Towards an inclusion of founders and founding processes in organizational identity research: The case of Rheinische Post

BÖRJE BOERS AND OLOF BRUNNINGE

JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS SCHOOL
JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Towards an inclusion of founders and founding processes in organizational identity research

The case of Rheinische Post

Börje Boers, Jönköping International Business School

borje.boers@jibs.hj.se

Olof Brunninge, Jönköping International Business School

olof.brunninge@jibs.hj.se

In this paper we look at the German newspaper Rheinische Post (RP) which was founded directly after WWII as a license newspaper. Based on our findings from Rheinische Post, we argue that the historical contextualization of identity process studies needs to be enhanced. We propose going one step further including the foundation and the pre-history of organizations in studies of organizational identity. As the RP case shows, important aspects of a company's founding identity are shaped prior to the formal foundation and sometimes going far back into the personal histories of founders may help us understand how an organization's identity initially came about.

1 Introduction

Identity is a phenomenon that cannot easily be captured by snapshot pictures only. While identity sometimes has a tendency to stabilize organizations (Bartunek 1984; Reger, Gustafson, Demaire, and Mullane 1994), it also changes over different life cycle phases of the firm, including its formation, phases of growth and retrenchment as well as sometimes mergers and acquisitions (Albert and Whetten 1985). An identity that seems stable on the surface may show signs of adaptive instability (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000) or fluidity (Gioia, Bouchiki, Fiol, Golden-Biddle, Hatch, Rao, Rindova, Schultz, Fombrun, Kimberly, and Thomas 1998) if investigated more thoroughly. Hatch and Schultz (2002) therefore propose to carefully study the processes during which organizational identity is formed and changed over time. As Corley and Goia (2004) point out identity change processes are typically lengthy and may be misinterpreted as stable if researchers fail to study them over extended periods). The organizational identity concept is hence inherently historical and needs to be studied over time in order to be fully understood (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Already Albert and Whetten include a clear temporal dimension in their 1985 definition, stating that organizational identity (OI) basically refers to aspects that are claimed to be central, distinctive and continuous over time about an organization. They continue the discussion of the concept, pointing at a number of phases during the life cycle of a firm when identity issues can be expected to be particularly salient, one of them being the formation of the organization (p. 274). Similarly, Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995) point at the foundation, and the founder in particular, as important aspects in the creation of an organization's identity. Although firm formation being the time when the purpose, the resource configuration, the structure and strategy of the organization are defined for the first time obviously are important for identity formation, the foundation of firms has so far not been much studied in the organizational identity literature. In the present paper we are therefore going to put a special emphasis on the foundation of an organization and its role in the organization's identity process. Taking a processual approach to the study of organizational identity, our paper

aims at exploring how organizational identity is constructed before and during the formal creation of the firm, and how the foundation is referred to in identity processes during later phases of the organization's life cycle.

1.1 A need for including founding and founders in OI research

The classical organizational identity literature (e.g. Albert and Whetten 1985; Bartunek 1984; Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Gioia and Thomas 1996) typically takes for granted that an organizational identity – in some cases perhaps a dual (Glynn 2000) or hybrid (Albert and Whetten 1985) identity – is in place. In most studies little or nothing is said about how this identity has originally come about or how it has developed over time to reach its current state. The organizations that are empirically studied have typically existed for many decades. There is usually no doubt that the prevailing identity has gained at least a certain degree of stability, meaning that it has consequences for members' behavior as well as the organizational and strategic development of the firm. The identity is sufficiently established to facilitate choice where traditional decision making fail (Albert and Whetten 1985), to provide strategic direction (Ashforth and Mael 1996), to constrain the interpretation of the firm's environment (Bartunek 1984) and to offset forces that sometimes inhibit (Reger, Gustafson, Demaire, and Mullane 1994) and sometimes eventually facilitate (Dutton and Dukerich 1991) external adaptation. One drawback of classical OI research is however, that identity is typically captured in a snapshot manner or over relatively short periods. This implies that it is difficult to understand the dynamics of identity over time and that OI may appear as more stable than it actually is. Notable exceptions like Ravasi and Schultz's (2006) longitudinal study of Bang & Olufsen, reveal the potential of processual studies of OI, yet they seldom take a closer look at the earliest phases of identity and firm formation. While most OI literature at least implicitly assumes that identity is rooted in the organization's history, typically little is said about the past and how the organization's identity has initially come about, how it perhaps has been changed and how it has been referred to over the life cycle of the organization. The general lack of empirical studies on

identity proceeses during the early phases of an organization's life cycle, at least partly explains the fact that such processes have not yet been sufficiently conceptualized. Albert and Whetten (1985) present a life cycle model of identity change, depicting an organization's identity process as an iteration between different mono forms of identity, going through phases of dual identities. While the mentioning of organizational formation as an important phase in an identity process is valuable as such, no closer look is devoted to the identity process around the start-up phase.

We believe that by putting an emphasis on identity formation and firm foundation, it is possible to contribute to a better understanding of organizational identity as a process. In his keynote speech at the Second International Symposium on Process Organization Studies[1], Michael Pratt called for concepts capturing the processes of identity formation. Drawing upon Mead (1934), he suggested studying self-processes, including the identity claims an organization makes towards its constituents as well as the expectations by constituents that the organization needs to relate to (Pratt and Kraatz 2009). We agree with Pratt that identity claims as well as stakeholder expectations are important elements in the understanding of identity processes. The notion of claims was already central to Albert and Whetten's (1985) classical work and the interplay of identity claims and stakeholder expectations has been important in showing how organizational identity is constructed and potentially changed (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Hatch and Schultz 1997). Identity claims are considered important by proponents of the social actor actor-perspective (Whetten and Mackey 2002) as well as a social constructionist perspective (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000). There is little research that addresses the development/change of identity claims over time (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Studies address the reaction to changes in the environment or identity threats (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000; Ravasi and Schultz 2006) and also emphasize the importance of anchoring identity claims in the organization's history. However, these rare studies do not look at founding identity claims of

---

[1] The symposium was held in June 2010 in Rhodes and addressed the construction of identities in and around organizations as a special topic.

organizations. Therefore, by doing so, the purpose of our paper is studying identity claims before, during and after firm formation which helps us exploring how organizational identity is initially constructed and subsequently referred to over an organization's life cycle.

1.2 The empirical context

Empirically, we are going to study the German newspaper *Rheinische Post (RP)* that was founded right after World War II. By putting particular emphasis on the period before and during the foundation of the firm, we will be able to study identity formation processes from their very beginning. Drawing upon Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995), we believe that including the pre-history of a firm, meaning the history preceding its actual foundation is important for understanding phenomena such as OI. Our data thus also includes information about the founders' activities before the formal start-up as well as the wider historical context, RP was launched in. Our paper will however not be limited to the formation phase of Rheinische Post. In order to see how OI has developed over time, we are going to include how organizational members today see the identity of their company and how they look back upon the time of its foundation. In the following sections of our paper we will first present a theoretical frame of reference, reviewing related research as well as more clearly pinpointing the research gap that we want to fill. After presenting our research method, we are going to provide a relatively comprehensive case story of Rheinische Post's development with a focus on the identity process of the firm. While the case as such will include some first-order interpretation, the analysis of the case as well as our conclusions and contributions to OI research will be presented in the following sections at the end of the paper. Considering the previously outlined lack of empirical studies as well as theoretical conceptualization of early identity processes in organizations, we hope that our study will contribute to our knowledge of such processes, both by presenting a relevant empirical case and by proposing concepts for understanding and analyzing early OI processes.

2 Frame of reference

We believe that the processes of how organizational identities are formed, developed and changed need to be understood in order to understand identity. Such an understanding cannot be obtained by snapshot pictures of identity, it rather requires a processual approach. This needs to include the entire life-cycle of the firm, starting with the situation preceding its formation and ranging until members' present expectations for future development.

2.1 Identity claims and identity expectations

Identity claims are an important notion in the organizational identity literature. One should recall that Albert and Whetten (1985) in their seminal paper defining organizational identity spoke about what is *claimed* to be central enduring and distinctive. At times, this seems to be forgotten as Brunninge (2005) remarks. Discussing Brunninge's comments, Whetten (2006) confirms the centrality of identity claims to his identity definition. He characterizes them saying that "identity claims are likely to be represented as categorical imperatives—what the organization must do to avoid acting out of character." (2006:221). Furthermore, Whetten postulates that identity claims are positive attributes that distinguish organizations and are manifested for instance in values, policies, procedures and programs. Similarly, Lerpold et al. (Lerpold, Ravasi, Van Rekom, and Soenen 2007) suggest that such claims are often expressed in formal statements about what the organization is and/or is about, e.g. in mission or value statements. According to Ravasi and Schultz (2006) identity claims are viewed as central for organizational identity both for proponents for a social actor perspective (Whetten and Mackey 2002) as well as proponents of proponents of a social constructionist perspective (e.g. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000). Formal claims may endure over longer periods of time but meanings and understandings of these claims may change (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000). More recently, Kjærgaard et al. (2010) have published a study that addresses the media influence on organizational identity construction. They suggest to further study on how identity claims are used with regards to media accounts of the organization (2010:23). We agree, however we think it is equally relevant to look at media

outlets and how they use and develop their identity claims. We consider this especially relevant for media houses that have a substantial organizational history with strong formal identity claims as in the case of RP.

Van Riel (1995) suggests that OI is consisting of an interplay of formal claims, members' beliefs and understandings and managers' aspirations. Also Whetten and Mackey (2002) suggest identity claims to be relevant in terms of addressing how often leaders or top management define the identity of the organization. Identity claims so to say provide the formal or official answer to the question posed by Albert and Whetten (1985) "Who are we as an organization?".

In principle, identity claims can be made by different stakeholders *in* the organization. However it is likely that they become more explicit when made by members of the organization's dominant coalition, i.e. the group that according to Child's (1972) definition is the group of actors that is the nexus of power in the organization and makes the strategic choices. Not all members of an organization have the formal or informal authority to speak on behalf of the organization. Making official claims about the organization's identity is in most cases the privilege of top managers and perhaps owners, board members or information officers. While the formation of organizational identity as such may include all organizational members in one way or the other, the expression of identity claims will typically be limited to the dominant coalition that legitimately make claims on behalf of the organization.

The formulation of identity claims as such also needs some elaboration since OI cannot only be created but also constructed, transformed, maintained, threatened or changed (Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, and Hatch 2006; Hatch 2005; Hatch and Schultz 2002; Ravasi and Schultz 2006; Soenen and Moingeon 2002). Identity claims are never made out of context, but rather in relation to internal or external audiences. Although not explicitly using the concept of claims, Hatch and Schultz (1997) nicely illustrate, how organizational identity is communicated to various stakeholders who based on these claims as well as on other impressions of the

organization create organizational images. What is particularly important for the connection between identity claims and stakeholders' perceptions of the organization is the feedback mechanism existing between them. The image held by stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz 1997) or the construed external image, i.e. the image members believe their organization has among stakeholders (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) influences how members perceive the identity of their organization. As Elsbach and Kramer (1996) found, unfavorable business school rankings either made members questioning their organization's identity claim or triggered them turning towards stakeholders that had more favorable beliefs about them. Identity processes are therefore characterized by on the one hand expressing the cultural understandings of organizational members and on the other hand mirroring the impressions of external stakeholders (Hatch and Schultz 2002). If the organization fails to establish a balance between the two, it runs the risk of either becoming narcissistic or of abandoning its own values and following external demands in what Hatch and Schultz (2002) label hyper adaptation.

As OI refers to a collective that share the meaning it becomes relevant to ask who is part of this collective. Scott and Lane by taking a stakeholder approach define OI as "…the set of beliefs shared between top managers (hereafter called "managers") and stakeholders about the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of an organization." (2000:44). This definition is also based on Albert and Whetten's definition but it includes external stakeholders. What is problematic with Scott and Lane's view is that it leads to unclarity regarding the ontological nature of identity. If OI is constructed by insiders and outsiders simultaneously, identity tends to be reified as an object that is neither the subjective view of organizational members nor an image held among external audiences. The mixing up of internal and external stakeholders also deprives us of the fruitful possibility to distinguish between organizational identity as emerging from the context of organizational culture, and image emanating from the external context (Hatch and Schultz, 1997). We therefore choose to talk of stakeholders, meaning external audiences. The

central groups of actors in our analysis of identity formation will thus be internal audiences, particularly the dominant coalition, making identity *claims* as well as external stakeholders confronting the organization with *expectations* about its identity. In both groups, we explicitly include the corresponding actors before the foundation of the firm, i.e. founders and prospective organizational members as well as external audiences that follow the start-up process of the organization. Recently, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) have argued that institutional claims and collective understandings may represent different aspects of the construction of organizational identities. They refer to this as sensemaking and sensegiving processes (Ravasi and Schultz 2006:438).

