

Connecting the Dots: Issues of Organizational Identity Among Training and Development Professionals

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Connecting the Dots:
Issues of Organizational Identity Among
Training and Development Professionals

by
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ABSTRACT
CONNECTING THE DOTS:
ISSUES OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

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Marquette University, 2015

This study explored issues of identity, identification and the identification (attachment) process of training and development professionals employed in medium to large organizations. This research focused on determining what resources training and development professionals identified with, how these resources were expressed and acted on and finally what challenges or tensions are results of this identification process. The findings of this project illustrate unique identity related resources and challenges specific to the training and development industry; furthermore, this study analyzes these results and presents both theoretical and practical implications. Notable findings of this study suggest that training and development professionals primarily identify with helping others and prefer to execute job duties that directly develop or assist others within the organization. Additionally, this service to others mindset often is expressed when training professionals are able to help make sense of organizational messages for other employees, and this work often subordinates the training and development professional. Thus, this research suggests that the identity related challenges that training and development professionals encounter stem from being an unknown or misunderstood part of the larger organizational mission; furthermore, training and development professionals may communicate an organizational message that they do not experience in practice.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Today, across the globe, organizations are looking for cost-effective ways to increase productivity, minimize turnover and to develop talent. Additionally, organizations face stiff challenges in acquiring personnel who have the skills and talent needed to compete on a truly global scale (see Beechler, & Woodward, 2009; Lindegren, 2013) and in integrating and socializing new employees into the existing organizational culture (see Jablin, 2001; Berkelaar, 2013). Within an organization an internal training and development (T&D) professional is increasingly called upon and uniquely positioned to address multi-faceted organizational challenges of talent acquisition, development and retention.

The role of the internal training and development professional is increasing every year as organizations attempt to solve organizational challenges. According to the American Society for Training & Development “State of the Industry 2012” report there was an estimated \$156.2 billion spent on employee learning and development in 2011 (American Society for Training & Development, 2012). According to this ASTD report approximately 85% (\$132 billion) of the \$156.2 billion was spent directly on internal or external learning/training services. Moreover, according to the next year’s “State of the Industry 2013” report, the ASTD stated that U.S. organizations have increased spending levels to \$164.2, and \$146 billion (89%) of total expenditures was spent directly on internal or external learning/training services (American Society for Training & Development, 2013). The annual ASTD survey finds that the amount of money being spent on T&D continues to grow annually, as well as the desire to understand and

develop the field more broadly.

As T&D professionals are increasingly called upon to solve organizational challenges it is important to recognize that both organizational and individual identity is multi-faceted in communication. In essence, identity can be communicated by word and in deed. In order to understand how messages of culture are communicated and how identity is constructed it is just as important to focus on what an organization says as much as what an organization does; Larson and Pepper (2003) argue “discursive strategies are central to the identity formation process and provide a window into the sensemaking of participants” (p. 529). In many organizations T&D professionals are in a unique and pivotal position to deliver these discursive messages of culture, success and commitment. For example, organizational development professionals in the human resources management (HRM) field are specifically tasked with the identification and cultivation of future personnel talent in an organization, and in this role these professionals convey a message of teamwork, commitment, loyalty, and future success. Teamwork, commitment and loyalty are examples of organizational values that strongly influence identity and identification within an organization.

Unfortunately, as the role of the training and development professional grows within organizations, T&D professionals face mounting communicative and identity related challenges as well. The challenges that T&D professionals face on the job can be unique and impact professional identity. For example, T&D professionals may be responsible for communicating messages of organizational culture that may conflict with their own experiences or established identity. Another identity related challenge that a T&D professional may face is that in tough economic times the organization is quick to

reduce funding for “soft skills” like leadership, communication and conflict resolution (Gordon & Miller, 2014). Furthermore, T&D professionals operate in an industry that is largely devoid of uniform performance metrics or evidence of success, and the intangible nature of talent development can create a tension between the T&D professional and the organization. Thus, a T&D professional may identify with certain positive communicative values like teamwork, leadership and culture, while simultaneously distancing themselves from negative identity anchors around issues of budgetary cuts, ineffective training sessions or unproductive employee relationships.

Accordingly, investigating organizational identity through a communications perspective would allow for a unique examination of communicated messages of organizational support, and a better understanding of the potential tensions or complications that frustrate the efforts of T&D professionals. For example, T&D professionals often find that training related tasks are rarely ever completed and are often labeled ongoing within an organization, and this ongoing training objective requires continued attention and resources that may not be available. These ongoing training sessions may be communicated as a part of an essential organizational culture; however, the lack of resource support may reinforce a different message for the training professional. Furthermore, many training and development professionals operate within an industry that is loosely defined and organizationally specific. Therefore, this study investigates the communicative identity targets and the identification process of internal training and development professionals, and what if any conflict or tension exists within the position.

Perhaps the largest identity related challenge in the training industry is the ambiguity surrounding the position and the corresponding lack of external awareness. Many internal and external individuals often misunderstand or are completely unaware of what a training professional is and what work a training professional does. Therefore this project presents training and development professionals as not one specific job title or set of job responsibilities; however, it may be helpful to think of a T&D professional as a member of an industry tasked to develop organizational talent.

In response to this ambiguity the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) rebranded and changed its name to reflect the growing and diverse set of employees that qualify as a T&D professional in May of 2014. Tony Bingham, president of the ASTD, in a keynote address to the annual conference of T&D professionals explained that ASTD would become the ATD, or the Association for Talent Development. “Talent and development encompasses the breadth and the depth of the profession, and includes [change management, knowledge management, coaching, integrated talent management, managing learning programs, evaluating learning impact, learning technologies, training delivery, instructional design, and performance improvement] and more...” (Bingham, 2014). T&D professionals are no longer employed just to facilitate training sessions or to coach employees on key organizational messages. Tony Bingham echoed the complex mission of today’s T&D professional, “We can see that in [the ATD] job bank: organizations are continually looking for individuals who can lead the development of talent” (Bingham, 2014).

Recognizing the complex and diverse set of objectives a T&D professional faces requires a fairly flexible definition of who specifically is a T&D professional. In fact

some organizations do not recognize the term training and development and opt instead for department labels and definitions such as: employee learning, learning and development, talent management or change management. In some organizations a T&D professional may be a training facilitator and in another organization a T&D professional may target specific candidates for promotions. After nearly 70 years the Association for Talent Development specifically transformed the title of the group because training and development has evolved globally to encompass many different positions, activities and organizations. In response to this ambiguity, for the purposes of this study, any professional working within an organization, regardless of title, will be labeled broadly as a T&D professional if they accomplish any of the following ATD core responsibilities:

Table 1

ATD Core responsibilities listed with examples of titles and job duties

ATD Task	Title	Job Duties
Change management	Director of development	Director/executive level planning
Knowledge management	Learning manager	Program rollout and tracking
Coaching	Mentor	Apprenticeship, Instructor
Integrated talent management	Occupational development	Succession plan, Annual reviews
Managing learning programs	Talent management leader	Curriculum design, Instruction
Evaluating learning impact	Learning analyst	Analysis of business impact
Learning technologies	Learning technologist	Focus on digital learning
Training delivery	Trainer	Working with employees
Instructional design	Curriculum leader	Program research, Design
Performance improvement	Training consultant	Skills improvement

Another aspect, aside from definitional issues, that makes it difficult to classify a T&D professional is the internal vs. external dimension. Many T&D professionals make a lucrative living consulting for organizations as an outsider who can examine with a

fresh perspective what an organizational culture may be lacking, or are contracted to deliver a specific service the organization lacks. This study will exclusively focus on internal T&D professionals who work day-to-day within one organization. An external T&D professional spends a specific, often contracted, amount of time within an organization and likely does not become an “insider” in a meaningful way for this study’s purpose. Thus, as this study discovers issues around organizational identity, identification and potential challenges or tensions, the focus will remain on individuals who are connected and integrated into one continuing organizational culture.

This study examines and identifies a rather amorphous population of professionals. Even the act of defining the T&D profession is problematic as individual organizations utilize different training ideologies, titles and scopes of work. These professionals are difficult to examine as they are difficult to define and vary between organizational contexts; with this in mind, the challenges of professional identity center around a nebulous understanding of who and what these professionals are. This study does not classify or sort training professionals, as mentioned earlier a better definitional understanding may come from classifying job tasks, but rather examines the challenges around a loosely defined, measured and understood profession.

Study Rationale

As the field of T&D grows the scholarship focusing on issues of T&D grows as well. In addition to the stacks of practical “how to” guides dealing with issues of T&D through a communications lens, there has been a growing academic presence in the field as well. Miller and Gordon (2014) note that communication theory is helping to develop

a more academically informed T&D industry, and this focus on theory is helping direct organizational change more broadly. In fact, many tasks that T&D professionals are responsible for are poorly understood. Cleveland, Lim, and Murphy (2007) argue that many of the root assumptions employers have about the value of feedback and performance appraisal in the training process are incorrect, or at a minimum are misunderstood. Moreover, Beebe, Mottet, and Roach (2013) argue that contemporary T&D practitioners yearn for academically informed theory and that there is a growing recognition of the value of practical communication theory in the industry. This research project deals specifically with identity and identification within the training and development profession within an organizational context; moreover, this research aims to deliver practical and grounded recommendations, based on communication theory, that may help solve potential identity problems among the profession.

Research Goals

As scholarship on communicated organizational identity continues to flourish there is very little scholarship devoted to the identity challenges and opportunities that T&D professionals face on the job. This study presents a better understanding of the identity targets and the identification process of internal training and development professionals, and what if any conflict or tension exists within the position.

Organizational communication scholarship has the ability to research the tensions, challenges and goals of the people behind a \$160 billion industry. A better understanding of the identity challenges facing training and development professionals would lead to a better understanding of the industry, and ultimately would lead to more effective training

and results. Additionally, this research gives something back to the study of Human Resource Management and Organizational Communication (see Cleveland, Lim, & Murphy, 2007; Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004; Miller & Gordon, 2014) and finds a seat at the table for communication research specifically targeting organizational identity.

Preview

In the following chapters I will provide a detailed examination of the theory at work, the methodology of this project and the results of the data. To begin, the literature review presents identity and identification as argued by communications scholars more broadly, and then moves in to a more detailed examination of identity and identification through the lens of Scott, Corman and Cheney's (1998) structurational model of identification. Furthermore, the literature review also discusses tension based communication in order to examine potential challenges of the training and development industry. I pose three research questions based on the literature review's focus on identity, identification and potential challenges in the workplace. After moving from the literature review and the research goals I present the qualitative method of inquiry. The methodological review presents the benefits of interview based data collection and details the data analysis procedures. The results section of the study is then presented along with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications of this research. Finally, this study provides actionable and practical recommendations for the training and development industry.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents important theoretical concepts as they relate to an understanding of identity, identification and tensions based communication research. The chapter begins with a theoretical overview that introduces the communicative study of identity, and then moves on to a more detailed examination of theoretical concepts central to the understanding of identity and identification. Scott, Corman and Cheney's (1998) structural theory of identification is presented as a theoretical framework for this study. A central outcome of this study is a better understanding of the tensions that complicate a training and development professional's identity and an examination of tension based communication theory is presented as well. After discussing the theory that guides the project three research questions are presented at the end of the section.

Theoretical Overview

The communication perspective is a valuable lens for studying issues of identity, and organizational communication scholars have studied identity at great length. Cheney and Tompkins' (1987) view of organizational identity is based upon the relationship of two inter-related concepts: commitment and substance. In this theoretical lens of identity the "substance" is viewed as the "what" of identity and "commitment" is viewed as the "how." When looking at identity construction it is just as important to focus on what an organization says as much as what an organization does; Larson and Pepper (2003) argue "discursive strategies are central to the identity formation process and provide a window into the sensemaking of participants" (p. 529). The focus on how, what, and when an

organization broadcasts certain messages is an important factor in the identity construction of individuals within an organization. Thus, Cheney (1991) argues “the rhetoric of organizational life is conceived in terms of how identity is managed on the individual and collective levels” (p. 13).

One of the most comprehensive studies of organizational identity comes from Scott, Corman, & Cheney’s (1998) study of organizational identity through the lens of structuration theory. This study demonstrates that attachment with an organization is symbolic and shaped by individuals and the corresponding social contexts people are a part of; moreover, an individual’s attachment is on a target, and these identity targets are both an important part of an identity and the very foundation of the identification process itself. Scott, Corman, & Cheney (1998) go on to argue that an individual can identify with multiple and conflicting identities and that identity can exist on multiple levels with varying strengths of association at different times. The use of this structuration theory provides a comprehensive model to examine not only past academic identity work, but also the complicated identity relationship between an individual and an organization.

Professional organizations and academic researchers alike are preoccupied with the study of identity (Cheney, Christensen, & Dailey, 2014). The frequency and pervasiveness of identity research reflects the importance of identity for both individuals and organizations. In fact, Cheney et al. (2014) argue,

The explicit focus on identity, which is one of the defining preoccupations of the contemporary industrialized world, is a fairly recent phenomenon... Consequently, identity emerged as a salient issue, pursued and contested at many different levels. For most organizations today, identity is not only a key point of reference but also a practical building block for other objectives and projects... Most organizational activities, in other words, are pervaded by identity concerns (p. 695).

Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers (2003) argue that identity construction and management is more than a metaphor, it is a practical construct that allows organizations to enhance the understanding of organizational processes. There may be a preoccupation with the study of identity but the recognition that identity matters to organizations and individuals is integral in understanding organizational processes.

Identity

Issues of identity center on the defining communicative question of whom and what we are. Cheney, et al. (2014) argue that there is a drive to define in every biological unit from the smallest cell to the largest complex international system. Within an organization members must be able to define the “essential self” or the distinctive, central and enduring characteristics that define identity (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994). An individual’s ability to define who and what they are, perhaps even more importantly what one is not, is an important part of communicative interaction.

This study presents identity as both a core enduring characteristic and something that can be flexible, altered or changed. Contemporary organizational communication scholars argue that identity is layered, complex and contextually situated (Cheney, 1991; Cheney, et al., 2014; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Torres, 2014). That identity can exist on multiple levels implies that the varying strengths of association or expressed attachment to an identity target is contextually specific (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Perhaps the strongest argument for a contextually specific identity is that identity targets and the identification process is extremely personal and varies from person to person (Cheney et al., 2014). Since individuals ultimately decide what identity

to target or what identity anchors are important to them the enduring characteristics at the core of an individual are free to change as necessary. Another dimension that makes identity contextually specific is the nature of an identity target. Identity targets are the resource, organization or value that one identifies with and these targets are under a constant state of negotiation (Scott, et al., 1998; Cheney, et al., 2014; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002).

