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Abstract

Purpose – Multi-supplier project networks represent a large part of the business-to-business sector as the scope of many projects requires that different providers participate in their development and delivery. This raises the question of how the integration of the resources of the various partners can be shaped successfully.

Specifically, the different organizational identities provide institutional frames of reference to the resource-integrating firms. As the organizational identities are typically not harmonious with each other, at least partial misalignments of the institutional setting that shapes the resource integration processes may emerge.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper makes use of interpretive phenomenology in conjunction with a qualitative case study approach to access the lived experience of actors of different professional service firms having experienced changes in resource integration in a business-to-business project network.

Findings – A conceptualization of organizational identity as institutional context for resource integration is developed and empirically investigated. The findings show a strong impact on the firms' organizational identities and the actors' resource integration experience and evaluation. Moreover, the findings provide evidence that, if unmanaged, an at least partial misalignment of the institutional arrangements of multi-organizational business-to-business project network represents a normal and also stable condition.

Originality/value – As a first conceptualization and empirical analysis of the interplay between organizational identity and resource integration, this paper advances the current understanding of the institutional context for resource integration. It argues for the wider relevance of organizational identity constructs and paves the way for future development.

Keywords: Organizational identity, resource integration, institutional context, institutional misalignment, project networks

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Introduction

Project networks, in which multiple supplier firms engage in the development and delivery of a customer project, represent a large part of the business-to-business (B2B) sector, like in management consulting, marketing services, and IT (Ahola, 2009, Artto and Kujala, 2008, Artto and Wikström, 2005). Such project networks typically emerge, when the outcome a customer seeks to achieve with a project cannot be realized by one supplier alone due to a lack of the necessary quantity and/or quality of resources. Consequently, in the course of such projects, it is necessary for the involved suppliers to integrate their various resources in order to obtain the desired result (Marcos-Cuevas *et al.*, 2016, Pera *et al.*, 2016, Löbner, 2013, Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016, Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). This resource integration comprises the deployment, combination and exchange of resources a firm has directly or indirectly access to with other companies involved (Lippman and Rumelt, 2003, Moran and Ghoshal, 1999, Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

As all resource integrating activities comprise some sort of collaboration of the specific actors (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018), resource integration is not possible without coordinating the behaviors of the specific actors involved. In social systems in general, coordination is achieved by institutions as “a set of rules” (North, 1990, p. 70) comprising “regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements” (Scott, 2013, p. 56). In project networks, the organizational identities of the suppliers that built the specific network represent important parts of the respective institutional setting that shapes the behavior of the project partners. Such an organizational identity represents a self-referential concept defined by the organizational members (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2016, Gioia and Hamilton, 2016), which reflects the answer to the question “Who are we, as an organization?” (Albert and Whetten, 1985, p. 264). The norms, values and taken-for-granted assumptions that make up such organizational identities, thus govern the behaviors of the members of the respective firms (Besharov and Brickson, 2016, Phillips *et al.*, 2016).

However, as the organizational identities of the various members of a project network typically differ, institutional misalignments (Karpen and Kleinaltenkamp, 2018) or institutional dissonance (Chandler *et al.*, 2019) may occur leading to conflicts and tensions that may endanger or delay the success of the project. To contribute to the avoidance of such deficiencies and as the mechanism and consequences of institutional misalignments have only been discussed conceptually so far, the purpose of this paper is to empirically investigate the impact of various organizational identities on the course and outcome of resource integration in project networks.

This paper is organized as follows: In the following section, the concept of resource integration is outlined and linked to the concepts of institutional elements and organizational identity, especially in the context of project networks. This is followed by a description of the methodology and of the investigated case and the different organizational actor groups

involved. Thereafter, the findings of the analysis are presented. The final sections of the paper present the resulting conceptual framework and discuss the theoretical contributions as well as the implications of the study for research and practice.

Resource integration and its institutional context in project networks

In project networks, the different project partners integrate various tangible as well as intangible resources (e.g. physical resources, knowledge, software etc.) in order to achieve the outcome the project customer desires. Resource integration is thus the key mechanism to create value (Caridà *et al.*, 2015, Edvardsson *et al.*, 2014, Edvardsson *et al.*, 2012, Kleinaltenkamp *et al.*, 2012, Peters *et al.*, 2014, Lusch and Vargo, 2014, Findsrud *et al.*, 2016), both for the customer of the project as well as for the suppliers that are the members of the specific project network.