2.2 Identity and the foundation of the organization

In their 1985 article, Albert and Whetten underline that issues relating to the identity of an organization are not equally salient over its life-cycle. Rather, there are specific phases, where identity questions typically appear on the agenda. One of these is the formation of the organization. During this phase, the people involved in the start-up need to define the goals, the business idea and the structure of the organization and they need to equip it with an initial resource configuration, including its technology. These choices will eventually form the foundation for how organizational members as well as external stakeholders perceive the identity of the organization and what they will expect from it in the future. By definition, a newly founded organization does not have a historical track record that can reveal what features will be considered as central, distinctive or enduring/continuous over time about it. Nevertheless as Brunninge (2005) and Whetten (2006) remark, identity claims made by the organization and its founders as well as asset commitments create expectations regarding what organizational features are supposed to characterize its identity. Such identity statements and asset commitments may already be made during the start-up preparation phase before the formal incorporation of the organization, meaning that identity formation starts before a firm is officially launched. By definition, identity claims made prior to or at the organization's start-up cannot refer to any

characteristics that *are* enduring about the organization. However, as Brunninge's (2005) and Whetten's (2006) examples show, they tend to contain promises of which important characteristics *are supposed to be* enduring. If these promises eventually materialize is another question, yet they are important in understanding how organizational identities are initially formed.

Management literature in general, and research on organizational identity in particular, have so far shown relatively little interest in the foundation of the firm. A notable exception is the literature on imprinting, following the work of Stinchcombe (1965). Stinchcombe's point of departure is the observation, that firms with similar founding conditions often share the same characteristics that they then maintain over long periods of time. His work primarily refers to ways of organizing the business and imprints made by the institutional environment on the organization. Later work (e.g.Boeker 1989) also considered other imprinting forces, including the role of the founder, imprinting his or her values and strategies on the newly founded firm. One might of course argue that the phenomenon of imprinting during firm foundation is trivial when it is merely limited to some initial choices remaining in effect for some time. However, if these choices are perpetuated over extended periods of time and perhaps remain in place even when environmental pressures push for a change, the imprinting phenomenon becomes interesting. Stinchcombe (1965) attributed the maintenance of imprints to what he called traditionalizing forces, including institutionalization. Studying the Paris Opera, Johnson (2007) found that imprints have remained in place for several hundred years. Without explicitly mentioning the notion of organizational identity, she was able to trace the sources of the Opera's distinctive identity back to decision processes at the time of foundation. Johnson (2007) further observed that imprinting is an agency-driven process, meaning that founders as well as external stakeholders influence the choices that result in imprints. Institutionalization then maintains the imprints over time. This observation is interestingly in line with Selznick's work, using the notion

of organization[al] identity already in 1957. Selznick there sees identity as the result of an institutionalization process where early organizational choices that were originally made for functional reasons become infused with value and cherished for their own sake, resulting in a need to perpetuate them.

Boeker (1989), putting special emphasis on the founder, found that the involvement of founders in management and long founder tenure contribute to the maintenance of imprints. Family business research suggests that this observation can be extended to members of the founder's family that are typically reluctant to change characteristics of the firm that were important to their ancestors and relatives (Brunninge and Melander 2010; Habbershon and Pistrui 2002). Also Schein's (1983; 1985) work on founders puts special emphasis on family firms. He maintains that the founder's values are more likely to survive when a firm remains family managed after the founder's exit. Even though younger generations might start questioning their ancestors' values and assumptions they tend to be more interested in maintaining non-economic values and assumptions than externally hired manager are (Schein 1983). Schein's (1983; 1985) work mainly relates the founder's influence to the establishment of an organizational culture, i.e. a set of values and assumptions that provides guidance to the actors in the company. Although Schein does not explicitly address organizational identity, the value system his founders create contains many elements that are likely to be part of or influence the formation of organizational identity. It is important to note that Schein (1983) emphasizes that founders do not create an organizational culture *ex nihilo*. Rather they start out from assumptions they have acquired in previous cultural contexts. Referring directly to organizational identity, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) remark that founders make critical choices for what is to be considered important in their company. These choices may maintain their significance as the founders' heritage far beyond their personal involvement in the firm.

Similarly to Boeker (1989) and Schein (1983; 1985), Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995) note that apart from the creation of material conditions, the phase around the start-up is important for shaping the values of the organization. They affirm that the values of start-up firms typically are strongly influenced by the personal values of the founder. These personal values may again relate back to the experiences long before the current start-up, be it previous involvement in businesses or personal experiences from non-business contexts. Following Sarason (1972), Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995) propose the concept of *prehistory* to capture processes before the actual foundation of the firm that yet have an impact on its identity. They include the institutional context into which the start-up is born as well as the shaping of the founder's values and ideas. Garvi (2007), examining the identities of venture capital firms, has found that young firms are characterized by founding visions, typically held by the founder or founders of the business. These founding visions provide the young firms with a sense of purpose and direction. Along the way, particularly in cases where the founder has left the firm or has lost his or her influence, the founding vision may get lost, leading to an identity crisis for the firm as the force providing it with direction and defining its characters is no longer there. Schein (2004) takes a similar life-cycle approach to the role of founders, addressing problems that may arise once ownership by founders or founding families is converted into public ownership or when founders hand over leadership to external managers. In such situation a critical question is whether the new managers/owners want to adhere to the founder's original values and ideas or reinvent the firm.

The entrepreneurship literature is one further stream of research where founders and the activities preceding firm foundation are an important topic. For instance, entrepreneurship research has acknowledged the processual character of firm foundation. This process includes activities preceding the formal incorporation of the firm, where founders are involved in so-called gestation activities, including various preparations such as resource acquisition or the development of a business plan (Alsos and Kolvereid 1998; Carden, Zietsma, Saparito,

Matherne, and Davis 2005). However, whereas firm foundation is a topic in entrepreneurship research, less emphasis has been put on the long-term influence of the founder and the circumstances of foundation on the development of the firm. Nelson (2003) attempts to explore the persistence of founder influence claims that by imprinting structure, strategy and culture of the organization. She argues that these imprints are often locked-in and continue having a decisive role during a long time after the foundation. Focusing on family businesses, Kelly, Athanassiou and Crittenden (2000) claim that founders are particularly influential on managers' mindsets as well as on organizational level values and goals.

Furthermore, Shepherd and Haynie (2009) have argued that entrepreneurship is related to distinctiveness which they consider to be one of the needs the entrepreneur can satisfy with being an entrepreneur. Moreover, being an entrepreneur can also help creating a feeling of belongingness. There might be multiple identities present however the focus is on the entrepreneur or the entrepreneurial identity which might lead to the dark-side of entrepreneurship. However, as Shepherd and Haynie propose a theoretical model it still remains to be tested empirically. Moreover, they do not touch on the link to the organization's identity.

Many firms keep the history of their foundation alive and put great emphasis on retelling the story about their foundation in various contexts, such as corporate museums (Brunninge, Helin, and Kjellander 2009). As Foster, Suddaby and Wiebe (2009) note, having an interesting story about a strong founder who laid the foundation to future success for the firm has become an institutionalized feature of corporate histories. Some companies even invent stories of non-existent founders (Harquail 2007). These fake stories about the foundation of the firm are supposed to contribute to the construction of an identity that provides members with a sense of direction and creates a favorable image of the company among external stakeholders.

The literature on founding, founders and imprinting suggest that important choices regarding the identity of an organization are made during the initial stages of its life-cycle, including the time

preceding its formal incorporation. Yet looking at the foundation as such is not sufficient to understand its significance for organizational identity. We also need to follow the further development of the organization, including how members threat the early identity in hindsight, and how identity is maintained and modified over time.

2.3 Stability and change in organizational identity

The discussion of the influence of an organization's early identity on the subsequent identity process, directly leads us to the question how stable or – if we refer to the common paraphrase of the Albert and Whetten (1985) definition – how enduring organizational identity is. If the identity at foundation was insignificant for the subsequent identity process, there would be little use in putting emphasis on this phase n scholarly analysis. The issue of stability and change in organizational identity has become one of the most actively debated questions in organizational identity research. With respect to our processual study of identity, it is of course an important question, to what extent organizational identity can change during such a process. Regarding the identity emerging at the foundation of a company, it is a critical question whether this early identity will be fixed after a short time and thus potentially constrain the company over the rest of its life cycle or if the early identity can be changed along the way as the company, its environment and the expectations of important stakeholders change.

The early work on organizational identity puts a relative emphasis on stability. Already Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition has claimed temporal continuity (the enduring character of identity) as one of its criteria. Identity relates to sameness, including sameness over time that makes it possible to identify an organization as being the same at different points in time. This does not exclude the possibility of change, however it excludes changes that radically cut of all links to the past and make the organization unrecognizable (Bouchikhi and Kimberly 1996). Similarly, yet relating to the identity of human beings, Brewer (1991, 2003) points out that present and future identities are typically related and compared to past identities. Individual strive

to maintain at least a certain degree of continuity with their historical identity, in order to avoid becoming unrecognizable to themselves and others. Identity change that is too radical, thus becomes problematic. Not surprisingly, early case studies (e.g. Bartunek, 1984; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) depict organizational identity as something that is difficult to change and thus reduces the organization's ability to adapt to changed circumstances. On the other hand, exactly the same cases also provide evidence that identity eventually will change, particularly when the pressure from external stakeholders' feedback grows too strong and continuously questions the insiders' beliefs about their organization's identity.

Gioia and Thomas (1996) found that negative feedback from the environment can even be consciously used by management to promote changes in an organization's strategy and eventually in its identity. Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) therefore see the interplay between identity and image (Hatch and Schultz 1997) as one of the major reasons for identity change. An underlying assumption is that image becomes increasingly important to organizations and is a potentially more fluid than identity(Alvesson 1990). Once managers perceive a discrepancy between identity and image they are faced with the choice of either trying to influence the image important stakeholders have of the firm, or adapting organizational identity to better suit stakeholder expectations. Even Albert and Whetten (1985), although emphasizing identity's continuity over time do not see identity as totally stable. They have identified that the hybrid character of many organization's identities, meaning the fact that identities may be in themselves composed of different types, is a source of identity change. As an example they mention the identity of universities comprising utilitarian as well as normative elements. Over the organization's life cycle, the identity iterates between the two and reflects each of them to different degrees.

Some scholars belonging to interpretive and postmodern research streams, however see identity as significantly more fluid. They talk of multiple and fragmented identities that may occur more

or less randomly in an organization (Gioia et al. 1998). Although Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) do not take an extreme stance in this question, they challenge Albert and Whetten's (1985) assumption of an enduring identity, claiming that organizational identity is characterized by adaptive instability. To them, organizational identity can change frequently as a result of adaptation to images held by external stakeholders. Nevertheless, Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) affirm that identity needs to refer to the organization's past. There is of course an inherent paradox in the need to change on the one hand, while on the other hand having to relate to a history that cannot be changed in hindsight. The solution to this problem may lie in the fact that while history as such cannot be changed, people's perceptions of it can. For instance, Ravasi and Schultz (2006), in line with Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000), have suggested that instead of formal identity claims the associated meanings and understandings with these claims change.

Corporate Communication, both towards internal and external stakeholders, needs to rely on sustainable and trustworthy corporate stories (van Rekom and van Riel 2000). In order to achieve this, firms often refer back to history, using the past to construct stories that appear consistent and provide the organization with legitimacy (Blomback and Brunninge 2009; Brunninge 2009). As Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer (2007) point out, history is one of the organizational traits giving the organization distinctiveness, stability and coherence in relation to both internal and external stakeholders. By revising corporate stories (Gioia, Schultz and Corely, 2000), identity can be adapted while maintaining a sense of continuity with the past. One means of doing so may be the use of historical claims and labels, while reinterpreting them and infusing them with new meaning (Chreim 2005; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000). Ericson (2006) and Normann (2001) describe how the identity of a Swedish consumer cooperative was renewed by assigning new meanings to early identity claims of building business on cooperation and sustainability. In this context, managers can refer to the past selectively, picking suitable identity

claims, rediscovering claims that have been forgotten, dropping those that have become outdated and reinterpreting those that need to be adapted. In relation to the present paper, this suggests that the ability of an organization to change and to modify its identity during the identity process following foundation, not necessarily needs to imply that early identity claims are dropped or replaced. There is also an option of creatively reinterpreting and adapting early identity claims to fit new circumstances. For instance, Ravasi and Schultz (2006), in line with Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000), have suggested that instead of formal identity claims the associated meanings and understandings with these claims change.

In more extreme cases, companies may consciously or unconsciously go beyond mere reinterpretations of early identity claims. The work of Casey and associates (Casey 1997; Nissley and Casey 2002) suggests that firms organize what aspects of their history they want to remember and what aspects of history they prefer to forget. Metaphorically speaking, history becomes a quarry (Schulze 1987), where managers selectively pick elements they find suitable to remember and modify them in a way that suits their purposes. In their study of Cadbury, Rowlinson and Hassard (1993) demonstrate how a company may rhetorically invent 'non-authentic' stories about their foundation in order to construct a corporate story that suits their strategic purposes. Aspects of identity that appear as enduring, looking at official or taken-for-granted corporate stories may thus appear as changes if one carefully investigates historical identity.

