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CHAPTER 4

TRANSLATING IDENTITIES: MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS AS MEANS AND OUTCOMES OF IDENTITY WORK

This study seeks to develop a better understanding of the translation of management concepts by showing how it is intimately connected to identity work. We focus on the narrative constructions that agents articulate in their efforts to construct a sense of self in relation to a management concept. This gives rise to various tensions between individual identification with the concept and broader management engagement with it in their respective organizations. Through an examination of qualitative data, including forty interviews with those with a formal role in the implementation of Lean in a hospital context, we identify four different categories of translation-as-identity-work (externalizing, professionalizing, rationalizing and proselytizing) through which the agent and the concept are produced simultaneously. We argue that this broad and dynamic understanding of human agency within translation is essential in understanding the nature and form of management concepts.

KEYWORDS: *translation, agency, management concepts, identity work*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Because of their potential for gaining competitive advantage and/or securing control and legitimacy, organizations will often invest significant amounts of time and resources in the adoption and adaptation of these new ideas and concepts (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; Sturdy, 2004). While research has long focused on the extent to which employees may embrace or resist new forms of management as they are applied to them, in the last two decades attention has also focused on the processes of the selection, adoption and adaptation of ideas by managers and others (Mueller and Carter, 2005). For example, Total Quality Management, Lean Management and Business Process Re-engineering have all been studied from a number of theoretical perspectives, as ideas and concepts rather than simply as forms of management practice or control (Birkinshaw, Hamel and Mol, 2008; Parush, 2008). These perspectives take different starting points to answer questions such as why ‘new’ ideas are adopted by managers and through what processes this occurs (Birkinshaw, Healey, Suddaby and Weber, 2014; Sturdy, Clark, Fincham and Handley, 2009). One important approach that emerged quietly, but rapidly is that of ‘translation’. This is concerned with the modification and variation of ideas as they ‘travel’ the distance from their ‘original’ social contexts to new ‘recipient’ settings (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Munir, 2005; Zilber, 2006). It gives emphasis to the active role of agents (Reay et al. 2013) and the mobilization of interests and meanings in creating practice variation (Waldorff, 2013; Zilber, 2006) and represents an important advancement in understanding management ideas, but also in contributing to wider theoretical developments such as institutional theory (see reviews in Spyridonidis Currie, Heusinkveld, Strauss and Sturdy, 2016). However, and as we shall argue, there remains considerable scope for the further development of translation approaches in studying the flow and impact of management concepts. In particular, ‘research is still needed to explore the role of agency in translation’ (Zilber, 2006 p. 300). While some progress has been made in this direction (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016), translation research tends either to conflate the agent and his or her organization, or separate them. Furthermore, it tends to neglect mechanisms of mutual modification whereby the concept and the agents influence each other. Indeed, more generally, agents are often neglected in translation studies. As Huising (2016) noted recently:

‘While acknowledging the role of managers in adaptation and translation, the primary

focus of the adaptation and translation literatures is the changing nature of the practices as they move across time and space. . . . The people involved in changing the practices—their experiences, interpretations, and decisions—are not at the centre of the literature on practice adaptation and translation’ (p. 388).

In seeking to address both this specific and broad neglect, we draw on another important development in organization theory; identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This lens has enormous potential as a bridging concept, especially considering recent calls for more micro-theorizing in translation research in general and for the integration of translation with other theories (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016). We explore this empirically by investigating managers’ reflections on the implementation of the management concept of *Lean* in the context of a network of hospitals. We show how the interrelation between key individuals and their organizational context shapes different categories of identity work, simultaneously affecting the concept and the agents involved. In doing so, we contribute to extant literature in three ways. First, by uncovering distinct types of identity work our findings suggest a reconciliation of the current opposing conceptualization of agency in translation. Second, by problematizing the assumption of rationality underlying both conceptualizations we show how the agents’ individual identification with a concept and the necessity to keep a coherent self-narrative going, is playing a defining role in the translation of management concepts. Third, in a better understanding of how these concepts and ideas concurrently change the agents they come into contact with, we develop a conceptual model that shows translation as a dual mechanism, in which agents narratively construct the position of concept in relation to themselves and to their organization.

The paper is structured as follows. We first review the translation literature to reveal the scope to develop further the conception of agency within it and the lack of attention to the relationship where the concept and the agent influence each other. Here, we also introduce identity work as an appropriate lens to explore these shortcomings. This is followed by the discussion of our research methods and a description of our empirical context. The subsequent sections present the research findings revealing different forms of translation as identity work. Finally, we discuss the implications of our analysis and provide some directions for further research.

4.2 TRANSLATION: ACTORS AND AGENCY

A growing body of research on the flow and impact of management concepts draws inspiration from translation theory. Theorists of translation emphasize the significance of movement and transformation (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996) and denote the active role of situated agents in influencing the way in which ideas are translated by ‘establishing deep connections between the specific situational and the more abstract ideational aspects of a practice’ (Gondo and Amis, 2013, p. 231; see also Boxenbaum and Battilana, 2005; Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Creed, Scully and Austin, 2002; David and Strang, 2010; Reay et al., 2013). Inspired by Actor-Network Theory (e.g., Latour, 1986), these scholars took issue with the apparent stability and standardization implicit in neo-institutional and other studies of innovation, whereby ideas simply ‘diffused’ (Røvik, 2011). Central to this tradition of research is the ‘travel of ideas’ metaphor (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Here, idea-objects travel a distance in time and space between a context of ‘origination’ and the new ‘recipient’ locale where they become reapplied to specific contextual conditions and existing practices (Latour, 2005; Mica, 2013). It is often argued that the degree of translation required for an idea to be reapplied in the new setting depends on the geographical, contextual and temporal distances the idea is travelling. For example, ‘reinterpretation through repackaging and simplification into tools and techniques’ becomes even more necessary where the original idea and its recipients are further apart (Morris and Lancaster, 2006, p. 210; Nicolini, 2010). Of course, other factors such as power relations also come into play such that ‘distant’ practices can sometimes be imposed with little adaptation (Sturdy, 2004).

By shifting our focus to concept variation and distinctiveness, translation studies have also ‘redirect[ed] [our] attention to the importance of change participants' active engagement in the implementation process’ (Gondo and Amis, 2013, p. 242; Spyridonidis et al., 2016). Here, there is a tendency to portray agents as either *embedded* or *strategic* (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 191; Van Grinsven, Heusinkveld and Cornelissen, 2016). Embedded agents engage in ‘an implicit search for pragmatic solutions’ (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 191) to fit the needs of their specific (i.e., embedded) contexts. They are portrayed as being representative of (i.e., embedded in) institutional and organization-level mechanisms of implementation, which influence variations in responses or patterns of adaptation. For example, Kostova and Roth (2002, p. 229) show how the adoption of TQM

reflects different patterns in the subsidiaries of a multi-national as a function of two factors; the institutional profile of a host country and the relational context between a parent organization and a subsidiary (dependence, trust and identification). Adoption is understood as a combination of *implementation* and *internalization* (see also Guillén, 1994) such that mere ‘ceremonial adoption’ involves implementation without internalizing or buying into the concept while ‘active’ adoption involves both. Likewise, Ansari, Fiss and Zajac (2010) map an adaptation continuum for diffusing practices, showing technical, cultural and political fit or misfit between the characteristics of a practice the potential adopter will result in different adaptation patterns. Overall, this literature focuses on *organizational* level responses to concepts and ideas as a function of the orientation or engagement caused by institutional or organizational mechanisms. We find this organizational engagement ranging in degrees of acceptance, internalization and implementation and affecting the overall level, ‘extent’ and ‘depth’ with which the practice is accepted and/or implemented across the organization as a whole (see also Ansari et al., 2010; Canato Ravasi and Philips, 2013; Fiss, Kennedy and Davis, 2012; Gondo and Amis, 2013; Kennedy and Fiss, 2009; Kostova and Roth, 2002; Love and Cebon, 2008; Lozeau, Langley, and Denis, 2002; Saka, 2004).