The evaluation of the respective resources as well as the behaviors of the resource-integrating actors is governed by various regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive institutional elements (Scott, 2014) that built the context of the specific resource integration processes (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2014). While regulative institutional elements comprise rules, laws, and sanctions, the normative elements consist of norms and values that constitute standards to which existing behaviour or structures can be compared and evaluated. The cultural-cognitive institutional elements encompass the beliefs, opinions, and ideas that individuals hold and take for granted (Scott, 2014).

Encompassing the norms, values and taken-for-granted assumptions of the respective firms, the organizational identities of the project partners represent an important part of the institutional setting of project networks. As such, organizational identities do not only provide appropriateness of behavior (Glynn, 2017, Besharov and Brickson, 2016, Cornelissen *et al.*, 2016), they also reveal those behaviors that violate the expectations or question the beliefs of the organizational members about their organization. Consequently, such behaviors are most often seen as organizational identity threats (Petriglieri and Devine, 2016) that may lead to conflicts and dysfunction (Anthony and Tripsas, 2016).

Method

To analyze the interplay of resource integration and organizational identities in a project network, an in-depth case study was conducted in conjunction with interpretive phenomenology consisting of an ongoing interpretative process of participation, conversation and dialogue, known as the hermeneutic circle (Horrigan-Kelly *et al.*, 2016, Conroy, 2003).

The empirical data for this study was collected from a multi-vendor project consisting of four professional service firms (PSF) that were in charge of developing the digital infrastructure for all customer touchpoints of a German Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) in the automotive industry. (A) PSF Iota is an Internet agency with approximately 250 employees and

part of a worldwide agency network. The tasks of PSF Iota comprised the conception and development of the frontend of the client's website, including the development of website content. (B) PSF Gamma is an Internet agency with approximately 90 employees and part of a European agency network. The tasks of PSF Gamma are similar to PSF Iota. (C) PSF Alpha is a provider of IT consulting and system integration that is the subsidiary of a worldwide operating company with approximately 1,000 employees. PSF Alpha's tasks comprise all IT-related concepts and developments. (D) PSF Tau is also a provider of IT consulting and system integration with approximately 200 employees. The tasks of PSF Tau are similar to PSF Alpha.

Following the hermeneutic circle of interpretive phenomenology, this study uses four methods of data collection: (1) participant observation, (2) in-depth interviews, (3) member check group interviews inside the case, and (4) expert focus groups outside the case. In detail, data collection consisted of (1) one of the authors' participation in the investigated service ecosystem over a period of two years; (2) in total, 23 interviews of informants of the different PSFs, covering all hierarchical levels (four senior management, seven middle management, and twelve staff level); (3) member checking both as means for accuracy and as a reflexive process (Cho and Trent, 2006, Koelsch, 2013, Doyle, 2007); (4) conducting of four focus groups with PSF actors from the same industries (internet agencies, IT consulting, and system integrators) with no connection to the case.

Findings

Resource Integration Modes

Applying the perspective of the three institutional pillars to the specific project network, the contractual policies and the working instructions set by the project customer could be identified as the regulative institutional elements of resource integration, termed "resource integration modes" (RIM). In the course of the project, the client changed the mode of how the providers should work together and hence integrate their and the client's resources three times. The first two RIM changes resulted from a client's dissatisfaction with the former RIM, while the third and last change was not related to the specific project but to all projects in the customer firm. Hence, with the first change the client hoped to improve the speed of innovation to produce a releasable solution. With the second change the client wished to improve the efficiency of the rollout and the quality of the solution. The last change finally resulted from directives of the client's legal group department affecting all projects of the company. Overall, all respective changes were made through work instructions that represent regulative institutional elements given by the client firm during the project execution.

At the start of the project, resource integration was carried out by dividing up tasks between the individual PSFs. Hence, this mode of resource integration within the project network is termed 'RIM1 – separated'. In this mode, the PSFs are briefed individually, and the PSFs are

responsible for implementing the tasks. They create their work outputs separately from each other, while the client had to bring together the separate partial outputs.

