



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1057/s41267-020-00397-9](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00397-9)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Fortwengel, J. (2021). THE FORMATION OF AN MNE IDENTITY OVER THE COURSE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52(6), 1069-1095.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00397-9>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

THE FORMATION OF AN MNE IDENTITY OVER THE COURSE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

Forthcoming, *Journal of International Business Studies*

Johann Fortwengel

King's Business School, King's College London

Bush House, 30 Aldwych

WC2B 4BG London, UK

Email: johann.fortwengel@kcl.ac.uk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0765-1274>

Keywords: organizational identity; multinational enterprise (MNE); internationalization; headquarters-subsidiary relationship; qualitative research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Mary Teagarden for her editorial guidance and the three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive comments, which have helped improve the paper. Funding for this research was provided by two separate grants from the German Research Foundation (DFG), under grant numbers GRK 1012 and FO 1024/1-1. I am grateful to the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina for having hosted me, and to Charlotte Cloutier, Michael Etter, Gabriela Gutierrez Huerter O, Aimee Hamilton, Ahmed Hassan, Arne Keller, Michael Pratt, Juliane Reinecke, Thomas Roulet, and Luda Svystunova for their feedback. The paper has also benefitted from comments I received during a workshop at Griffith University in 2017, the 'Cognition in the Rough' workshop of the Managerial and Organizational Cognition Division of the Academy of Management in 2018, and presentations at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in 2019 and Newcastle University Business School in 2020.

Johann Fortwengel is a Senior Lecturer at King's Business School, King's College London. He received his doctorate from Freie Universität Berlin, and he previously held visiting positions at the University of South Carolina and the University of Michigan. In his research, Johann leverages the MNE as a research setting to develop contributions to organization theory.

THE FORMATION OF AN MNE IDENTITY OVER THE COURSE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

ABSTRACT

Organizational identity describes how members of an organization think about ‘who we are.’ But how exactly does a multinational enterprise (MNE) form an identity revolving around its key feature—that it is a globally operating organization with subsidiaries across several countries? Tracing the evolution of AutoCorp, a German MNE, over almost thirty years, I develop theory on how an MNE identity is formed over the course of internationalization. Focusing on the relational evolution of the pair comprising headquarters and the first major foreign subsidiary, my data reveal how the formation process of an MNE identity involves awareness, aspiration, and assimilation as key steps, and sensemaking, storytelling, and standardizing as process mechanisms. I unpack how the process of MNE identity formation unfolds along a set of discrete events, which constitute inflection points marking the transition from one stage to the next: from multiple identities via identity reflection and identity envisioning to an MNE identity. By introducing the notion of an MNE identity, this paper enriches the way international business scholars think about classic questions around the coordination and organization of MNEs.

Keywords: organizational identity; multinational enterprise (MNE); internationalization; headquarters-subsidiary relationship; qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

How does a multinational enterprise (MNE) develop an organizational identity revolving around its key feature—that it is a globally operating organization spanning subsidiaries located in several countries around the world? Fundamentally, organizational identity describes how members of an organization think about ‘who we are.’ Seminal work on organizational identity establishes that it captures what is central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). MNEs often extend their international activities in a stepwise process (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). But when and how exactly does an MNE start to see itself as an MNE? In other words, when and how does being an MNE become central, enduring, and distinctive to organizational members?