The embeddedness perspective on agency provoked a strong counter reaction from what may be labeled a strategizing approach to translation (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009). This second portrayal of agents emphasizes ‘the self-determinacy of managerial consumers [and] shows how they strategically use management ideas, and adapt or ‘translate’ them’ (Gross, Heusinkveld and Clark, 2015, p. 276). The point here is that there are many more ways for an agent to interpret an idea than those implied by embeddedness in a specific organizational context. In other words, ‘to the extent that agents gain awareness of alternative frames or interpretations, they may deliberately try to translate an idea or a practice in a manner that aligns with their own interests’ which by no means necessarily align with those of the organization (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 192; see also Guillén, 1994; Kelemen, 2000; McCabe, 2011; Wilhelm and Bort, 2013).

While both these perspectives may be held to instill a more active sense of agency into debates and have provided useful insights into the role of translators in creating variation in how practices are adopted (Boxenbaum and Battilana, 2005; Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Reay et al. 2013), we argue that translation research in management needs to be developed

further, in three main ways. First, studies tend either to conflate or separate organizational and individual considerations. As we have seen, on the one hand, agents are portrayed as largely representative of (embedded in) their organizational environment such that the adaptation outcomes are primarily a function of intra-organizational responses to different institutional factors. For example, Kirkpatrick et al. (2013, p. 50, in Van Grinsven et al., 2016), who follow an ‘embeddedness approach’ to focus on how agents make sense of and adopt a particular model of hospital management in four different health systems, as a function of contextual (regulatory and political) structures. In other words, individual agency here is, at best, implied and, in some cases, its neglect is explicit (e.g., Zilber, 2006, p. 300). On the other hand, agency is conceptualized as resulting from the strategic redefinition of the meaning of a concept by individual agents, largely disconnected from organizational considerations and even in opposition to them. For example, Morris and Lancaster (2006, in Van Grinsven et al., 2016) illustrate how translation has been used as a strategy by which agents manipulate and reshuffle interests to reinforce the concept of Lean Management, thereby portraying translation as a political process. Overall, this polarization between a form of determinism and voluntarism has limited our understanding of the interdependence of both individual and organizational considerations.

Second, both views tend to treat agents as largely rational ‘idea merchants’ (Creed, Scully and Austin, 2002, p. 479) who ‘seek to account for the [a] new model in a rationalistic and legitimate way that fits the local context’ (Waldorff, 2013, p. 221) either as organizational or ‘free’ agents. Currently, the role of identity in translation is mostly implied and there is little acknowledgement of the complex, prior and emerging orientations, emotions and identities of agents, both generally and in relation to a concept, except insofar as assuming (substantive) rationality as being ‘central to managerial identity’ (Wilhelm and Bort, 2013, p. 428; see also Creed et al., 2002). We argue this rationalization of actors has restricted our understanding of agency in translation as fairly limited attention is directed to how self-definition in relation to a practice or concept is enacted in the subsequent shaping of these practices (Lok, 2010). This neglect is surprising, since identity is closely linked to actors’ engagement with managerial practices (Etzioni, 1961; Kelman, 1958). Here, even in its simplest terms, engagement with these practices is seen as a function of actors’ belief in—and acceptance of—their values and goals (Etzioni, 1961; Kagan, 1958; Kelman, 1958; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986). In studying the flow and impact of management concepts, studies point to similar diversity within managerial

audiences and the importance of identity mechanisms in actors' responses to these concepts, which range from being critical, compliant or cooperative to being committed and championing new concepts, but also include more nuanced positions such as ambivalence as well as changes to these positions over time (Boiral, 2003; Clark and Salaman, 1998; Gross, Heusinkveld and Clark, 2015; Harding, 2007; Jackson, 1996; Kostova and Roth, 2002; Nicolai and Dautwitz, 2010; Parker, 1995; Sturdy, 1998; Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Littlejohns and Winstanley, 2006; Sturdy and Gabriel, 2000; Watson, 1994). However, and crucially, not only is such variety often absent in translation research, but there is limited discussion or theorization on the consequences that mechanisms of identity and identification have for translation (Creed et al., 2002). This becomes especially relevant when recognizing that identity is a constitutive element of human agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Goffman, 1959, 1961; Weick, 1995) and that the ways in which actors understand themselves can actively and purposefully influence the ways in which they condition and reproduce practices (Lok, 2010). In short, there is no clear analytical link between actors' engagement or identification with ideas and their translation efforts. This calls for a closer study of the adaptations and transformations of concepts that occur as a result of the identities and identifications attached to them (Creed et al., 2002; Lok, 2010).

Third, the effort of most translation studies to conceptualize the transformation of concepts and ideas, has gone at the expense of a closer understanding of how these concepts and ideas concurrently change the actors they come into contact with. In some ways, this is surprising as it was an explicit element of Actor-Network Theory from where translation studies in management often draw their inspiration. For example, Latour noted how translation denotes the 'creat[ion] of a new link that modifies . . . those who translated and that which is translated' (Latour, 1993, p. 6 in Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, p. 24; see also Frenkel, 2005; Latour, 1986). And also Czarniawska and Sevón (2005, p. 10) indicated that 'translation changes what is translated and those who translate'. However, as Sturdy et al (2006, p. 843) note: 'in an effort to emphasize the activity of 'inanimate' objects, such as technological hardware, in the translation process, the transformation of human actors is underplayed'. Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum (2009) also recognize such neglect and suggest that it might be partly due to the type of data often used, as retrospective and archival approaches lend themselves poorly to illuminate this dimension of translation. Whatever the case, it seems clear that, while translation theorists in management are increasingly recognizing agency, theoretical and empirical work on the relation

between how these agents relate to concepts on a personal level and how this shapes both the application of concepts and the actors themselves is rather narrow and scarce. Addressing this neglect, Rossem and Van Veen (2011) studied the cognitive processes of individual managers related to fashionable management concepts. They showed that differences in awareness of individual actors can be explained by individual and contextual characteristics, which in turn impacts the way in which concepts are diffused through the population and come to be applied in specific organizational contexts. In recognition of the challenge of a better understanding of the link between actors' engagement with ideas and their translation efforts, we draw on a perspective of identity work to which we now briefly turn.

4.3 AGENCY: IDENTITY WORK AND IDENTIFICATION

The growing recognition that organizational life is fused with individual meanings (Watson, 2008) has fueled the position that 'we cannot understand processes of organizing unless we understand identity' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 52). Perspectives vary considerably, especially on how stable, sovereign or decentred identity is (Dunne, 1996; Knights and Clarke, 2014). In brief, modernist theories assume identity to be relatively stable and unified, seen as 'an intrinsic, essential content, defined by a common origin or a common structure of experience, and often, both' (Howard, 2000, p. 385). In contrast, postmodernists—or post-structuralists—veer away from these 'essentialist' or 'objective' approaches and rather emphasize subjective and decentred identities (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Altheide, 2000; Webb, 2006). Here, contradictions, tension and incongruence are seen as integral to 'the reflexive project of the self' (Linstead and Thomas, 2002; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008, p. 99). And whereas these extremes might be critiqued for either being overly deterministic or instead 'overplay[ing] the disorderly, chaotic, variable, and flux-like nature of self-experience' (Crossley, 2000, p. 527), other perspectives are more flexible or contingent. Our intermediate position follows that of Giddens (1991) and others, where identity is a continually and reflexively constructed narrative, produced largely through discursive acts in the ongoing interaction of structure with agency (Giddens, 1991, p. 53; Ybema et al., 2009). Discourse in this context refers to 'using language and reasoning in which [the notion of identity] is constructed rather than revealed or mirrored' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1167). Or as Snow and Anderson (1987, p. 1336) would note: 'identity talk' constitutes the primary form of 'identity work' by means of which . . . people construct and negotiate

personal identities.’

