most interesting findings related to identity.

In particular the Chair of the network (and of the non-profit company sponsored by the members) was assertive and (seemingly) self-consciously businesslike; at times he ridiculed academics (as did others—he led a chorus of sniggering about a company with a university management team). This was intriguing as the non-profit company had been formed from, and was designed to support, to support a network involving universities amongst its clients and was based in a university building. Most interestingly of all, the Chair himself was an accomplished former academic, and was always dressed less formally than sponsor company representatives from large, influential firms. We suggest that this indicates a transitional situation in the chosen identity of the Chair as academic tradition is rejected in order for him to position himself within (join the sniggering chorus) of the business establishment—or perhaps (deliberately or otherwise) associate himself with the traditions of a more powerful reference group¹.

The possibility of tradition linking identity and power in this situation was also suggested by the role of names in the discussions at the meetings of the collaboration and the final investment conference; where startups had attracted interest from famous establishment individuals (either as investors or potential leading members of their management teams), the mention of these names seemed to be a justification of the strength of the startup, and rational judgements were pushed to the background. This was most strongly exemplified by a startup (K) that had gained the interest of a particularly famous name that was part of the conference buzz. The other 22 startups bidding for funds at the conference were represented by a smartly-dressed manager, making a sober presentation that concentrated on financials. A founding member in a crumpled t-shirt, making a fun presentation with no numbers at all, represented K. This had no effect on the buzz around the startup, which seemed to be on the way to becoming a name itself.

We also noted that differences in expectations of behaviour seemed to delineate the identity of a privileged class. This was most apparent in the criteria for inclusion at the conference. One startup was excluded from consideration for the conference, because of the reported bad behaviour of its manager at an earlier conference—a kind of behaviour that didn't sound very different from the exuberant drunkenness of some of the serious venture capitalists and sponsors observed at the conference dinner at the close of this research. The division in gender roles was equally stark: all the presenters, guest and dinner speakers from all of the startups at the conference were male; the only formal visible role undertaken (almost exclusively) by women was in operating the registration desk and handing out conference packs.

1. This connects with Weber's (1978: 246) comment that, «it is necessary for the character of charismatic authority to become radically changed. Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in *statu nascendi*. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both.»

We have only touched on parts of the data for the Conference situation, but these data are indicative of a range of other observations describing the way interactions and events proceeded in this case. The data seem to suggest the existence of a privileged establishment group; this group seems to have been able to implicitly dominate other parties with an interest in events; reserve certain behaviours to itself and govern the futures of others through the use of (and participation as) seemingly mythical names. These names in particular seemed to be given authoritative significance in judgement processes. We recognise, in the implicit domination exercised in this way by this group—which seems to be a rather loose and ill-defined network—the operation of a tradition.

To conclude the findings, we suggest that features observed in both of these two cases conform with the lines of enquiry set out in the methodology, and that traditions have been noted in apparent modes of reasoning, identity issues, power relations and the operation of authority in collaborative settings.

DISCUSSION

Huxham and Vangen (2005) describe three purposes of power: power *over* focussed on gain for the individual or organization; power *to*, focussed on mutual gain; power *for*, to allow others to gain. They also characterise power in terms of three asymmetries: in the resources controlled by each partner; in the value placed upon the relationships by each partner; and in the structural positions of the partners. We have discussed how tradition is manifested in issues of power and identity in the situations described earlier in this paper, and has indicated its influence in patterns of reasoning from the past. The findings also suggest the hidden presence of authority in the situations of domination that have been alluded to.

We would argue that the exercise of the power in an organization or collaboration cannot properly be understood without reference to tradition. This may particularly be the case regarding the value placed on relationships by each partner; which is fundamental to understanding the purposes for power that individuals and organizations enact in collaboration. An inability to find organizational language to describe this may leave it unaddressed and hence it may remain another irritant or inertial force upon collaboration.

There is room for extension and challenge of these findings, however. First, for collaborations involving organizations of very similar traditions, the power and identity issues might not arise (or may not arise so markedly) — or alternatively be derived from different causes. Second, there needs to be some thought about whether it is the particular agent (and/or their communities of practice [Lave and Wenger, 1991]) or the particular organization that belongs to the kinds of traditions observed; the discussion set out earlier in the article leads us to expect to encounter multiple, intertwined traditions (West-Turner, 1997, Dobel, 2001; Giddens, 2002).