After one year, this form of resource integration was switched over to an agile way of working using the Scrum method. Here, all PSFs were obliged to be on the client's premises, at the project location, with their project team members, and work together in mixed teams with the project staffs of the other PSFs. The responsibility for the work outputs of the mixed teams remained with the PSFs. This mode of collaboration within the project network is thus termed 'RIM2 – mixed'.

After another year, the client took over the leadership of the mixed teams. Now, the PSFs essentially made available a certain number of employees of a certain level of seniority at the request of their colleagues of the client firm (e.g. x front-end developers, y of which are senior level). Consequently, this mode is termed 'RIM3 – client-led'.

Again, after another year, the customer switched back to a separated-teams approach of type 'RIM1 – separated'.

Organizational Identities

In contrast to the regulative institutional elements, the normative and cultural-cognitive elements of the institutional setting are represented by the organizational identities of the different member firms of the project network. They consist of work norms, habits and values as well as of shared understandings (Palthe, 2014) that both provided guidelines for acting as well as imposed behavioral restrictions by defining moral and cultural boundaries and acceptable or unacceptable behaviors (Scott, 2013). In relation to each of the individual PSFs, different organizational identities consisting of different normative and cognitive institutional elements could be identified.

The PSF Iota actors narrated their organizational identity as artists who value a product focus and an emotional attachment to their products. The norms of the PSF Iota actors consist of several counter-narratives. The PSF Iota actors reject a mercenary mentality and a process orientation, rejecting a collaboration with PSFs from other industries and especially with the client. The PSF Iota actors take a leading role in a multi-vendor project for granted, as well as working at the agency.

The PSF Gamma actors narrated their identity similarly as "creators" who value a product focus and idealism regarding their products. The norms of the PSF Gamma actors consist also of counter-narratives, a mercenary mentality and a rejection of collaboration with PSFs and clients who are not from the creative industry. The PSF Gamma actors take a supporting role in a multi-vendor project for granted, as well as working at the agency.

For the PSF Alpha actors, their organizational identity is that of an efficient ruler of projects. They value efficiency and proactiveness. The norms of the PSF Alpha actors are to act pragmatic with personal leeway with a strong sales orientation. The PSF Alpha actors take a leading role in a multi-vendor project for granted, as well as working at the client.

The PSF Tau actors narrated their identity as efficient supplier of individual experts. They value a client focus and individual expertise. The norms of the PSF Tau actors consist of pragmatism and a strong sales orientation. The PSF Tau actors take a supporting role in multi-vendor project for granted, as well as working at the client.

The different organizational identities of the four PSF actor groups and the normative and cognitive institutional elements by which they are characterized are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Perception and evaluation of the different Resource Integration Modes

The perception and evaluation of the different RIMs by the various actor groups was based on two dimensions; first, the degree of institutional (mis)alignment between the organizational identity and the respective RIM, and second, the feedback that this institutional (mis)alignment gives to the respective organizational identity. This feedback may result (1) in a reinforcement of the organizational identity in the case of a full institutional alignment, (2) a stretch of the organizational identity if there is a partial institutional misalignment between the institutional elements of the RIM and the organizational identity, or (3) a threat to the organizational identity in case of a high institutional misalignment between the institutional elements of the RIM and the organizational identity. Such a threat can be further distinguished regarding its strength, i.e., whether it is low or high (see Table 2).

PSF Iota The PSF Iota actors experience resource integration by working in separated teams (RIM1) as highly valuable. From an institutional perspective, RIM1 is aligned with their organizational identity. It thus supports its full enactment of being artists who develop creative products in a leading role and are emotionally attached to a project. RIM1 assures the absence of all ‘how we don’t do it’ features; a mercenary mentality, a process orientation, and a collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs and the client. Overall, the separated way of working with a clear differentiation between the PSFs thus reinforces their organizational identity of the PSF Iota actors.

In contrast, RIM2 represents a partial institutional misalignment for the PSF Iota actors that threatens their organizational identity. RIM2 forces the PSF Iota actors to enact the counter narrative of their organizational identity and to work in collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs. Working in mixed teams is experienced as process-

oriented and in addition with political decision-making which is associated for the PSF Iota actors with a mercenary mentality. The only counter-narrative element that is not enacted within RIM2 is collaboration or excessive proximity to the client. As a consequence, RIM2 is experienced as being of low value.