The nature of identity for a T&D professional revolves around the targets that an individual associates with. A T&D professional may identify as being part of a helping profession, a member of a great organization and a feeling of togetherness with a larger industry; however, at the same time a T&D professional may feel like they are not a respected member of the team and also feel like they are working in an unproductive department. Identity targets, both positive and negative, operate on different levels and are contextually specific. Thus, this study determines what identity targets T&D professionals identify with in order to see what strength of associations are most valuable or may create tensions through the identification process.

Identification

Identification can largely be understood as the process by which individuals select and express identity targets to identify with. For a T&D professional an identity target may be that of being an employee behind the scenes, and the identification process revolves around executing job tasks without recognition. Furthermore, identification is the expression and relative strength of association of various identity targets for an individual (Scott, et al., 1998). Individuals often times identify with multiple targets,

some even conflicting, and the ability for some identities to be stronger than others or to vary at different times represents the contextual nature of identification. For example, a T&D professional may find that at certain times it is easy to identify with a profession that helps others, and at the same time be frustrated that their position helps others inequitably. Identification for a T&D professional is complex and understanding what identity targets the profession identifies with most, or more often, will help shed light on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the industry.

Identification takes on a different meaning and manifestation within the organizational context, and at different times organizational identification has been measured in different ways. Traditionally, identification has often been measured by how much, or how little, an individual attaches themselves to the organization (Cheney, et al., 2014), and this attachment view of identification was argued to be “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p.104). What makes identification a difficult concept to concretely define is the measurement of how an individual may identify with the organization, and how that relationship may change over time. Additionally, the concept of “perceived attachment” acknowledges the fact that identification is both a dynamic and contextual concept. As an example, individuals within an organization can attach themselves to such targets as mission statements, ethos, beliefs, values, and other communicated goals.

One of the reasons communication theory is well suited for the study of organizational identification is because many identity targets are communicative in nature. For example, an organization’s use of mission statements or strategic branded messages both internally and externally is a representation of the power of

communication in creating attachment or loyalty among conflicting stakeholders; furthermore, it has been argued that one of the most important aspects of an effective organizational leader is the ability to create an organizational culture around a shared vision or mission (Feldner, 2006; Keyton, 2005; Trujillo, 2012). T&D professionals are in a position within an organization to disseminate such identity building messages and values. All of the above examples evince a discursive approach to communication and identification. Training and development professionals are both a product and source of communicated messages of identity and identification.

This communication-centered discursive approach to identification is a key factor in understanding how identification is constructed within an organization. Research has argued that organizational identity is constructed and manifested through the interaction and communication of organizational activities (Kuhn & Nelson; 2002). These activities can be built around identity structures (identity targets and resources) and allow organizational members to construct identity around their association or disassociation (Scott et al., 1998). The rhetorical nature of identification has long been associated with successful attachment (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987), and Larson and Pepper (2003) argue “because organizations use discourse to influence employee identities and employees use discourse to connect or disconnect with particular structures of identity (through the process of identification)” (p.531)

Recognizing the discursive nature of organizational identification is important for this study in many ways. The primary reason discursive organizational identification is relevant is because in many organizations T&D professionals execute the rhetorical identification strategies of an organization. T&D professionals operate within an industry

that is largely based and measured on the success of communicating goals and business needs. In this way a T&D professional is both in theory and in practice a discursive communicator. Communicative organizational identity resources like mission statements, corporate social responsibility reports, long-term planning goals and the implementation of company culture often pass directly through the hands of T&D professionals when interacting with internal stakeholders. In some organizations, an employee's first interaction with an organization is a structured amount of training time before they are ready to enter the workforce, and in these training sessions identity targets are being established (Stephens & Dailey, 2012). Stephens & Dailey (2012) argue that organizational identification is an ongoing process that begins even before orientation, and that taking a less formalized and more individualized approach to bringing in new employees leads to higher levels of attachment within an organization. These interests are directly related to this study's aim to understand identity construction among T&D professionals and through the execution of T&D tasks like new employee orientation.

Additionally, through the execution and interaction of these discursive strategies T&D professionals are in a position where the introduction and interaction of identity targets may further the identification process. Scott, et al. (1998) argue that identification is a recursive loop where identity and identification are interrelated processes that build off one another. A T&D professional, for example, builds identity amongst employees and this identity building process becomes a target that T&D professionals in turn identify with as well.

Communication theory also argues that because organizational identification is built around discursive or rhetorical strategies identity is itself a conversation, and this

conversation itself is a process. Historically, identity has been studied as a fixed notion where a central characteristic or association becomes the main manifestation of attachment (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) and that identity can be free of social or external factors (Collinson, 2003; Godley, 2003; Smith, 2013). However, communication researchers argue that identity and identification is a discursive process of recursive interaction and this process is an ongoing conversation that is contextually specific, dynamic and transformative (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Kuhn & Nelson, 2003; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Scott et al., 1998).

The notion of organizational identity as a contextual conversation leads to many important arguments about the identification process. One contextual factor that impacts identification is organizational prestige. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to identify with an organization that is well regarded, rather than organizations that are thought of more poorly (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996.) Frandsen (2012) argued that employees of a low prestige organization do not attempt to defend or to fix organizations with a negative opinion; rather, internal stakeholders of a low prestige organization choose to disassociate with that organization that have been fairly criticized, and that this disassociation happens through thoughtful and engaged conversation with external and internal stakeholders.

Thus, an important contextual factor of organizational identification is whom one is talking with when explaining their work and identity targets. Organizational communication scholars argue that identity is built around the context and conversation we are having with others, and that we tell “our story” through a running narrative (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott et al., 1998). Accordingly, the story we tell about ourselves

depends on who we are communicating with, and it is through interactions with others that we have an opportunity to define who we are (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Scott et al., 1998). As identity is forged and reforged through communication and context it becomes important to recognize that the identification process revolves around the individual situation. In this way Parker and Haridakis (2008) argue organizational identity is cognitively constructed and communicatively expressed, and this belief and expression reinforces itself over time.

This project will focus on identity as a dynamic process that is in constant transformation depending on identity target utilization and contextual conversation. Furthermore, this project demonstrates that organizational identification among T&D professionals is an important and central characteristic that is in flux and contextually specific. A major theoretical foundation of this study is the Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) study “Development of a Structural Model of Identification in the Organization” that argues that organizational identity is part and parcel of the larger structuration theory, and that the use of this theory allows researchers to specifically focus on how organizational identification is based on attachment to a target or resource symbolically shaped by individuals and social contexts.

Identity, Identification and Training & Development

While there is an existing amount of research on identity and identification there remains room to explore the attachment process in the specific context of T&D professionals. By recognizing that identity and identification studies play an important role in understanding how an organization operates, it is important to analyze the identity

research that has already begun in the field of training and development. Recently, one study examined issues of identity built around discourse and the coaching profession in Germany, however this study examined identity between coach and client, and not of the T&D profession in an organizational setting or industry (see Rettinger, 2011).

Additionally, identity work has been done on professions that practice some tasks within the scope of T&D like teaching skills, but are primarily focused on educators and not T&D professionals (for examples see Fitch, & Morgan, 2003; Morton, & Gray, 2010).

Researchers have also begun to examine the relationship between T&D professionals and identity among trainee populations; however, these studies fail to address identity concerns amongst the trainers and primarily focus on effective training through cultural or group identity awareness (for examples see Sun, 2013; Hwang, 2010). The proliferation of academic inquiry has yet to touch the T&D professional in a meaningful way.

This study positions itself among the void of research dealing with specific identity challenges, tensions and targets amongst internal T&D professionals. Miller and Gordon (2014) argue that the T&D profession is largely devoid of academic research, but that communication theory is helping to bridge the gap. This study's usage of organizational communication theory facilitates an exploration of important T&D identity questions. By examining possible tensions this study hopes to contribute practical examples that can help a \$162 billion industry continue to thrive. Organizational communication theory incorporates the use of a structuration theory lens and a tension-based research lens in order to delve into the dynamic and complex communicated issues of identity, identification and the identification process of the T&D industry.

The Structural Model

In this section of the literature review, Scott, Corman and Cheney's (1998) structuration theory of identification is explored and introduced as this project's theoretical foundation. An overview of the theory is introduced as well as a more detailed discussion of the theory's use of duality, regionalization of multiple identities and a situated action view of identity. The theory argues that both the individual and the organizational level affects identity, that an individual within an organization can identify with many different identity targets simultaneously, and that individuals express identity through a communicative activation.

The structural model that Scott et al. (1998) propose provides the situational perspective that a contextually communicated organizational identity requires. As stated earlier, this model argues "the attachment process is largely symbolic and is shaped by both individuals and the social contexts of which they are part" (p. 299). Scott et al. (1998) focus on identification as the primary means of investigating attachment and define it as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to [a collective], where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the [collective] in which he or she is a member...and as occurring when an organizational member desires to choose the alternative that best promotes the perceived interests of that organization" (p. 299). As mentioned earlier the process of attachment with an organization can be in positive association or negative disassociation and that an individual sees themselves as part of a larger collective (Frandsen, 2012). Finally, Scott et al. (1998) focus on identification as the primary means of investigating attachment because "both identity and communication

have been clearly linked to “identification” [more] than to other forms of attachment (p. 299).

Scott et al. (1998) utilize the structurational theory first proposed by Giddens (1984) but purposely exclude certain elements of the original theory, and propose a structurational theory specific to a communication lens. Thus, this adapted structuration theory focuses on Giddens’s duality of identity structure to reconcile previous academic arguments between individual or structure based identity orientation. This adapted structuration theory also focuses on the regionalization of multiple and interconnected identities based on contextual applications within an organization. Furthermore, the use of structuration theory also incorporates situated activities and contexts that allow for identity and identification manifestation, and these situational activities allow for the expression of different identities at different times (Scott et al., 1998). Scott et al. (1998) summarize,

Thus, we seek to offer a middle-range theoretical and heuristic framework for understanding better how organizationally related identities and identifications serve to structure one’s experience, how they become meaningful in action, how they are evoked situation ally, and how they relate to one another and to some sense of an overall identity (with a “working” level of coherence). (p. 300).

Duality.

One of the more elegant features of this usage of structuration theory is that it reconciles previous academic inquiry conflict over identification as a process and identification as a structure, because a structurational view argues that identification is a process and a result of that process. Scott et al. (1998) explain the difference between identity, identification and identification process,

we shall endeavor to use the term “identification” when we mean interaction or other behaviors illustrating one’s attachment; we shall speak of “identity” as a set

of rules and resources that function as an anchor for who we are; and we will speak of the “identification process” or the “attachment process” when we wish to address the relationship between identity and identification during attachment. (p. 303).

This current research study will utilize this structurational theory specifically because identity targets, identification and the identification process are distinct but interrelated concepts, and these outlined definitions will be used throughout this study as well.

Structuration theory, as well as other research, argues that individuals may identify with certain identity anchors that orient their identification process (Cheney, 1983; Cheney et al., 2014; Scott et al., 1998). Considering, as stated earlier, that Scott et al. (1998) argue that the identification process is based on attachment with an, or multiple, identity target(s) it becomes important to study what the identity targets within an organization may be. The structuration theory approach argues that an identity target may be a structure, process, belief, idea or goal as long as an individual believes there is a utility in association or disassociation (Scott et al., 1998). A T&D professional may identify with certain organizational values like teamwork, leadership and culture, while simultaneously distancing themselves from negative identity anchors around issues of budgetary cuts, ineffective training sessions or unproductive employee relationships.

These identity anchors, such as resources or beliefs, then serve as the basis for an individual’s identification. Scott et al. (1998) argue “structures and systems imply one another, so the real emphasis is on the duality between them...this duality accounts for the perceived linkage between (re)sources of identity and our (re)presentations of identification” (p. 306). This dualistic relationship is expressed in a structurational sense when an identity is appropriated and expressed through identification and this formation and identification serves to strengthen the original identity target (Scott et al., 1998).

Scott et al. (1998) argue that identity and identification is a recursive loop that does not give priority or bias to a structure, and that in today's communication environment this process is more important than ever. An example of this recursive loop of identity and identification among T&D professionals may be in the relationship between ongoing tasks and completed work. For instance, a T&D professional often faces on the job tasks that are never truly complete and that these tasks can't be completed may make a professional feel that they are under supported and overtaxed; thus, the feeling of being overworked and underserved underscores the feeling that work cannot be completed.

The concept of an identity-identification recursive loop offers much insight into the communicative study of the T&D profession. This study will look to answer research questions around the classification of an identity target and the identification process that accompanies them. An understanding of what identity targets are present in the profession coupled with how a T&D professional expresses those targets as part of a larger identification is the avenue to explore how larger T&D trends relate to this duality. For example, if this study reveals that a T&D professional identifies with the notion of helping others then it becomes possible to explore how a T&D professional communicates about being able to help others, and what potentially helps and hinders this assistance. Scott et al. (1998) argue "the story we tell of ourselves in interaction (or posit with respect to interaction) with others is the essence of identification" (p. 305). If identification manifests itself through conversation with others it becomes possible to gather identity related concepts through interviews with T&D professionals, and even in this (re)telling with an interviewer the research participant reforges their own identity-identification loop.

Structuration theory also takes into account the dualistic nature of past academic research regarding how and where the identification process takes place. Structuration theory allows researchers to look past the “individualistic-bias” of past identity research that puts too much emphasis on the individual deciding aspects of identity, and recognizes that there is in fact an existing “field of discourse” that culturally and historically sets parameters for identity construction (Scott et al., 1998). Scott et al. (1998) argue that the use of structuration theory permits the researcher to recognize that it is both the individual looking to make identity related choices and the structure already in place informing the individual, and neither of these two perspectives need to be in conflict.

This reconciliation of organizational primacy and individual primacy allows this research project to focus on what identity related factors at play without having to pinpoint the identity source. In fact, this duality more or less argues that the attachment process is fluid and dynamic and that attempting to identify whether an organization, industry, group or individual is the source or byproduct is unnecessary. Identity related factors are taking place at the individual and organizational level simultaneously and this flexibility permits this research project to focus on the larger identity related issues around the profession, rather than on the source or direction of identity expression.

Regionalization of multiple identities.