A key development in this tradition has been the concept of ‘identity work’ to help explain individuals’ active, ongoing construction of identity (Brown, 2014). This has become widely understood as ‘being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness’ (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). Recent work focuses on the interplay between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ aspects of personal identity in particular (e.g.; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Down and Reveley, 2009; Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006; Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008, 2009). Watson (2008, p. 129) for example, argues that:

‘Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives’.

Research here reveals how identification is both a *position*—or state of being—reflecting the extent to which a role’s essence is self-defining, as well as a *process of becoming* (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth and Mael, 1998; Watson, 2008) through which individuals bring attributes of a role into their own identities. As such, identity scholars place importance on differentiating or shifting their foci of identification (Ashfort, 2008; Frandsen, 2012; Kuhn and Nelson, 2002), though which actors may shape identifications in their favor (Creed et al., 2002) to manage or mitigate discrepancies between self-identity and role obligations. In these theorizations, identifications, may involve the ‘voluntary maintenance of various types of distance’ (Goffman, 1963, p. 99) through which actors create a positive, coherent and distinctive sense of self (Brown, 2014, p. 11; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987).

In more stable day-to-day situations, identity work may run relatively smoothly and fairly unconsciously as an ongoing process (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). However, in situations where tension is prevalent, identity work seems to be not only more necessary (Brown, 2014), but can also become more explicit and sometimes even anxiety inducing or energizing (Collinson, 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Snow and Anderson, 1987). Key

here, is the appreciation that individuals do not just ‘feel bad’ when there are tensions between identities, but ‘certain emotions serve to reduce discrepancies and preserve the social structures within which their identities exist’ (Stets and Burke, 2005 in Gill, p. 309). This view of ‘identity as struggle’ (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1188; Ybema, 2014), where actors may shape identifications to deal with this struggle, is particularly relevant to our concerns with how actors engage with a specific organizational context where new concepts and practices are introduced and where there is an expectation to engage with them in terms of self-identity. In particular, as translation, in essence, reflects the efforts of agents to dis-embed and re-embed concepts or in which either the concept or the context might form an ‘unknown’, we argue that tension, threat and novelty might be expected and therefore that identity work will be common in such situations. Therefore, in the context of this research, an identity work perspective might contribute to a better understanding of how actors achieve (or ‘actively manoeuvre’, Watson, 2008, p. 431) an optimal balance between themselves and the ideas they translate, between individual agency and creation of the self, on one hand, and the shaping of management concepts in a broader organizational context on the other. After all, in line with Lok (2010), identity work may impact the ways in which these concepts are translated, ‘as different degrees of identification produce different forms of behavior’ (p. 1308). In short then, this study aims to answer the question: What is the relationship between the identity work of key actors and the translation of management concepts?

4.4 METHOD

Research setting

Researching translation and identity is best done in relation to one or more of the many management concepts associated with significant changes in behavior and orientation. This is most likely to make visible the identity work implied as individuals adjust to new organizational roles and expectations. ‘Lean’ clearly meets this requirement, at least as it is applied in new contexts. The concept can be traced back to scientific management traditions, but in particular, to the Toyota production system (TPS) in 1950s Japan (Holweg, 2007; Ohno, 1988). Despite different interpretations and definitions, the main claim of Lean is to bring ‘value to the customer’ through continuous and radical quality improvement (‘kaizen’ and ‘kaikaku’) and reducing waste (Benders, Van Grinsven and Heusinkveld, 2014). Notwithstanding its now,

established existence and claims for the universal relevance of Lean (Morris and Lancaster, 2006), it continues to be extensively promoted in managerial discourse and associated with substantial organizational change. Its application in healthcare is relatively new (Burgess and Radnor, 2013, Graban, 2009), starting in the UK and USA around the turn of the century (Benders et al., 2014; Brandao de Souza, 2009) and therefore, this context is ideal for our purposes. In Dutch healthcare, the first explicit implementation of Lean started around the same time (Simons, 2014) and led to the formation of a national network of healthcare institutions in 2011, 'LIDZ' ('Lean in de zorg' - Lean in healthcare), which is the specific setting for our study. LIDZ initiated a variety of activities to promote the core principles of Lean and its growing number of members, both individual and organizational, suggests a continuing appeal of the idea. At the time of study, 57 healthcare organizations had joined the network, including 38 Dutch hospitals. These hospitals are an ideal context for our purpose.

Data collection

We decided to pursue an interview approach with all the implementation managers in the network, to identify the link between their individual engagement (identification) with Lean and their translation efforts. The primary data comprise interviews and observations of 'Gemba walks' as they would allow for an in-depth understanding of both the motives behind practice adaptation and the processes involved (Lægreid, 2007 in Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009) and were likely to provide some insight into identity work, as actors seek to account for their relationship with concepts in context (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Contextual data were gathered to gain a better understanding of the implementation of Lean in a hospital context (see Table 1.1 for an overview of the data).

All 38 contact persons of the Dutch hospitals in network were sent a request to be interviewed. These individuals all held a formal role in managing the implementation of Lean. Despite differences in corporate-level functions (i.e., quality manager, project leader Lean, consultant care innovation, policy officer and innovation manager), they shared similar tasks and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of Lean in the hospital. Most of them had been with their organization from the initial introduction of Lean and were able to provide a rich chronological account of the evolution of the concept and of their relationship to it. It should be noted however, that not all hospitals used the same terminology for the practice (e.g., Productive

Ward, Planetree, Operational Excellence or Six Sigma). Even so, the Lean principles were central to their practices as these formed the basis to their membership in the LIDZ network. In total, 45 interviews were conducted between July 2014 and January 2016 (See Appendix 1).

All interviews followed the same semi-structured outline. The main idea was to have the interviewees start with their personal background and experiences with Lean, then to discuss the development of the concept within the organization and finally to have them describe the way in which they related to other organizations with respect to the implementation of Lean. To invite comments on our nascent findings, we also interviewed the chairman of the network, the network coordinator, a health insurance representative and two external consultants who had all played an active role developing the network. Also, we conducted two interviews with external consultants who had consulted a number of hospitals in introducing Lean. After piloting and exploratory research, most of the interviews were held at the informants' offices and lasted 75 minutes on average. All interviews were tape recorded with approval of the interviewees, transcribed verbatim and sent back to the informants for comments. The interview language was Dutch and the authors translated the quotes in the findings section. Informants were assured confidentiality, and quotes that compromised anonymity were altered or omitted.

In addition, the first author observed ten so called 'Gemba walks'; a core activity of the network, organized by and for its members, where organizations affiliated with the LIDZ-network demonstrate their application of Lean. Gemba walks lasted three hours on average and were tape recorded with approval, and were, for most part, transcribed verbatim and coded in a similar fashion as the interview data. As background information against which the account of individual interviewees could be better understood, contextual data were gathered. This included a company visit by the first author to a local factory of Scania. This is a Swedish automotive industry manufacturer of commercial vehicles that, in its way of working had been heavily inspired by Toyota and that had been applying the concept of Lean to production for over twenty years. Also we closely studied documents interviewees sent us after the interviews and that were available through the LIDZ-website, including annual reports, power point presentations, books published by members of the network and web pages on specific initiatives.