A shared organizational identity “improves coordination, communication, and learning” (Kogut & Zander, 1996: 507). Thus, an MNE identity can be critical for improving the coordination of the intra-firm network and for units to communicate and learn from each other (Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Yet we still know little about how such

an MNE identity is formed. This study traces the evolution of AutoCorp (a pseudonym), a German MNE, and how it has developed from a ‘German-centric organization to one that thinks globally,’ to paraphrase one of my interview respondents. Taking as my starting point the establishment of the first foreign greenfield investment, I map the evolving relationship between this foreign subsidiary in the United States (U.S.) and the headquarters in Germany. More specifically, I address the following research question: *How do members of a foreign subsidiary and headquarters develop a shared organizational identity of being an MNE?*

Based on an inductive case study, I develop theory on how an MNE identity forms over time in interaction between foreign subsidiary and headquarters, involving awareness, aspiration, and assimilation as key process steps, and sensemaking, storytelling, and standardizing as important mechanisms. My qualitative data reveal how the formation of an MNE identity develops along key events (Isabella, 1990), which are interpreted by members of the organization in a way that drives the MNE identity formation. Overall, I unpack how the process unfolds across distinct stages—from multiple identities, whereby foreign subsidiary and headquarters develop views as separate and independent entities; via identity reflection, whereby members become aware of changes in the organization and engage in corresponding sensemaking; and identity envisioning, where organizational members aspire to be an MNE and engage in supportive storytelling; and finally, to an MNE identity, involving members seeking assimilation and engaging in standardizing across the intra-firm network. The process revealed in this study describes the formation of an MNE identity, involving the shared understanding that being an MNE is central, enduring, and distinctive to organizational members in the various units.

Focusing on how members of an organization experience and interpret possible implications of internationalization, this study makes a number of contributions to research at the intersection of identity and international business literature. First, it complements previous work that emphasizes the plurality of identities in MNEs. Founded on the idea that foreign subsidiaries can base their organizational self on the host environment or the larger MNE organization

(Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008), a key research problem tackled in earlier work is how subsidiary units and managers deal with this kind of ‘identity duality’ (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017; Vora & Kostova, 2007). This research stream has generated a number of important insights, such as the ability of foreign subsidiaries to craft a ‘minority identity’ in order to minimize the liability of foreignness they experience (Edman, 2016a). However, this dominant focus on plural identities within an MNE organization has largely ignored how a shared identity of being an MNE can form within the wider MNE organization. I argue that the process of MNE identity formation creates an organizational self *as an MNE*, which offers an ‘integrative structure’ and ‘binds together’ various sub-identities (see Pratt & Kraatz, 2009: 387), including different functions within the organization or different foreign subsidiaries. I thus theorize that an MNE identity is a meta-identity, which involves “a superordinate self-categorization with which discrete organizational identities can relate [...] [and] the production of a new identity that serves to organize or gather existing identities ‘underneath’ it” (Pratt & Foreman, 2000: 34; quotation marks in original). Importantly, as a ‘new identity,’ the meta-identity of being an MNE allows considerable space for experimentation at the lower level, and, as such, the perspective developed in this study meaningfully complements existing work emphasizing the value of foreign subsidiaries forging a minority identity (Edman, 2016a) and using identity claims to manage the tension between global integration and local responsiveness (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017).

Second, my study offers insights into the phenomenon of nested identities in organizations (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011). Leveraging the MNE as a research context (Roth & Kostova, 2003), I challenge the dominant assumption that nested identities are cascading, meaning that the higher-order identity “informs convergent lower-order identities” (Ashforth et al., 2011: 1152). Instead, I offer process theory on how a common understanding emerges at the interface of a foreign subsidiary as a lower-level entity and its headquarters as the higher-level entity. Here, I draw on the notion of relational identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), which has, so far, largely been conceptualized at the level of inter-personal relations. Applying

this concept to the relation between a foreign subsidiary and its headquarters as it develops in interaction and over time, I unpack a largely emergent process of identity formation. I discover how this emergent process is anchored in events, which occur at the levels of headquarters and foreign subsidiary, respectively, constituting inflection points for a co-creational and interactional identity formation process. As the process outcome, I reveal how members of the organization perceive their units—here, foreign subsidiary and headquarters, respectively—as proto-typical members of an MNE organization (see Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 10). My findings contrast with the dominant view in the literature emphasizing more deliberate and strategic identity work, involving “processes in which individuals engage to create, present, sustain, share, and/or adapt organizational identity,” constituting an “ongoing, agentic effort” (Kreiner, Hollensbe, Sheep, Smith, & Kataria, 2015: 985). In contrast, my study of MNE identity formation reveals a more co-creational and less teleological process, unfolding in interaction between members of lower-level and higher-level entities.