Members of an organization face many possible identity targets ranging from organizational, gender, class, occupational, ethnic, work-team, national and many others, and really the struggle to manage and express these identity options can be classified as

an “identity crisis” (Scott et al., 1998). A strength of the structuration theory is that it acknowledges that an individual has varying degrees of identity association that express themselves differently in different contexts. Scott et al. (1998) argue that the four most relevant identities in organizational life are the individual, work group, organizational and professional, and these four relevant identities can be classified as studying the following characteristics (p. 313):

- Individual: personal interests that put the individual’s well-being above more social considerations.
- Work group: team or department, where the interests of an immediate and interacting group are strongly considered.
- Organizational: where the interests of the employing or primary organization are more salient.
- Professional: where consideration is made about the effects of one’s actions on their industry, professional associations, unions, or job types.

From the T&D standpoint there are many organizational opportunities afforded with focusing on the four primary identity characteristics. For example, perhaps a T&D professional feels that their identity is strongest at the professional level and identify as a profession that gets to assist others, or perhaps a T&D professional identifies with training the entire workforce within one organization. Structuration theory acknowledges that organizational identity is dynamic and temporal, and the utilization of these four characteristics provides a sound starting point for probing identity related questions.

The strength of regionalization within structuration theory is that it permits the various identity resources available to an individual to be grouped and classified (Scott et al., 1998). As an example Cheney (1983b) argues that individuals have access to multiple identity targets both individually and collectively, and this potential struggle is a component of organizational identity. The regionalization of structuration theory acknowledges that identity is not a homogenous identity throughout, and that there is conflict between different identity resources. Scott et al. (1998) argue that regionalization is represented through four characteristics (pp. 314-317):

- Overlapping and unique regions: you can have many different attachments and they can be in conflict or in accordance.
- Front and back regions: “face” as a front regions: things like beliefs, premises, beliefs, values. “Back regions” and disidentification represent important counterparts to the more widely addressed front regions and identifications.
- Identity size and position: identities that are important are often “very large” and can encompass many features of the organization, and the self.
- Identity tenure: identity is characterized by the duration of the association.

Measuring for regionalization can account for the various strengths of identity association both in terms of regionalization internally and contextually. The flexibility to examine and quantify identification across time, space and intensity provides the framework for understanding the identification process.

For a T&D professional this regionalization of identities reflects the attachment process and how it takes place both in theory and in practice. Periodically, any employee will identify more strongly with their workgroup and peers versus the larger organization;

on the other hand, sometimes an employee may identify with the organization and not with their peers. A T&D professional is no different and might encounter different levels of the attachment process at different times. For example, a T&D professional may identify strongly with the organization when expressing trust in the organization during a training session, but later that day may express dissatisfaction with organization to a peer over concerns of funding or scheduling. The attachment process is fluid and dynamic and can change over time or attachment.

A situated action view of identification.

As important as it is to understand how and why certain identifications form it is just as important to understand when identification takes place. Scott et al. (1998) argue that any useful framework must include the ability to measure identity that changes over time. Considering any organizational member is going to identify with different targets at different times it is a logical assumption to argue that as things change within an organization identity targets and anchors may change as well. The situated-action perspective argues that social contexts matter when looking at identities because identities are forged and expressed in communication, (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002) and identities are formed in the activities, or interactions, with identity targets (Scott et al., 1998). Scott et al. (1998) logically argue that, “Some activities will evoke one identity, while other activities may focus on another identity and support identification with an alternate target” (p. 324). For example, if a T&D professional feels that a strong part of their identity is the ability to teach important skills, during a training session the activity of teaching will activate that identity; however, if another important aspect of identity is the ability to work with every employee an activity that isolates the T&D professional

one-on-one may prevent the activation of that identity target. It is the contextual interaction with an activity that activates certain components of identity.

Structuration theory provides a framework to measure the activity that activates certain identity targets and stimulates identification. This third major component of structuration theory will allow this study to look for certain key events or resources that trigger the identification process for a T&D professional. In fact, narrowing down identification to a few central activities may help guide the research and keep queries situated amongst relevant activities.

Overall, structuration theory focuses on the duality of identity-identification, the regionalization of identity resources and the contextual activities that stimulate the identification process (Scott et al., 1998). Scott et al. (1998) argues that the recursive loop of identity and identification is forged in the activation opportunities of communication. This theory keeps the focus of the research project on a dynamic and transformative process while incorporating and reconciling existing academic literature. This comprehensive and inclusive theory permits the study of organizational identity on both the individual and occupational scale.

Tension Communication

The communication process is rarely executed and understood perfectly, and much is often lost in translation between communicators. Thus, focusing on a tension-centered approach allows for the transformation of communication theory and research into practical observations that can help organizations. Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) argue, "A tension-centered approach begins with the premise that organizations are

conflicted sites of human activity; accordingly, foregrounding tension can lead to richer understandings of actual practice and thereby aid in theory building” (p. 82). This study looks to accept the challenges and benefits of a tension-centered approach in that a richer understanding of the T&D identity field will not only lead to a richer understanding of the identity theory but will lead to a richer understanding of the problems of T&D identity within an organization. Ultimately, the purpose of this research study is to generate sound practical advice or observations that can be used to assist the professionals working in the field today. The lack of academic research more broadly, including tension-focused research, is a problem that this research study seeks to solve.

Recognizing that communication within an organization is often dynamic, complicated and nuanced it is critical to integrate the lessons of tension communication theory. In order to truly understand organizational communication, which as stated earlier is a foundational component of organizational identity, it is important to understand the potential tensions and complications that exist during the communication process (Fyke & Buzzanell, 2013). The larger academic umbrella of “tensions-centered scholarship” is built around four often misused or conflated terms: tensions, ironies, contradictions and paradoxes (Fyke & Buzzanell, 2013; Stohl & Cheney 2001; Torres, 2014; Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004). Cheney and Stohl (2001) argue that tensions are “the clash of ideas or principles or actions and to the discomfort that may arise as a result” (pp. 353-354). An example of a tension in a T&D profession may be the feeling that a T&D professional would ideally like to help as many employees as possible with coaching and teaching, but may be in a position where they are only able to train selected employees. Furthermore, contradictions are defined to be “situations in which one idea, principle, or action is in

direct opposition to another” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p.354). Stohl and Cheney (2001) argue that democratic identities in an authoritarian power structure is an example of a contradiction in organizational communication. Gibbs (2009) argues “paradoxes are dilemmas that demand impossible choices between non-existent or mutually exclusive options [the notion that one should] be spontaneous” (p. 908). Stohl and Cheney (2001) argue that paradox is inherent within any organization that features participation or employee democracy. Finally, the notion of irony is described as “a stance toward paradoxes that invites observers and participants at least to realize and perhaps also to transcend the limitations of their own efforts, however noble they may be” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p.354).

The clarification of terms is important in tension-related research because of the tendency to misuse or to conflate certain key terms when addressing the complicated “mess” of communication. Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) argue that too much order of logic is applied to the organizational communication field, because as organizations continue to grow and job titles and duties continue to expand, the nature of work and identity may become contradictory. Furthermore, Koschmann and Laster (2011) argue “[organizational] tensions are both material and discursive constructions: They exist within the material conditions that bound human activity, but they emerge from the various ways people make sense of and communicate about their situation” (p. 48). Koschmann and Laster (2011) conclude that tensions are an inherent byproduct of any discursive sense-making and organizational communication is the study of communication in action. This focus on communicated tensions, tensions that are discursive in nature, is a perfect fit for the communicative research lens of this study.

This study utilizes a tension-focused study that assumes that tension, contradictions and paradoxes are a discursive byproduct of interpersonal communication within an organization (Koschmann and Laster, 2011; Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004). Recognizing that tensions (used in the broad not definitional sense) are a constant threat to the effectiveness of any program or resource within an organization a tension-based approach would be appropriate. As an example, in a T&D application it becomes possible to study issues of being a member of a team dedicated to others with resources allocated from sources that may not understand the work or the objectives. T&D professionals likely face organizational identity challenges that a researcher may be completely unaware of and this theoretical lens of examination makes it discover interesting lines of inquiry.

Summary and Research Questions

This review presented the Training and Development professional as the primary subject of this research study. In order to determine who or what constitutes a T&D professional the core responsibilities of the Association for Talent and Development will be utilized: change management, knowledge management, coaching, integrated talent management, managing learning programs, evaluating learning impact, learning technologies, training delivery, instructional design, and performance improvement. This study considers any internal employee primarily engaged in the ATD core responsibilities as a T&D professional more broadly.

Furthermore, structuration theory provides the theoretical lens to study issues around T&D identity factors. As outlined above, structuration theory highlights the role

of identity anchors, identification utilizing those anchors and the attachment process as the recursive loop between identity and identification. Structuration theory argues that there is an identity-identification duality in organizational identity for an individual. The theory also argues that there is a regionalization of identity resources that helps classify and express different identities at different times. Finally, structuration theory would argue that through situated activities an individual has the opportunity to express an identity through an activity that offers an opportunity to interact with that identity.

Structuration theory is utilized as the approach to T&D identity in order to specifically target the identity and identification loop that T&D professionals are forging communicatively. If identity and identification are forged and reforged in activity and communication it is important to understand what the identity targets are and identification processes are at play, and where and how they are expressed. That structuration theory is based on the how, when and why of identity it is important to understand the discursive activities that express identity.

This review outlines the benefits of using a tension-based lens to study issues of organizational identity. Utilizing tension research in an effort to determine if there are any paradoxes, tensions or contradictions within the T&D profession provides an opportunity to find practical solutions for potential identity related problems in the profession.

RQ1: What identity targets does a training and development professional identify with?

RQ2: What interactions or behaviors demonstrate identification for a training and development professional?

As mentioned earlier, Koschmann and Laster (2011) conclude that tensions are an inherent byproduct of any discursive sense-making. This communicative understanding of tension recognizes that any communication between individuals, externally or internally, will create tension. This approach to tension in communication also recognizes that identities do not solve tension related problems; rather, identities are often constructed with tensions and in spite of tensions. However, an attempt to understand the tensions or paradoxes within the T&D profession may allow for practical application based recommendations, and with this in mind this study asks the following research question:

RQ3: For a training and development professional what identity challenges or tensions emerge from the identification process?

The T&D profession has been academically underserved in research study around training and development identity, identification and the identification process. A richer understanding of identity issues within the T&D profession would further academic progress in this area. Furthermore, the T&D profession is a \$162 billion industry with unique challenges and potential tensions. Practical theory and application based observations would serve to help the industry and the academic conversation considerably.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As detailed earlier, the training and development profession is amorphous and difficult to define. In fact, the uncertainty of training and development as a dynamic and contextually specific industry lends itself to qualitative inquiry¹. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to understand the resources that training and development professionals identified with, the means in which identification is expressed among training professionals, and to explore any potential identity related tensions that training professionals face.

Training and development professionals operate within a largely misunderstood and poorly defined space. In order to effectively delve in to these identity related challenges a mode of inquiry that featured expressive storytelling and flexible understanding was necessary. Mayan (2009) argues that qualitative inquiry affords a researcher with the opportunity to explore complex and evolving situations without making prior assumptions. Due to the contextually specific nature of training and development it is difficult to propose a series of hypothesized questions to be accepted or rejected. In fact, as mentioned earlier, this project originally featured a mixed-method approach based on quantitative survey methodology and qualitative interviews; however, the survey approach failed to adequately capture data from a training population in a meaningful way. This quantitative methodological failure may, at least partially, be

¹ This project initially featured a quantitative survey to be used in conjunction with the qualitative interviews. The mixed-method approach was proposed in order to capture data at a national scale to help account for geographic variance; however, after reaching an agreement with the ATD to be studied a mere 17 professionals completed the survey via an online tool. The exclusion of a quantitative methodology may be attributed to the difficulty in defining a training population. In the end, the exclusion of the quantitative data resulted in a loss of geographic diversity and is addressed in more detail in the limitation section. After much email correspondence I would like to thank Tony Bingham the CEO of the ATD for his patience and assistance with this research.

attributed to the difficulty in training and development professionals responding to uniform questions that do not apply to their context.

The undefined and relatively understudied nature of this project's research questions leads to the strength of qualitative inquiry. Davis (2014) argues that qualitative interviews are most beneficial when there are questions or situations that cannot be anticipated or when data will emerge that was previously unknown. The strength of qualitative inquiry is in the emergent nature of data and the flexibility of the research design.

In fact, the qualitative research design of this project was based on previous pilot study data conducted earlier in the year. This pilot study data featured T&D professionals more broadly and helped inform the more nuanced research questions that this study features. Therefore, recognizing that a qualitative survey methodology provides a researcher with an ability to delve more deeply into nuance and complexity, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gather insights on issues around identity, identification and possible tensions in the training and development industry.

Participants and Context

In this study, fourteen participants were interviewed across the Midwest in a variety of roles and industries. Each participant needed to meet the requirements, as outlined above, of the research protocol in order to be considered for the interview. The requirements mandated that training and development professionals be employed full-time within an organization of at least fifty or more individuals while conducting training tasks, as defined by the ATD, the majority of the work week. In essence, these

requirements sought to eliminate any professionals who occasionally conducted training tasks or were too often excluded from an organization's larger identity. This study only measured individuals who were engaged in the outlined Association for Talent Development tasks of change management, knowledge management, coaching, integrated talent management, managing learning programs, evaluating learning impact, learning technologies, training delivery, instructional design or performance improvement (see Table 1).

The diversity of the interviewee population reflected the diversity of the position in the larger industry (see Table 2). Due to the logistical geographic restrictions of the principal investigator, in conjunction with the prerequisite population requirements, focusing on one specific industry was not feasible; furthermore, the nature of the training and development professional as a specialist within medium to large organizations diminished the need for the focus on one particular industry context.

Table 2
Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Industry
Bob	M	Learning Manager	Retail, Services
Brian	M	Trainer, Instructor	Retail
Cathy	F	Department trainer	Healthcare
Dawn	F	Director of Org. Development	Manufacturing
Gail	F	Trainer, Manager	Healthcare
Keri	F	Learning instructor	Research, Manufacture
Kirk	M	Trainer, Manager	Human Services
Lynn	F	Trainer, Coach	Financial
Michelle	F	Trainer, Coach	Financial
Nancy	F	Director of learning	Healthcare
Polly	F	Change management	Manufacturing, Service
Steve	M	Senior manager, Trainer	Manufacturing, Sales
Tom	M	Education, Training manager	Manufacturing, Food
Zeb	M	Instructional design, Leader	Manufacturing, Service
Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Industry

The 14 participants were self-identified as employed in the training and development, learning and development or employee education departments within their larger organizations, and were selected via a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. In 12 of the 14 cases individuals were targeted specifically because of the scope and size of the organization, and were selected via known contacts. The final two participants were selected via snowball sampling technique. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue that the snowball sampling technique allows participants to be accessed “through referrals made among people who know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (p. 124). These participants provided a rich and unique understanding of the industry and the identity related issues that training professionals face.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data collection for this project took place over the course of many stages during a six week period. In order to target a suitable sample of participants a list of known professional contacts was cross-referenced with a list of organizations that fit the size and scope requirements of the project. Once targeted, individuals were contacted via email in order to introduce the project’s aims and to gauge the potential interest of each participant. After the participant expressed interest in the project logistical emails were exchanged in order to establish a time and location for the interviews. After establishing a time and location of the participant’s choosing the principal researcher traveled to the location and conducted the face-to-face interview.