Data analysis

Because research on what actually happens within organizations during processes of practice

adaptation remains relatively undeveloped (Gondo and Amis, 2013; Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer and Zilber, 2010), our study was largely exploratory. Analysis started with the following broad question: how do actors engage with the concept in relation to both their own identities and the organizational context? It then progressed in three overlapping stages. After an initial review of the data, we open coded both for the extent of *individual* identification the managers gave to the concept of Lean, and for the demands and opportunities they experienced from their organizational context. These two dimensions were mapped abductively from the literature (Van Maanen, Sørensen and Mitchell, 2007) in ‘a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data’ (Wodak, 2004, p. 200). The result was that we began to organize variation in *organizational* context in terms of its engagement with (dominant stakeholder support for) the concept along the lines of low and high ‘internalization’ in Kostova and Roth (2002). At the same time, we classified levels of *individual* identification as corresponding to the traditional employee engagement with managerial practices; compliance, cooperation and commitment (Etzioni, 1961), but also including mixed orientations or ambivalence. *Compliance*, relates to the position in which the concept is taken on for instrumental reasons, not because of shared beliefs. *Cooperation*, relates to the position in which an individual accepts the concept’s values without adopting them as his or her own. *Commitment*, relates to the position in which the induced attitudes and behaviors associated with the concept are congruent with one’s own values (Kelman, 1958; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Our coded data revealed different forms of narratives through which the implementation managers tried to balance tensions (and congruence) between these two dimensions—*individual identification with the concept and the organizational engagement with it*. Specifically, codes were gradually grouped (Miles and Huberman, 1994) around four broad types of narrative which we labeled as forms of identity work—*externalizing, rationalizing, professionalizing and proselytizing* (see discussion below). By looking for regularities and patterns in the data, in a third stage of selective coding, we initially identified three ‘elements’ shared across the four types of identity work. Going back to the identity literature and in line with Ashfort (2008)—who touches, albeit briefly, on a similar notion—we started to recognize these elements as ‘attributes of identification’. The first attribute was *salience*, which refers to the ways in which actors enhance or diminish the importance of the concept in linking it to the strategic goals of the organization, for example by narrowing or broadening its scope. The second attribute of identification—*transience*—brings a

temporal quality to the concept in terms of how it comes to be constructed as short-lived/replaceable or persistent which, in turn, has implications for the actors' identification with the concept over time. Thirdly, *valence* refers to how the actors infuse the concept with intensity of meaning or feeling and the way they engage emotionally with it themselves. Overall, while our main focus was initially on how Lean was narratively constructed through these three attributes of identification, we also found the actors to be simultaneously produced. Our final categories are presented in Figure 1 below and are further outlined in the following sections.

In presenting our analysis, we needed to consider the issue of anonymity, given the contextually rich and empirically specific nature of our data. In a research context where the sample comprises an entire community, in which participants are members of a network and are likely to know and recognize each other, data becomes sensitive (Sergi and Hallin, 2011). Furthermore, there is a risk that outsiders may also recognize individuals, who participated on the understanding of anonymity. One approach to dealing with such sensitive contexts is the use of *ideal-type vignettes* (Barter and Renold, 1999). These bring together illustrative quotes from multiple research participants into single composites, allowing us to create coherent narratives and represent our sample as a whole, while retaining biographical anonymity. We have randomly given these ideal types the pseudonyms 'Lisa', 'Nick', 'Daniel' and 'Claire'.

4.5 FINDINGS – TRANSLATION AS IDENTITY WORK

As noted above, we developed an abductive framing of how identity work as translation occurs. This is grounded in the view that embedded and strategic conceptions of actors in translation research should not be conflated or regarded as independent. In particular, organizational considerations related to adoption, notably the extent of organizational engagement or acceptance, and the level of individual identification with the concept by key individuals are interdependent. These two dimensions may be in tension. For example, a person might identify strongly with a concept, but find himself in a context where there is only limited organizational engagement, such as when organizational adoption is merely 'ceremonial'. By contrast, the dimensions might be congruent. As we shall see, in either case, both the actor and concept are affected through the resulting identity work and we outline here four types of translation-as-identity-work (externalizing, professionalizing, rationalizing, proselytizing). For each of these, we present an ideal-type vignette of an 'individual' organized around three attributes of

identification—*salience, transience and valence*—through which the position of the concept in relation to themselves and to their organization is narratively constructed. Our four types of translation-as-identity-work are presented in Figure 4.1 and are further outlined in the following sections. Table 4.1 provides additional examples of the data.

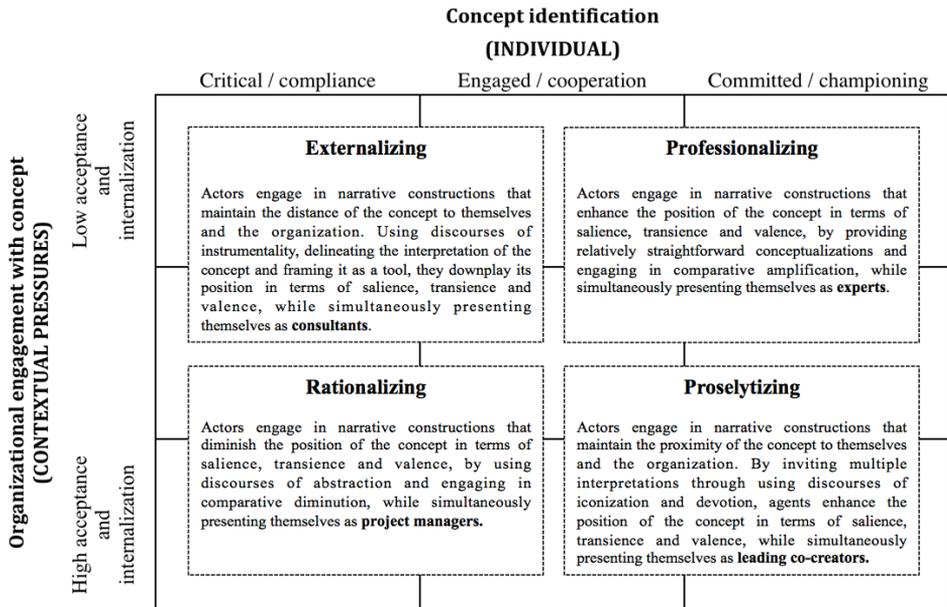


Figure 4.1 *Translation as identity work*

1. Lisa - Externalizing

One of the narrative constructions that reflects identity work in the translation of Lean may best be described as *externalizing*. We found this most prominent in situations where individuals show limited identification with the concept themselves (compliance) and where organizational engagement also appeared to be limited, to acceptance of the concept solely for reasons of legitimacy for example. Here, we found a tendency on the part of the implementation managers to position Lean in a way that maintains a significant distance from both themselves as actors and from the organization. Here, individuals stressed how they sought to play down the overarching productive value of Lean for their organization. They did this by using discourses of instrumentality through which they framed the concept as a tool. At the same time, they used

self-narratives that understated or distanced their (ascribed) role as implementation managers, positioning themselves instead as consultants.

Saliency

Most of the interviewees who articulated this type of positioning emphasized narratives that constructed the concept as *just a tool* to be used, as ‘something’ that can be picked up and put down depending on whether it is deemed to be useful to the situation at hand. Lean is then, framed as relatively subordinate to strategic priorities of the organization. At the same time, in presenting themselves as *consultants*, our interviewees placed Lean as simply one of a multitude of tools and resources they possessed. This reflected their ability to shift between approaches or methods depending on what was deemed to be necessary in a specific context. In relating her experiences with Lean, Lisa talks about the concept and about herself in a way that connects both and which reflects how the concept resembles a pair of glasses worn or put aside by its user and easily replaced:

‘And surely I can take off these glasses. And I think that goes for all of the 5-6 people [in the department] that they are critical and will consider taking off these glasses and looking at it in a different way? We don’t have people here that would be able to do only Lean, and I like that. We have a background that allows us to look at things from different perspectives. But, so to speak, I will not be the one to take up DMAIC. . . . Other colleagues are much better at doing that. . . . I see Lean as an opportunity to give my people the tools to have more fun in their work. And that is what it should be like, we should learn to also look through the Lean glasses; what is going wrong here?’