Despite the criticism of the "enduring" criteria in the Albert and Whetten (1985) definition, Whetten more recently (2006) has once again emphasized the importance of organizational features enduring character, stating that continuity over time is a prerequisite for making legitimate identity claims. Whetten's argument is that only central and enduring claims will result in distinctiveness and allow the organization to be recognized by external parties. While we agree with Whetten that an overly fluid identity would lead to a lack of recognition and question

whether the identity notion is still meaningful, we believe that it is important to note that changes in organizational identity may occur without completely erasing identity (Bartunek, 1984; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) and that changes may be concealed behind revisions of history (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000) or stability on the surface (Chreim, 2005). Failure to make any modifications of organizational identity may result in an organization ending up in a vicious circle of conservatism, analogously with Gagliardi's reasoning relating to culture (1986). We therefore believe that it is important to learn more about how organizations maintain and modify their initial identities over their life cycle and how they look at their early identities in retrospect.

3 Method

This paper is based on an in-depth single case study of a media company which is family owned. Case study research is a well-established and accepted way of theory development where the source can be a single case (Dyer and Wilkins 1991) or multiple cases (Eisenhardt 1989). Following Flyvbjerg (2006) we argue that RP is an extreme/deviant case which allows developing our understanding concerning the unfolding of organizational identity processes before, during and after firm formation. The deviant nature of the case particularly lies in the unusual founding situation of Rheinische Post. The newspaper was established in post-war Germany after most established media had been wiped out either by Nazi media policy or by the Allies' attempts to get rid of Nazi influence in the media sector. Due to the re-shaping of the entire German media sector that was the context for RP's foundation the identity dynamics around the start-up are particularly interesting. RP was founded as a license-newspaper, which is an unusual feature as such, and adds interesting dynamics connected to stakeholder expectations by the licensor. Eventually, RP is unusual in the sense that it has survived the license phase and turned into a sustainable business on a long-term basis with the same ownership structure as from the start. The dynamic founding context as well as the sustainability of the business makes Rheinische Post a highly relevant case for theorizing on identity processes. Case studies have been proven to

be a useful method for studying organizational identity. Studies of single cases have advanced theory development thanks to the richness of data and the researchers' profound knowledge of the relevant context (e.g. Bartunek 1984; Dutton and Dukerich 1991). This is not least the case when scholars have been able to capture longitudinal developments (e.g. Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). The contextual richness and historical embeddedness allows process theorizing that would not be possible based on a cross-sectional study Pettigrew (Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew 1990).

This paper follows the ideas of an interpretative approach which is considered suitable and useful when studying organizational identity (Gioia et al., 1998). Face-to-face interviews and secondary literature on RP and key actors in the case have been the main data sources. Interviews were conducted within the company during two visits in 2009. The interviews lasted between 60-120 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured and had besides the general focus on OI different themes depending on the position and seniority of the interviewees, as well as strategic issues the particular interviewee had been involved in. Open questions were asked concerning central and distinctive aspects of the organization. Moreover, interviewees were specifically asked with regards to the identity claim on the first page of the newspaper. The participants were members of the management board (Geschäftsführung), the advisory board, owners, journalists and other members of the management team. Several interviewees, some of them being managers belonged to the dominant owner families and could thus provide their view both on the contemporary situation of RP and to the work of previous generations of owners. In addition to interviews, the in-house magazine and other internal documents were used as complementary sources. A detailed overview of the interviews can be found in Appendix 1. All material was originally in German and after analyzing, quotes were translated by the authors.

The analysis of the data was based on themes that evolved during the study as well as in relation to the presented theoretical framework. We started out by reviewing our data for identity claims

that were made before and during the time RP was founded. Due to the lack of contemporary witnesses of the foundation we searched the archives for documents and found biographies, other historical reports and research on the newspaper that allowed us to trace back the development of identity claims before and after the foundation of RP. We also looked for expectations regarding the new firm's identity made by external stakeholders during the same period. We focused on identity claims that reoccurred frequently during the early phases of the case. Our case is the identity process of RP. In our data we then looked for additional information concerning these identity claims, including how they came about, how they were motivated and justified, and how they matched with the identity expectations articulated by external stakeholders. In this analysis process the identity claim of being a Christian newspaper emerged as particularly important. The claim was made explicit on the first page of the newspaper, stating that RP is a "Newspaper for Christian Politics and Culture". This claim has also been particularly enduring. It is still made today, while other claims relating to the founding situation and the particular status of RP as a license newspaper have become obsolete. We constructed a case story focusing on the early identity claims of RP and their development in the subsequent history of the company. The construction of the case story followed an interpretive logic where we iterated between our empirical material and theory (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000), looking for additional literature helping us to make sense of our data and vice versa. Following Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) we developed the story of the Rheinische Post from before its foundation in post-WWII to the formulation of identity claims and how these founding identity claims a viewed in retrospect. As there are no more living contemporary witnesses we draw on secondary sources. The case story is going to be presented in the following section of the paper and forms the basis for the following analysis and conclusions sections. The case starts with an introduction to the context of post-WWII Germany and the conditions for starting a newspaper.

4   The case of Rheinische Post

In the following section we present the case of Rheinische Post (RP). As the specific circumstances of post-war Germany we begin by outlining the historical context of RP's foundation. This includes the general development of a new media landscape in occupied Germany, specifically the British occupational zone where RP was to be located, as well as the founding process of RP. We outline the preparations for the start-up, including the activities of key actors during the founding process. The first part of the case concludes with the actual launching of the newspaper and the way RP and its identity were presented to the readers. Investigating the start-up of RP we identify five key identity claims. These identity claims are: 'Rheinische Post as a Christian newspaper', 'Rheinische Post as a non-partisan newspaper', 'Rheinische Post as a regionally anchored newspaper', 'Rheinische Post as a license newspaper', and 'Rheinische Post as a newspaper combining journalistic and business aims'. In the second part of the case presentation we explore how today's owners and managers of RP look at the early identity claims in hindsight. This allows us discussing each identity claim, outlining its background, debates around it, as well as its development and its significance for RP today.

4.1   Newspapers in Germany after WWII

In order to start up a newspaper in occupied Germany, generally a license from the allied authorities was required. However, there were different approaches to distributing those licenses in the different occupation zones (Hüffer 1995). While the Soviets granted licenses to organizations and political parties, the British authorities mostly gave licenses to individuals. The Americans took a third approach by licensing so-called "Gruppenzeitungen" (Group newspapers). These were run by a group of people, usually having different political backgrounds. The first licensed Gruppenzeitung in the American Zone was the "Frankfurter Rundschau" which started up August 1st, 1945 (Fischer 1971; Hallin and Mancini 2004). The Gruppenzeitungen were issued in various areas of the occupation zones and could sometimes be relatively small units. Moreover, the representation of different political parties in each group of

licensees was part of the concept (Hüffer, 1995). However, the idea of having group newspapers representing individuals with different (political) orientations also gained acceptance in the British zone.

4.2 Rheinische Post

Düsseldorf, the city where Rheinische Post eventually was founded, was one of the major cities in the British zone. When the British authorities created the new state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1946, Düsseldorf became its capital. However, already in 1945 the first attempts were made to form a Gruppenzeitung for Düsseldorf. The group to run the newspaper represented a wide variety of political orientations. Dr. Anton Betz, Karl Arnold and Max Hildebrand von Gumppenberg all represented or were associated with the Christian Democrats (CDU), Georg Glock represented the Social Democrats (SPD) while Dr. Friedrich Vogel was liberal and Peter Waterkotte was a member of the communist party (KPD). In addition Dr. Friedrich Linz, a protestant pastor was part of the group (Betz, 1963). As a result of their joint effort, the "Neue Rheinische Zeitung " (NRZ) was published from July 1945 until February 1946. However, Fischer (1971) maintains that the NRZ was the newspaper issued by the British authorities and the "Gruppenzeitung" never appeared, yet the people involved still continued their efforts. As Hüffer (1995) notes, the group was rather unusual for the time as no publisher from the Nazi-time was included. Betz had experience from publishing newspapers during the Weimar Republic, but he had been fired by the Nazi regime. Besides representing more or less the whole political scene from far left to moderate right, all envisioned licensees were politically clear with respect to the Nazi past. The idea of having more party-oriented newspapers gained momentum and the British occupation forces came to the conclusion that the Gruppenzeitungen might suffer from tensions between the different, sometimes opposing interest groups (Hüffer, 1995).

By the end of 1945, the British authorities had turned towards the idea of launching party-oriented newspapers. In Düsseldorf, they planned to issue licenses for one communist, one social democratic and one Christian democratic newspaper. For the latter, Betz was commissioned by the British to form a group of licensees (Hüwel 1980). On October 26th, 1945, Betz, Arnold, von Gumppenberg, and Vogel together with Dr. Erich Wenderoth who had not been involved in the previous Gruppenzeitung project, applied for a license for the "Rheinische Post". However, the British authorities were skeptical towards von Gumppenberg as he was also a civil servant in the press-office. This might have resulted in conflicts of interest and was not in line with the idea of an independent press (Betz 1986). Consequently, von Gumppenberg was removed from the application. Vogel was previously editor-in-chief for the NRZ, the Gruppenzeitung preceding RP. He became the first editor-in-chief of the new paper. Both Arnold and Wenderoth had already good relationships with the British authorities (Hüwel, 1980). Vogel left Rheinische Post relatively soon as he involved himself in the start-up of Handelsblatt, a business newspaper. From 1948, Betz, Arnold and Wenderoth alone were licensees for Rheinische Post. In parallel with the preparations for starting up the Rheinische Post, Dietrich Oppenberg formed a group of licensees for the SPD-oriented "Rhein-Echo" (Rhine Echo) and Max Dahlhaus prepared the launching of a communist newspaper called "Freiheit" (Freedom). When the British authorities finally issued licenses to different groups of licensees, publishers that had been active during The Nazi-time were excluded. This strict policy was considered as a surprise as there had initially been signs that former publishers would be included in the process of rebuilding the press in post war Germany (Hüffer, 1995). However, these individuals were excluded from publishing newspapers until the end of the licensing system in 1949. Figure 1 shows the process of foundation from the first application to the first issue.
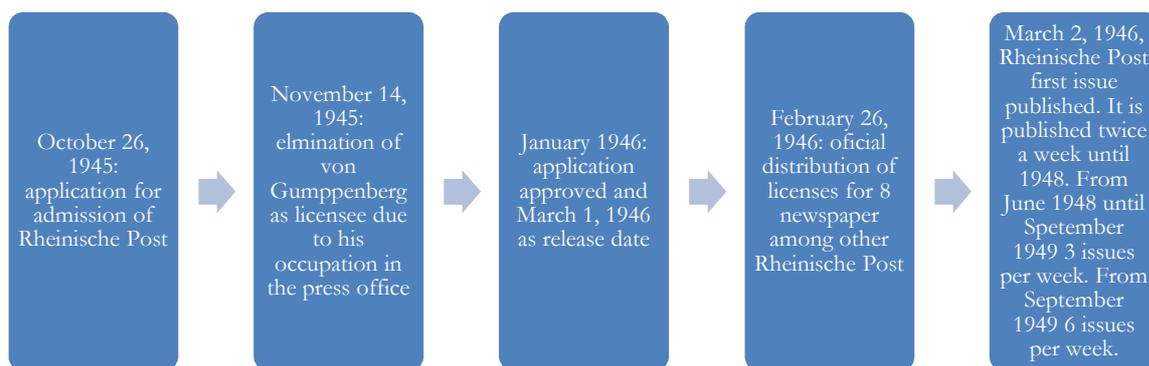
| October 26, 1945: application for admission of Rheinische Post | → | November 14, 1945: elmination of von Gumppenberg as licensee due to his occupation in the press office | → | January 1946: application approved and March 1, 1946 as release date | → | February 26, 1946: oficial distribution of licenses for 8 newspaper among other Rheinische Post | → | March 2, 1946, Rheinische Post first issue published. It is published twice a week until 1948. From June 1948 until Spetember 1949 3 issues per week. From September 1949 6 issues per week. |

Figure 1. Timeline from the license application to the first issue.

4.3   Rheinische Post and the Christian democrats

The foundation of a newspaper oriented towards Christian democratic ideas in post war Germany has to be seen against the development of the political landscape in Germany before and after the Nazi regime. The foundation of Christian democratic parties, uniting both Protestant and Catholic voters, was a development running in parallel with the foundation of Rheinische Post. Traditionally, German Catholics had a distinct political identity that became manifest in specific catholic parties and trade unions, dating back to the time of the German empire (Scholder 1977). During the time of the empire, the Catholic minority in Germany faced political pressures from the Protestant majority. This contributed to the formation of parties, namely the Zentrum and the Bayerische Volkspartei (BVP) that fought for the interests of the German Catholics. As the tensions between the German Catholics and the state eased, the Catholic parties became part of the political establishment in Germany. Notably the Zentrum was part of various governments during the Weimar Republic. Still, the target group of the parties remained more or less limited to Catholics. Among these however, the Zentrum and the BVP had a very high percentage of voters. Even as Hitler's Nazis became increasingly popular in Germany, the share of voters the catholic parties could attract remained relatively stable

(Scholder, 1977). The German protestants on the other hand had no tradition of having their own parties, except for the "Christlich-Sozialer Volksdienst" that existed towards the end of the Weimar Republic and only attracted few voters (Scholder 1977). Both Zentrum and BVP dissolved themselves in 1933, a few months after the Nazis had come to power. They had previously supported Hitler in increasing his power, believing that co-operation would allow the German Catholics to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Nazis and allowing them to maintain a certain freedom of action for the church. This attempt to maintain the independence of the church by sacrificing political influence eventually proved to build on false hopes (Scholder, 1977).