Third, my study changes the way we think about some classic questions in international business research. Previous work has produced rich insights into how and why firms internationalize, and what kinds of capabilities and assets enable them to do so (see Santangelo & Meyer, 2017: 1117). Much less attention has been paid to the question of how firms experience and interpret the process of internationalization. Focusing on how major steps toward internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) facilitate a process of MNE identity formation, my study contributes to our understanding of the implication of internationalization for members of the organization. The identity lens developed in this paper offers a new perspective on classic questions around MNE coordination and organization, such as the challenge of balancing between local responsiveness and global integration (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), decisions to engage in knowledge sharing and the transfer of organizational practices (Kostova & Roth, 2002), and, more broadly, the complex and dynamic relationship between headquarters and subsidiaries (Brenner & Ambos, 2013). I submit that the presence or absence of an MNE identity, or

differences in the degree to which organizational members identify with the ‘whole’ of the MNE organization (Bednar, Galvin, Ashforth, & Hafermalz, 2020; Vough, 2012), adds an important nuance to our understanding of the underlying processes as well as outcomes. By introducing the notion of an MNE identity, this paper thus paves the way for future work to tackle exciting research frontiers exploring the role of MNE identity as a so far largely overlooked explanatory factor.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE MNE

Organizational identity can be defined as “the socially constructed perception of an organization’s core characteristics broadly shared by organizational members” (Oliver & Vough, 2020: 76-77). It is a self-referential concept (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013b) seeking to capture the essence of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). While early work emphasizes the enduring nature of identity, often taking the form of formalized identity claims, more recent work highlights identity as an accomplishment and as a process (e.g., Oliver & Vough, 2020). In particular, research has moved toward exploring identity formation and change (Gioia et al., 2013b). Here, a key observation is that the nested character of identity can trigger and drive important dynamics (Ashforth et al., 2011). The concept of nested identities captures the idea that identities are embedded, and that between-level dynamics more than within-level dynamics can explain ‘much of the impetus for a given identity’ (see Ashforth et al., 2011: 1144-1145).

Scholars interested in identity have argued that the MNE offers an intriguing research context to explore identity dynamics across levels (Gioia et al., 2013b; Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). As a complex organization, the MNE involves various nested identities. One distinguishing feature of the MNE is that it comprises subsidiaries located in different countries. Forming a coherent answer to the question ‘who are we as an organization?’ is challenging under these conditions. Vora and Kostova (2007: 328) posit that the “extreme heterogeneity” of MNEs “makes it difficult for shared norms and values to emerge [...] and challenging for managers to recognize the key characteristics of an organizational unit.” In a similar vein, Corley (2004: 1146) establishes that

the geographical separation of MNE operations can “undermine attempts at achieving a cohesive, single identity for the entire organization.” This relates to work on identity and identification that establishes that physical proximity is a critical factor in these processes (see Vough, 2012: 790). Given the absence of physical proximity, and corresponding to the view of heterogeneity, a significant amount of work in international business emphasizes how MNE subsidiaries differ in their identity when compared to headquarters. For example, Pant and Ramachandran (2017) explore how Hindustan Unilever, the Indian subsidiary of Unilever, strategically managed its organizational identity over time by balancing the host environment and the MNE organization as bases for the organizational self. Along similar lines, work by Edman (2016a, 2016b) has shown how foreign subsidiaries strategically craft their identity to benefit from their minority status in the host environment and manage the liability of foreignness that they experience. More broadly, identity is critical for a situated sense of an entity (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000), and, in the context of MNEs, foreign subsidiaries face the challenge of developing a situated sense within the wider MNE organization.