In providing descriptions of the activities they carried out as implementation managers, interviewees tended to provide rather fixed or static conceptualizations of Lean and labels that allowed them limited discretion in the way they introduced concept. Lisa described how she saw the concept of Lean as a *good tool* to help structure her department and to take on a more process oriented perspective. In using Lean she aimed to show the organization what beneficial effects it can have, without having to engage in what she called deep implementation:

'Don't make things appear better-looking than they are. Lean is just a tool. It has been around for years. Don't think that we won't succeed if we don't do Lean. I see Lean as: take it in, consider it seriously and try to work by means of a process. When I got here . . . years ago, departments were tied very loosely together, not knowing about each other or what they were up to. Because we have started to describe that with Lean and [other concept] as a tool with the consulting group and project group, we try to take a more overarching perspective. But Lean is (just) a tool, come on!'

Simultaneously, the above comment expresses how she has come to see herself as an implementation manager. It demonstrates what efforts on her part are necessary to make the concept *locally meaningful* when it is conceptualized in a static fashion. Lisa sees herself as needing to be knowledgeable about what the concept entails and how it relates to problems that might be observed, but with, with limited responsibility when it comes to deep implementation of the concept.

Transience

Our data revealed that the narrative construction of the interviewees who articulated this type of positioning reflected a temporal orientation that can best be described as finite. These interviewees didn't perceive the concept as especially novel—'old wine in new bottles'—and expected it to disappear or be replaced by other similar constructs, contributing to an image of instability of the concept:

'I don't rule out the possibility that within ten years we will have something new. Yes, years ago we had the INK-model (Quality model Instituut Nederlandse Kwaliteit), so I think it is reasonable to expect that... And Lean is not something new. From other models a number of elements were taken and put under that label to give them a new lease of life. The way it is being applied in healthcare right now; I don't rule out the possibility that something else will come our way.'

Valence

Similarly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, we found that this type of identity work displayed limited

positive emotional involvement on the part of the implementation managers. ‘But Lean is a tool, come on!’ is indicative of how the concept was constructed as ‘out there’, with limited connection to the organization and its operations. At the same time, some of our participants related how this distance toward the concept was also quite prevalent in their self-presentation, which hinted at a negative emotional connection:

‘For me it means that I work more as a consultant and have less (involvement in) Lean activities. And that is not a problem . . . I really don’t mind. It depends on how you look at it. I approach it (Lean) very critically myself and I have always found it quite hard to translate Lean from a manufacturing context to a hospital context. . . . I think it has to do with, well it never really became clear to me how you do that well. But I have to say, I think I am one of few, because I see that as a real obstacle and that is not the case with everybody. That is not a real issue, but it is my personal position.’

2. Nick - Professionalizing

Another strong and pervasive narrative construction that reflected identity work in the translation of Lean, was what we term ‘professionalizing’. We found this type of translation most evident in situations where individuals showed significant individual identification with the concept, but where the extent of organizational engagement or support appeared, once again, to be quite limited. In ‘professionalizing’, we found a tendency on the part of the implementation managers to promote the organizational value of the concept by emphasizing its legitimacy and by providing relatively straightforward conceptualizations, while simultaneously playing down their significant personal and emotional engagement by presenting themselves as experts. This inclination to balance personal commitment with organizational reticence posed challenges that often went to the heart of their sense of self and created anxiety.

Salience

We found narrative constructions that reflected a tendency among managers to boost the position of the concept with respect to the organization’s strategy in a way that contributed to its perceived coherence and autonomy. Lean was presented as potentially paramount to strategy, by providing relatively straightforward conceptualizations that enhance the clarity and identifiability

of the concept. Nick remarked how it was essential to connect Lean as a method to reaching accreditation goals, since this would make the implementation more natural and would create a link that makes it easy to recognize the concept's value for strategic considerations:

'I was saying that last year already, that we need to interlink NIAZ [and Lean]. Then you have a better grip on improving and like that you will work it into the structure of things. When we do things, we will do it with this method or it has to be recognizable as such or translated to it. Then it's a natural thing. We should not be Lean accredited, but NIAZ [The Netherlands Institute for Accreditation in Healthcare] accredited. That is what we should improve. And then it is a very natural way to do it with this method [Lean]. It was what I said before; we need to connect it to something, we need to strive for a link. I have given many presentations with people asking why should we do this. You need to get a mark of quality.'

At the same time, such accounts also appeared to invite a narrative construction of the self as an expert engaging with others in an 'expository teaching mode', almost as if the managers were responsible for the learning process of staff whose task was merely to assimilate the concept (also Bruner, 1961; Czarniawska and Sevon, 1997):

'Just go and do it, fall down and get up again. That is something I learned. And I think it is funny, because people will come to me and ask: do I turn left or right here? And then they would look at me as if I would know. And I think, well I really don't know, but I think they are more than happy if I decide for them. So then I say: I would do the right turn. And then everybody goes right whereas I think: Left would also have been fine, but at least they are moving somewhere. . . . And sometimes I think, well I am just saying something.'

Transience

In outlining his work, Nick remarks on the longevity of Lean, narratively contributing to the stability of the concept. Also he shows how Lean might replace others that share similar features, even if the name changes. This *comparative amplification* enhances the perceived impact of the concept and the necessity for others to deeply engage with it. Simultaneously, it contributes to a

positive image of himself as an active agent of change as opposed to being a project-worker whose efforts will not always see the light of day:

'Well, I often see it (Lean) as continuous improvement. Now it's called Lean or Productive Ward. And in ten years it will be called something different. It was there ten years ago, but it was more project-based. I think that this is the big difference. Ten years ago we also did all sorts of things to improve, but on a project basis, and then it went well and then after three years it collapsed and there was nothing for a while and things went well. Whereas now you see it is really on a short cycle. Of course, it can happen that for a couple of days it is not that evident in a department, or even for two or three weeks, but then you see they pick it up again and that is the big difference [from other concepts].'

Valence

Nick explains how this type of identity work reflects a tension between the high levels of personal, emotional involvement and the necessity to present himself as an expert. By taking the position of a teaching expert, managers played down their positive subjective involvement, but also provided a legitimate context to act on the concept as they sought to change others' perceptions. On many occasions though, interviewees expressed experiencing feelings of putting themselves at risk by championing something not embraced fully by the rest of the organization:

'That is what I mean by overstepping the mark. It will come, because you know, with me it runs deep. I believe in this so much, that well, I think I am just one step ahead of everyone else here who says we don't need this. I think you just have to wait and see, I am sure that within a year everyone will say yes I do want this. So what we do; we do a training day with clear tools and guidelines, we will do a [puppet] game to enthuse them and then we will develop a process in a group setting, a VSM [Value Stream Map] of sorts and then work with a fishbone diagram, 5xwhy through A3 and then we say: well you have given this a try, now try to map one of your own processes in practice, we will be there to help you. Well they will feedback that and we will invite management for that so that we infect them too and show them that we are doing wonderful things. And then management will be enthusiastic and we are allowed to do another training [laughs]. That is how we do that.'

3. Daniel – Rationalizing

In situations where implementation managers show limited identification with the concept themselves, but where the extent of organizational engagement appears to be significant, we find a different type of translation as identity work, which we call ‘rationalizing’. Here, by presenting themselves as ‘project managers’, individuals sought to diminish the strong organizational position of the concept by using discourses of abstraction that opened up the concept for other interpretations. Also, by pointing to the relative value of similar concepts, they were able to distance themselves from supporting a deep implementation of the concept and to open up the possibility of translations of Lean that were more in line with their personal views and aspirations.

Salience

We found narrative constructions that reflected a tendency among managers to frame Lean as relatively subordinate to the strategic priorities of the organization which diminished its coherence and autonomy. By providing relatively abstract conceptualizations of Lean, implementation managers opened up the concept to accommodate alternative interpretations, which detracted from its clarity and identifiability, and which mitigated the position of the concept with respect to the organization’s salience and its relation to its strategic considerations:

‘What I . . . see is that a lot of things are the same. . . . It all boils down to the same thing. . . . It is fun to see how methods and philosophies, because in the end it’s all philosophy, sometimes scientifically proven, but it really approximates each other. And Lean might give you a bit more tools, and that is what I need, but the philosophy does not deviate so much.’