When political groupings started to re-organize themselves in Germany after the lost war, it was not evident that the Catholic parties and trade unions would be re-established. The parties had discredited themselves by cooperating with the Nazis. Moreover, many politicians formerly being members of the Zentrum and the BVP believed that, considering the experience of dictatorship and terror, it was necessary to unite Christian voters across confessional border lines (Hüwel, 1980). Likewise, many former representatives of the Catholic trade unions believed that it was desirable to have a united labour movement, organizing workers regardless of their religion and their affinity for any political parties. Karl Arnold, one of the founders of Rheinische Post, was a Zentrum politician as well as a unified trade unionist. Arnold had been chairman of the Christian trade unions' confederation in Düsseldorf until the Nazis abolished the trade unions in 1933. Together with Betz and von Gumppenberg, he was one of the key actors during the foundation of the "Christlich Demokratische Partei" (CDP) in the Northern Part of the Rhine province. In parallel, similar Christian democratic parties had been founded in other parts of occupied Germany, finally uniting themselves under the name of "Christlich Demokratische Union" (CDU). It's leader was Konrad Adenauer, a prominent Zentrum politician from the Weimar Republic. With his unionist background, Arnold stood for the left wing of the Christian

democrats. In an early manifest written in 1945 together with Betz and von Gumppenberg, Arnold emphasized that religious tolerance, social justice and an economic system based on co-determination were key issues for a Christian party (Hüwel 1980). Towards the British authorities, Arnold advocated the expropriation of large business groups and the abolishment of monopolies. Such ideas were in line with the intentions of Britain's Labour government. They were also quite popular among German Christian democrats right after the war. However, the party soon took a stance for more economic liberalism under Adenauer. Arnold, sometimes using the concept of Christian socialism to express his ideological standpoint, remained one of the most prominent representatives of his party's socially progressive wing (Hüwel, 1980). He became the first elected mayor of Düsseldorf after the war in 1946 and the first elected prime minister of the newly founded state North Rhine-Westphalia in 1947.

The founding team of Rheinische Post had a significant overlap with the key persons behind the foundation of a Christian democratic party in Düsseldorf. The licensees also had a reputation as opponents to the Nazis during the Third Reich. Betz had been arrested several times during the Nazi regime. He had been the publishing manager of the "Muenchener Neuesten Nachrichten" a newspaper in opposition to the Nazi regime. As a result, the Nazis did not allow Arnold to work in the newspaper industry any longer and had to relocate to Düsseldorf. Arnold had been involved in opposition circles that were looking for ways to overcome the Nazi dictatorship. As Hüwel (1980) reports, Arnold and his friends were never directly involved in any attempts to overthrow the regime. However they may have been important in preparing for a democratic post war order in Germany. Also Wenderoth was considered a trustworthy opponent of the Nazis. He had supported haunted during the Third Reich and being a lawyer, the British authorities had put him in charge of liquidating the Nazi party's fortune after the war. He described himself in his autobiography as a dedicated member of the protestant church who never joined any Nazi-organization. Given the background of the founding team, it was a crucial

question how the identity of Rheinische Post in relation to the Christian democratic party would be defined. After all, having departed from the previous Gruppenzeitung concept, the British authorities had approved of the newspaper as a Christian democratic paper and the emerging Christian democratic party had a strong interest in creating itself a platform in the media. Betz (1986) quotes from a letter sent to Anton Betz, the designated publisher, aiming at gaining influence for the CDU over Rheinische Post *"It is of utmost importance to us that the editorship is given to a man, whose attitude and performance we know well, with whom we harmonize and with whom we are in close contact…".* Anton Betz, despite his central role in the Christian democrats, emphasized the difference between a Christian democratic orientation and being an organ of a Christian democratic party: *"In order to avoid misunderstandings from the beginning, I would like to inform you that Rheinische Post will not be an explicit party newspaper. It is rather an independent newspaper that has to be edited according to Christian democratic principles."* Thus, as a licensee, Betz wanted to make clear that while standing for a political direction similar to that of the CDU, the newspaper was to be independent of the party and needed to be able to take its own stance whenever the editors believed this was necessary. According to Betz (1986), Anton Betz emphasized the importance of independence from the political parties in his talks with the British authorities. The British were also keen to make sure that the new license papers were economically independent. The conditions for Rheinische Post's license stated that *'This license has been granted under the condition that no person that is not mentioned as financially involved in this venture in the license application, has any share of the profit of this venture, and furthermore that no financial share of the venture is reserved without approval of the military government for any person not mentioned in the application.'* (Hüffer, 1995). All in all, the intentions of the founders and the requirements from the British authorities lay the foundation for some important aspects of Rheinische Post's identity, involving potential tensions: the newspaper was political, yet not bound to a particular party and it was a business venture, yet under clear regulations ensuring its economic independence.

4.4   Identity statements in the first issue of Rheinische Post

As the events preceding the foundation of RP show, discussions about the identity of the newspaper were already going on vividly before the actual start-up of the newspaper. The relation of the newspaper towards the Christian Democrats as well as to Christianity in general were key issues in these discussions. Eventually, on February 26th, 1946 the first issue of Rheinische Post was published and the newspaper needed to present itself to its readers. The title Rheinische Post was determined in the license document and could only be changed with the approval of the British authorities. The document furthermore clearly stated that it was forbidden to call it an official party newspaper. However, it was allowed to have a subtitle indicating a general orientation (Betz, 1986). Anton Betz and his fellow licensees agreed on the subtitle "Zeitung für christliche Kultur und Politik" (Newspaper for Christian culture and politics). According to Betz (1986), this implied that the paper would present and focus on politics and culture with special attention to Christian aspects in the areas of the churches, of art and of literature. However, it should be clear that this is an interpretation in hindsight based on conversations between the father, Anton Betz and his daughter, Esther Betz. Still, this was a first official identity claim.

In the first editorial, Anton Betz provided an extended identity statement, addressing the ideological stance of the newspaper and its relation to political parties:

'Rheinische Post has assumed the right and the duty to promote the Christian democratic stance. Thus it will differentiate itself from other newspapers and align itself with the party that has set as its goal to implement Christian democratic principles. However, Rheinische Post is not a party newspaper in the previous sense of that concept. It is an independent company and aims at serving and leading based on the knowledge and experience of its editors and collaborators… In addition, Rheinische Post aims at uniting all groups that are willing to contribute to recovery and that commit themselves to Christianity and democracy… The more we promote the genuinely Christian, the more sustainably we will be able to fight the rests of the spiritual plague of Nazism…

The newspaper is neither able to create bread nor employment, but it can contribute to creating the willingness that is essential for any constructive recovery work.' (as quoted in Betz 1963).

The idea of moral reconstruction and the role of Christian values were also central to an official address to the readers of Rheinische Post that Karl Arnold wrote in his role as prime minister in the first issue of the newspaper:

'We do not want to reform the outer world without simultaneously renewing the spirit and the soul.' (Hüwel 1980).

The identity statements, on the one hand addressed the particular situation of post war Germany, mentioning the economic hardships and the need to rebuild the country both physically and morally. On the other hand they also addressed the need for being an independent newspaper as well as the political orientation to a Christian democratic ideology and to Christian values. The editorial was however relatively unspecific regarding what for instance Christian values implied. They were seen as a general cure against rests of Nazi thinking in society and a foundation to build a democratic society on. Identity statements in the first issue editorials of the local competitors the Rhein-Echo (social democratic) and the Freiheit (communist) were similar in their focus on the need for material and moral recovery, however proposing different ideological foundations for these ventures (Betz, 1963).

4.5   Early identity claims by Rheinische Post

Already these first identity statements included a number of claims that were to a large extent based in the debates held before the foundation of the newspaper, particularly in the intentions of the founders as well as in the expectations articulated by key stakeholders.

4.5.1   Rheinische Post – a Christian newspaper

The claim that is most clearly emphasized is that of Rheinische Post being a Christian newspaper. The Christian identity of the newspaper can easily be linked to the personal convictions of the founders. These had their personal identities linked to Christian faith and

partly, like in the case of Karl Arnold, also to Christian political movements. Arnold came from the Christian union movement and was like Betz a Catholic, while their co-founder Wenderoth was a Protestant. The presence of both Catholics and Protestants in the group of founders was however in line with Arnold's conviction that the dividing lines between different groups in society, such as the different Christian denominations, needed to be overcome in order to create a new, democratic Germany. Hence the inclusion of 'Christian culture and politics' in the subtitle appeared logical. The inclusion in the subtitle stabilized the identity claim more strongly than other claims that were made during the founding period of RP. While editorials could quickly become forgotten, the subtitle was by definition reiterated in every issue. A major change or a dropping of the subtitle and the included identity claim would have required a conscious decision and it would hardly have gone unnoticed.

4.5.2   Rheinische Post – a non-partisan newspaper

A claim that had a close connection to the Christian identity of RP was that of Rheinische Post being a non-partisan newspaper. The foundation of RP and the creation of a Christian democratic party were to a large extent parallel processes, partly with the same key actors involved in both start-ups. Betz, in his first editorial, stated that RP should promote a Christian democratic stance and it was obvious that RP was meant to promote a specific political orientation opposed to that of its social democratic and communist counterparts. Still being Christian democratic was not the same as being affiliated with the Christian Democratic Party. The non-partisan identity stood in contrast to the partisan newspapers that had been common during the Weimar Republic before the Nazis came to power. For the publishers of RP being to closely affiliated with a party would have run counter to their desire of overcoming social, religious, and political barriers. While a clear political orientation of RP was unproblematic, being dependent of a party would not have allowed RP to create bridges between different groups in society. The question about RP's party affiliation was to a large extent sorted out in a debate between Betz and the party before the start-up of RP. The founders needed to counter identity

expectations put forward by politicians that wanted to have a traditional party newspaper. Betz and his co-founders wanted the newspaper to be independent vis-à-vis the party. This meant that the editors were free to choose their stance in different political questions without party interference. Karl Arnold, who soon after the foundation of RP became the first elected prime minister of North Rhine-Westphalia could thus use RP as a political platform with opponents in his own party. Being relatively leftist, he engaged in various conflicts with chancellor Adenauer. Arnold published a number of editorials criticizing Adenauer. The editorials were anonymous and signed with three stars. Although the agreement with the editors was to keep the author secret, it was not very difficult to conclude that Arnold was the author (Hüwel, 1980). He also published his "manifesto for German Unity" (Manifest für deutsche Einheit) completely only in the RP (N.N. 1948).

4.5.3   Rheinische Post – a regionally-anchored newspaper

Closely related to the debate around the political affiliation of RP was the identity claim of Rheinische Post being a regionally-anchored newspaper. This claim already became obvious from the title, stating that the newspaper was produced for the (not more closely defined) Rhine region. Based in Düsseldorf, the capital of the newly founded state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the editors perceived it as natural that RP should cover local and regional politics that had their nexus in the city. At the same time, being located in the capital of a federal state in the emerging democratic Germany, implied that the location in Düsseldorf also meant relating regional politics to issues on a national level. During the period when RP was a license newspaper, the limited number of local newspapers implied that RP circulated in relatively distant parts of the Rhine and Ruhr areas. When the license requirement was dropped, new newspapers were published in cities like Essen and RP withdrew from some areas that were rather far away from Düsseldorf. The license was issued for the administrative district of Düsseldorf and distribution, days of publication, allocation of resources (paper) and therefore also the number of pages (4) was decided by the British military government. The fourth page varied with regards to local content

and information from the military government. Thus, a local focus which is still evident with today's 31 different issues was already part of the founding identity.

4.5.4   Rheinische Post – a license newspaper

On issue about the identity of the newly founded newspaper was so obvious that it was not a major issue in editorials or in presentations, namely the claim of Rheinische Post being a license newspaper. The license newspaper form was the only organizational arrangement being available in occupied Germany at the time. In relation to the British authorities, this had a number of important implications, meaning that the editors had to fulfill identity expectations put forward by the British. These included the aim to promote democracy, the composition of the editorial team, and the newspapers' financial independence. Preparing for the start-up of RP, the editorial team had to meet all expectations connected to being a license newspaper. In contrast to other stakeholders, like the Christian democratic party, the British forces had coercive power, making it possible to impose the fulfillment of their expectations.

4.5.5   Rheinische Post – a newspaper combining a journalistic and a business mission

Closely related to the identity as a license newspaper was the identity claim of Rheinische Post being a newspaper combining a journalistic and a business mission. In their license applications the editorial team was required to state that the newspaper was financially independent from anyone except for the licensees, meaning that RP was financially viable as an independent business venture. While economic independence was less pronounced in editorials and public identity statements than the journalistic aims of RP, the claim of being able to combine political and business aims was a necessary condition for being able to start up the newspaper. In that sense, RP was characterized by a dual identity, combining utilitarian and normative aims (cf. Albert and Whetten, 1985) from the very beginning.