Participant responses were conducted with an IRB assurance of confidentiality and anonymity due to the potentially damaging and sensitive information that may have been collected (see Appendix A). Interview questions focused on issues of organizational loyalty, engagement and identification, and while these questions put participants at no risk beyond what is faced in day-to-day life the decision was made to guarantee confidentiality in advance. All 14 of the participants consented to the IRB approved informed consent form before any interview took place (see Appendix B).

Qualitative data collection.

This project featured semi-structured interviews to collect data. Mayan (2009) argues that qualitative data can be collected in a variety of ways; however, the semi-structured in-depth interview is a tried and true qualitative method of data collection. These interviews allowed the training and development professionals to delve into the details of their work and related identity issues. Additionally, the utilization of a semi-structured interview protocol covered key topic areas while maintaining the flexibility to follow unforeseen academic lines of inquiry. Mayan (2009) argues that the strength of semi-structured interviews is that “you have a fair enough idea of what is going on in or with the phenomenon to develop questions about the topic not enough to predict the answers” (p. 71). Earlier pilot study information revealed issues around identity, identification and obstacles in the training industry, and the semi-structured interview questions allowed for data to emerge among follow-up questions in the conversational interview flow. These human focused interviews allowed complex data to emerge beyond

a simple hypothesis or predetermined index of questions, and this flexibility provided a much greater level of detail in participant response.

One of the primary theoretical backbones of this project, as detailed earlier in the literature review, is the structurational model of organizational identity. This project demonstrates that discursive strategies, language and communication matter when analyzing identity, and Scott et al. (1998) argue that qualitative inquiry is key to understanding the complexities of identity within an organization. Furthermore, Parker and Haridakis (2008) argue that individuals link themselves to their organization via discourse and communication, and this communication can be examined to determine the strength and manifestation of identity at large. Communication is an important expression of identity, and the examination of this communication via interview provided this research project with an opportunity to gather insights and analysis.

The fourteen face-to-face interviews were conducted over the course of five weeks across the Midwest. The interviews ranged from 24 to 51 minutes in length and on average took 35 minutes to complete. When meeting the participants the informed consent form was signed and a brief introduction of the project was shared before launching into the semi-structured interview questions. Programmed questions and related follow ups (see Appendix C for the list of IRB approved questions) were discussed and interesting or relevant themes were examined. Participants were audio recorded for transcription purposes, save four candidates who asked to forgo the recording, and in depth notes were taken in conjunction with the recording. At the time of the interview any identifying information was collected and later redacted for anonymity.

Two distinct, yet interrelated, sets of questions were included in the interview protocol: questions of identity and identification and questions that deal with potential tensions in the industry. Questions of identity and identification were largely modeled after the scale of questions introduced by Parker and Haridakis (2008) that offered insights into identity construction via cognitive belief and communicative expression. For instance participants were asked “would you feel a sense of loss if you left the organization?” to capture data related to identity cognition. Another question “do your coworkers help you make sense of what’s happening at work” addressed issues of identity as expressed through communicative activities. Parker and Haridakis’ (2008) organizational scale argues that organizational identification is related to four factor loadings: management connection, invested self-concept, integrated goals and values and coworker connection (p. 114). Furthermore, Scott et al. (1998) argue that discourse and language matter when examining issues of previous work history and relationship building. Questions were then crafted around the analysis of the cognitive and communicative nature of prior work decisions, relationships and goals and values.

Data Analysis Procedures

The issue of when to analyze data collection is an important consideration when conducting qualitative interviews. The constant comparative method of data analysis, first introduced by Glaser and Strauss, utilizes the flexibility of grounded theory to conduct an analysis of data as it is gathered, while looking back and comparing it to the research that has already been collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After the data had been collected it was transcribed and analyzed and compared to the handwritten notes taken during the

interview. After analyzing and rereading the transcript it was compared to the existing transcripts to identify emerging themes and results classifications. Mayan (2009) argues that failure to utilize data concurrently is a rookie mistake that first-time qualitative researchers commit,

“The only time it is acceptable to have collected all of your data without analyzing them concurrently is for [strict] semi structured interviews...the questions do not change, all participants are asked the same questions, in the same order, and the answers to each question are studied together” (p. 92).

Mayan (2009) argues that the flexibility of analysis provides researchers with the opportunity to discover a new or more fascinating line of inquiry, and this insight is only possible because of researcher immersion in the data and interaction with participants. The ability to remain flexible with emergent data over time is specifically why a qualitative research design was conducted.

As new interviews occurred, each additional interview transcript was analyzed and compared to existing transcripts in order to compare and gather additional insights. When all of the transcripts were complete and cross-referenced to the field notes a series of notes and memos were highlighted among the original transcriptions. These various selected lines of inquiry were then grouped together and categorized into larger groupings in order to address the relevant research questions. Overall, nearly 1,300 lines of data were analyzed, selected and grouped together to forge the results and insights utilized for this research project.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter reviews the analyzed data and suggests results relevant to this research study. The results are divided by the three research questions posed earlier: 1) what identity targets does a training and development professional identify with? 2) what interactions or behaviors demonstrate identification for a training and development professional? 3) for a training and development professional what identity challenges or tensions emerge from the identification process? The results are presented together within the larger research question heading because the identity and identification processes are part of a recursive loop of identity and identification (Scott, et al., 1998) that occur simultaneously and build off each other.

These findings shed unique insights in to the communicated identity of T&D professionals. To begin, T&D professionals identify with serving others by building relationships and offering the right level of training and development. For a T&D professional the identification process occurs when identity resources are expressed by bridging the gap between organizational messages, personnel and skills. Thus T&D professionals connect the dots of the organization, and this work is usually done behind the scenes and from a subordinate position. Finally, these identity resources and identification manifestation lead to unique communicative challenges that the T&D professional faces on the job. These T&D identity challenges range from advocating an organizational message that is not experienced to devaluing their position by focusing on others.

RQ1: What identity targets does a T&D professional identify with?

In this section of the chapter the identity resources that a T&D professional identifies with will be presented. In their adapted communication focused structuration theory of identification Scott, Corman & Cheney (1998) argue that identity targets are resources, or anchors, that an employee builds the identification process upon. These identity targets are foundational to understanding how T&D professionals express their identification within the organization and are the root of the challenges that are faced on the job. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, these identity resources are communicated messages that are expressed both verbally and non-verbally between the organization and the T&D professional; furthermore, the attachment process is built on the interaction between identity targets and the identification process (Scott, et al., 1998). Thus, it is important to understand that in the case of T&D professionals identity anchors are built on a foundation of service to others, the cultivation of strong interpersonal relationships and by providing an appropriate level of support to train and develop employees of the larger organization.

The results for RQ1 will be presented in unison specifically because these findings are expressed and interact together. Therefore, the findings of RQ1: “what identity targets does a T&D professional identify with” are presented in the following order: a) T&D professionals are service oriented and put the needs of others ahead of their own, b) T&D professionals are people persons who pride themselves on building strong interpersonal relationships, c) T&D professionals seek to provide the appropriate amount of training and development as necessary for the organization.

Service oriented.

The primary identity target that T&D professionals identified with is the notion of being able to help people. This help manifests across many different departments of the organization and T&D professionals are in a unique cross-functional position to assist employees throughout the organization. Helping other employees develop their careers, learn important skills and become more successful was reported as the number one most rewarding part of being in the training industry. In fact, when asked “What is the most rewarding part of your job?” 13 of the 14 respondents replied that being in the service of others and helping them develop was the best part of being a T&D professional; interestingly, the one participant who didn’t respond with helping people as the most rewarding part of the job felt that working with others and collaborating on how to make training more effective was the most rewarding. This service to others identity is of such primacy that Nancy said in her organization trainers “serve the customers”; to clarify, Nancy believed that she is obligated to deliver the same level of customer service internally to the organization’s employees that the organization delivers externally to customers. Brian shared that trainers can do so much more in the service of others,

The most rewarding part [of the job] is seeing someone get to where they want to go because I touch so many different areas. I don’t think I could do what those people do in that specific role, but that’s what they want to do. So, helping them get there and do more than what I could do in that role and help them get the tools to get to where they want to go. That’s a really cool thing to see.

By helping others and putting the needs of the trainees ahead of their own T&D professionals communicated their work is very fulfilling.

Since T&D professionals identify with helping others, the most rewarding job tasks centered on facilitating the growth of others in various parts of the organization. As

mentioned earlier, Scott, Corman & Cheney (1998) argue that identification is based upon situated actions where identity has an opportunity to be expressed. The results of this study indicated that through helping others T&D professionals had the opportunity to communicate their service based identity. Gail felt such a connection with helping others she stated that her preferred way to work was through developing training resources and tools because “with established tools I can help more people across the organization than I could with classroom training.” Brian also found that the best part of his work is being able to positively touch many different employees,

I work with a variety of people, as much as I share information people are always going to share information back and make that connection. Every time I train somebody, whether that’s a customer [or] an employee, I’m going to get to know them a little bit more and I’m going to get to hear stuff that I don’t normally get to know about.

The connection that T&D professionals have with employees is an opportunity to express and to receive identity related messages. As goals are communicated and expressed between the trainer and the trainee identity resources are being established.

Communication scholars argue that identity is constructed both cognitively and in expression (Scott, et. al, 1998; Parker & Haridakis, 2008). T&D professionals reported that helping others was something they believed their job was all about. Zeb said professionals like himself “in education or in training [are] largely helping people and that’s kind of the way we’re wired.” Zeb argued that T&D professionals want to help people and takes it one step further by saying that an individual in this line of work has to be “wired” for it. This cognitive belief in helping people is expressed both discursively and in action. Nancy said that T&D professionals are driven to “always have to say yes” to training requests; Bob discussed that he needs to “make learning more available and to

put it in the hands of more employees so that all of my employees can have a computer, phone, tablet and have learning available at their fingertips when they want it.” T&D professionals expressed a sincere belief and need to help people whenever possible. The tasks that T&D professionals perform on the job in most cases are literally discursive in nature; for example, training sessions, coaching, mentoring and curriculum design center around a T&D professional communicating directly to employees.

People persons.

Another key identity resource T&D participants reported identifying with was a focus on interpersonal relationships and savvy. 13 of this study’s 14 respondents stated that they believed that success in the T&D profession is based on the professional’s ability to navigate and forge successful business relationships, and another 11 of the 14 specifically discussed taking pride in their ability to relate to others. Furthermore, 10 of 14 respondents professed that they make sense of what is going on at work by way of communicating with their peers. Sensemaking via communication is an important component of identification, and scholars argue that by communicating interpersonally employees have opportunities to construct or deconstruct identity (Larson & Pepper, 2003; Parker & Haridakis, 2008; Scott, et al., 1998).

Thus, T&D professionals believe that their work cannot be completed if they are not building strong relationships between key organizational leaders and the learners that they interact with. One reason for this strong attachment to interpersonal communication is practical. T&D professionals need to be able to communicate the value of the work that they do to their bosses and to key thought leaders. Zeb believed that relationships with his

bosses and learners are so important that he has created his own mantra: “Thou shall not void the relationships.” Zeb explained that it may be easy to discount leaders or learners when a training professional is frustrated or losing resources, but being able to communicate and work with others is a prerequisite for success. Michelle believed that she is successful in her position because she knows how to navigate the organization with her “interpersonal savvy.” Polly echoed Michelle’s sentiment and explained that strong working relationships are important as well and argued it is how she solved tough problems,

I just think that establishing those good working relationships whether that be through others through the regions or try to somehow really make them feel good about doing the work that they’re doing for them. That’s really important. I think that that’s how I’ve found success in navigating certain difficult issues is really through others.

When asked about other people and working as a T&D professional all 14 respondents were quick to mention that communicating with others is a vital component of the job because without communication there is no training.

Therefore, T&D professionals report that in order to build strong relationships and to be successful, trainers must be people focused, active listeners and skilled communicators. Kirk discussed that his greatest strength is being able to build relationships and to focus on the learner, “You have to be learner focused. What’s the point of training if you’re not using it to help people develop?” Kirk went on to argue that being learner focused and skilled in T&D is about knowing how to work with people and being able to “connect with both leaders and employees.” Nancy also believes that the best part of her job is “working with others” and that she gets to see “the little wins that teams and individuals” make every day. Nancy typifies a common response from the

interviews: T&D professionals seemingly take more pride in the accomplishment of others than from the work that they do themselves. This pride is a key pillar of T&D professional identity it is important to help others and in order to do that professionals have to develop communication based interpersonal relationships.

Getting it right.

In addition to being motivated by helping others and by building personal relationships, another key identity T&D professionals communicated throughout the interviews was the level of maturity of their department and services. This assessment on T&D maturity is based on the ability of the training professional to offer the services, receive support and prove the value of the work that is being offered. In essence, T&D professionals are quick to identify how they are getting it right and where they view additional opportunities. This assessment is likely a reflection of the T&D professional's ability to analyze situations and problems that need work within an organization.

T&D professionals pride themselves on being effective communicators and sound strategists. Strategy is important when looking at how to analyze a problem, synthesize a solution and then execute it to deliver the results the organization is looking for. T&D professionals use this same analysis and communication when addressing their own departments and skillsets. All 14 of the T&D professionals reported that they are very aware of the scope and ability that their department has to offer; 9 of these 14 are actively advocating for improvement or changes in how training and development is implemented; 5 of these 14 report that their department is actively growing in both size and scope; only 2 of the 14 interviewed feel that the size and scope of their department is

just right. The size and scope of the training department is a reflection on the training professional. T&D professionals reported that receiving additional support in the form of time, budget or personnel was a communicated commitment from the organization; on the other hand, a decrease in resources or being relegated to a minor role within the organization represented a lack of commitment. T&D professionals identify with the message that the organization communicates to their position and department.