‘Yes, but being a project leader, you don’t have to have the expert knowledge of what Lean is, so it is mostly about organizing and managing it. I didn’t really miss having that knowledge. You learn quickly enough from other hospitals and that is also what we did. . . . We didn’t really know about the characteristics of Lean, we just thought we were going to do a project with a beginning and an end. A project comes in and you need a project leader and there are subjects in which you are not [an expert] so that is not so strange to me.’

Transience

The latter also shows that this category of translation as identity work involved showing how alternative concepts might be equally viable. This *comparative diminution* of the concept on part of the implementation managers challenged the perceived impact of the concept in the organization and the necessity to deeply engage with it. Here, some of the interviewees' narratives reflected a temporal orientation that, again, was finite which detracted from the overall stability of the Lean, creating an image of transience:

'Yes, well sometimes I think it is a bit of hype. Because in the end, of course, it is not so exciting. . . . That is what I told you about all the Belts—everybody wants to be Lean and to have the Green Belts and the Black Belts. . . . You see that at the . . . and I think that hospitals treating it (just) as a project—I don't think that's going to cut it. . . . There is more to Lean than Lean tools but I don't think that a lot of hospitals are working with it in that way. The way we are doing Lean is a little bit of a hype I am afraid.'

Valence

Daniel notes how what is expected of him as an implementation manager conflicts with his personal position. On the one hand, the organizational engagement with Lean appears to be significant, but Daniel, who has been working with the concept for years in a row, has started to identify less with Lean as it does not challenge him as much as it used to. He copes with this tension by positioning himself as a project manager, allowing for a relatively detached personal involvement from the main lines of the concept. In doing so, he broadens the scope of the concept slightly to incorporate activities he feels more passionate about:

'Well I realized that people would say 'I will send it to you' [a presentation or a document on the application of Lean in the hospital] and that I would reply with 'don't bother, I will see it when we discuss it'. So if you ask me, why would I want things differently? Well the challenge is what do I learn and how do I develop, that is complete at a certain point in time. So you know, I organize that now, by doing other things as well . . . you will encounter different things and you will see things of yourself. And you will develop like that also for your role here'.

4. Claire - Proselytizing

A fourth type of narrative construction that reflected identity work in the translation of Lean may be described as proselytizing. Here, we found a tendency on the part of the implementation managers to position Lean in a way that maintains proximity with themselves as actors as well as with their organizations. We find this type of translation most common in situations where individuals showed significant identification with the concept themselves and where the extent of organizational engagement appeared to be similarly high. By inviting multiple interpretations through using discourses of devotion, they sought to enhance the organizational position of the concept, while simultaneously presenting themselves as leading co-creators committed both to the concept and the organization.

Saliency

This type of positioning involved narrative efforts to construct the concept as ‘leading the way’. In other words, Lean was framed as relatively central to the organization’s strategy. In doing so, the implementation managers were inclined to talk about the application of the concept that allowed for broad and emergent interpretations. This reflected the ambition to work towards a meaningful and idiosyncratic application where they invited others to cooperate in giving meaning to Lean. It also reflected modesty and even insecurity on their part with respect to the how the concept was best implemented. As with professionalizing, participants appeared to construct a sense of themselves as teachers, but in this case engaging in a ‘hypothetical teaching’ mode where the teacher and the learner are in a more cooperative relationship where they would go through various stages of discovery together (also Bruner, 1961, p. 23; Czarniawska and Sevón, 1997):

‘Well, that is what I want to accomplish. That all the things we are doing are pointing in the same direction. Lean is one of the major pillars, so considering that I don’t need to be a Lean expert, because you would have to be a BPM and a JCI expert at the same time, so you need to position yourself behind that. So how can we make these pillars go in the same direction so everybody has a sense of direction and will go that way and will see Lean as one of the most important drivers to get there, for developing leadership and managing departments and improving [processes]. I want to make that big, let the whole organization come into contact with Lean and let them work according to Lean principles. The

organization still has to realize that, it is the same learning process as the one I am going through. . . . That is the kind of improvement you want: our ways are Lean and holding on to that improvement, and developing our own ways based on the philosophy of Lean.'

Transience

In proselytizing, Claire remarks on the novelty and expected durability of Lean, thereby narratively contributing to its stability as a concept. Simultaneously, this contributes to an identity of herself as leading her organization towards real change:

'I am really preaching that we need to continue with Lean. We will never be done with doing Lean. But I do think that we need to loose the label but stick to the culture of continuous improvement. If we stop now, or stop de training, that is just not possible.'

'What I say, it is a definition of Lean, we can put everything under the Label, as long as it is Lean, but if you define it as continuous improvement, we have been doing it since thirty years, so then it is not a hype at all. Then it's something we will be doing for the next hundred years and something we will be doing for a while. Continuously.'

Valence

This type of identity work displayed a high degree of mostly positive emotional involvement on the part of the implementation managers, with limited tension between this and organizational expectations. Interviewees provided descriptions of how they would feel inextricably linked to the concept. They engaged in self-affirming identity work that reflected their subjective involvement yet also allowed them to express and embrace their insecurities in the application of the concept. They also invited others to cooperate in giving meaning to Lean, opening up the concept for variation in possible interpretations:

'I was a firm believer from the start. It really was like I believe in this and it is my intrinsic motivation to improve processes and we can always do better than what we are doing. I had known that forever, but this was a real nice lead to develop myself further in that regard. So then I also did the Black Belt. And I went to [a different department] and

focused solely on this subject matter and to spread Lean thinking.'

'The only reason we didn't get lost is that we believed in it. I believe in in this [Lean] from the very start. I immediately thought; this is going to bring us what I always felt was needed, but for which I had never found the job that preached it, or the place to practice it.'

Table 4.1 Additional examples of data

1. Externalizing

<i>Saliency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'When departments approach me and say: 'our workload is too heavy, but we don't get extra people. Would you think along with us and see how we can do things better or different?' Then I look and see and start thinking what might work. Maybe 5s could be beneficial or something with Value Stream Mapping or improvement boards. That's how I've tried applying it a little, in the past few years.'</i> (Informant 31) • <i>'There are all sorts of aspects, concepts and principles to Lean that help me as a tool, because indeed it is just a tool, to reach that agreement to make healthcare in [our hospital] better and safer.'</i> (Informant 32)
<i>Transcience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'Yes, it will partly go away again, and I think that's a good thing. At the moment it is a hype in Dutch healthcare and maybe also abroad. I think it will vanish because people see it as a toolbox, they implement it like that and then it is not sustainable and then it will decline again.'</i> (Informant 16)
<i>Valence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'We are simply streamlining and reducing our fte's, we have to work more efficiently, that's just the way things are in every hospital now. That is what we do, and my role as [position] and being knowledgeable of Lean, I try to get that clear with a cause-and-effect analysis, a Lean analysis, an A3 . . . I just cram everything together [laughs], but that is neutral, mind, because they receive it well, these ladies are scheduled to work at a different department and they liked that. But it depends on how you communicate it.'</i> (Informant 11) • <i>'I just discussed that with a trainer, coincidentally. I asked him, what does Lean mean to you. And he said 'Lean really just means making problems visible'. And that's what I made of it myself, I will also tell it like that.'</i> (Informant 14)