The PSF Iota actors clearly rejected RIM3 as a result of the strong institutional misalignment that is caused by the specialist leadership on the part of the client. For them, this RIM thus represents the counter-narrative of the PSF Iota actors. Hence, RIM3 forces them to enact the opposite of their organizational identity; not being in a leading role, having a mercenary mentality and a process orientation, and a collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs and the client. Thus, for the PSF Iota actors this RIM3 strongly threatens their organizational identity.

The PSF Iota actors experienced the changes of the RIMs very strongly as an insulting injustice. For them the resource integration experience changed from high value within RIM1 to low value within RIM2. The following RIM3 exacerbated the institutional misalignment even and increased the strength of the organizational identity threat, leading to a negative value perception.

However, despite these negative experiences, they did not align their organizational identity-based institutional elements to the new RIMs. Instead, the actors afterwards called for future resistance against the mixed and client-led resource integration after they had to leave the project.

PSF Gamma The PSF Gamma actors experience the RIM1 as highly valuable because of its high institutional alignment with and thus reinforcement of their organizational identity. This mode prevents them from all 'how we don't do it' features; a mercenary mentality and a collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs and the client. In addition, RIM1 supports the enactment of the organizational identity of being an idealistic creator. Only the organizational identity component of being in a supportive role is not enabled by RIM1.

RIM2 is experienced by the PSF Gamma actors similar to the PSF Iota actors but not that strong. It also represents a partial misalignment with their organizational identity, however, it only stretches their organizational identity. Hence, the PSF Gamma actors still experience some value in RIM2 as they – in contrast to the PSF Iota actors – can enact their supportive role in RIM2. But identically to the PSF Iota actors, working in mixed teams is also associated by the PSF Gamma actors with their organizational identity counter-narrative elements of mercenary mentality and collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs. Overall, the PSF Gamma actors do not reject RIM3 as vehemently as the PSF Iota actors do. RIM3 enforces them to enact their organizational identity counter-narrative, mercenary mentality and collaboration with or excessive proximity to creative non-competent PSFs and

the client. But the PSF Gamma actors are still able to enact their supporting role. Thus, for the PSF Gamma actors RIM3 is of low value.

PSF Gamma. Similar but less strong, the PSF Gamma actors experienced the progression from RIM2 to RIM3 as inner resignation. For the PSF Gamma actors, the experienced resource integration changed from mid value in RIM2 to low value in RIM3. The following RIM1 ended the organizational identity threat, reinforced the organizational identity due to institutional alignment, and led to high value.

Despite the partially negative experiences, they did not align their organizational identity-based institutional arrangements to the new RIMs. Instead, they experienced an inner resignation until the RIMs changed to a preferred separated form. Also, there was no mobilization effort to change the RIMs, neither bottom-up nor top-down.

PSF Alpha For the PSF Alpha actors, the RIM1 is experienced as highly valuable as its institutional elements are aligned with those of their organizational identity, thus reinforcing it. By working in separated teams, the PSF Alpha actors can enact their organizational identity as being an efficient ruler of projects that takes responsibility for a project in a leading role with a focus on costs. They can act rationally and proactively, being pragmatic with personal leeway, and sales-orientated.

RIM2 is experienced as being of mid value by the PSF Alpha actors. It prevents them from enacting their organizational identity elements of taking responsibility for a project in a leading role. However, meeting the client's demand in terms of resource integration is experienced as valuable by the PSF Alpha actors as the sales orientation component of their organizational identity can be enacted. In addition, they can still portray their organizational identity as being rational and proactive and pragmatic with personal leeway. This mode thus represents a partial misalignment that stretches their organizational identity.

The PSF Alpha actors experience RIM3 also as being of low value. This RIM prevents the PSF Alpha actors from enacting their organizational identity of taking responsibility for a project with a cost focus in a leading role and to be rational and proactive. But RIM3 still enables the enactment of the PSF Alpha actors' organizational identity of being pragmatic with personal leeway and to be sales-orientated. Overall this mode is thus characterized by a strong institutional misalignment and a threat with respect to their organizational identity.

The PSF Alpha actors experience the progression of the RIMs as severe but were sitting-out the changes. For the PSF Alpha actors, the experienced resource integration changed from high value in RIM1 to low value in RIM2, to low value in RIM3. The following RIM1 ended the organizational identity threat, reinforced the organizational identity again due to institutional alignment and consequently led to high value.