Training and development professionals working in an immature, growing or future focused training department identified more strongly and enthusiastically with the organization. Unsurprisingly, commitment from an organization in the form of communicated resources, importance and scope of work leads to a higher level of pride in the individual trainer. Five of the interview participants reported being members of a growing department, and were excited about the role that their training has in the organization's future. Furthermore, this excitement and positive identity was related to the impact the individual trainer hoped to have on the organization. Keri, a relatively new T&D professional within her organization, explained that she joined an organization desperate for training and development,

People are very excited about training and everyone wants a piece of the new department... I think people are really excited about this role and people are really craving the training that we need... Before I got here there was no formal training department and the [training opportunities] were [hit or miss]

Keri finds that she is in a unique position within the training industry because she has joined an organization that has not had a formal training department in the immediate period before she joined the organization. She explained that training wasn't valued and it sort of disappeared, but after seeing the training services discontinued many in the

organization are thrilled to stop by her office and to ask for help. This level of enthusiasm and support is a positive identifier for her and keeps her motivated to help as much as possible. Dawn is in a similar position as director of the T&D department within her organization. Shortly before joining the team her organization discontinued training and radically decreased the amount of training offered. Dawn explains that her job exists because the organization recognized and communicated that training is important,

I think I was really very lucky because, luck might not be the right word, but in 2012 they did a [reorganization] and eliminated a lot of positions in our old department and a year later decided “wow that was a miss.” We need something but we need something different. We want to reintroduce this team in OD and build it from the ground up. There was full support from the CEO which you know if you go into the field of OD you need to make sure that your CEO has support for development. I definitely made sure that my boss and I are meeting with the CEO and staying close to the issues at hand, but helping kind of drive what does he want? Where does he want the company to go? Really focusing on development.

Dawn explains that she was lucky to be able to come into the organization and offer that “something different” that the organization needed. In fact, Dawn discussed that in the absence of the T&D department costs were saved but overall the performance suffered. T&D professionals identify with the enthusiasm and the vision of the department and take pride in offering the right services.

Not all T&D departments are growing because they have been outright discontinued; some T&D departments are growing in response to a fairly substantial restart within the organization. In Lynn’s case she works for an organization that made some dramatic changes in the vision and personnel of the training department in response to inadequate or poorly received training. Lynn stated that she came from an organization that was on the “cutting edge” and joined an organization that was a “little behind the times on training”,

Yes, while I'm very proud of our organization's [training] offerings I do not feel that they are cutting edge. I would love for our, that's one of the challenges right now, I come from organizations that were a little more on the cutting edge, this group and this organization is a little slower so helping them see the possibilities. They're a little slow right now. I would love for them to be excited about the possibilities and breaking out of the mold out of what we offer and how we currently deliver training.

Lynn recognized that her training department needs a change and she hopes to be the professional who can bring it about; however, she is also realistic in her expectations and knows that positive change takes time. Zeb also identified with this frustration and believes that training is an expense many organizations are wary of investing in, subsequently Zeb believed that training is "not on the top of the heap." T&D professionals receive the organization's communication about training's importance and stature within the larger organization, and this communication has an impact on a T&D professional's identity.

Conversely, many T&D professionals report working within a training department that is mature and established. This established presence within the organization may be a result of senior leadership buying into training or the organization having a successful history of training offerings. However, T&D maturity comes with an accompanying set of challenges. 9 of the 14 T&D professionals interviewed for this project reported working for an organization that is very bureaucratic within a department that is stretched thin. The growth and future focused excitement is not communicated within this subset of T&D professionals; however, these professionals have an established curriculum of training offerings and a lengthy record of successful development.

Established T&D professionals had many unique identity related challenges that differed from the upcoming, immature or future-focused training department

professionals. These T&D professionals reported that issues of budgetary restraint, justification and metrics were far more prevalent. These professionals do not feel the same sense of excitement or awareness around their programs and this negatively impacts identification with the position and the organization. Bob also discussed that T&D professionals within “mature” organizations have an easier time explaining the work that they do but they then have to “spend more time justifying their increased budgets.” Steve communicated that with an increased budget comes increased expectations and it can often be difficult to keep evolving and improving year after year,

Same thing here in [the training and development department]. I’m not doing the same things I was doing five years ago. Nor am I using the same technology, nor am I deploying it the same way. So, it just keeps evolving and advancing and the drive is competitive. You know you’ve got to do things faster and better and in a higher quality.

The push to keep evolving by doing more with less presents a significant strain on T&D professionals. Steve went on even further to explain the pressure to deliver,

So, that’s it, that’s what makes it kind of fun and challenging. I think there’s always pressure on doing something better, faster, cheaper. I always tell people you get to pick two. You don’t get to pick all three. Do you want it better? Do you want it faster? Or do you want it cheaper? Pick two. The three of them don’t go together well.

Thus, T&D professionals in more mature or developed training programs report that there is a different pressure associated with being established. Many of these professionals negatively identify with the stress associated with justifying resources and why there has been certain resource spend in the past. T&D professionals may feel that increased negative organizational criticism is a communicated message of trainings decreased importance and relevance.

Many of these established trainers reported that the work that they are able to do is often very tailored to a specific business need or within one specific training area like organizational development or leadership training. T&D professionals expressed that it is ultimately easier to advocate for resources closer to the top of the organization because senior and executive leaders have an easier time seeing the benefits of the resource investment. Michelle said that her organization is really focused on leadership and organizational development for a number of reasons including the “practical benefits” of succession planning that is “easy to see and easy to trace.” Michelle expressed a desire to be able to do more training for all employees but recognized that ultimately the resource decisions are made without her input. T&D professionals negatively identify with communicated messages in the form of funding and curriculum selection that is too restrictive or focused on certain workgroups.

RQ2. What interactions or behaviors demonstrate identification for a T&D professional?

This section of the chapter outlines how T&D professionals express the previously discussed identity targets in action. Within the Structuration Theory of Identity the expression of identity resources is considered identification; thus, this section discusses how a T&D professional acts on helping others, building relationships and providing the appropriate level of training (Scott, et al., 1998). The acts of expression and the identity resources that lead to them form the recursive loop of identity and identification that takes place simultaneously for any individual (Scott, et. al, 1998). As discussed earlier in the literature review, this simultaneous loop means that at any given

time the following identifications are taking place with various levels of expression and are influenced by both the individual T&D professional and the organization that they are a part of (Scott, et al., 1998).

T&D professionals express identity primarily by assisting in the development of other employees within the organization. The findings of RQ2 will cover: a) T&D identity is expressed by acting as a bridge between key organizational messages and initiatives and the organization's personnel, b) T&D assistance often focuses on the learner and puts the trainer in a subordinate position, c) the desire to help others and to build relationships drives the T&D professional to spread the work of the T&D department to as many employees as possible within the organization. Therefore, the findings of "RQ2: what interactions or behaviors demonstrate identification for a T&D professional" will be presented under the following headings: "the miracle of the organization", "not in the spotlight" and "equitable training for all."

The miracle of the organization.

A key T&D identification theme that emerged is the training professional's ability to communicate messages, goals and skills across an organization. As mentioned earlier, Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) argue that identification is the manifestation and expression of an identity resource. Within an organization T&D professionals have an opportunity to be the primary resource internal stakeholders rely on for assistance. Tom reflected on the unique position T&D professionals are in,

Because what happens with most, especially lower-level personnel, is that they have a huge desire and need to be more effective and to be more efficient. People don't come to work wanting to work poorly. They come to work wanting to do a good job. Wanting to be properly motivated. Wanting to be trained correctly to

perform the duties that they're asked to perform. There's often a disconnect between upper-management type personnel and higher-levels and, you know, the resources and the requirements to get them the training that they need. So, I really like to have the ability to bridge that gap. It's something that I've done for a long time. I feel that I'm pretty good at it. I can take the goals and the strategic objectives of higher-level management personnel and then meet those goals with lower-level personnel and give them the expertise that they're needing.

For Tom, the identification process revolves not only around being able to help people but to make sure that the entire organization benefits from his position and skill set. The T&D professional's ability to communicate the strategic goals of the organization to the lower level employee is an opportunity to develop others through communication. Tom notes that T&D professionals have an ability to "bridge the gap" and to communicate and execute on important messages. Nancy echoed this statement and believes that T&D professionals should be "connecting the dots" for individuals within an organization, "the greater purpose of training is that when done well effective training ties together all of [the] missions, statements and goals of the organization." Nancy believes in this mission so strongly she calls the training department a "miracle of the organization" because being that bridge is a "key pillar of identity" for T&D professionals. Dawn succinctly summarized this mindset when she said "it's really about being curious and connecting the dots."

T&D professionals recognize that internal stakeholders want to be connected to the organization that they are a part of and by "connecting the dots" they have an opportunity to build engagement. All 14 of the interview participants of this study reported that they are proud of their organization and the services that the organization offers, and specifically mention the organization by name when discussing the work that they do. Being proud of an organization's services, products and values is a strong

indicator of employee identification more broadly (Parker & Haridakis, 2008) and T&D professionals believe they have an ability to instill that pride in others. Kirk argued that individuals within an organization need to be aligned with their work and says “the trainer needs to be able to understand how values and mission come together.” Brian echoed that T&D professionals have an ability to share this value alignment,

When personal values align with the company it feels like you can do more because you're connected to it in a way. The way you handle things may be different than how the company would so when [an employee is] similar to that it can help add to that. A lot of my work focuses on training, benefits and supporting people, and it feels like those are decisions that I make and that contributes to my level of pride of feeling aligned.

T&D professionals are in a unique position to communicate values and “connect the dots” for an employee of an organization and this identification activates the service to others mentality. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) would define a T&D professional's identifying with service and then being able to act upon it as the attachment process between an employee and an organization.

Not in the spotlight.

The nature of T&D work is that it takes place behind the scenes because developmental conversations are traditionally held in private. T&D professionals work to set other employees up for success, and these professionals are often communicating messages and skills behind the scenes. Training sessions and developmental conversations are delivered in meeting rooms, offices, in one-on-one conversations, or accessed via training modules on a computer; furthermore, these conversations may address deficiencies and opportunities that would be inappropriate to conduct in front of peers or other employees. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) describe identity building as

a duality between the identification creating identity and the identity creating the identification, and in this instance the identity of being behind the scenes is both a function of the job duties and the individuals performing them. 12 of the 14 T&D professionals in this study somehow or another expressed that their work is about putting others needs first, and that training is not about receiving accolades or their own ego. This identity construction is both the nature of the job that is being completed as well as the mindset of the individuals doing the work. Simply put, T&D professionals oftentimes put the needs of others ahead of their own.

These professionals went so far as to report that if putting the needs of the learner ahead of the needs of the trainer is a foundational component of good training. Brian explained that T&D professionals need to put their egos aside in order to facilitate good training,

I think if you're passionate about not being necessarily in the spotlight if you're happy with helping other people, yeah you're in the spotlight during the training, but from there the success and emphasis is on the trainee. You may not get the credit, but they're going to accomplish things you won't because you're busy training and if you're comfortable with that you'll have a lot of success. If you have a problem with that that's where ego comes in and gets in the way of training. Being trainee focused is being goal aligned.

Brian believed that good training happens when the learner is put front and center, and put in a position to succeed. Dawn agreed and said that T&D professionals "do our best work when people don't know we're a part of it." Thus, T&D professionals place themselves in a subordinate or secondary position to the learner, and trainer identification is based on putting others first and being unheralded.

Furthermore, as Brian evinced in his most recent quote above, T&D professionals believe that being trainee focused is the only way to accomplish the goals of the

individual trainer as well as the goals of the organization. Bob agreed with being learner focused and argued that a good trainer needs to be an effective communicator,

As the [veteran T&D] professional one of the biggest mistakes that I see in newer trainers is that they have a training manual or a binder in front of them and they feel like the training is all about them completing that binder. When you're truly learner centric it's not all about you. It's really all about the learner. So maybe that means you don't get through everything that's in your binder, maybe it means that you adjust on the fly because you're starting to sense that you're losing your audience a little bit. Maybe by the questions you're asking and hearing from them you realize that the curriculum and material you have in front of them isn't going to address a pressing need that you're hearing from the group so you need to be able to adjust that way. Communication is what helps you to do that.

Bob's focus on communication skills illustrates that in order to put others first and to be effective a T&D professional has to have an understanding of how communication works. Kirk echoed this communicative focus and says "being a good trainer is about being a good facilitator", and he goes on to say "you can't put messages into trainees. That's not how adults learn. As a trainer you have to draw the message out of the people you're working with." T&D professionals construct an identity of being skilled communicators working behind the scenes and putting their egos, messages and needs in a subordinate position.

Equitable training for all.

As discussed in an earlier theme of this results section, T&D professionals have a desire to help other people and this desire to help others is the primary identity resource associated with training professionals. As a result of this drive to serve others, T&D professionals reported that they identify most strongly with training that reaches everyone and provides equal opportunities to every member of the organization. 13 of the 14 training professionals reported that they wished they had the chance to communicate with

more employees, more often and with more developed training. While T&D professionals communicate a desire to work with every employee they are aware that this type of training is not always feasible. This identification had an impact on medium for training as well as the reach of their training efforts.

Overall, T&D professionals identify most strongly with being in a classroom and working with learners face-to-face. To that point, 12 of 14 respondents reported that when given the opportunity training in person is the most effective way to conduct learning; however, these same trainers also report that classroom training limits the opportunity to reach out to more employees. This identity related paradox is based around the idea of communicating one on one to build better learning relationships versus the ability of digital training resources to reach a greater number of employees. Gail stated that she prefers “digital tools and resource based learning” because she can touch more people at once. Steve discusses the challenges and benefits associated with more electronic and digital learning,

What happened was the internet got faster and brought our bandwidth and you didn't have to do it so expensively. So, we started doing more and more on the internet. I moved in to e-learning [which helped reach more people]...I wish I had more time for my team to do some more investigating and research around trying to bring a more collaborative environment into e-learning. I think that there is a hole there that isn't in a classroom where people are exchanging best-practicing, telling war stories, literally becoming lifelong business friends at least. Bouncing ideas off each other in a classroom and trying to replicate that same thing as part of an e-learning in a distance class so that everybody doesn't feel isolated. I think that's very, very challenging. It's actually very challenging because people don't have the time to do it.

Steve recognized some that e-learning brings about challenges associated with isolation, time management and collaboration, but he also admits that without e-learning he would have a harder time reaching as many employees. Bob agreed with this statement and believes that having the right balance of “dedicated people focused classroom learning” is

just as important as having “podcasts, digital libraries and learning tools” that are “available to everyone.” Zeb believed the debate is academic because electronic learning is so cost effective,

I think anybody who has seen it evolve over the last bit of time [many years] it is in many ways still the same but in many ways it is different because of technology. Pressure is on cost. So, just looking at this one of the hot buttons these days is do people learn better in the classroom or virtually. There are some arguments and debate that goes on whether one environment over the other is more conducive to learning. Unfortunately in the classroom environment in a large organization like I work for people have to travel. You have to house them; you have to feed them; in order for them to come to central location for learning or training. There is a lot of cost that really doesn't pay for the training itself. The travel and the housing and the food are unfortunate cost burdens to bring people together to network face to face and to have that exchange. So, the fact that we have virtual learning and e-learning is effective, but if you came up in the classroom training world. Classroom is more effective than the virtual world.