2. Professionalizing

<i>Saliency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'Because we have shaped it, the [Lean] program, that we focus on three big fish like we call that: duration of hospitalization, housing, working smarter and purchasing policy. And we want to spread the philosophy and we want to run many local, decentralized projects, improvement projects. So we have trained a lot of Green Belts, we have done games, we have been to Scania.'</i> (Informant 20) • <i>'Because in contrast to [other hospital] that has said they are 'Lean and mean', our board of directors has always said: 'We will not be a Lean hospital and we want to apply it to reach our goals, but Lean is one of the methods to do so.' The tricky thing is that we [people from Lean group] consider Lean a philosophy. And that makes it hard to apply it like that.'</i> (Informant 23)
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- *'But at the same time no official staff is made available, that makes it difficult to take the lead or to say we can take steps in professionalization. We are looking for that, how can I raise funds so to speak for a year to launch a program office. To establish training or education, to provide that. That is what I am looking for since I know they won't tell me 'here is the money to do it'.'* (Informant 24)
 - *'As a manager I was a little bit ahead of my team. But if you ask if I had a well enough overview of what I knew, of what my team knew and what was behind it, I really didn't have a clue. And they didn't know that, because I always held up the appearance of being in control, but I didn't know what I didn't know either. Well and I mean, sometimes you keep up appearances, but if I really feel like I am floating, then I won't do it. To some extent I knew what I was doing, but on the outside I made it look more in control than I really was.'* (Informant 25)
- Transcience**
- *'It is not a hype, but you will now see other variants to Lean. The other day I read something about which I thought 'that really looks like Lean, it is just called differently', but I don't think it's a hype. We call it Lean, but also process improvement. It is something you can't do without anymore. And it is so powerful because of the close involvement of the work floor. I think we are starting to become more aware of the work-floor employees. They just know so well themselves. These managers no longer have to determine it all, it is something you do together.'* (Informant 18)
 - *'It is no longer a hype. It is more than that. It is in my genes and I don't see it as a hype. I see it as a given which can really service healthcare in general very well. The only thing I see as a risk is that when organizations say they will deploy it as an austerity measure. Yes, well then it is not going to work, it will work against you. Then people will dig their heels in.'* (Informant 24)
- Valence**
- *'I think it is an expedition and I think it's unfortunate that [colleague] is gone because I am not sure it should be me who is running it, because I still have so much to learn. I think I have changed as well. In the beginning I saw a lot of good things, all the pieces of the puzzle. But now I am starting to see the big picture, but the puzzle I still haven't figured out, but I do think I have all the pieces. . . . I think in a position like this you should be five steps ahead, whereas I am only one step ahead, so I keep being confronted with questions of which I think 'oh, erm', so I have to work very hard to be that one step ahead. And if you are five steps ahead you saw that question coming and you could anticipate it. But I am not, so that is really quite hard.'* (Informant 20)
 - *'They [board of directors] don't want any external people, but at the same time, I am not given the means to do it [Lean]. So what am I supposed to do? I hope this year it will become clearer what we are going to do and if not, it is really a mission impossible. . . ., but I don't want to think about it too much, the movement I can cause and is pretty evident. And I think, then let's do it like that and let's just work with the people in the divisions and hope it will emerge from there. It is really a procession, 'two steps forward and one step back' that is how it is.'* (Informant 20)
 - *'Now we are looking at a culture that has to merge [old culture and a new 'Lean*
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culture' of continuous improvement]. That we have established, but to my great sorrow we have come to a standstill when I look at the Lean program.' (Informant 21)

3. Rationalizing

- Saliency**
- *'What I see in such a workshop is that a lot of things are the same, TOC or Lean. At [organization] we folded hats, in another workshop we folded paper airplanes and a different time we stacked legos. I always do a dice game. It all boils down to the same thing. I try to explain it clearly, but sometimes I lose focus and go off on tangents. So the workshops I have had on [different construct] look very much like the things you learn in Lean. It is nice to see how methods and philosophies approach each other. Lean goes beyond the tools we had before and I need its tools, but the philosophy is not so different.'* (Informant 12)
 - *'[Other hospital], the projects they do, that is something we can learn from. But as program leader, I am not looking for projects, but for strategic goals and what is necessary to further help improving the organization.'* (Informant 15)
- Transcience**
- *'It is something that's in fashion now. But I don't know how that will be in ten years and if it will still be called that [Lean]. Because Planetree is also a predecessor, that is also really a philosophy that has been a hot topic for a while and they are quite similar to some extent. It does come from another source, but it is also about hospitality and the environment. There are a couple of elements that can really be translated to one another.'* (Informant 25)
- Valence**
- *'It was just because I had been to a conference and [my superior] then told me; I want you to take this on [communicating Lean] more actively. But very specifically, what I should be doing with it, I don't know. I did take a closer look at the website [of the LIDZ network]. And now I am asked to write something about [our hospital], so I was looking at what they would want to know. So I try sharing useful information, like what I am telling you now.'* (Informant 12)
 - *'We were at a conference in [place] with the board of directors. The hospitals, also the academic hospital, there [in Belgium] are way more serious than I have seen so far [in the Netherlands]. They want to change the organization into an organization that is changing daily. If we keep doing it the way we are doing it, I don't think it will exist within a couple of years. It is not being done seriously enough.'* (Informant 10)

4. Proselytizing

- Saliency**
- *'We want to be JCI-accredited as well. But we have Lean and JCI and we have put in a lot of effort to get there. We are improving and we are going to try to integrate the two. Where we will see JCI as a framework of standards with which you have to comply and you need continuous improvement [Lean] to get there. That is how we started it, but actually we will say: the improvement teams are not just there in the context of JCI, but you need an improvement team at your department anyway. So JCI or something else, that does not matter.'* (Informant 22)
 - *'Lean was here before, when I started . . . years ago, without knowing what it really entailed. I had seen some examples and I had heard about it at a national*

conference. I immediately thought it had potential and that it is something I would like to experiment with. We did that within our own division. We hired an external consultant and together we started with a couple of nursing departments where we had some efficiency matters to address. That turned out not to be the ideal combination but that is what we did. Then Lean started to grow organically because other departments were interested too.' (Informant 6)

- 'The main advantage is that, if you do that in the beginning [work from the principles of Lean], you can make it really easy. Because you don't need to know all the tools. You just need a principle to boost performance. For example; what do we want here, how do we know we are doing things right? . . . That dot [on the horizon] is necessary to know that what you are going to do is a step in the right direction. I think it is better to get to grips with such a principle yourself and then go find the tools to make it possible. Instead of giving people the tools you give them a process. Where do I want to go and where am I now and how do I get there?' (Informant 40)

Transcience

- 'The time is right to optimize processes. Healthcare is far behind in having a business approach to things and I think it coincides. [But now] the hospital is ready for it [Lean], in terms of governance and annual planning. It is both, I think. I think the intrinsic motivation [for Lean] is there and I believe in it. I have the expectation it will work since the healthcare environment is changing and legislation in healthcare is changing. There is so much primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare that needs to be addressed.' (Informant 21)
- 'Lean is just a name for a collection of tools and concepts. And the name Lean will disappear, but these concepts; and I will call that process improvement or process optimization, that will stay . . . something has been set in motion in healthcare. And that can't be stopped. But if you have to call it Lean?!' (Informant 32)

Valence

- 'So that is how you get in, fairly easy. Because you can tell with conviction why you are doing it. And people find it very interesting that you make such a switch [in position], because you really believe in it [Lean] yourself.' (Informant 17)
 - 'But Lean; there are a couple of things I already did, that I had done my entire life already. But from which I just didn't know it was Lean. It has to do with protecting employees from their superiors, fighting bureaucracy really. Everything developed by consultants, I'm allergic to that. That was the case before, but Lean has given me the support or maybe even the foundation to dare fighting it properly. That really attracted me. I know that from the core of my being, that is something I strongly advocate.' (Informant 30)
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4.6 DISCUSSION

Following recent calls for more micro-theorizing in translation research and for its integration with other theories (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016) our purpose in this paper has been to provide insight into how the interrelation between key individuals and their organizational context shapes the simultaneous translation of both management ideas and the actors involved. By applying

identity work as an analytical lens, we developed a conceptual model (see Figure 1) that uncovers four types of translation-as-identity-work. Ranging from externalizing to proselytizing these types differ as a function of the tensions between the individual identification with the concept and the perceived demands on the self by others in the same social context. This model helps to explicate some of the ways in which both concept of Lean and the implementation managers as human actors are transformed simultaneously as an outcome of the identity work through which these actors try to negotiate a coherent narrative construction of the self. Central to this model are the attributes of identification; salience, transience and valence around which the four types of translation as identity work were further specified. Against this backdrop, our study has a number of implications.