The existence of multiple (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) or nested (Ashforth et al., 2011) identities makes the MNE a suitable research setting to tackle two key research problems as identified by Ashforth et al. (2011: 1144): How do nested identities become linked, and, once linked, how isomorphic are nested identities? While the question of linkage targets the process of identity formation, the question of isomorphism refers to the identity’s content. Ashforth et al. (2011: 1152) identify the “potential interactions of the process and content” as a key research frontier with regards to nested identities and cross-level dynamics. Focusing on the process through which a lower-level entity, such as a foreign subsidiary, and a higher-level entity, such as its headquarters, become linked and possibly develop converging views marks a departure from existing research in international business, which has tended to highlight sustained differences in identity. In fact, international business scholars have focused their attention on ‘identity duality’ (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017), referring to the observation that their multiple embeddedness

(Meyer, Mudambi, & Narula, 2011) presents parts of the MNE with different possible bases for their organizational self, giving rise to heterogeneity of identities within an MNE. Previous work has unpacked how this challenge can be managed (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017), the key role that subsidiary managers play in this process (Vora & Kostova, 2007), and how it enables foreign subsidiaries to carefully manage their liability of foreignness (Edman, 2016a, 2016b).

Extending this research stream, this study shifts the view toward the question of how MNEs can still form a ‘whole,’ here coalescing around the shared understanding that being an MNE is a key feature of the wider organization. Recent research establishes that MNEs “provide an extreme setting for often quixotic attempts to maintain an enduring sense of common identity in the face of organizational complexity, geographical distance, different languages and cultural diversity” (Storgaard, Tienari, Piekkari, & Michailova, 2020: 1486). Yet, rather than necessarily involving ‘quixotic attempts’ at active identity work (Hatch, Schultz, & Skov, 2015; Kreiner et al., 2015), a ‘sense of common identity’ can also form in a more emergent manner. However, as Gioia et al. (2013b: 143) observe, “[u]nfortunately, little conceptual or empirical consideration has been given to the non-teleological perspective and emergent organizational identity change.” Instead, the little we know about identity formation is often based on research into new ventures, emphasizing the role of founders and leaders in strategically crafting an organizational identity (e.g., Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). The MNE setting offers a promising research context to explore processes of identity dynamics beyond the dominant teleological view comprising planned identity work. Building on the established understanding that internationalization is a process phenomenon (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), this study seeks to uncover how members of the organization experience, interpret, and explore possible implications of internationalization over time in terms of the organizational identity. More specifically, when and how does internationalization acquire meaning in the sense of shifting the basis for the organizational self toward the MNE organization? Addressing the research problem of how linkages emerge between a foreign subsidiary as a lower-level entity and its headquarters

as the higher-level entity, I zoom in on the relational and interactional processes yielding a shared understanding that being an MNE is critical to how members think about ‘who we are’ as an organization.

RESEARCH METHODS

I employ a qualitative research design. Qualitative case studies are dominant in the research on organizational identity (e.g., Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Corley & Gioia, 2004), not least because they enable rich insights into identity dynamics (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013a). A related strength of qualitative research is its ability to facilitate the development of process theory on a particular phenomenon (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). This is particularly appropriate for this study, which is interested in contributing to our knowledge of how a shared understanding of ‘who we are’ is accomplished over time at the interface of foreign subsidiary and headquarters, coalescing around the idea that being an MNE is key to the organizational identity. In accordance with the notion that identity is an accomplished process, I take an interpretivist stance in this study (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). Isabella (1990: 9) establishes that “[t]he strength of the interpretive stream of research has been the articulation of organizational members’ collective viewpoints on particular organizational occurrences”—in my research setting, ‘organizational occurrences’ refer to events associated with the process of internationalization, and the ‘collective viewpoints’ refer to the formation of an MNE identity.