Zeb firmly believed that training should happen in person and strongly identified as helping people face to face, but at the end of the day he recognized that “training online is here to stay..

T&D professionals identify with equitable training for everyone and part of the challenge is convincing people that training is a worthwhile endeavor. Kirk found it frustrating that some people just don't see the value in self-improvement, “The people that need training the most are often the ones who don't think they need it at all.” A significant challenge beyond cost effective training and digital distribution is related to getting the message out that training should be for everybody. Cathy observed that “the average employee is just too busy to really focus on training” and that unless an employee is mandated to take compliance related training it is rarely a priority. Additionally, T&D professionals reported that some senior leaders only want to fund specific training built around a few core skills, and this training often becomes redundant

over time. Dawn found that training sessions within her own organization largely went unattended in the past because “[the training] wasn’t hitting the mark because so many people had already developed those skills.”

T&D professionals expressed a desire to find the right balance between e-learning initiatives and more traditional classroom learning, as well as finding the right balance between compliance and technical training and leadership and soft skills training. The desire to present a robust and well-formed training curriculum pushes T&D professionals to advocate for resources or changes within the training department or larger organization. However, the needs of the business, the costs associated with training and the timeframe available to present training often curtails this well-rounded approach to employee development.

RQ3: For a T&D professional what identity challenges or tensions emerge from the identification process?

This section of the chapter outlines the identity related challenges and communicated tensions that results from the T&D professional identification process. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, the identification process is the culmination of identified resources and the acts that express them; in essence, the identification process is the result of the recursive loop of identity and identification (Scott, et al., 1998). Thus the identification process represents the culmination of identity and identification and these results present certain stresses that uniquely affect T&D professionals. These job related challenges are often expressed via communicated tensions, ironies, contradictions and paradoxes (Fyke & Buzzanell, 2013; Stohl & Cheney 2001; Tretheway & Ashcraft,

2004). These challenges are a natural byproduct of communication and become more frequent as job roles, responsibilities and messages change over time (Koschmann & Laster, 2011).

The identity related challenges that T&D professionals face are communicative in nature and stem from a larger misunderstanding of the work that training professionals do. The research findings for “RQ3: for a T&D professional what identity challenges or tensions emerge from the identification process” will be presented in the following order: a) T&D professionals are responsible for communicating messages that they do not receive within the organization, b) the nature of training tasks is that they are never truly complete and require ongoing support, c) T&D professionals are often at a disadvantage in advocating the importance of training because of their subordinated position, d) T&D must be executed with clear and tangible business related goals, and e) T&D professionals are externally focused and often neglect their own development and organizational relevance. Therefore the findings of RQ3 will be presented under the subheadings of “in word but not in deed”, “ongoing nature of training”, “advocating the importance”, “tangible and profitable” and “training the trainer.”

In word but not in deed.

The nature of the identification process between an individual and an organization is not a static relationship. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) argue that there is a regionalization of multiple identities and that various identities can express themselves with different levels of strength or duration at any given time. This research found that T&D professionals often experience an identity challenge around communicating the

values of the organization and the employee. All 14 respondents reported that they are proud of their organization and mention it specifically by name; however 13 respondents also reported that that one of the biggest challenges they face on the job is in the allocation of resources. Not only are T&D professionals concerned with the amount of time, money or personnel they have access to in order to complete their work but 6 of the 14 respondents explained that budgetary concerns are expounded by the need to prove that their resource spend is worthwhile. This general feeling of being under supported (13 of 14) or outright targeted for reduction (6 of 14) presents a real identity challenge for T&D professionals. T&D professionals are in a position to advocate for the value of employee engagement by communicating messages of culture, value and employee appreciation; however, these messages that a training professional communicates are often not experienced in practice.

T&D professionals report that the mission of talent development and personnel support is communicated in word but not always in deed. Lynn shared that if a T&D professional asks senior leadership if they support the development of their personnel they'll say "yes." But, she goes on to pose a question, "but will [the same leaders] invest in the resources needed to achieve that [development]? [They'll then say] well how much are you asking for?" Lynn discussed that it is common for an organization to support internal stakeholders via discursive strategies like newsletters, mission statements and annual reviews; however, when looking to implement the training programs and assessment tools to actually measure that commitment the funding comes up short. Bob echoed this sentiment with past training organizations he has worked for, "Training is an easy mark when you're trying to pinch budgets and such, or you really have to fight tooth

and nail to kind of justify the work that you do and show the return on investment.” The ongoing struggle of a T&D professional to communicate and demonstrate that their budget, position and mission are valued is a very real and tangible identity challenge; furthermore, this challenge takes the form of a communication tension because T&D professionals are often clashing with key organizational stakeholders over issues of support and value.

Many non-operational departments may face similar identity challenges around budgetary concerns; however, what makes the T&D professional unique is that the training department is responsible for spreading the messages of organizational support and appreciation. In this sense, T&D professionals report being discursively responsible for spreading the message of organizational engagement and identification; however, T&D professionals also encounter in practice a message that contradicts the identity. Thus, T&D professionals face a communicative tension around the dynamic and conflicting attachment process that associates and disassociates at various times.

Ongoing nature of training.

Further complicating the work that T&D professionals do is the nature and scope of the tasks that they are assigned. In many cases the tasks that the T&D department is responsible for focuses on skills, values and competencies that are continuous and ongoing such as emotional intelligence training, conflict resolution, and annual performance reviews with self-directed checkups. Nancy, a T&D director, reported that the scope of her department’s work is “always increasing while the resources are constantly decreasing”, and that her department is always “under attack.” Nancy

explained that her scope of work is always increasing because “when a project is done it just becomes ongoing on my list of duties, and is never completed.” The nature of training tasks being revisited down the road is common because organizations and trainers alike do not want to see tasks, skills or messages diminishing over time. Dawn provided an example of such an ongoing task,

What we’re doing is that these are where our priorities are focused and then holding them accountable to certain components. So we rolled something in August and we went back and revisited again last week. Every six months we’ll do a check in and see how we’re progressing.

The ongoing nature of T&D tasks prevents work from ever truly being complete because tasks are now part of an ongoing accountability and vision for the future. Steve also argued that training expands but resources do not, “Almost 100% of the time once [leaders] start seeing what [the training] actually looks like the scope expands, but not necessarily your budget.” Steve went on to say that one the best parts of the job is being able to see a training program “be completed” because it happens so infrequently.

On the other hand, frustrations aside, T&D professionals are quick to report that the work of training is never done. Kirk said that the “work of a trainer is ongoing and is never done because there is always more to learn.” To a T&D professional it makes sense that training and learning is ongoing because knowledge is a process not a result. In fact, 11 of the 14 respondents reported that a T&D professional is trying to communicate with key leaders that the mission of training is ongoing and evolving; thus, 9 of the 14 trainers specifically mentioned that they wish they could be allocated more time to execute training. This identity related challenge is further compounded by the fact that T&D professionals want to encourage ongoing growth, as evinced by Lynn’s statement,

We tend to take a continuous improvement approach in that we don't feel like anything or any initiative or object is ever done because our external and internal environments are always changing. Once we roll something out there is always a process in place for continuous improvement. So, every couple of years we need to refresh the program and continue to make sure it is aligned with where it is going as an example and [with] the needs of the leaders. We need to continue to do that. I feel like everything is always moving and in movement. But, I don't feel like it is incomplete in that we start and stop and start and stop, it is just evolving.

This desire to see learning as an ongoing process is often countered by the stark realities of a budget and goals.

T&D professionals must be able to deliver on key metrics that the organization provides. Thus, learning is often fast-tracked in an effort to save money as Cathy explained,

There's a lot to do and I cover a lot of areas. I often feel that I don't have enough time to devote to making what I'm doing excellent. Sometimes I feel like I have to finish things really fast and get them out. Because we have to get them out.

Communication scholars would argue that this situation is a paradox (Cheney & Stohl, 2001; Gibbs, 2009) because T&D professionals express the need for learning as ongoing and constantly evolving; however, organizational leaders communicate a finite schedule and set of resources. These two communicated realities cannot exist and a T&D professional is often put in the position having to make an impossible choice.

Advocating the importance.

There are identity related challenges associated with being relationship driven and behind the scenes. The primary challenge that T&D professionals face with being behind the scenes is that it becomes much more difficult to prove your value to the organization. T&D professionals face a unique challenge of supporting the mission of the larger

organization while simultaneously preferring to stay out of the spotlight, and this lack of attention can be detrimental to the individual trainer and training department.

Of the 14 respondents included in this research 13 responded that the only way to make T&D a priority is by receiving support from senior leaders in the organization; 11 of 14 said T&D is only a priority if it is advocated from the top with senior leadership. Clearly, T&D professionals feel that in order to be supported from the organization a concerted effort must be made to build consensus with executive level leadership. Steve believes so strongly in senior leadership involvement that he takes pride in being able to build those relationships, “You have to be very tied to the business leaders. You have to create value or your position won’t be around very long.” As T&D professionals work primarily behind the scenes it can be a challenge to win the support of the key thought and budget leaders at the executive level, and this challenge is often communicated to T&D professionals in the form of reduced budgets or a general organization-wide unawareness of the work that T&D professionals do.

T&D professionals often work in a space that supports the larger organizational missions, objectives and values; however, T&D professionals and the work that they do often goes unrecognized and unrewarded. Nancy addressed such a tension when she offered this story,

One of the departments in our organization approached [the T&D department] about creating an online proficiency test to replace an old handwritten test. This test was administered and graded by hand, and took hundreds of hours to review and cost thousands of dollars in payroll. My [the T&D] department took the time, while bearing the cost that was not in our budget, and created an improved digital testing efficiency that that department was able to claim at the end of the year review. In the end that department was credited with saving thousands of dollars that impacted the organization’s bottom line while the T&D department went over budget.

While sharing this story Nancy was proud of the work that her team was able to deliver the other department; however, Nancy was also quick to point out that by helping the other department directly and the organization indirectly, the T&D department suffered. This scenario is an example of a communication tension that T&D professionals face on the job as a byproduct of staying out of the spotlight. Serving the training mission of the organization can be a disservice to the T&D professional.

In some cases the lack of recognition awarded to a T&D department is because the larger organization is unaware of the work that T&D professionals do. 6 of the 14 interview respondents reported that key members of the organization were at some point unaware of the work that their T&D department was responsible for. Lynn explained that her department is actively announcing the work that they do and the services they offer,

So we have a relationship culture where we spend a lot of time using our lunches to build networks. So, we use that. Then we, also as an organization, have kind of our “road show deck” where we like to go out and share with the organization and each group who or what we’re doing and then asking them what’s going on with them. Based on what we’re offering do they see any gaps and what can we do to close those gaps for their group. It’s informal and formal.

T&D professionals are aware that there are members of the larger overall organization that do not know about training; furthermore, Bob shared that not only does the organization not understand the work of training but that society at large is unaware of the mission of T&D,

But, I find that a lot of people, it depends on where they work.... [people] are pretty unfamiliar with the work that we do. I would see that as an area of opportunity within our community and our society to have the average employee to better understand. In an organization like ours where L&D is tied directly to an HR department than it becomes even more challenging because I’ll go that route: well we’re part of the HR department because everyone knows HR but that can sometimes create a skewed view of it as well. So, I’ll say, “Well, we’re the fun part of HR.”

Considering that employees outside of T&D may largely be unaware of what a T&D professional does presents a real identity and definition problem for training professionals.

This challenge takes on the form of a communication paradox because T&D professionals recognize that any communicative effort toward building T&D will be impossible if an organization or society at large is unaware of the work that is being done. Furthermore, a communicative irony is expressed in Lynn's most recent statement because she's attempting to transcend this paradox by communicating the value of T&D work despite how difficult it may be to be understood. T&D professionals recognize the conflict of being unknown and the effects that it has on the attachment process with the profession.

In fact, the ambiguity related to this profession is manifested in the multitude of organizational specific roles, titles and job duties. It certainly appears that the American Society for Training and Development was merited in changing their name to the Association for Talent Development because there seems to be little to no consensus in the industry about what constitutes a T&D professional and how to define the work that these employees do. Zeb shares this frustration and believes that his senior leaders don't have a rich understanding of what it is he does,

The hardest part of my job is working with people who don't really understand the amount of time and effort that it takes to produce various learning deliverables in a quality fashion. [Other employees] more or less look at the job as being a, how do you say it, something that is easier than it really is.

T&D professionals express a communication tension about being a misunderstood member of an organization. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, people have a biological drive to define who they are and what they do especially when compared to

others and a T&D professional is no different (Cheney, et al., 2014). The lack of understanding and awareness that is communicated to T&D professionals presents an identity tension centered on definition, self-awareness and self-worth.

Further complicating the matter is that T&D professionals report that they are responsible for executing the training that the organization deems important; however, in most cases the organization has a poor understanding of how training works within the organization. In rare cases, a few interview participants discussed that they are given “carte blanche” to solve certain key issues but this level of funding is not the norm. All 14 of the interview participants agreed that the work that they do is carefully crafted and bound within the limit of budgetary and strategic requirements. Thus, the organization communicates what is important or not for a T&D professional to implement and these decisions affect the scope and delivery of training within the organization. Organizations may be unaware, or at a minimum have a poor understanding, of how training is created and delivered while communicating budgets and importance, and this results in a communicated tensions that T&D professionals have to navigate.

In light of this tension, interview participants communicated that the T&D tasks they implement are strategically related to the business goals of the organization. T&D professionals reported that the training offerings must add value to the larger organization and has to come under budget. Tom explained how training is structured within his organization,

Just like any other company we have resource constraints. We have task saturated personnel in other departments and it is extremely challenging to get training at a high enough priority to get buy-in. That’s very challenging. It’s not that people don’t want to do it. It’s just that when you got 20 projects and not enough time in the day to do it well then where do you really place training on your priority list?

Tom discusses two important points in the preceding quote: that training is bound by resource availability and ranked by priority. It can be extremely difficult for T&D professionals to feel that the work that they do is a priority within the organization, and this prioritization is a communicated message that affects trainer identity. Lynn faced a similar experience within her organization where she recently had a meeting with key leaders about training titled “metrics that matter.” Lynn relayed that this meeting was largely supportive of training but that there was a clearly communicated message: certain components of training are worthwhile and “matter” and others do not.