First, by uncovering distinct types of identity work that may originate from situations of accordance or discrepancy, we address the current, yet inadvertent, tendency in studies of the ‘travels’ of management concepts to conflate or separate organizational and individual considerations related to the translation of concepts. Portraying actors as either representative of their organizational environment—adapting a concept to local settings, or as agents who engage in a strategic redefinition of the meaning of a concept for it to be beneficial to their own interests—has inhibited the development of an underlying theoretic about the dynamic between the two and has limited our understanding of their interdependence. We show instead how the complex interaction between the agents’ individual identification with the concept and the contextual pressures which pertain to them, is a mechanism for identity work which will have these agents negotiate a coherent narrative as way of ‘distancing and shift[ing] in identification targets . . . to cope with [experienced] discrepancies’ (Frandsen, 2012, p. 351; see also Ellis and Ybema, 2010; Fleming and Spicer 2003). In doing so our findings suggest a reconciliation of the current opposing conceptualization of agency to better understand their interaction.

Second, we address the assumption of rationality underlying both conceptualizations and we show how the agents’ individual identification with a concept and the necessity to keep a coherent self-narrative going, is playing a defining role in the translation of management concepts. Our categories of translation as identity work came to reflect three attributes of identification with which agents narratively constructed the position of concept in relation to themselves and to their organization (*salience*, *transience* and *valence*). The importance here lies in the appreciation of the link between actors’ engagement with ideas and their translation efforts.

Through the lens of identity work we found agency related to the narrative construction of subjective distance. In creating this distance, agents strongly affect the position and shape of the concept in the organization. It is remarkable that the ideas of distance in translation and distance in identity work are so different. Distance in translation research is conceptualized in terms of fixed and objective geographical, contextual and temporal distance ‘to be overcome’ (Morris and Lancaster, 2006; Nicolini, 2010). In contrast, the notion of distance—and distancing—in identity work is related to the separation between a ‘current self’ and an ‘aspirational identity’ (Beech, 2008, 2011; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) where the ‘distance [agents] [have] to travel to reach that future self’ (Pratt, 2000 in Vough, 2012, p. 787) is referred to as the ‘trajectory of the self’ (Giddens, 1991). Snow and Anderson (1987), for instance, show how ‘categorical’, ‘specific’ and ‘institutional’ distancing may be used to assert a contrary identity by means of ‘identity talk’ as a means to reject the incongruence between role-based social identities and personal identities. Distance is then conceived of as a ‘cynical distance’ (Fleming and Spicer, 2003), a ‘cognitive distance’ (Creed, DeJordy and Lok, 2010) or a means to ‘distance [oneself] from other identity options’ (Larson and Pepper 2003, p. 532), to ‘resist through distance’ professional occupations (Collinson, 1994; Alvesson and Robertson, 2016) or to ‘subjectively distance’ oneself from managerial domination and a work-imposed identity (Costas and Fleming, 2009). We argue that these personal and subjective constructions of distance by key agents guide and affect the subsequent mechanisms of translation as specified by current literature, and translation literature could benefit from a broader and more dynamic understanding of agency to understand the flow and impact of management concepts.

Third, by taking identity work as a perspective, we contribute to the literature on the translation of management concepts by developing a conceptual model that shows translation as a dual mechanism in which agents narratively construct the position of concept in relation to themselves and to their organization. Our study stands in contrast to prior translation literature that focused primarily on the changing ideas as the key to understanding change in practices, be it a macro or micro-level perspective (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005; Reay et al., 2013; Sahlin and Wedlin, 2008; Zilber, 2006). Instead, we reintroduce a seminal contribution of early translation theorists that has not been fully accounted for when the notion was imported from Actor-Network Theory to management and organization theory. The conceptualization of translation as the ‘creat[ion] of a new link that modifies . . . those who translated and that which is translated’

(Latour, 1993, p. 6 in Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, p. 24; see also Frenkel, 2005; Latour, 1986) highlights the simultaneous modification of idea and translator. And whereas previous research has recently started to address the transformation of human actors as one side of the equation to be ‘underplayed and seen largely in terms of how the idea transforms the content or label of who they are or become’ (Sturdy, 2006, p. 843) we find limited attention to this mutual modification. Our findings instead outline the recursive relationship between the idea and agent through *salience*, *transience* and *valence* as narrative acts with which agents narratively construct the position of a concept in relation to themselves and to their organization. We aimed to show that this recursive relationship manifests itself through the narrative constructions of management concepts as a means and an outcome of identity work through which agents strive to shape a relatively coherent narrative construction of the self under the pressures which pertain to them in the context of the organization in which the concept is to be applied.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

In this study we sought to answer how in translation, the concept and the actor are modified simultaneously by taking identity work as an analytical lens. The study described in this article naturally has its limitations.

A first consideration is that even though we know that the institutionalization of practices implies the involvement of various types of actors, both internal and external to the organization (Perkmann and Spicer, 2008), our focus on implementation managers as key agents may have been limited as many other employees will embrace change and may take responsibility for enabling and managing it. Furthermore we have relied on the interpretations of the informants in deriving the organizational engagement with the concept under study. Even though our focus was aimed at perceived contextual pressures and we have sought to validate our findings by closely studying the associated documents interviewees sent us after the interviews, we did not in fact systematically study the engagement with the idea of other actors or its application in practice beyond our informants’ accounts.

A further limitation that needs to be addressed is our categorization of translation as identity work in typological extremes. Even though these extremes allowed us to better illustrate the variation present in our data by means of ideal-type vignettes, we wish to stress that in practice, intermediate positions were prominent as well (Ruble and Tomas, 1976). The

specification of such a category initially seemed to be of limited analytical relevance, but during the process of analysis—and reflecting our theoretical position on the nature of identity—it became clear that the narrative constructions of identity work pertained not so much fixed positions but rather exhibited shifts as a function of individual identification with the concept and the (experienced) contextual demands placed on them in processes of translation. Data collection and analysis however, were not laid out in a processual way, in terms of identity work over time. A closer study of these shifts, also incorporating intermediate positions, by means of longitudinal research and real-time data collection, will allow for a better understanding of how identities and ideas change, what they change into and how they are interrelated.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this study we aimed to provide an analytical model to understand translation as a means and outcome of identity work. Specifically, by drawing on a perspective of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2014; Watson, 2008; 2009) our approach stands in contrast to conceptualizations of translation as being either organizational or individual-level, as instead we start to see it as an interpretive activity of constructing coherent identity narratives through which key individuals balance individual claims and the demands on this self by others in multiple social interactions. Using organizational-level engagement and individual identification with a concept as two fundamental dimensions we show how individuals might engage in four different types of translation as identity work, simultaneously shaping themselves and the management idea involved. We argue that in an effort to keep a positive, coherent and distinctive self-narrative going, and as a way of ‘distancing and shift[ing] in identification targets . . . to cope with [experienced] discrepancies’ (Frandsen, 2012, p. 351) key agents will draw upon salience, transience and valence as narrative acts to construct the position of a concept in relation to themselves and their organization, thereby translating the concept and themselves simultaneously. Thinking of translation as identity work calls for the ‘problematization’ of what is considered agency in translation. Researchers should try to go beyond a rationalization of actors that conflates or separates organizational and individual considerations for adapting concepts and instead allow for a conceptualization where agency reflects the continuous, and mutually constitutive, interpretive activity of constructing a self-narrative in the tensions between individual claims and the perceived demands on this self by others.