Nevertheless, we would argue that while it may be difficult to identify particular traditions, the role of the tradition as —or in— processes is clearly significant in relation to the engagement of the agents in the interpretation of events and relationships. Specifically, it seems that this interaction and engagement can be considered as operating in relation to tradition in two interfacial modes, as illustrated earlier in Figure 1. Firstly, there is the moment of engagement in events, which can be construed as interpretive events: «Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself» (Gadamer, 1998: 490); this means that there can be no complete freedom from the prejudices —the authority of our traditions— within an individual's process of understanding. Secondly, there is the process of interaction; the encounter with others from differing perspectives in the enactment and creation of structures of collaboration, which seems to present new and challenging problems to the participants. A reflexive engagement at the structural level can therefore allow new understandings to be incorporated.

As the instances of views in transition described earlier (in the Spinout situation, particularly) suggest, this adoption of new (elements of) tradition(s) is through taking up a new vocabulary that provides more useful descriptions (or redescrptions [Rorty, 1989]) of the situation. Understanding interorganizational collaboration therefore requires an appreciation that new sets of terms can help practitioners to engage reflectively within these challenging situations and to consider that they are problematic in part, perhaps, because of their own traditions. There is a need to be able to see and reflect upon the reference groups that are important traditional resources for our assumptions and practices (Kelley, 1952; McCabe and Dutton, 1993; Jones and Ryan, 1997; Tinson and Ensor, 2001) and the conceptualizations of our (individual or organizational) identity that are affected by the ways in which we relate to these groups (Fiol and O'Connor, 2002; Hatch and Schultz, 2002).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As Hatch and Schultz (2002) have suggested, identity rests upon both inward facing and outward facing moments of construction. We are in agreement with this analysis, and our work here suggests also that the internal dialogue of identity may be seen as interpenetrating aspects of tradition (which we use to explain the continuity of our own construction of the past into the future) and culture (which we use to explain the connectivity between our own and community understandings) —as indicated in **Figure 4**.

Our findings also suggest that this inward-facing dialogue may support or undermine collaborative, outward-facing dialogue. However, through constructing a set of terms that are immediately recognisable in events (perhaps identified in event talk), but having explanatory value in the context of structural engagement —such as the conceptual handles described by Huxham and Vangen (2004)— there is a possibility of connection, of the fusion of horizons, amongst practitioners employing these

vocabularies and hence the possibility of change. We do not argue that this redescription is of itself an overcoming of the problems associated with collaboration in general, and the role of tradition in particular; but perhaps it is a way of beginning to develop better questions.

In fact, we do not foresee or wish for any final overcoming of all tradition for others or for ourselves. As Caputo (2004: 35) has remarked: «Where would I be without my tradition? (...) I would not know what questions I would ask, or what texts I would read, in what language I would think, or in what community I could move about.»

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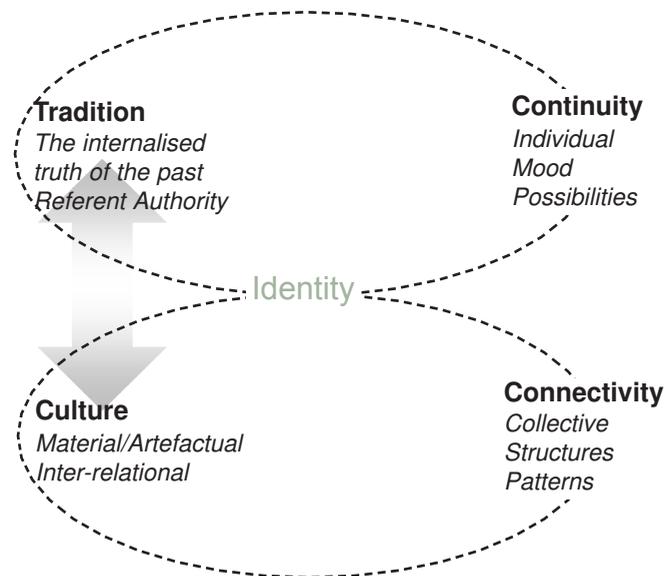


Figure 4. Internal Dialogue of Tradition, Culture, and Identity

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