This is not to say however that T&D professionals do not wish to add value to the business; on the contrary, T&D professionals pride themselves on and identify with being savvy business focused employees. Steve believes that any learning organization is “kind of roll[s] up under HR and we are a support organization. So, I mean that’s where we play. It’s kind of a service and support organization and that helps the business be successful.” Steve communicated that when boiled down the mission of training work is to support the business by helping add additional revenue and to be more efficient. Dawn agreed and discussed that trainers have to be completely focused on the needs of the business,

You just have to make sure that you’re focused on the same things as the business that you’re really listening to them and that you’re not going in a different direction and creating “fluff” or spending money foolishly. The business is hunkering down you’re hunkering down with them. Example: We’re going to send some people around the world to do some training. How do we go about doing that? Where do we maximize our time? Where are we going to spend it. Rather than foolishly just going anywhere. Being mindful about how you use your budget and where you use it.

Dawn communicated that training professionals have to be focused on the same things as the business while trying to achieve the same goals. Dawn further elaborated on this and

said that she needs to spend more time “getting to know the business” because training doesn’t happen “in a vacuum.” Polly expressed a similar concern and said that her job is harder “to get her head around” because she doesn’t have the “technical knowledge” about the work that the larger organization is doing. T&D professionals are interested in advancing the goals of the larger organization as well as the goals of the training department, and that means proposing and executing training that adds value to the organization.

By being strategically focused and budget restricted, T&D professionals are forced to make hard choices about who is helped and how often. 13 of the 14 T&D professionals reported that they had a desire to help touch more people in the organization. This identification with helping as many as possible has been discussed earlier and becomes relevant again when looking at how and what training is selected to be administered. In fact, 9 of 14 participants reported that they believed before starting in this line of work that they would be doing more general teaching and classroom style learning for all employees. T&D respondents were quick to add that in their experience training has evolved from “helping people” to “strategically targeting” certain valued messages, individuals and skillsets. Determining what training “matters” is an identity challenge that negatively impacts T&D professionals who are most interested in helping work with as many people as possible.

Tangible and profitable.

T&D professionals reported that a challenge in securing more expansive support for training from the organization is in quantifying how successful training is or can be.

The reason that measuring success within T&D is difficult is because each individual organization assesses what success is and how to define it. 12 of the 14 participants in this research described the difficulties around quantifying the success of training and remarked that it is an unfortunate side effect of working in the training industry. This organizationally specific measurement method contributes to the lack of a universally understood return on investment; furthermore, many training tasks are related to the “soft skills” of communication like leadership, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence and it is difficult to measure how much more an individual can lead or resolve situations. It weighs on T&D professionals to have to find ways to measure and to prove their success while on the job.

T&D professionals point out that it is possible to quantify and measure the success of the training that is being created and that the goal is to create training that has a positive impact on the business. How to achieve this measurement depends on the senior leadership and, as mentioned earlier, on the maturity of the T&D department. Polly explained that training measurement has to move beyond the “smile sheets” of a post training evaluation that primarily asks trainees if they were engaged or enjoyed the food that was provided. Polly went on to discuss that simply probing trainees about effectiveness fails to adequately measure how much was learned and in what way. Brian believed that measuring “soft skills” and training should not be about achieving a certain number or any one skill and that learning is a process that is individualistic and contextualized. Many T&D professionals agreed with this sentiment but recognized that some form of measurement has to be implemented. Tom argued that trying to figure how to measure training is the “nature of the beast” and that there is no one good way to do it;

however, Tom did say that training evaluation should be co-constructed between the T&D department and the senior leaders. This co-construction of training allows the T&D professional to explain how learning takes place in order to make sure that measurement is appropriate.

Unsurprisingly, more mature organizations have a more defined method of measuring success. The goal of training within these organizations is to have a measurable impact on the business and to see positive behavioral changes. Steve explained the four step evaluation process that he holds training to within his department as an evaluation of what the learner knew before the training, what the learner knows after the training, to check and see if there was a positive behavior change and how that behavior change affected the organization. He added that the process of measuring success from training is available but it takes “time and money” and these are resources that organizations are reluctant to spend on tracking changes. Lynn agreed with this assessment and said in her organization the focus is on “making positive behavioral changes that impact the business” but the trick is in constructing appropriate measures on this impact.

Training and development professionals also recognize that it is very difficult to operationalize when learning takes place. It is difficult to differentiate between a learning opportunity that was created by a T&D professional and an employee figuring it out on their own. Nancy felt it can be tricky to determine when learning takes place and adds,

There are many metrics that can be put in place to measure the impact of training but the problem is that there is no control group or isolated variables. You don't know if a good training is responsible for success or a good manager. Or you may have good training and the person goes and works for a subpar manager... You can measure the metric over time but it takes a lot of time and money in order to

determine how successful training is. When you have in place though you can see how well it went.

This difficulty in determining at what place the training took place makes it very difficult to conduct inexpensive or timely measurement. Zeb also discussed that it is hard to determine what training really takes place and how to measure it,

We know how to do it. The fact of the matter is that there is not as much time to do it or to do the data mining around the data being mined. Saying that this particular learning thing, ruling out the other things, delivered that result. It's hard to isolate the impact that it had without saying it was the quality of the brochure, the salesperson or the advertising. It's hard to really isolate the extent to which training had that part of the impact. You know, claim 20% of the impact because of our success or our failure or whatever.

The difficulty around measuring training further reinforces identity related challenges of feeling valued or appreciated, and this uncertainty requires that T&D professionals really reach out for the support of senior leadership. T&D professionals are quick to point out that core metrics in areas like accounting, sales or manufacturing can be easy to generate and even easier to interpret, but training requires greater insights and support in order to understand success. Recognizing the need and the difficulty in communicating training value is a communication tension between T&D professionals and the decision makers of the larger organization.

T&D professionals forge relationships with senior leaders in an attempt to navigate the tension around communicating training value, but these same professionals will privately share that some tasks are easier to sell than others. As an example, T&D professionals who work primarily within the organizational development realm find it easy to quantify the work that they are doing because much of the data is number driven and easy to quantify. Organizational development often focuses on employee retention and reducing employee turnover while simultaneously focusing on identifying key future

talent for advancement; organizational development tasks are centered around producing the cost benefit analysis of introducing new employees to an organization, the cost of recruiting and paying out benefits and other various outcome related expenses. Dawn agreed and discussed that it is “easy to explain to leaders how important training is when you look at how much it costs to find the right talent.” Dawn’s assessment is based primarily on these organizational development tasks that analyze the costs of losing or gaining certain positions over time. Dawn also pointed out that her organization has a poor history of measuring soft skills training, and she suggests that is a likely reason that more knowledge based or communicative based training is rarely offered in her organization.

Other T&D professionals find it is easy to create buy in from senior leaders by focusing training specifically on executive level talent. Lynn works most often with key organizational leaders in developing the managerial skills they need to succeed in the boardroom and as the leaders of large departments. Lynn communicated that by “hanging with senior leaders” she is provided more access to funding and information than other employees or trainers in her organization, and she said she “does not envy” other training professionals who have less access to the people who make funding decisions. Kirk agreed and said he prefers working with senior leaders because “if you don’t secure their help nothing will get done” and that leaders “will definitely spend money on themselves” and their executive peers before “[spending money] on the lowest levels of the organization.”

T&D professionals recognize that it is important for their department and their own job security to focus on training that can be measured and deployed; however, this

pragmatic strategy does preclude training from reaching the “masses.” Polly remarked that she is responsible for “key dimensions and accountabilities” and determining ways to measure the success of her department, but that day-to-day she takes the most pride in “discussing individual career goals and really holding the hand of employees.” Polly sincerely enjoys having one on one career focused conversations with employees in order to help push their career to new heights; unfortunately, Polly is quick to add that these conversations don’t happen enough because “she doesn’t have much time” after spending so much of it in meetings, administratively and in the pursuit of quantifying success for the quarterly training report. T&D professionals positively identify with training initiatives that touch more areas of the organization, and this identification is complicated when training professionals have to focus on specific workgroups or have to advocate for resources only when they can be measured.

In the end however T&D professionals strongly believe that once an investment in T&D is made it must be protected. The cost of implementing training can be high but T&D professionals believe that if the costs aren’t calculated and supported by senior leadership from the beginning it will be more expensive to try and implement after. Bob strongly believes that training resources should be spent in a way that holds employees accountable in order to protect the resource investment,

One of the harder parts of the job is encouraging employees and leadership that you can’t afford to not spend time on learning and development. It’s often the easy thing that gets pushed to the side because I just don’t have time for that today. So, one of the things that I have found is that organizations even L&D valued organizations rarely hold employees accountable for it. Rarely do they say you have to take x number of hours of training this year, or as a manager I’m going to hold you accountable for developing your employees. We hold people accountable for hitting sales or production numbers, but rarely do employees hold their employees accountable for their own learning or the learning and development of their own employees.

This focus on accountability is directly related to T&D identity because it frustrates T&D professionals to advocate for resources to create a training curriculum that then are ultimately underutilized or poorly enforced. Nancy agrees and believes that training should be conducted by the T&D professionals who understand how to do it, “If we didn’t do this work it would just be pushed off on to other people at lower levels who don’t have the time to do it and would be unaware of the best way to make it happen.” This professionally driven training curriculum highlights that there are challenges associated with securing and spending resources and the best way to protect the investment in training is to support the T&D professionals who create the work.

Training the trainer.

Taking a subordinate and potentially unknown role in the organization presents an additional identity related challenge for T&D professionals in the form of taking time to personally improve. As discussed earlier, T&D professionals are focused on helping others and avoiding stepping into the spotlight and this drive to help others diminishes the growth of the training professional. Bob discussed that “there is never enough time” and that by utilizing all of his time on others he forgets to take care of himself,

Then my other personal challenge is that I have to keep up my capabilities and my skill set so that I am not outdated in my industry, and that I’m aware of current trends and technology. [These are things a T&D professional must do] just to keep myself and my department relevant.

T&D professionals are focused on the improvement of others while simultaneously working in an industry that is often short on time and resources, and this combination of

factors often prevents trainers from training themselves. Lynn echoed this statement when asked what she wishes she had more time to do,

I wish I had more time for more of my personal growth and development so that I could have even more information about what's going on in other organizations... Yeah to make me more effective to make them more effective is really a challenge. A challenge of how do I break out of the day-to-day to make sure that I'm staying on the cutting of edge of [training and development] so that I can offer that is always a challenge.

T&D professionals are advocating for more time to improve their craft and the curriculum that they're presenting to adult learners in the organization, because trainers know that if they are not staying relevant they are less effective in helping develop others.

The taking more time to self-improve identity challenge was expressed in some form or fashion by 11 of the 14 participants in this research study. These 11 respondents expressed a desire for more time to improve their communication skills, curriculum design and knowledge in order to better help the organization. The communicative byproduct of sincerely believing and acting in the best interest of others puts T&D professionals in a disadvantaged position when it comes time to justify resources or to express relevance within the organization, and this communicative byproduct is another communicative tension that is difficult to address.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This study presented a number of qualitative findings related to T&D professional's job identity and identification, and the challenges that stem from the identification process. This study's findings were drawn from in-depth interviews, and indicated that T&D professionals primarily identify with being service oriented by assisting in the development of others, building strong relationships and by affording the appropriate level of support and development. These findings also illustrated that by acting on this service to others mindset T&D professionals are able to connect various organizational dots by working behind the scenes for the betterment of the organization. Finally, the communicative T&D job related tensions that stem from this identification process were presented as challenges that T&D professionals face as a result of their own actions and the organization that they are a part of. Having established these results this study contributes and advances known theory and practice about the work that T&D professionals do.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributed valuable theoretical and methodological inquiry into the T&D profession. This section presents some of the key contributions of this study. This section will begin with an examination of the theoretical advancements extended in this study and will transition to methodological advancements.

Perhaps the most significant theoretical implication of this study is the advancement of academic inquiry to the training and development field. As discussed

earlier in this literature review scholars have noted that there is a dearth of academic inquiry related to both the T&D industry and profession (Beebe, et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this study contributes to practical theory that is relevant for a better dialogical relationship between the organization and the individual T&D professional and the departments that they serve. Earlier lines of academic T&D inquiry have traditionally been extended to focus on the efficacy of training deliverables or the relationships between the trainer and the trainee in an effort to build stronger training (see Fitch, & Morgan, 2003; Morton, & Gray, 2010; Rettinger, 2011; Sun, 2013) but have largely avoided the issues of building a stronger relationship between T&D professionals and the organizations that they belong to. This examination of internal T&D relationships within medium to large organizations provides an opportunity to understand the communicative challenges and tensions that diminish effective training and working relationships.

Additionally, this research extends the work of Scott, Corman and Cheney's (1998) Structural Model of Identification and reinforces how this communication focused middle-range heuristic framework provides a better understanding of how identity on the job is expressed. The Structuration Model of Identification was heavily modified from Giddens (1984) initial work and this study finds that the theory's focus on communication, duality and various levels of expression are of real value to understanding individual identity within a larger organization. T&D professionals exemplified these findings primarily in the relationship between focusing on helping others and being able to develop the careers of those around them; however, the challenges and tensions that arise from this identification process are just as apt to

demonstrate that T&D professionals' identity is in a constant state of negotiation and expression.

The T&D professional in particular complicates our understanding of the structural model of identification because training professionals are unique communicators of organizational values, culture and messages within the larger organization. That the T&D professional is responsible for advocating and connecting the dots between organizational messages that they themselves do not experience is an interesting dynamic that Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) were unable to explore. Furthermore, the structural model of identification argues that the dualistic relationship between the employee and the organization is where identity is constructed; however, these findings may imply that certain job duties or other unique regionalized areas of identity are more uniquely suited to understanding how identity is constructed within larger organizations (Scott, et al., 1998). Ultimately this study uncovers interesting identity related questions around the importance of how and whom delivers these messages that the organization presents to individual employees.

Finally, this research helped shed light on the unbalanced relationship between the individual and the organization in a theoretical understanding of identity construction. As discussed earlier in this literature review there has been an enduring debate about whether identity construction primacy takes place either at the organizational or individual level, or if identity is constructed dualistically between both organization and individual (see Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Scott, et al., 1998). Additionally, scholars have also examined the role of the organization as “unknown” and how that affects individual identity construction within an organization that is poorly understood or recognized (see:

Scott, 2013; Torres, 2014). This study finds a unique intersection between the debate of where identity is constructed and how it manifests within an unknown organization because the T&D professional reports being an unknown or misunderstood individual within the larger organization.