4.6   The early identity claims of Rheinische Post in retrospect

Identity claims as commonly presented following Albert and Whetten (1985) are supposed to denote organizational features that are central, distinctive and continuous over time/enduring

about an organization. Even in a newly started organization, such identity claims can be made, meaning a commitment by the founders to keep these features intact for a long time (Brunninge, 2005; Whetten, 2006). In this context, it is interesting to investigate what has happened to RP's early identity claims more than 60 years later. The newspaper is still published and it is still owned by the Arnold, Betz and Wenderoth families. In 1970, a fourth owner group, the Droste family was added. Droste had been printing RP from the very beginning, but due to involvement with the Nazi regime the family was not able to engage in newspaper ownership right after the war. Meanwhile the venture has grown to an internationally operating media group, including a wide range of newspapers and other journalistic products. Still, Rheinische Post constitutes the traditional core of the operations. RP alone has 31 regional issues and a circulation of approximately 351.000 copies.

4.6.1 Rheinische Post – a Christian newspaper

Rheinische Post being a Christian newspaper was a key identity claim when RP was founded. It was included in the first editorial as well as in the subtitle 'Zeitung für Christliche Kultur und Politik' (Newspaper for Christian culture and politics).

The subtitle is almost the same today. A slight change has occurred, but it is so small that it is hardly noticed, being 'Zeitung für Politik und christliche Kultur' (Newspaper for politics and Christian culture).

Gottfried Arnold tells why the subtitle was changed:

"This was during the foundation time. Even in the years after. Some have derived from it: Christian politics? The name of a party is Christian Democratic Union. Is it a party newspaper? We did not want to be and were not. That was one reason why the precision has been taken in the new subtitle. Another reason was also that it can be evaluated conceptually different, whether a 'Christian politics' can exist or not, if you stay at the wording. Or if it exists, it's difficult to define it. Therefore, the modified subtitle has led to greater clarity. 'Politics and Christian culture'."

In the German language the change may be interpreted as a clarification. While it was unclear in the original subtitle whether 'Christian' referred to both culture and politics or to culture only, it is now clear that only culture is supposed to be Christian. The stability in the subtitle is conjuring up a sense of continuity from foundation until today. On the other hand we know from organizational identity research that stability in labels, such as an identity statements, may often conceal actual change in the meaning that it ascribed to the label (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000; Chreim, 2005). While a statement is kept unchanged its meaning is reinterpreted by organizational members and thus adjusted to new needs and agendas. After all, a statement like 'newspaper for Christian culture and politics' leaves quite some room for interpretation, for instance as to what Christian culture actually is and how it is distinguished from other kinds of culture. Interestingly, we found during our empirical work that the managers of RP today do not consider the subtitle of the newspaper as a sign of stability. Rather some of them claim that the subtitle used today constitutes a significant change from the original one. They argue that the subtitle originally used was 'newspaper for Christian politics and culture', thus putting a much stronger emphasis on the Christian character of RP's political stance than on its affinity for Christian culture. Managers we talked to believed, that the subtitle was reversed, dropping the claim of advocating Christian politics. The reason for this was supposed to be that the claim of standing for specifically Christian politics was seen as problematic and difficult to define and conjured up the picture of being partisan whereas the desire to present culture as one could find it in the activities of the churches was unproblematic. In an interview, the current editor-in-chief explained the subtitle saying:

'Here, however, it refers to the tradition of our title, Founded in 1946 as a licensed newspaper of people who came from the Christian, more specifically from the Catholic workforce. The subtitle was also the first "newspaper for Christian politics and culture", and was then changed times in the 60s, to make it clear that this newspaper is nonpartisan. It should convey that we are committed to the values of the West, a Christian view of humanity, the

social market economy, the public policy reason. And that is an expression of this title and that we also want to preserve a society that is democratically-paced, on the right path in social policy. And a newspaper that is dedicated to the promotion of cultural life, too. […] cultural life is also defined as a religious life, just as a friend and patron of the arts.'

Today's managers thus believe that a certain change in identity as well as in identity claims has occurred during the history of RP, reducing the emphasis on a political stance linked to Christianity. This is further illustrated by the quote from Stephan Marzen, who is the responsible manager for the international investments:

'Christian culture, I think that has a couple of readings. First, it is a mirror image of that specific principles and values how we wish to deal with each other, how we do business. On the other hand it means what it says and is in there too. Even compared to other prominent newspapers, we are continually reporting on church issues. We also give space for it in the newspaper. This is not necessarily inevitable, but an expression of our own positioning. So this means it has to do with the newspaper because the newspaper is a formative and central element of the company, it also has to do with the company. ... I think what we would not do that one as the motto of the group. I do not think so. We would assume so, yes, but we would not write boldly on it somewhere.'

As regards the link to Christianity, the founders established a relatively clear link between faith and politics, pointing at the need of a spiritual foundation for overcoming Nazism as Betz expressed it in the first editorial. Today's third generation of owner managers thus also ascribes the link between Christianity and politics to the historical context in which it was originally made. As Karl Hans Arnold (KHA) who is the grandson of Karl Arnold puts it today: "Christian Culture, … is a guiding principle that we have. Christian politics and culture with the founding of the newspaper than ... after the fall of the Nazi Reich when Christianity, Christian values again appealed. ". The grandson thus puts the emphasis on the potentially less problematic claim of standing for Christian culture while explaining (or perhaps even excusing) the Christian politics

claim with the specific political circumstances of the post war period. This is further exemplified with the quote from the anniversary edition and the quote by Michael Hermela:

'Since her first issue, Rheinische Post in its subtitle took a stance for Christian values and these still describe its position today. This was and is an indication of the attitude of its founders in the Nazi era and after and it was a lesson from the past.'

As today's RP has grown into a publishing house with many products in addition to, RP it is important to see how this link to Christianity is seen as important also for other newer publications like the formally independent online unit. There are two editors in chief, one for the online edition and one for the print edition. The editor in chief of the online site rp-online puts it in relation to the online edition:

'For us this is of course quite clear that it is also our job to relate Christian culture in this sense (…) the media house's goals are also our ideas we implement.'

The editor in chief of the online edition also puts the importance of the Christian identity claim into a context:

'Because it shapes, I believe, a newspaper and an online presence as well. Because in the end the newspaper and online presence provide a kind of signature of the whole company. Like how is a topic addressed? What titles are in there? What is bold and what is small? It also has a higher identification with the product. Not now as a reader, too, but mainly as an employee. It is important to know that the online activities are formally independent of the (print) newspaper and are organized in a separate entity (GmbH). Some journalists have worked for the print edition before but today they are formally independent. However, the editors in chief join the editorial meetings of one another and it happens that the print editor covers for the online editor and vice versa. The manager who is in charge of the international activities, Stephan Marzen, understands the subtitle and its implications as follows:

"So now if here on it [the newspaper] would be "newspapers for news and Muslim culture", then that would stand there, but it would not comply with all life and how we think and operate here. So that's a line. So I don't need it. Only a few colleagues need to know what we actually want to do for a business. This is on the paper. Has passed into flesh and blood. We still write it. I think it's a piece of the past ... for reasons because we have always done so, tradition and also because we obtain a certain pointed emphasis to the outside, what shall we do what we write, what we do not even want to write."

The various reflections by today's owners and managers on the newspaper's subtitle show that the founding period's identity claim of being a Christian newspaper is still referred to more than 60 years later. In 1946 the identity claim was made not only in the subtitle, but also in the editorial and in various statements by the key actors of the founding process. This implied that it was probably comparatively easy to interpret what the claim was supposed to mean. The inclusion of the Christian aspect in the subtitle has played an important role in the survival of the initial identity claim. Yet, it can be interpreted in many ways, ranging from more reporting on church issues to a general ethical stance in the production of the newspaper. Generally, today's managers tend to somewhat tone done RP's identity as a Christian newspaper, saying that the emphasis on Christianity was stronger with the supposedly original subtitle and claiming that the Christian aspect is primarily a reflection of the specific historical context around RP's foundation.

4.6.2 Rheinische Post – a non-partisan newspaper

The claim of Rheinische Post being a non-partisan newspaper was very explicit from the beginning of RP. The founders did not want it to be a partisan newspaper as it was common in the Weimar Republic. Gottfried Arnold, who today is co-publisher of RP was a member of the German parliament (Bundestag) for many years, representing the Christian democrats. Being asked about potential conflicts of his political career and his publishing activities, he underlines:

'During the days I was a member of the Bundestag - I am not since a long time ago - not experienced any conflict in practice. With regards for the tendency of the newspaper, I can also say we feel as a bourgeois newspaper as an open newspaper vis-à-vis all modern and new trends. But with the subtitle newspaper for politics and Christian culture."

Also Clemens Bauer underlines the role of the two co-publishers of the RP with regards to being non-partisan. Based on their seniority the two publishers identify with the journalism and the nonpartisan role of the newspaper and support the editorial staff in securing it:

'There are even two representatives of two shareholder groups who are publishers: Dr. Gottfried Arnold and Dr. Esther Betz. They have been it for more than thirty years. Both are close to the editors and are close to journalism. In other words ... this is also one of the things I said earlier, the owners highly identify with the newspaper through journalism. It also happens because one wants to be proud of the newspaper, from the publishing side and it is important to them that the newspaper is not foreign. In large enterprises it can sometimes even happen that a publisher takes the newspaper in his hand and says that this not really my product. This is not the case here.

By pointing out the seniority and the identification with the newspaper also refers to the explicit non-partisan orientation of the RP. In their current guidelines they refer to impartiality and openness as principles guiding the company.

While the identity claim of being non-partisan is still important today, the motives behind this stance seem to have changed, at least to a certain extent. To the founders, the memory of the Weimar Republic years with a fragmented society being divided through religious, social and political barriers was still alive. Having a political orientation without being tied to a specific party was a means of creating bridges between different groups in society. In addition, political independence also meant increased freedom of action for RP. For today's publishers the latter motive of being non-partisan is still valid. They identify with the journalistic product and see political independence as a question of producing high-quality journalism. The problems of the

Weimar years, on the other hand seem to be overcome in German society and do not seem to play a role for RP's identity as a non-partisan newspaper any longer.

4.6.3   Rheinische Post – a regionally-anchored newspaper

The claim of Rheinische Post being a regionally-anchored newspaper was expressed in the title of RP from the very beginning. On the other hand the close connection to the Rhine region was so much taken for granted that the claim was not much elaborated on. It was in 1956, ten years after the founding of RP, that the three owner-publishers agreed on the first editorial guidelines restating the original ideological stance, but defining the role of RP in relation to the young federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia rather than in relation to post war recovery. Until 1956, Karl Arnold was also prime minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, meaning that the connection between RP and state politics was close at hand:

'Rheinische Post is a newspaper with a Christian democratic orientation for the urban and rural population in the Rhine and Ruhr area. It is not bound by the programme of any political party. In addition, being published in Düsseldorf the capital of the federal state, Rheinische Post has the task of particularly covering events and developments in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia with news and articles.' (as quoted in Betz, 1986)

The first part of this identity statement relates to its regional context. This regional context is of course also expressed by the title which refers to the Rhine. But this regional aspect which has been there from the beginning is still relevant today as the editor in chief for the print editions explains:

'So it's like that, people have very quickly become accustomed to reading national news, but they now want to know what happens in their neighborhood. That's a thing that has not yet conceded to the Internet, three, four, five years ago. Where it has been said, well then that's a different task. Now that is a task that you need to do and which we do gladly. Of course we can only do in cooperation with the city desk, because those are the people who know the issues on site.'

At the tenth anniversary publisher Anton Betz commented: *'Our Rheinische Post is one of the largest daily newspapers in West Germany and is in the advertising section at the top of the German newspapers.'*

So the focus has evolved based on the economic success. Already then the effect of RP had probably been bigger than North Rhine-Westphalia. As the geographic focus in terms of journalism might have been on North Rhine-Westphalia this has changed as Stephan Marzen explains:

'For one, literally, newspaper for politics, means or marks our claim that we are not only a pure regional newspaper, but also that we have a nationwide political claim, and which is essentially a political. So we, assured through the chief editor here and our editorial office in Berlin, that we feel very much the pulse of time what is happening politically on the federal level that we can sort this for our readers here and can break it down, what does it mean for the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, our circulation area. So this is a defining element.'

The current co-publisher and chairperson of the advisory board, Gottfried Arnold describes the regional and national impact accordingly:

"We attach great importance to the coverage of the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia. But an equally great emphasis on our well over 20 local editions that we have from the Dutch border to the upper mountainous land (Oberbergisches Land). And not only that, we also attach importance to the federal policy and international policy to inform our readers constantly. We do not rely on agencies and their messages. We maintain in our capital city Berlin our own editorial staff and with its own office and thereby want to achieve that we can do research ourselves and inform our readers fully."

4.6.4 Rheinische Post – a license newspaper

Against the background of the specific post-war circumstances, the claim of Rheinische Post being a license newspaper was a necessary condition for being able to launch the newspaper, yet as it was so obvious, it was not included in statements to the readers such as the first editorial. Once the license requirement was dropped and RP ceased being a license newspaper there were

no regrets about this change as it practically implied increased freedom without any license restrictions for RP. Being imposed by a stakeholder having coercive power, the license newspaper identity was never important for the founders or the readers in the sense that they perceived it as a major threat to other elements of identity when the license character was dropped.