Hence, the PSF Alpha actors experienced the progression of the RIMs within the project network as negative over a long period of time. Despite these negative experiences, they did

not align their organizational identity-based institutional elements to the new RIMs. The PSF Alpha management however, tried to convince the client several times to change the RIMs. Even though they were not successful, the PSF Alpha actors expectantly sat out the resource integration that they experienced as negative as the PSF Alpha actors were confident that the inexperienced client would eventually change back to separated resource integration.

PSF Tau Different to the other PSF actor groups, the PSF Tau actors evaluate the form RIM1 as being of only mid value as it results in a partial institutional misalignment with and a stretch of their organizational identity. By this RIM, the PSF Tau actors can enact their organizational identity as an efficient supplier of individual experts with focus on the client in a supporting role only limited. However, they are not able to enact their pragmatism and their strong sales orientation.

Differently to RIM1, the PSF Tau actors experience RIM2 as being highly valuable as it stands for an institutional alignment that reinforces their organizational identity. This RIM supports all organizational identity components; being an efficient supplier of individual experts with focus on the client in a supporting role as well as being pragmatic and sales-oriented.

In contrast, the PSF Tau actors experience RIM3 again as being of only mid-value as it is partially misaligned with the institutional elements of their organizational identity that is thus stretched by it. This RIM enables the enactment of their organizational identity elements of focusing on the client in a supporting role and being pragmatic and sales-orientated. However, RIM3 prevent the PSF Tau actors from enacting their individual expertise.

Differently to all other PSF actors, the PSF Tau actors experience the progression as less strong with little steering expenditure. For the PSF Gamma actors the RIM experiences first improved from mid value to high value in RIM2. The experience then fell back to mid value in RIM3. The following RIM1 was experienced also as mid value. Thus, because of the only small changes, there was no need for the PSF Tau actors to align the organizational identity-based institutional elements.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The results of the study support the view that organizational identities represent important parts of the institutional arrangements of multi-vendor B2B projects that drive the behavior of the various organizational actors. Organizational identities provide the organizational members with expectations on appropriate behavior. They also influence the organizational members' evaluations of the experience as well as the outcomes of resource integration processes.

The identified misalignments between the RIMs – representing regulative institutional elements – and the organizational identities – representing normative and cognitive institutional elements – empirically support the conceptual view that institutional arrangements do not need to be fully aligned (Huemer, 2013, Pera *et al.*, 2016). However, (partially) misaligned institutional arrangements are a possible source of conflict and tension within a service ecosystem (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2016) and thus restrict the possibilities for smooth and successful resource integration and value co-creation. As a consequence, misaligned institutional arrangements may negatively impact the resource integration experience as well as the resulting value-in-use as perceived by the actors. Hence, the findings provide empirical evidence that the evaluation of the resource integration experience is determined by the extent of the alignment of the regulative, normative and cognitive elements of the institutional arrangements that govern the respective service ecosystem.

All PSF actor groups experienced institutional misalignment during the progression of the project. However, the experience of misalignment differed with respect to its degree. The PSF Iota actors experienced the institutional misalignment of RIM2 and RIM3 as a threat or even a high threat to their organizational identity. The PSF Gamma actors and PSF Alpha actors experienced institutional misalignment also in RIM2 and RIM3, but as organizational stretch or organizational threat respectively. The PSF Tau actors experienced institutional misalignment in RIM1 and RIM3, but only as organizational identity stretch.

Even though all PSF actor groups experienced the RIMs negatively at some point of time, no PSF actor group did align its organizational identity to the changing RIM, nor did they actively leave the B2B service ecosystem. This is especially remarkable for the PSF actors of the PSFs Iota, Gamma, and Alpha, as their realized co-created value in use steadily declined over a long period of time from RIM1 to RIM2 to RIM3. Thus, the PSF actors who experienced a decline in resource integration experience value due to institutional misalignment accepted this low value or even negative value in the long term.