In many respects the organization is a microcosm of society at large and T&D professionals report being generally misunderstood by society and organizations alike. How does the T&D professional's lack of understanding or being an unknown quantity affect how unknown employees identify with known organizations; how does being an unknown employee affect the T&D professional's ability to affect and be affected by identity influencing messages of the larger organization? This research suggests that an organizational focus on learning and development is a good thing for individuals and the larger organization; however, T&D departments and professionals need the resources to make that happen. If a T&D individual identifies as being unknown or misunderstood it is unlikely that successful training is being recognized or implemented. In essence, existing academic scholarship has begun to examine unknown organizations or individuals who wish to remain anonymous, but academic inquiry into workgroups or individuals who identify as unknown but wish to be better understood within a known organization is an area that could greatly impact identity related studies.

Practical Implications and Interventions

This study uncovered many interesting findings about how T&D professionals identify with their position and the larger organization that they are a part of. In addition to the theoretical implications of this study as discussed above, the following section will

provide practical implications and interventions directed at addressing the challenges and tensions that this study uncovered. This section delivers on a primary goal of this research project: to provide grounded and practical insights to address the challenges and tensions that a T&D professional faces on the job. It is important for organizations that employ T&D and the professionals that execute T&D to recognize that solutions to these challenges are found in working and communicating together.

Help the helpers.

Perhaps the most important findings of this research suggest that T&D professionals identify most strongly with helping others, and job tasks that activate this assistance are the most highly regarded. T&D professionals are interested in creating and executing on the value added training that employees and organizations need in order to be successful. Job tasks, profiles and schedules should be focused as much as possible on delivering the value add to the organization.

In fact, helping others was such an important component of T&D identity it seems to almost act as the glue that binds T&D professionals to the organization. The T&D professionals interviewed for this research communicated very strong levels of identification within their organization and this high level of attachment stemmed from job tasks that developed others around them.

Furthermore, organizations need to be more mindful of the costs associated with the ongoing nature of T&D tasks. Ongoing training missions, regardless of scope or size, require ongoing resource support. It is difficult for T&D professionals to conduct training with periodic check-ins if the time, personnel or budget is not there to support the

initiative. Additionally, T&D professionals need to be mindful of when and how budgets are allocated and the expectations that accompany funding. T&D needs to be strategically aligned with the business goals of the organization in order to support the mission of the larger organization; however, this department requires the appropriate level of funding in order to execute assigned tasks.

Develop dialogical relationships.

Another important finding of this research suggests that T&D professionals feel underappreciated, misunderstood or completely unknown within the organization. It would benefit both organizations and T&D professionals to have an increased dialogical relationship around the role of training, the importance of the training mission and the value of the individuals. This data routinely demonstrated that T&D professionals are receiving messages about their perceived value, ability and importance based on resource allocation and access to key organizational members. If these messages are indeed being communicated indirectly as this data suggests it would benefit the entire organization to have more direct conversations or communication about the role of T&D. In this study, two T&D professionals reported working within an organization that respected and communicated the value of training as part of the overall mission of the organization or through routine meetings with key leadership, and these professionals identified strongly with their respective organizations. A strong calculated message about the value, or lack thereof, can help mitigate the indirect communication that may be suppressing T&D identification. In short, T&D professionals and key organizational leaders need to spend

more time communicating about what is important within the organization and how to execute it.

Furthermore, indirect identity communication disproportionately affects T&D professionals because in many organizations they are responsible for broadcasting messages of culture, acceptance, development and value. For example, if a T&D professional is responsible for creating an atmosphere of inclusion and openness to new and existing employees it is important that the same T&D professional feels valued and welcomed within an organization. In the event that a T&D professional does not identify with the values being espoused by an organization, and are subsequently responsible for spreading them, chances are greater that communication will be less effective or more muted. Ultimately, if the T&D professional is the internal mouthpiece of an organization it is important that they can properly facilitate the messages that are being communicated.

It is also important to encourage open lines of communication and understanding around what constitutes effective T&D. Key organizational leaders and T&D professionals need to be on the same page about what T&D initiatives, goals and skills are important in developing in others. This data suggests that T&D professionals pride themselves on being strategically aligned with the business of the organization. The data also suggests that each organization values the role of T&D differently and measures success in different ways. This dynamic and contextually specific set of circumstances prevents one industry wide application of what it takes to be successful in T&D and mandates that a strong dialogical relationship exists between organizational leadership and T&D professionals. In the end, it is important that there is clear communication around what constitutes successful training and how it is measured.

Clear communication between the organization and the T&D department and professionals can be accomplished in a variety of practical ways. First and foremost organizational leaders and T&D professionals can meet and discuss important issues as the business requires. These periodic meetings should focus on specific measures that T&D professionals should implement and how the results will benefit the larger organization; additionally, T&D professionals should be ready to explain and demonstrate the success that existing initiatives have delivered. Ideally, both key organizational leaders and T&D professionals should communicate and construct measures to show how behavioral change has positively, or negatively, impacted the business. In short, senior or executive leadership should be able to communicate with the T&D department to ensure that successful training is being delivered and measured on a timely basis.

Recognition of how T&D is done.

Another challenge that T&D professionals face is the irony in communicating important and highly visible messages behind the scenes of an organization. The nature of the T&D professional is to put others first, and the job tasks of the T&D professional naturally subordinate the employee behind the scenes. An important communication irony exists when T&D professionals are asked to deliver highly relevant and impactful messages while simultaneously communicating indirectly or from a position of weakness. It is important that an organization and its key leaders support and value the messages that are being delivered while simultaneously supporting the department that executes the

message. If a T&D individual lacks the time, resources or ability to deliver important and highly relevant messages it becomes difficult to execute and deliver on the message.

Recognition of how T&D professionals subordinate themselves is an important identity challenge as well. T&D professionals reported that there is rarely enough time to improve their craft and to become better trainers. T&D professionals and organizations alike need to take the time to ensure that trainers are training themselves. The natural tendency of a T&D professional to put the needs of other departments and employees above their own puts the trainer in a position that jeopardizes their own effectiveness and job security. Organizations are increasingly holding their employees to certain compliance standards and production goals and senior leaders should be holding T&D professionals to similar developmental goals as well.

Therefore, T&D professionals need to be mindful of their own progress and skill development when it comes time to track their own development and career progression; additionally, the organization should be providing time and resources to trainer development as well as holding T&D professionals accountable for progress in 360 reviews or annual performance assessments. In the end, the organization and the T&D professional need to schedule time, no matter how hectic the working environment may be, in order to verify that trainers are being trained effectively.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study features three notable limitations. First, this study is limited in the working definition of what constitutes a T&D professional. The lack of clarity around whom or what constitutes a T&D professional is a considerable identity related burden to

the T&D industry at large; however, this study aimed to equate T&D tasks in relation to the Association for Talent Development definition. This definitional uncertainty of what constitutes a T&D professional pushed this research into medium or large organizations specifically to locate individuals who could be employed to engage in these tasks on a full-time basis. The size and scope of the organizations may have played a role in the expression and intensity of identification. Furthermore, this study suggested that a T&D professional engaged in training tasks is a specialized position that exists in every industry; however, the various industries featured in this study may have affected the findings. Finally, these participants were all interviewed within the Midwest of the United States of America. With this study's exclusion of a national survey designed to capture geographic variance it is possible that results are geographically specific.

Future research should focus on a geographically diverse sample of T&D professionals within the same industry. In this way, a series of investigations into how professionals within the same industry define and express identity could shed more relevant insights. Conducting this research across the United States, as well as the globe, may parse out results more highly related to cultural, linguistic or other contextual backgrounds. Future research should also incorporate more direct participation based observation and recording. This study focused on retrospective interviews and insights but failed to address how identity is expressed and defined as it is taking place within the organizational context. Finally, future research should have a more precise understanding of whom or what constitutes T&D. This current study reflects the uncertainty and ambiguity in the industry today; however, in the future a better understanding of what T&D is would result in a better understanding of how T&D views itself.

Conclusion

This study examined the identification process of T&D professionals within medium to large organizations in an effort to understand what identity resources are valued and how these identity resources are expressed. The results of this study suggested that communicative tensions are a byproduct and contributing factor to T&D identity.

Throughout this study I presented T&D professionals as facing unique identity challenges that are communicative in nature, and these challenges are both an asset and an obstacle to T&D success. T&D professionals are largely motivated by a service to others mindset and when training professionals are engaged in developing others job identification positively increases. The nature of the work that T&D professionals do limits exposure to recognition and opportunity for self-development and these identity related challenges hamper the viability of the T&D professional. The unique challenges that T&D professionals face within organizations can be understood and addressed by increasing communication and understanding around the expectations of the T&D department within individual organizations. Ultimately, this project attempted to locate and present practical solutions that deal with the identity challenges that T&D professionals face within their organizations.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance

December 17, 2014

Andrew Taylor
Communication

Dear Mr. Taylor:

Your protocol number HR-2906, titled "*Issues of Organizational Identity Among Training and Development Professionals*" received expedited approval on December 17, 2014, from a member of the Marquette University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Your approval is valid until December 16, 2015. Prior to this date, you will be contacted regarding continuing IRB review.

You are approved to recruit a total of 12 interview subjects and 300 survey subjects. Please keep in mind that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the approved total, even if they have no further participation in the study.

Written consent must be obtained from each interview subject. These subjects must also receive a copy of the consent form for their records.

The IRB granted a waiver of documentation of written consent for the online survey portion of this protocol. Please follow the consent procedure outlined in your protocol and use the consent language submitted with your protocol.

Only IRB approved consent documents and recruitment materials may be used for this study. The following document is attached consent form for qualitative interview.

Any changes to your protocol (including increasing the number of subjects, adding research personnel, modifying questionnaires, etc.) prior to the next continuing review must be requested by submitting the appropriate Amendment Form. Changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before being initiated, unless the change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to research participants. To make an administrative change such as correcting a typo or revising a phone number, contact the Office of Research Compliance (ORC).

Please note that you may be required to adhere to MU Policies and/or state and federal laws, some of which are outside the purview of the IRB. More information can be found here: www.mu.edu/orc/irb/policies.shtml. If any adverse events, deviations from the approved protocol, unanticipated problems, or research subject complaints occur please notify the ORC consistent with IRB policies and procedures.

You are responsible for closing this research protocol when the study is complete or obtaining continuing approval prior to the protocol expiration date. Either a Final Report or Continuing Review must be submitted by the due date determined by the Office of Research Compliance.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Compliance. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Amanda J. Ahndt, RN, MS, MSN, CDM, CIP
IRB Manager

cc: Dr. Jeremy Fyke, Communication
Ms. Sheri Lee, Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: IRB CONSENT FORM

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Issues of Organizational Identity Among Training and Development Professionals

Andrew G. Taylor
Diederich School of Communication

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to examine and discuss identity related topics as a training and development professional. You will be one of approximately 10-15 participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES: Andrew G. Taylor, the principal researcher, will interview you at a time and place of your convenience. You will be audio taped during the interview portion of the study to ensure accuracy. The tapes will later be transcribed and destroyed after 3 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded. If you do not wish the interviewer to use an audio recording device please inform the researcher. During the interview open-ended questions will be utilized to ask you to discuss your experiences, history and beliefs about the position you currently hold. Potentially controversial or damaging questions will not be utilized and at any point you have the ability to skip any question. No interview question will be aimed at discovering protected information. The interview will last anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour based on your availability and preference.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of one session lasting as long as you are comfortable to discuss your position. Ideally, the one-time session would last between 30-60 minutes. If you felt you had additional time a longer interview would be beneficial for the research; however, the length of the session is completely at your convenience.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study include any statements that would be made that could affect your employment status with your employer. In order to minimize these risks a pseudonym of your choice may be created at the beginning of the interview. During and after the interview the only referenced name would be the pseudonym. Any collected data would be stored electronically in password protected files, and any correspondence will be destroyed. The interview questions will be open-ended in nature and at no point will the interviewer ask questions that would be intended to jeopardize your position. Participation in the interview is completely voluntary and if at any point you do not feel comfortable answering a question you may skip it or end the interview entirely.

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than you would experience in everyday life.

BENEFITS:

This research may benefit society and the industry at large by increasing the available knowledge about the benefits of employment in a similar position. There are no fiscal or reward based benefits provided to participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned using a pseudonym rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are completed or published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 3 years after the completion of the study. The data will be converted from the audio recording device (if you agree to a recorder's usage) to an electronic file which will be password protected on a password protected computer. All correspondence will be destroyed after the completion of the interview. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. After the completion of this interview a follow up email will be sent to you asking to verify that the information collected may still be used. If you do not wish to have the interview data included in the project it can be redacted or destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Andrew G Taylor at 414-690-9903, andrew.g.taylor@marquette.edu at any time for further information. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570 or orc@mu.edu.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

(Printed Name of Participant)

(Signature of Participant)

Date

(Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent)

(Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent)

Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Identity, identification and the job.

What is your current occupation?

Can you tell me about your job?

What do you do?

What does it take to be successful in your work?

What brought you into this line of work?

What is the most rewarding part about being in your profession?

What is the best part of your job?

What do you look forward to doing most when thinking about your day?

What is the hardest part of your job?

What do you look forward to least when thinking about your day?

Do you ever feel like your position is based on helping people?

What words do you associate with your work?

What words do you associate with your profession?

What, if anything, about your job do you pride yourself on?

Do you have a lot of pride in the organization's product/service?

Is how you feel about yourself influenced by the organization's image?

Have you ever made any mistakes on the job that you wish you could correct?

When you describe your job to others what do you say?

Do you ever tell other people "I'm from _____" or "I work for _____"?

What would you tell someone thinking about joining your line of work?

Are you glad you work _____ rather than another company?

Do you feel defensive when others criticize the company?

In your own words what is it like to do the work you do within your organization? What is your favorite part of your job? What is your least favorite part?

Potential tensions at work:

What was your idea of this line of work before you started?

What are some of the challenges you face within your organization?

What do you wish you had more time to do while at work?

If you could change one thing about what you do what would it be?

If you could change one thing about the organization you are a part of it would be?

Do you ever feel like in your position you are treated differently than other employees?
Do your coworkers help you make sense of what's happening at work? (through either communication or example?)

If you could start your career over again in T&D would you do it again?

Would you feel a sense of loss if you left the organization?

Would it be hard to move on to a better position at a different organization?

Final Thoughts:

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Is there anything you would like others to know about the work that you do?