4.6.5 Rheinische Post – a newspaper combining a journalistic and a business mission

In contrast to this the identity claim of Rheinische Post being a newspaper combining a journalistic and a business mission is still perceived as being highly relevant by owners and editors today. Interestingly, in retrospect they primarily refer to the journalistic aims of the founders when talking about RP's history. In contrast to this, the business aspects of RP's early years are seldom mentioned. In a retrospective view Karl Hans Arnold emphasizes the political aims of his grandfather Karl Arnold and associates. He conjures up the picture of the early RP being a newspaper that primarily aimed at promoting democracy where commercial aspects of running RP as a business venture had little relevance:

'The origin of the company was at that time, the reconstruction of democracy. The licensor was not thinking of a commercial company after the war in any way. The job was a reconstruction of a democracy. In the end the most then became business enterprises. Our ambition is to make good, responsible, high-quality journalism. But we are a commercial enterprise, and so far held to make money, generating profits to ensure that the company is viable. So if we follow the economic assumptions as well as any other company.'

This statement is interesting as the person was not born during the time and thus can only relate to it from stories within the organizational context. Moreover, it also illustrates the hybrid character as there is the normative aspect of high-quality journalism on the one hand side and the utilitarian aspect to generate profits. Following this statement one could get the impression that while the normative aspect was dominant at foundation, the identity of Rheinische Post has meanwhile very much shifted towards a utilitarian one. This is another form of reinterpreting the

existing identity claims and developing an interpretation that is in line with the current view RP has of itself. Likewise, Karl Hans Arnold emphasizes the necessity to follow the economic rationale which is according to him is in line with previous identity claims.

The shift from a primarily normative to a primarily utilitarian identity, maybe with certain remnants of the original values can however be questioned. While today's managing director who is also the grandson of one of the founders claims that there was no intention for a commercial company the literature suggests differently. In the founding license the term "Geschäftsunternehmen" (business venture) was used and the financial independence was emphasized as well (Hüffer, 1995). Nevertheless, it clearly indicates the different notions the business had to respond to. Hüffer (1995) argues that the British and American authorities were interested in that the newspaper should have a "watchdog" position towards the state which was in line with libertarian theory of the press. In order to be that a certain financial autonomy was deemed necessary. However it is also important to mention that the British and American authorities were oriented towards private ownership of the press and private persons as holders of licenses. Having this in mind, the founding identity of Rheinische Post was obviously not as normatively dominated as suggested by today's owners and managers. The business aspect in RP's identity was there from the beginning. One may argue that a shift in emphasis from normative to utilitarian aspects has occurred over time. The hybrid identity can however be observed over the entire history of the company.

A further indication that business aspects were important during the early years of RP can be found in the continuity of business principles over time. Economizing with resources is still today highly valued at RP and this attitude is often motivated with references to a strategic heritage from the founders. A member of the Droste family, Felix Droste, describes parsimony as a characteristic of the group:

'This changing of great parsimony and the quest for independence gives also rise to this funding strategy of the Rheinische Post. Self-financing, minimize debt. But then, what has been saved to re-invest…'

The owner manager Karl Hans Arnold puts it accordingly:

'…the owner is also aware of his responsibility, otherwise the capital is gone. And knowledge of each other, if you do it correctly and faces its responsibility, I believe, may well create stability in business and a different sense of belonging, as perhaps in publicly traded companies.'

RP exhibits a strong desire to remain financially independent. This is in a sense a characteristic that can be observed during the company's entire history, beginning prior to its actual foundation with the British authorities' emphasis on financially independent newspapers. Today, RP sees its strong equity base as a prerequisite for its independence both businesswise and with regard to its journalistic mission. Profits are re-invested in the firm and the equity rate is supposed to remain high. This responsibility is also emphasized in the internal communication. In the in-house magazine which is published 4 times a year and is supervised by the top management the managing director Clemens Bauer states that *'our shareholders leave the major part of the money that we earn in our house, in the company and thus have enabled the large future investments of the past at all.' (CB in Pressehaus 48, 2004).* Similarly the head of the finance department comments that *'Banks are always impressed as we have currently no outside capital.'* The owner's investment policy is based on an equity rate that should remain at least above 50%. This logic of financial and consequently also journalistic independence is a theme that has followed RP for more than 60 years. In the striving for independence the normative and utilitarian aspects of identity finally converge as the journalistic mission necessitates financial independence. Michael Hamerla puts it accordingly in the 60th anniversary edition:

'Therefore, did the new type of newspapers not belong to the parties, but were economically and politically independent. This framework proved in the case of the Rheinische Post as resilient, because it was driven by inner conviction, and represented steadfast in times of need.'

RP's stance to the heritage of its dual identity as a business venture and a normative organization thus includes an interesting paradox. On the one hand the business aspects of RP's early operations sometimes tend to fall into oblivion compared to the political mission of the newspaper at foundation. Owners and managers tend to depict the business orientation of the venture as an accomplishment of later generations of managers. Still, when explaining the high equity ratio and the desire for financial independence, RP's managers rationalize these characteristics with the heritage from the founders. Particularly when it comes to the hybrid identity of RP, today's owners and managers are very selective in their references to history and in their conception of RP's early identity. The need to legitimize action by reference to a historical heritage and the desire to emphasize the accomplishments of more recent generations of managers implies that the business aspects of RP's early identity are sometimes emphasized and sometimes forgotten.

5 Analysis

Having presented the case of Rheinische Post and having elaborated on the way how today's owners and managers refer to the firm's early identity, we will now analyze the formation and development of organizational identity. A special emphasis will be put on the self-understanding process before and during the actual foundation of the firm, as well as how organizational members look back on these periods in hindsight. Whereas previous literature on organizational identity typically deals with identity formation in established firms it mostly leaves out their pre-history, to use Sarason's (1972) concept. We argue that the period before and during foundation comprises critical phases in the organizational identity process of an organization.

5.1   Identity processes preceding the start-up

The RP case clearly demonstrates that identity processes start before the foundation of an organization. Building on the case, we can distinguish between the **general historical background** of the start-up that may cover several decades prior to foundation, and the actual **pre-foundation phase,** i.e. the period when the start-up was actually prepared*.*

The general historical background refers to the historical experience of the actors involved in the start-up of the new organization. As in the case of RP, it may comprise several decades, ranging from the time of the Weimar Republic with its failed attempt to establish democracy in Germany until the more recent experience of Nazi dictatorship. While there were not yet any ideas of during this period of starting-up Rheinische Post, the experiences the founding team made during the Weimar and Nazi years, deeply influenced the stances they took when eventually preparing the launching of RP and the identity they envisioned for the newspaper. This finding is well in line with the ideas of Schein (1983, 1985) as well as Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995), stating that the personal experiences of founders critically influence the initial choices they make for a new firm, the culture they strive to create and the strategic direction they go for. As the RP case shows, the influence of the founders' historical experience can be explicitly extended to comprise the formation of an organizational identity. To Arnold, Betz and von Gumppenberg it was an obvious conclusion from the experience of Nazi dictatorship that Germany needed a political and moral revival. In their opinion this had to build on democracy and Christian values which their newspaper was supposed to promote. While the distancing from the Nazis was obvious, the founders of RP also to some degree distanced themselves from the Weimar Republic style democracy. While advocating a democratic society, they wanted post-war Germany to be free from the shortcomings of Weimar, such as the particularianism between political, social, and religious groupings.

With the pre-foundation phase, we denote the period where actual activities for launching a venture are undertaken, starting with the initial idea and ending with the formal founding of the organization. Once the start-up preparation phase had begun, the group of licensees was formed and the founding process of RP could be initiated, the founders envisioned an identity for the newspaper that included the lessons they had learned from their own historical experience. Of course, the group was not fully self-selected but to a certain degree determined by the British authorities. Their newspaper was supposed to be based on Christian values, and take a Christian democratic stance while remaining non-partisan. The general historical background thus provided important input to the pre-foundation phase. In line with Stinchcombe's (1965) idea of imprinting, we argue that important features of the organization are shaped by founding conditions. These include conditions that apply to a certain societal setting in general, as for instance the license-newspaper form that was the only available organizational arrangement for a newspaper at the time. At the same time it is important to note that founding processes are agency-driven (Johnson, 2007). In line with more recent imprinting research (Boeker, 1989; Johnson, 2007), the RP case shows that founders and their personal backgrounds play an important role in shaping a young firm. From an organizational identity perspective this implies that during the pre-foundation phase the experiences and visions of the founders together with the expectations from important stakeholders start shaping the identity of the organization under creation.

The identity process preceding the foundation shows interesting parallels with the classical organizational identity, culture and image model by Hatch and Schultz (Hatch and Schultz 1997; Hatch and Schultz 2002). Whereas Hatch and Schultz see top management's role in mediating between the organizational identity in an established organization and the image external stakeholders have of the same organization, the team of founders in the RP case had to balance their own ideas and visions of RP's identity with the identity expectations put forward by key

stakeholders, such as the Christian democratic party and the British military government. In practice, the founders countered the stakeholders' identity expectations with identity claims for the not yet founded newspaper. The iterative process of identity claims put forward by the founders and identity expectations articulated by stakeholders could go through several rounds. In the RP case there was of course an important difference between the various stakeholders trying to influence the identity of the newspaper. While the British authorities had the power to sop the start-up of RP if the founders did not comply with their expectations, the founders' negotiation position as compared to the Christian Democratic Party was far better, allowing them to stick to their vision of a non-partisan newspaper.

During the ongoing identity formation process with identity claims by the founders and identity expectations put forward by stakeholders, the identity of the company was more and more narrowed down. The founders tested identity claims in relation to stakeholder expectations and waited for the stakeholders' reactions. Based on the reactions, the founders were able to modify, revise, drop, and justify identity claims until an identity had taken shape that was considered as viable in relation to the founders' visions and stakeholder expectations, taking into account the power and importance of different stakeholders. We would like to conceptualize this identity formation process as the formation of a *pre-identity*. Although there was yet no organization, the pre-identity taking shape was a viable template for an identity that the organization could assume at the actual start-up. While of course further identity changes were both possible and likely after the actual start-up, the pre-identity was tested and sufficiently comprehensive to become the organization's founding identity.

5.2 The identity process at the start-up

For the actual *foundation phase*, meaning the formal foundation of the organization and the time directly after the start-up, there was no need to create an organizational identity from scratch. The founders of RP could rather make the pre-identity into a formal *founding identity* of their

newspaper, communicating it to their readers in a first formal identity statement. These gave the organizational identity statement a certain stability or enduring character as Albert and Whetten (1985) suggest. What was probably even more stabilizing than the comprehensive identity statement in the editorial, were those claims that were to be reiterated in each issue through their inclusion in the title and the subtitle. Yet, as the RP case once again confirms, identity consists of language and meanings (Corley and Gioia 2004; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000), meaning that claims are always subject to interpretations which may change over time.

Even though early identity claims can be stabilized by writing them down, reiterating them and formally announcing them to stakeholders, this does not mean that the identity process comes to a halt. As we have discussed, identity claims are context specific and as the context changes, so do the stakeholders' identity expectations. This means that also identity claims may need to be revised if the organization wants to avoid what Hatch and Schultz (2002) label organizational narcissism. The licensing period until 1949 was still uncertain as for instance Vogel, one of the original licensees left to start his own project. Moreover, was the newspaper restricted by scarce resources and an allocated distribution area. Also did the British authorities censor the newspaper. An important context change came in 1949 when the license requirement was dropped and RP's claim of being a license newspaper became obsolete. As this claim had been driven by external stakeholder expectations rather than the founders' vision for the newspaper, this change did not significantly affect any other elements of RP's identity.

5.3   The founding identity in retrospect

More than 60 years have passed since the foundation of RP. Nevertheless, owners as well as managers still relate back to the history of the newspaper's foundation and the founding identity of RP. The overall context the newspaper needs to relate to has of course changed a lot. The post-war era is over, Germany has established a stable democracy and neither a repetition of the Weimar Republic troubles nor of Nazi dictatorship appear as serious threats. It is nevertheless

interesting to observe that most of the claims per se did survive and thereby indeed became enduring. Owner-managers and externally hired managers try to relate to a historical heritage from the firm and its founders, dating back to the pre-identity and founding identity of Rheinische Post. Certain elements of the founding identity are picked up and used as examples for contemporary management, for instance the ideals of financial independence and parsimony, the claim of being rooted in Christian values and the idea of being a Christian democratic, but yet politically independent newspaper. Still, as we know from previous research reference to history is selective (Schulze, 1987) and managers can purposefully create continuities and discontinuities with historical events in order to promote or to stop certain strategic developments. As the work of Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000), Chreim (2005) and Brunninge and Melin (2009) demonstrates, managers often conjure up a picture of continuity with the past by using historical labels that however conceal changed meanings.

The treatment of RP's identity claim of being a Christian newspaper is particularly interesting. As previous literature suggests (Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000; Corley and Gioia, 2004), identity consists of both language and meaning that are not necessarily equally stable. Apparently, RP was always keen on clarifying that they were not a party newspaper. The slight revision of the subtitle that was made, further clarified this stance by stating that RP was a newspaper for politics and Christian culture. It was now clear that RP did not claim to represent Christian politics, which could easily have been confused with the political stance of the Christian Democratic Party. This observation complements findings in previous research, suggesting that formal claims or labels may stay unchanged while the meanings associated with them change (Chreim, 2005; Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000). The situation in RP's identity process was exactly the other way round as the formal claim was revised in order to keep the associated meaning, i.e. the non-partisan identity of RP stable.