The observed stability of the organizational identities as well as of the service ecosystem support the view of Huemer (2013) who argues that multiple contextually adapted identities are problematic. If actors aligned their organizational identities to every service ecosystem they are part of, this would undermine their legitimacy and authenticity. Accordingly, Pera *et al.* (2016) argue that actors within multi-actor service ecosystems are not necessarily seeking to achieve an overall alignment of norms and values. In contrast, at times conflicting organizational

identities are the normal state of a service ecosystem consisting of multiple firms and alignment (Pera *et al.*, 2016). The findings provide empirical evidence that the uniqueness of the different firms with respect to their different organizational identities does not necessarily lead to chaotic, inconsistent service ecosystems. Hence, an at least partial misalignment of various organizational identities within the institutional arrangements of a multi-organizational B2B service ecosystem could be seen as a normal and also stable condition.

Theoretical implications

Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical implications of our study. The organizational identities of the supplier firms mainly comprise normative and cognitive institutional elements. Together with the regulative elements of the RIMs, which are set by the customer, they build the institutional context that governs the resource integration activities within a multi-vendor project. The various organizational identities thus (at least partially) (1) shape the resource integrating behavior of the members of an organization as an organizational identity enactment, and (2) determine the evaluation of the resource integration experience. The performed organizational identity enactment as well as the evaluation of the resource integration experience as perceived by an actor group is dependent on the extent of the (mis)alignment of the institutional arrangement. As the degree of alignment between a RIM and an OI decreases, the perception of value of the RIM to the PSF also decreases, and vice versa.

Moreover, the extent of the (mis)alignment provides a feedback on the organizational identity in terms of a reinforcement (institutional alignment), a stretch or a threat (institutional misalignment). An experienced threat may lead to mobilization efforts to change RIMs that are perceived as unfavorable.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Overall, by applying the concept of organizational identity, this paper provides empirical evidence on how the institutional context shapes resource integration of a B2B service ecosystem encompassing multiple suppliers. The findings support the view that the organizational identity enactment as well as the evaluation of the resource integration experience are dependent on the institutional alignment of these normative-cognitive elements on the one hand and the regulative institutional elements on the other.

The findings provide empirical evidence that changes of the regulative elements of the RIMs also change the extent of the institutional alignment of the overall institutional arrangement. As a consequence, the degree of organizational identity enactment may significantly change as well as the value in use that is perceived by the different actors. Moreover, the study's findings

also support the view that organizational identity and the respective normative-cognitive institutions are relatively stable over time in relation to changing regulative institutional elements. The findings thus support the view that actors seem to trade-off their organizational identity for low or even negative value if RIMs are misaligned with their organizational identity. As a consequence, actors even accept high tensions and low experienced value in use if they are not able to adjust RIMs to their organizational identities. Consequently, the findings provide empirical evidence that an at least partial misalignment of institutional arrangement is not unusual within multi-vendor projects and does not necessarily lead to a destabilization of the specific service ecosystem. However, misaligned institutional arrangements may lead to low resource integration evaluation over a long period of time if the alignment is not managed properly. As a consequence, this may lead to lower as possible joint value creation in terms of quality and quantity as some or all PSFs may be forced to constantly work against their organizational identity.

Managerial implications

By altering (parts of) the regulative elements of the institutional arrangement (i.e., the RIMs), client firms typically want to steer their suppliers' behavior in a way that they are better able to achieve their goals. However, through these changes the client firm typically also reduces the extent to which the institutional arrangement is aligned. This is the case as the organizational identities of the provider firms that basically consist of normative and cognitive institutional elements have a certain stability. They thus typically do not adjust (completely) to the changed regulative regime although the respective actor groups may experience low or even negative resource integration evaluation. Therefore, practitioners who are in charge of managing resource integration processes of multi-organizational B2B projects should monitor the alignment of their institutional arrangements continuously, from selecting PSFs for a project to a project's set-up and execution. This could include issues like what RIMs are suitable or problematic for whom and why, and what are the trade-offs of different RIMs. Moreover, changes of RIMs should be managed deliberately to optimize resource integration. All actor groups should be integrated in the management processes of RIMs and the status of the RIM should be monitored and discussed mutually. Moreover, as low or even negative resource integration evaluation is to be expected for at least some of the suppliers, it seems also necessary to balance the resource integration evaluation of the various actor groups in order to stabilize the network. The management of a B2B networks should thus continuously balance the strategic intent and the institutional alignment in order to optimize the resource integration evaluation of the participating firms. This institutional B2B service ecosystem management could be organized by value-in-use audits (Macdonald *et al.*, 2016) comprising regular feedback on resource integration from all stakeholders and all hierarchical level.