I study AutoCorp as a revelatory case. AutoCorp is a company in the automotive sector, which evolved over time from being firmly rooted in Germany into an organization with considerable international presence in terms of both production and sales. It thus presents me with a suitable case setting in which to explore identity dynamics over the course of internationalization, including the process of a possible formation of an MNE identity. While case studies cannot provide statistical generalization, they do allow for analytical generalization (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). In particular, single-case studies allow the deep immersion

into and the collection of rich qualitative data covering long periods of time that is often needed to build new theories or further develop existing ones (Ozcan, Han, & Graebner, 2017). A single-case study is thus appropriate for this research seeking to elaborate theory on identity dynamics in the MNE setting. Furthermore, by focusing on the meso level as the key unit of analysis, my organization-level case study overcomes a weakness in much of existing international business literature, which tends to focus either on micro processes or macro explanations (see Mees-Buss, Welch, & Westney, 2019: 1516).

I focus my attention on the particular subsidiary-headquarters pair comprising the foreign subsidiary in the U.S. and the headquarters in Germany. The U.S. subsidiary is AutoCorp's "first complete car plant outside Germany" (Annual Report, 1994: 50). The establishment of the first foreign subsidiary is a critical event in the internationalization process of an MNE (see Santangelo & Meyer, 2017: 1121), not least because it raises the question of 'who we are as an organization,' similar to a corporate spin-off (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Focusing on this pair involving the first major foreign subsidiary as a lower-level entity and its headquarters as the higher-level entity enables me to track the development of AutoCorp's organizational identity, for which, in the words of one of my interview respondents, the creation of the U.S. plant "was a critical step in the development from a German Mittelstand company to a globally successful multinational corporation" (Headquarters [unit]; HR manager [function/role])¹. Paying special attention to the dyad involving the headquarters and the first foreign subsidiary overcomes a common methodological blind spot in the literature, because "researchers often fail to gather the dyadic level data required to truly understand [the] relational processes" (Vough, Caza, & Maitlis, 2020: 255).

¹ Some interviews were conducted in German, and quotes from these interviews were translated by the author. Mittelstand describes the particular form of small and medium-sized enterprises in the German economy.

Data Collection

I collected three kinds of qualitative data: archival, interview, and video. I thus combine historical data (Burgelman, 2011), which describe how things were or were seen at a particular point in time, with the accounts by individuals of how events—as ‘common breakpoints for the perception of change’ (see Isabella, 1990: 11)—progressed over time. My observation period spans the time from the year 1990, a few years before the decision was made to build the U.S. subsidiary, to the year 2018, by which time the MNE identity had been firmly rooted. Long observation periods can offer unique insights into the evolution of MNEs (Grøgaard, Colman, & Stensaker, 2019) and identity change or endurance (Anteby & Molnár, 2012). Correspondingly, Gioia et al. (2013b: 157) establish that “[a]nswering the question of how organizational identity forms requires a longitudinal stance tracing the arc of identity formation processes as they unfold over time.”

Archival data. I collected the annual reports of AutoCorp covering the period from 1990 through 2018. This yielded 5,627 pages of data. Annual reports, including statements by the chairpersons of the board of management and the supervisory board, are often used in identity research to reveal identity claims (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). They are directed at an external audience, involving shareholders and journalists, amongst others, and thus offer insights into how an organization presents itself externally. I complement this kind of data oriented toward an external audience with archival data that is directed at an internal audience: the company newspaper. The company newspaper prints stories about new products and services and news from the various subsidiaries and departments, as well as the organization as a whole, such as changes in the management and strategy. In the case of AutoCorp, the newspaper is not so much a tool of strategic communication utilized by headquarters as one reporting on issues of interest to the employees. For this purpose, the editors of the newspaper regularly conduct a survey to identify the topics most and least popular with the readership. This readership also includes members of the top management team. For example, the chairman of the board of management at the time is quoted as follows:

“I regularly read those articles that provide me with information. And there are a lot of those. For me, as someone with a production background, in particular articles about production. Here, I find news more often than in the annual reports” (Newspaper [data source], 1995 [year], 5 [issue]: 9 [page number]).²

I collected every issue of the company newspaper during the observation period (1990-2018). While the newspaper was published on a monthly basis in the beginning, meaning that there were 12 issues per year in the period from 1990 through 1998, this pattern subsequently became less rigid, and the number of issues per year fluctuated between seven and eleven in the period from 1999 through 2018. In total, these data comprise 295 issues over the observation period, yielding a total of 4,387 pages. Furthermore, I collected select additional documents, such as an overview of the subsidiary, newspaper articles, and press releases, many of which were sent to me during email exchanges with representatives of AutoCorp in both Germany and the U.S.

Interview data. Organizational identity research often relies primarily on interview data (e.g., Chreim, Langley, Reay, Comeau-Vallée, & Huq, 2020; Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007), because interviews can offer rich insights into individuals’ beliefs and understandings and the meanings they give to more formal identity claims. In this study, I rely on 31 semi-structured interviews, yielding more than 31 hours of material. The interviews were conducted in the period between 2012 and 2020, and almost all of them were conducted face-to-face during fieldwork. With few exceptions, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Where recording was not possible, I took detailed notes during the interview, created a memo, including direct quotes, and checked with the respondent that the memo accurately reflected the content of the interview. These memos and the interview transcripts amount to 375 single-spaced pages. I was careful to interview representatives from both headquarters and the U.S. subsidiary. The respondents also spanned organizational hierarchies and functions, and included two current (at the time of the interviews) and one former CEO of the subsidiary as well as middle and lower-level managers, such as the government and community relations manager within the communications department

² Newspaper quotes were translated by the author.

of the U.S. subsidiary. While my main focus was on the particular pair comprising the headquarters in Germany and the U.S. subsidiary as the first major foreign subsidiary, some of my interview respondents were top managers in other markets, namely Latin America and Western Europe. The primary purpose of these interviews was to confirm that the changes observed in the one headquarters-subsubsidiary pair had implications for the wider organization in the sense of mapping the formation of an MNE identity. I also interviewed the head of the AutoCorp archive, who joined the organization in the early 1990s and was thus able to offer deep insights based on both his professional role and personal experience.

While the role of identity was not my initial focus when I entered the field, it emerged from my interviews. For example, a subsidiary manager who has been with AutoCorp since 1993 reported how the ‘whole world within AutoCorp’ had changed. Similarly, a respondent from headquarters reported a ‘continuous process’ rather than ‘flipping a switch’ leading to international thinking within AutoCorp. In response, I adapted my interview protocol aiming to unearth the sources, drivers, and implications of these change processes. For example, in the opening question, I asked my interview respondents to describe how they thought AutoCorp had changed over time. I used probing questions to dig deeper and to gain insights into how organizational members of AutoCorp came to see their organization as a multinational firm. For example, when the respondent mentioned earlier stated that the ‘whole world within AutoCorp’ had changed, I asked him to elaborate on what had triggered this change, and how the change manifested in his daily experience as a member of the organization. Frequently, these kinds of probing questions revealed the importance of various events often described as ‘milestones’ or ‘critical junctures’ by my interview partners, which enabled me to map the MNE identity formation process as developing along a set of discrete events.