One further aspect about the revision of RP's subtitle is striking. Today's managers substantially exaggerate the change claiming that it has changed from 'Newspaper for Christian politics and culture' (the original subtitle was actually 'Newspaper for Christian culture and politics') to 'Newspaper for politics and Christian culture'. The supposedly 'original' identity claim that exists in the stories told by today's management contains a very strong emphasis on the Christian character of politics. The actual subtitle was much more neutral, leaving room for interpretation whether the attribute 'Christian' only referred to culture or also to politics. By claiming (and probably honestly believeing) that the identity-statement has been strongly modified, the managers of RP overemphasize their own ability to manage the identity process of the company. In contrast to Gioia, Schultz and Corley's (2000) finding of stable labels concealing changes in meaning, here the change in labels is even exaggerated in order to depict managers as guardians of RP's non-partisan identity.

With respect to RP's dual identity combining a journalistic and a business mission, today's managers are keen to emphasize change rather than stability. In their retrospective stories about the newspaper, RP was was initially dominated by a normative identity where business aspects only played a very minor role. Also this picture of history needs to be questioned when being critically scrutinized. Business aspects were part of RP's identity from the beginning and their importance to the founding identity was far bigger than today's managers admit.

Overall, the managers at RP both construct continuities and discontinuities with the firm's founding identity and the identity claims that were made early during the firm's history. By doing so, they on the one hand create the picture of a continuous development and the newspaper still being faithful to the heritage and the values of the founders. On the other hand today's managers are also eager to show that RP is a modern company that is not stuck in old patterns. The founding identity thus continues to be important in the post-foundation identity process of the company. However, new actors in the organization reinterpret and re-contextualize the founding

identity in order to maintain a balance between the culturally embedded values expressed by identity claims (cf. Hatch and Schultz, 2002) and the changing context with changing identity expectations meeting the company.

Thus, identity claims cannot be viewed separately. There is rather a close relation between them. The fact that associated meaning of identity claims change over time might be seen as a consequence of new people who are involved. However, the relative endurance (Whetten, 2006) of the founding claims, even though slightly altered and modified in its meanings, shows the importance of the foundation for an organization's identity. Moreover, as Schein (1983) and others have suggested in the family business literature, the founder/s in particular are inducing values and even set an imprint on the organization. As the case of RP shows this is also valid for an organization's identity. When, as in the case of RP, founding families remain in control of the organization over generations it helps to maintain founding identity claims. At the same time, as imprinting is an agency-driven process (Johnson, 2007) and hence also founders and external stakeholders leave their imprints on the organizational identity of the emerging organization by making identity claims or by voicing their expectations. It is then a choice for following generations to accept or reject these claims when they are in charge.

6   Conclusions

In the present paper we advocate moving towards a more historically contextualized view of identity processes. The historical context is critical for understanding organizational processes in general (Pettigrew, 1990, 1997) and, based on our findings from Rheinische Post, we argue that the historical contextualization of identity process studies needs to be enhanced. While there are already some examples of excellent identity process studies, covering extended periods of time (e.g. Bartunek, 1984; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006), we propose going one step further including the foundation and the pre-history of organizations in studies of organizational identity. As the RP case shows, important aspects of a company's founding identity are shaped prior to the formal

foundation and sometimes going far back into the personal histories of founders may help us understand how an organization's identity initially came about. This is again important to know as the founding identity of a company may retain its significance for the identity process over very long periods of time.

Dividing processes into distinct phases is always problematic as drawing demarcation lines between phases may exaggerate the change occurring when the process shifts from one phase to the other. However, we find it meaningful to distinguish between the pre-foundation phase before the actual start-up and the foundation phase that begins once the organization has been formally created. The notion of the pre-foundation phase helps us understand that the identity process of an organization starts prior to the firm's formal existence. It includes important claims about the envisioned identity, expectations put forward by stakeholders and choices resulting in the formation of a pre-identity. This pre-identity may to a large extent foreshadow what the organization's identity will be like once it is formally founded. With the start of the foundation phase, actors can then make the first legitimate identity claims on behalf of the new organization. While these will still be confronted with changing expectations from stakeholders, many of them have already been tested during the pre-foundation phase, making them more likely to survive. This implies that the pre-foundation phase of the identity process can be more dynamic than the foundation phase, provided that the pre-identity is already sufficiently negotiated to be accepted by both internal and external stakeholders. Of course, changing contexts and changing opinions inside the organization mean that identity claims need to be continuously readapted and recontextualized. Yet, the founding identity is likely to retain its significance as the organization needs to retain at least a perceived continuity with its original founding identity (Brewer 1991; Brewer 2003).

Under closer scrutiny, the activities during the identity process prior to and after the formal incorporation of the organization do not differ very much. Drawing upon Hatch and Schultz's

work on organizational identity processes (Hatch and Schultz 1997; 2002), we argue that identity processes unfold during the interaction of internal desires of the organization's identity and external identity expectations. Hatch and Schultz (2002) argue that organizational identity needs to be theorized in relation to organizational culture, i.e. a phenomenon internal to the organization, and organizational image, relating to the organization's external context. Prior to the start-up, there is not yet an organizational culture that can be expressed through identity. Yet there are ideas and visions held by the founders that are imprinted on the organization in becoming and that are expressed in the pre-identity that takes shape. During this process the pre-identity is negotiated in an iterative process of founders making claims about the envisioned and various stakeholders expressing their identity expectations. This iterative process goes on after the firm is formally founded and actors make the first identity claims on behalf of the organization. Founders need to balance their own visions about identity with the expectations of stakeholders. As Hatch and Schultz (1997) have shown, the same is true for managers once the start-up has occurred and the identity process is driven by dynamic interaction of the organization's culture and the image held by external audiences.

The founding identity that is manifested in early identity claims remains significant for the organization's identity process over a long time. Managers need to cope with situations where new and revised identity claims are compared to the founding identity. Perceived discrepancies need to be rationalized and explained. At the same time, continuities and discontinuities from old to new identity claims can provide strategic initiatives with momentum (Brunninge, 2009), by making managers appear as guardians of a successful historical heritage or as renewers adapting organizational identity to changing contexts. As Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) as well as Corley and Gioia (2004) suggest, the difference between language and meaning in identity claims provides opportunities for reinterpreting founding identities and thus bringing more flexibility to the identity process. Our study shows that the options for flexibility are even bigger than

suggested by previous research (Chreim, 2005; Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000) as not only meaning can change concealed by a stable language, but also language can be adapted to stabilize meanings. Consciousness of the significance of founding identities is thus an interesting input both to organizational identity research and to management practice.

6.1 Suggestions for future research

Since identity processes around the foundation of companies have not been much studied so far, our study of RP can of course only be one limited step in advancing our knowledge of such processes. Additional studies are still needed. With the following suggestions for future research we want to specifically point at two areas where our own study has limitations.

One of the main points we are making in this paper is the need to study identity processes in their historical context. By definition each historical context is unique and this sets certain limitations to our study. While we believe that it is possible to make theoretical generalizations from single cases (Yin, 1989), studying additional cases in different contexts can certainly further enhance our understanding of identity processes around the foundation of companies. With RP, we have deliberately chosen an extreme case, where the specific context of post-war Germany promised interesting identity dynamics. Being a media firm, RP's start-up of course created more public attention than newly founded firms in many other industries. Studying start-ups in different historical contexts and from different industries will however permit to investigate aspects of identity processes that were not visible in the RP case.

The case of Rheinische Post has provided us with the opportunity to historically study a start-up process of an organization as well as the retrospective view organizational members have on the founding of their organization several decades later. The ability of both studying RP as a start-up and as a mature firm has to be weighed against the limitation that we had to rely on archival data, secondary sources, and retrospective interviews for studying the start-up. While we believe that the data we had at our disposal had high quality, a real-time study of a start-up would of course

provide much more detailed information on the start-up process in general and could in addition specifically focus on identity formation aspects. We therefore encourage real-time studies of ongoing start-up processes.

In light of the apparent link between the foundation and its organizational identity we suggest studies that look at cases where ownership has changed during the life-cycle of the organization. Walsh and Glynn (2008) have suggested that there exists a legacy organizational identity. Accordingly, employees refer to "who we were as an organization". The foundation of an organization can also be seen as a legacy even though an organization did not profoundly change in its existence but is rather vital. This seems to be very important for family businesses (Athanassiou, Crittenden, Kelly, and Marquez 2002).

Of course the highlighting of founders as well as of pre-foundation and foundation processes is relevant not only to organizational identity studies. Process organization studies in general may benefit from more attention to the early stages of an organization's life cycle. There is interesting existing research on founders as well as on imprinting that we have presented in this paper, yet the subject is far from exhaustively treated. We therefore encourage process scholars to go back to the foundation and pre-foundation history of the organizations they study.

6.2 Implications for management practice

For managers and owners of organizations the case of RP eventually delivers a couple of relevant learnings. A manager, especially if she is externally appointed, needs to be aware of the organizational foundation. During this period an identity might have been established which is not easily visible for outsiders. This holds especially, when the organizational foundation lies way back in the past and the actual people involved might not be around any longer. However, relating to what can be reasonably framed as founding identity claims can help to gain legitimacy for instance in change processes. Then the organizational formation can offer a rich reservoir of claims that can be revitalized, rejuvenated or otherwise modified. Owners and managers of

businesses who are interested in leaving the organizations should also be aware that they might still be associated with the organization when they not any longer around. This can also be relevant when ownership is transferred. A family business that is taken over by another business will not necessarily lose all the attachments with the founding family even though ownership is transferred.

7   References

Albert, Stuart and David A. Whetten. 1985. "Organizational Identity." Pp. 263-295 in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, vol. 8, edited by L. L. Cummings and B. M. Staw. Greenwich, CT, USA: JAI Press.

Alsos, G.A. and L. Kolvereid. 1998. "The Business Gestation process of Novice, Serial and Parallel Business Founders." *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* 23:101-114.

Alvesson, Mats. 1990. "Organization: From Substance to Image?" *Organization Studies* 11:373-394.

Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Sköldberg. 2000. *Reflexive Methodology New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Ashforth, BE and FA Mael. 1996. "Oranizational Identity and Strategy as a Context for the Individual." *Advances in strategic management* 13:19-64.

Athanassiou, Nicholas, William F. Crittenden, Louise M. Kelly, and Pedro Marquez. 2002. "Founder centrality effects on the Mexican family firm's top management group: firm culture, strategic vision and goals, and firm performance." *Journal of World Business* 37:139-150.

Bartunek, JM. 1984. "Changing interpretive schemes and organizational restructuring: The example of a religious order." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29:355-372.

Betz, Esther. 1963. "Düsseldorfer Zeitungen 1945-1949. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Presse nach dem Kriege." Pp. 65-98 in *Festschrift für Anton Betz*, edited by K. Bringmann, M. Nitzsche, and F. Ramjoué. Düsseldorf.

—. 1986. "Zwischen Idee und Wirklichkeit. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Rheinischen Post." Pp. 226-242 in *1946. Neuanfang: Leben in Düsseldorf/2. März-14. September 1986, Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf*. Düsseldorf.

Blomback, A and O Brunninge. 2009. "Corporate identity manifested through historical references." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 14:404-419.

Boeker, W. 1989. "Strategic change: The effects of founding and history." *Academy of Management Journal* 32:489-515.

Bouchikhi, Hamid and John R. Kimberly. 1996. "The nature and dynamics of organizational identity." in *INSEAD Conference on Organizations in the Marketplace*.

Brewer, MB. 1991. "The social self: On being the same and different at the same time." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 17:475.

—. 2003. "Optimal distinctiveness, social identity, and the self." *Handbook of self and identity*:480–491.

Brunninge, O and A Melander. 2010. "Familiness and Entrepreneurship in the Context of a Mature Industry: The Rise and Fall of an Entrepreneurial Family Firm. MoDo 1872-1990."

Brunninge, O., J. Helin, and B. Kjellander. 2009. "Corporate Museums, Memoralization and Organizational Memory." in *25th EGOS Colloquium*. Barcelona.

Brunninge, O. and L. Melin. 2009. "Continuity in Change: Path dependence and Transformation in Two Swedish Multinationals." Pp. 94-109 in *The Hidden Dynamics of Path Dependence. Institutions and Organizations*, edited by G. a. S. Schreyögg, J. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Brunninge, Olof. 2005. *Organisational self-understanding and the strategy process - Strategy dynamics on Scania and Handelsbanken*, Edited by J. I. B. School. Jönköping: JIBS Dissertation Series No. 27.

—. 2009. "Using history in organizations How managers make purposeful reference to history in strategy processes." *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 22:8-26.

Carden, M.S., C. Zietsma, P. Saparito, B.P. Matherne, and C. Davis. 2005. "A tale of passion: New insights into entrepreneurship from a parenthood metaphor." *Journal of Business Venturing* 20:23-45.