For supplier firms that are involved in such multi-organizational service ecosystems it could be beneficial to regularly reflect on how varying RIMs relate to their organizational identity. The firms then need to strategically manage the degree to which they adjust their organizational identity to the RIMs. If they adapt their behavior too much to the regulative institutional elements, they may endanger their core competences and thus run the risk of losing their competitive advantage in the long run. If they resist to adapt, they might jeopardize the success of the project and run the risk of being disregarded by the client in future orders. In addition, an increase of misalignment in several projects may signal a market change.

Limitations and further research

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of the institutional context for managing resource integration in multi-organizational B2B service ecosystems like multi-vendor projects and thus open up new perspectives and avenues for future research in this field. First, to assure comparability, the clear but limited focus of this study is on different PSFs in a B2B project network. As a result, the client organization actors that also had an important role in the project network could not be observed. Second, this study mainly emphasized the impact of organizational identity on project networks. However, there exist further concepts that are important for the governance and evaluation of resource integration processes on the organization level like organizational competences, efficiency, and power (Salonen and Jaakkola, 2015). Third, supplier firms are typically involved in several projects at the same time. It would thus be interesting to investigate how such a simultaneous participation in multiple projects affects the organizational identity of a supplier firm as well as its business performance.

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Table 1: Normative and cognitive institutional elements of the different PSF actors’ organizational identities

PSF	Normative and cognitive institutional elements of the organizational identities (quotes in brackets)		
	Values	Norms	Taken-for-grantedness
Iota	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Product focus (“We all want it to look cool, in some way. We are [Iota] here. We want it to be a cool front-end.”)– Emotional attachment (“You need a few people who have, I’ll call it, an emotional connection to a project like this.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– No mercenary mentality (“If you don’t give a damn about it, you’ll never get it right.”)– No process orientation (“Bend and stretch things and they’ll just fit somehow.”)– No collaboration with or excessive proximity to other PSFs or the client who are not from the creative industry (“Other service providers are, primarily, opponents, enemies.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Leading role (“We felt like we’d all been blessed a little bit.”)– Working at the agency (“You need to motivate people to go to [the client’s site], to commute four days a week, maybe even five, to live there, to work in a field they’re not familiar with.”)
Gamma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Product focus (“Because we always feel that someone could have done it much better.”)– Idealism (“You’ve got a certain kind of idealism.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– No mercenary mentality (“The IT guys are just the bigger whores.”)– No collaboration with or excessive proximity to other PSFs or the client who are not from the creative industry (“We don’t like it when the client destroys the quality.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Supporting role (“And at the same time, anyway, you’re sort of the extension of the client, who has to put their interests into practice.”)– Working at the agency (“It’s being on the client’s premises that’s hard.”)
Alpha	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Efficiency focus (“We can make the project significantly more efficient in terms of processing.”)– Proactive (“And of course, we prepare that in advance.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Pragmatic with personal leeway (“You’re much, much more pragmatic there.”)– Sales orientation (“There’s a really strong effort to sell something”.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Leading role (“We always wanted to have some steering responsibility.”)– Working at the client (“We’ll always be working at the client’s site.”)
Tau	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Client focus (“Our company doesn’t have this: We’re [Tau]. That is subsumed, there’s no time for it.”)– Individual expertise (“Parachuted behind enemy lines and off you go.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Pragmatic (“That doesn’t help at all, you’ve just got to keep going, yep, that’s all.”)– Sales orientation (“So that was the stress point, really, that we tried to ensure that there was a follow-up business.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Supporting role (“We are always the people preventing stuff from happening, and the other people are always the absolute creative people, building castles in the air and stuff.”)– Working at the client (“You spend 80, 90% or even more of your working hours in a different context.”)

Table 2: Evaluation of the alignment and progression of the RIMs by the PSF actor groups

PSFs	Category of evaluation	RIMs			Experience of RIM progression	Behavioral response
		RIM1 – separated	RIM2 – mixed	RIM3 – client-led		
PSF Iota	Institutional (mis)alignment	<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Partial misalignment</i>	<i>Strong Misalignment</i>	<i>Insulting injustice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Institutional non-alignment – Insufficient bottom-up mobilization effort – Call for future resistance against mixed and client-led resource integration modes
	Organizational identity feedback	<i>Reinforcement</i>	<i>Threat</i>	<i>Threat, high strength</i>		
	RIM evaluation	<i>High value</i>	<i>Low value</i>	<i>Negative value</i>		
PSF Gamma	Institutional (mis)alignment	<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Partial misalignment</i>	<i>Strong misalignment</i>	<i>Inner resignation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Institutional non-alignment – No mobilization effort – Inner resignation until resource integration changed to a preferred separated resource integration form
	Organizational identity feedback	<i>Reinforcement</i>	<i>Stretch</i>	<i>Threat</i>		
	RIM evaluation	<i>High value</i>	<i>Mid value</i>	<i>Low value</i>		
PSF Alpha	Institutional (mis)alignment	<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Partial misalignment</i>	<i>Strong misalignment</i>	<i>Expectant sitting-out</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Institutional non-alignment – Sufficient top-down mobilization effort – Confidence that the inexperienced client will eventually change back the resource integration to separated resource integration
	Organizational identity feedback	<i>Reinforcement</i>	<i>Stretch</i>	<i>Threat</i>		
	RIM evaluation	<i>High value</i>	<i>Mid value</i>	<i>Low value</i>		
PSF Tau	Institutional (mis)alignment	<i>Partial misalignment</i>	<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Partial misalignment</i>	<i>Little steering expenditure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No need for an alignment as all modes of resource integration are experienced as at least of mid-value
	Organizational identity feedback	<i>Stretch</i>	<i>Reinforcement</i>	<i>Stretch</i>		
	RIM evaluation	<i>Mid-value</i>	<i>High value</i>	<i>Mid-value</i>		

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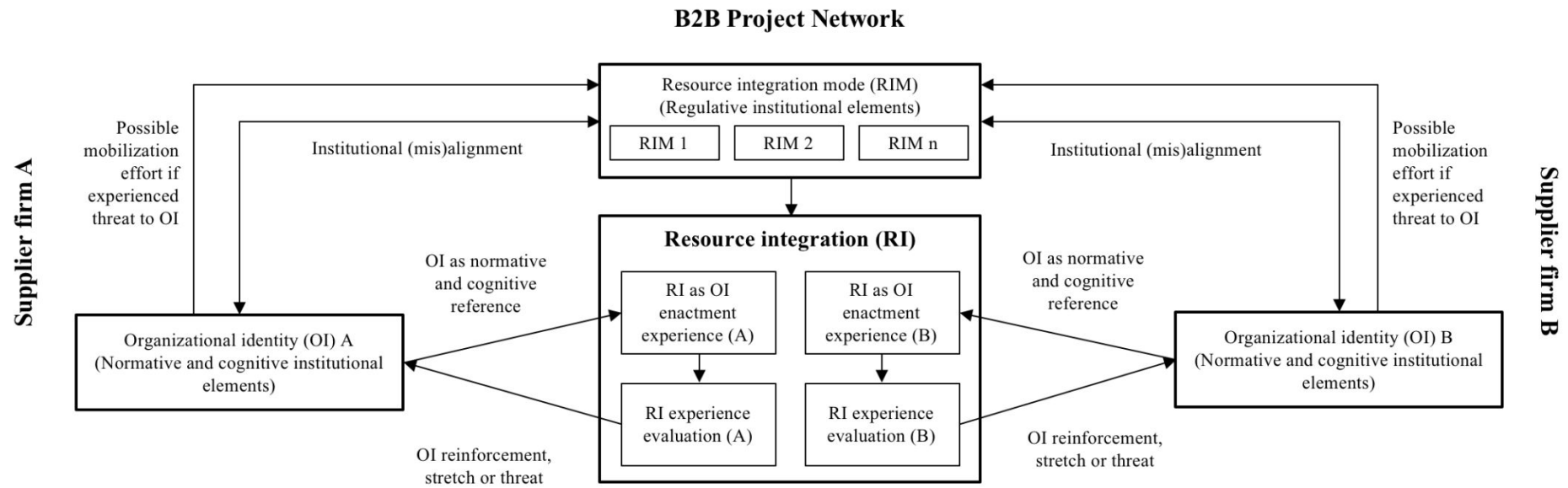


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the interplay of organizational identities and resource integration modes in multi-supplier projects