Casey, A. . 1997. "Collective memory in organizations." *Advances in Strategic Management* 14:111-51.

Child, J. . 1972. "Organizational, Structure, Environment and Performance. The Role of Strategic Choice." *Sociology* 6:1-22.

Chreim, Samia. 2005. "The Continuity-Change Duality in Narrative Texts of Organizational Identity*." *Journal of Management Studies* 42:567-593.

Corley, Kevin G. and Dennis A. Gioia. 2004. "Identity Ambiguity and Change in the Wake of a Corporate Spin-Off." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 49:173-208.

Corley, Kevin G., Celia V. Harquail, Michael G. Pratt, Mary Ann Glynn, C. Marlene Fiol, and Mary Jo Hatch. 2006. "Guiding Organizational Identity Through Aged Adolescence." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15:85-99.

Dutton, Jane E. and Janet M. Dukerich. 1991. "Keeping an Eye on the Mirror: Image and Identity in Organizational Adaptation." *The Academy of Management Journal* 34:517-554.

Dyer, W. Gibb, Jr. and Alan L. Wilkins. 1991. "Better Stories, Not Better Constructs, to Generate Better Theory: A Rejoinder to Eisenhardt." *The Academy of Management Review* 16:613-619.

Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. 1989. "Building Theories from Case Study Research." *The Academy of Management Review* 14:532-550.

Elsbach, Kimberly D. and Roderick M. Kramer. 1996. "Members' Responses to Organizational Identity Threats: Encountering and Countering the Business Week Rankings." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41:442-476.

Ericson, Mona 2006. "Exploring the future exploiting the past." *Journal of Management History* 12:121.

Fischer, Heinz Dietrich. 1971. *Parteien und Presse in Deutschland seit 1945*: Schünemann Universitätsverlag.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 12:219-245.

Foster, W., R. Suddaby, and E.M. Wiebe. 2009. "Organizational History and Tradition: Can it be a Source of Competitive Advantage?" in *25th EGOS Colloquium*. Barcelona.

Gagliardi, P. 1986. "The creation and change of organizational cultures: A conceptual framework." *Organization Studies* 7:117.

Garvi, Miriam. 2007. *Venture Capital for the Future Implications of Founding Visions in the Venture Capital Setting*, Edited by J. I. B. S. (JIBS). Jönköping, Sweden: Jönköping International Business School: JIBS Dissertation Series No. 39.

Gioia, Dennis A., Hamid Bouchiki, C. Marlene Fiol, Karen Golden-Biddle, Mary Jo Hatch, Hayagreeva Rao, Violina Rindova, Majken Schultz, Charles J. Fombrun, John R. Kimberly, and James B Thomas. 1998. "The Identity of Organizations." Pp. 33-80 in *Identity in Organizations*, edited by D. A. Whetten and P. C. Godfrey. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications.

Gioia, Dennis A., Majken Schultz, and Kevin G. Corley. 2000. "Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability." *The Academy of Management Review* 25:63-81.

Gioia, Dennis A. and James B. Thomas. 1996. "Identity, Image, and Issue Interpretation: Sensemaking during Strategic Change in Academia." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41:370-403.

Glynn, Mary Ann. 2000. "When Cymbals Become Symbols: Conflict Over Organizational Identity Within a Symphony Orchestra." *Organization Science* 11:285.

Golden-Biddle, Karen and Karen Locke. 1997. *Composing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Habbershon, Timothy G. and Joseph Pistrui. 2002. "Enterprising Families Domain: Family-Influenced Ownership Groups in Pursuit of Transgenerational Wealth." *Family Business Review* 15:223-237.

Hallin, Daniel C. and Paolo Mancini. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Harquail, C.V. . 2007. "Practice and identity. Using a brand symbol to construct organizational identity " in *Organizational Identity in Practice*, edited by L. Lerpold, D. Ravasi, J. van Rekom, and G. Soenen. London: Routledge.

Hatch, Mary Jo. 2005. "Organizational Identity." Pp. 160 in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management: Organizational Behavior*, edited by N. Nicholson, M. Pillutla, and P. Audia.

Hatch, Mary Jo and Majken Schultz. 1997. "Relations between organizational culutre, identity and image." *European Journal of Marketing* 31:356-365.

—. 2002. "The dynamics of organizational identity." *Human Relations* 55:989-1018.

Hüffer, Jürgen Benedikt 1995. *Vom Lizenzpressesystem zur Wettbewerbspresse. Lizenzverleger und Altverleger im Rheinland und in Westfalen 1945-1953/54*. München: K G Saur.

Hüwel, D. 1980. *Karl Arnold Eine politische Biographie*. Wuppertal.

Johnson, V. . 2007. "What is Organizational Imprinting? Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Founding of the Paris Opera." *American Journal of Sociology* 113:97-127.

Kelly, Louise M., Nicholas Athanassiou, and William F. Crittenden. 2000. "Founder Centrality and Strategic Behavior in the Family-Owned Firm." *Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice* 25:27-42.

Kimberly, John R. and Hamid Bouchikhi. 1995. "The Dynamics of Organizational Development and Change: How the Past Shapes the Present and Constrains the Future." *Organization Science* 6:9-18.

Kjærgaard, A., M. Morsing, and D. Ravasi. 2010. "Mediating Identity: A Study of Media Influence on Organizational Indentity Costruction in a Celebrity Firm." *Journal of Management Studies*:no-no.

Lerpold, L., D. Ravasi, J. Van Rekom, and G. Soenen. 2007. *Organizational Identity in Practice*. London: Routledge Publishing.

Mead, G.H. . 1934. *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

N.N. 1948. "Wenn ich weg bin." Pp. 3-4 in *DER SPIEGEL*. Hamburg.

Nelson, T. . 2003. "The Persistence of Founder Influence: Management, Ownership and Performance Effects at Initial Public Offering." *Strategic Management Journal* 24:707-724.

Nissley, N. and A. Casey. 2002. "The politics of the exhibition: viewing corporate museums through the paradigmatic lens of organizational memory." *British Journal of Management* 13:S35-S45.

Pettigrew, AM. 1997. "What is a processual analysis." *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 13:337-348.

Pettigrew, Andrew M. 1990. "Longitudinal Field Research on Change: Theory and Practice." *Organization Science* 1:267-292.

Pratt, M.G. and M.S. Kraatz. 2009. "E pluribus unum: multiple identities and the organization self." Pp. 377-402 in *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations*, edited by L. M. Roberts and J. E. Duton. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Ravasi, Davide and Majken Schultz. 2006. "RESPONDING TO ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY THREATS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE." *Academy of Management Journal* 49:433-458.

Reger, R.K., L.T. Gustafson, S.M. Demaire, and J.V. Mullane. 1994. "Reframing the Organization: Why Implementing Total Quality Management is Easier Said Than Done." *Academy of Management Review* 19:565-584.

Rowlinson, M and J Hassard. 1993. "The invention of corporate culture: A history of the histories of Cadbury." *Human Relations* 46:299.

Sarason, S.B. . 1972. *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, Edgar H. 1983. "The role of the founder in creating organizational culture." *Organizational Dynamics* 12:13-28.

—. 1985. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Fancisco: Jossey-Bass.

—. 2004. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Scholder, K. . 1977. *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich Bd 1: Vorgeschichte und Illusionen*. Berlin: Propyläen.

Schulze, H. 1987. *Wir sind was wir geworden sind*. München: Piper.

Scott, Susanne G. and Vicki R. Lane. 2000. "A Stakeholder Approach to Organizational Identity." *The Academy of Management Review* 25:43-62.

Shepherd, Dean and J. Michael Haynie. 2009. "Birds of a feather don't always flock together: Identity management in entrepreneurship." *Journal of Business Venturing* 24:316-337.

Soenen, Guillaume and Bertrand Moingeon. 2002. "The five facets of organizational identies: Integrating corporate and organizational identity." Pp. 13-34 in *Corporate and Organizational Identities*, edited by B. Moingeon and G. Soenen. London and New York: Routledge.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1965. "Social structure and organizations." *Advances in Strategic Management* 17:229-259.

Walsh, IJ and MA Glynn. 2008. "The Way We Were: Legacy Organizational Identity and the Role of Leadership." *Corporate Reputation Review* 11:262-276.

van Rekom, Johan and Cees B. M. van Riel. 2000. "Operational Measures of Organizational Identity: A Review of Exisitng Methods." *Corporate Reputation Review* 3:334-350.

Van Riel, CBM. 1995. *Principles of Corporate Communication*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Whetten, David A. 2006. "Albert and Whetten Revisited: Strengthening the Concept of Organizational Identity." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15:219-234.

Whetten, David A. and Alison Mackey. 2002. "A Social Actor Conception of Organizational Identity and Its Implications for the Study of Organizational Reputation." *Business Society* 41:393-414.

Appendix 1: Complete list of interviews

Name/abbreviation	Position	When	Where	Themes discussed
Patrick Ludwig (PL)	Managing director RBVG	11.12.2008, 10.2.2009, 13.2.2009, 26.3.2009	His office, cantina, on the floor	General access, OI, history of MRP
Dr. Karl Hans Arnold (KHA)	Managing director RBVG, designated chief md, 3rd generation owner	10.02.2009	His office	Role as owner, impact on OI
Christian Witt (CW)	Trainee RBVG	11.2.2009	His colleague's office	OI view as newcomer
Katrin Händeler (KH)	Trainee RBVG	11.2.2009	At her department meeting room	OI view as newcomer
Timm Weißmann (TW)	Trainee RBVG	11.2.09	At my guest office	OI view as newcomer
Sandra Hoppe (SH)	Trainee RBVG	11.2.09	At my guest office	OI view as newcomer
Horst Wendland (HW)	Head of finance department	12.2.09	His office	OI, impact of owners on business
Kurt Pfeiffer (KP)	Head of organization and methods	12.2.09	His office	OI, OI-work, Czech investment
Gerhard List (GL)	Head Controlling	12.2.09	His office	OI, OI-work, Czech-investment
Volker Kaufels (VK)	Personnel director	12.2.09	Guest office	OI, OI-work,
Stephan Marzen (SM)	Head holding management	13.2.09	Guest office	OI, activities abroad
Clemens Bauer (CB)	Chief managing director	13.2.09	His office	OI, relationship with shareholders
Matthias Tietz (MT)	Head printing shop	13.2.09	His office	OI, relation between printing unit and other units
Sven Gösmann (SG)	Editor in chief RP	13.2.09	His office	OI in relation

				to newspaper
Dr Esther Betz (EB)	Publisher and shareholder (2nd generation)	23.3.09	Guest office	OI, ownership, publisher, Christian heritage
Dr. Gottfried Arnold (GA)	Publisher, chairman of the board, 2nd generation owner	23.3.09	His office	Relationship to other owners, son as executive
Dr. Manfred Droste (MD)	2nd generation shareholder	23.3.09	His office Schadow Arkaden	OI, Relations to other shareholders
Felix Droste (FD)	3rd generation shareholder	23.3.09 (not planned, spontaneous)	His office Schadow Arkaden	OI, ownership
Wolfram Goertz (WG)	Editor culture RP	24.3.09	Guest office	OI, implications of Christian heritage on news-work
Irene Wenderoth-Alt (IWA)and daughter Elisabeth Alt (EA)	2nd and 3rd generation shareholder	24.3.09	Their living room (Jüchen)	OI, ownership
Matthias Tietz (MT), Bernd Twellmeyer (BT)	MD priniting shop, head rotation,	25.3.09	(visiting printing shop)	Update, investments in printing unit
Dr. Ridder (DR)	Member of the board, external but appointed by Wenderoth-Alt	25.3.09	Guest office	Board-work
Lutz Rensch (LR)	Deputy head of advertising	25.3.09	His office	OI, cooperation with editorial
Dr. Rainer Kurleman (RK)	Editor in chief RP-Online	26.3.09	His office	OI, print vs. online
Horst Thoren (HT)	Deputy editor in chief RP	26.3.09	His office	OI, editorial work, Christian heritage, cooperation with online
Martin Bewerunge	Chief of service RP	26.3.09	Thoren's office	OI, Christian heritage, cooperation with online
Franz Leo Mai (FLM)	Work council member			OI, role of union

Roman Latuske (RL)	Member of the board mafra	4.5.09	His office, Prague	OI and relation to headquarter
Roman Breitenfelner (RB)	Member of the board mafra	4.5.09	His office, Prague	OI and relation to headquarter
Michal Hanák (MH)	Editor in chief idnes.cz	4.5.09	His office, Prague	OI and impact on newspaper
Robert Čásenský (RC)	Editor in chief Mladá fronta Dnes	4.5.09	Michal's office, Prague	OI and impact on newspaper

Figure 1: Timeline from license application to first issue

| October 26, 1945: application for admission of Rheinische Post | November 14, 1945: elmination of von Gumppenberg as licensee due to his occupation in the press office | January 1946: application approved and March 1, 1946 as release date | February 26, 1946: oficial distribution of licenses for 8 newspaper among other Rheinische Post | March 2, 1946, Rheinische Post first issue published. It is published twice a week until 1948. From June 1948 until Spetember 1949 3 issues per week. From September 1949 6 issues per week. |