Video data. Finally, I included three video recordings of speeches given by subsidiary-level managers as part of semi-public events. Two recordings capture speeches given by the CEOs of the subsidiary in the U.S. at the time, and another recording is of a speech given by a middle

manager of the U.S. subsidiary. In these speeches, the managers described the development of the U.S. subsidiary over time, frequently by comparing and positioning it vis-à-vis headquarters. The three video recordings have a combined length of 74 minutes, and they were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

In sum, I collected different kinds of data that complement each other in meaningful ways. For example, interviews can suffer from retrospective biases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Golden, 1992), and videos from semi-public events as well as archival documents help correct these shortcomings, thus enabling the unpacking of dynamics over long stretches of time (Lubinski & Wadhvani, 2020; Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). Yet archival data such as annual reports or mission statements as expressed in documents or speeches also suffer from unique biases. For example, documents may make claims and assertions that do not correspond to the lived experience of an organization's members (see Gioia et al., 2013b: 170), they can hide differences in perception across hierarchical levels (Corley, 2004), and they also offer only limited insights into how exactly identity is accomplished. I leverage my interview data to unpack how members of the organization perceive and accomplish organizational identity as communicated to external stakeholders, and as reported in the internal company newspaper. Table 1 maps the various sources of the qualitative data, and how they were used in this study. All my qualitative data, comprising archival data, transcripts, and memos, were digitized and then stored in a digital case study database.

---Insert Table 1 About Here---

Data Analysis

Equipped with this large amount of data, I engaged in data analysis by undertaking three interrelated steps. First, I reconstructed the chronology of the development of the foreign subsidiary in the U.S., as well as of AutoCorp more broadly. This yielded a number of key events along the way, such as the establishment of another subsidiary in China, the development of 'twelve fundamental beliefs' or 'core principles' at the level of the whole organization, and

milestones of the sustained growth trajectory of the U.S. subsidiary. The timeline of select events depicted in Figure 1 is an outcome of this first analytical step. Notably, I mapped events in terms of their primary location or origin, meaning whether they were associated primarily with headquarters or at the level of a foreign subsidiary, respectively.

---Insert Figure 1 About Here---

Second, I engaged in coding of my qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In line with my research question, I sought to uncover how a shared understanding of being an MNE developed in AutoCorp. As part of this step, I went through my archival data, transcripts, and memos, line by line, and coded sections that address this theme. For example, I looked for data excerpts involving direct or indirect references to the organizational self, and also data that would reveal a possible convergence toward a shared identity across levels (Ashforth et al., 2011). My first-order codes were deeply anchored in the data, including using direct quotes. For example, I developed three codes—new plant as ‘independent site’; replicating corporate functions; own marketing campaigns, ‘we are something unique’—which I then grouped together to describe the common theme of independence, capturing the shared view at a particular point in time that the subsidiary in the U.S. was independent from headquarters. Overall, I arrived at 24 codes and eight themes. Three of these themes—awareness, aspiration, and assimilation—describe process steps, while another three themes—sensemaking, storytelling, and standardizing capture process mechanisms. I collapsed all eight themes further to describe four aggregate dimensions: multiple identities, identity reflection, identity envisioning, and MNE identity. For example, the themes awareness and sensemaking produce the aggregate dimension identity reflection. The data structure given in Table 2 is a tangible outcome of this second analytical step.

---Insert Table 2 About Here---

One advantage of drawing on extensive archival data is that it enables a precise chronological mapping of the identity formation process. As part of my second step of data analysis, I thus assigned the aggregate dimensions to particular time periods. Table 3 below

provides an overview of representative quotes to show how the various codes, themes, and dimensions emerged from my data, and it also gives concrete time spans. While these stages certainly overlapped to some degree, there is value in distinguishing them analytically.

---Insert Table 3 About Here---

Importantly, coding my qualitative data helped me unearth important insights into how the key events mapped out in step one were interpreted by members of the organization (Isabella, 1990), and how this shaped the particular effect of the events. For example, and as I will describe further below, the event of the creation of a subsidiary in China was interpreted as ‘changing the whole world within AutoCorp,’ to paraphrase one of my interview respondents, and I unpack how such awareness of changes in the ‘world of AutoCorp’ actually contributed to the materialization of a ‘new world’ involving a shared MNE identity. This corresponds to insights from the broader literature on sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that “sensemakers inevitably change the world that they are working to understand” (Vough et al., 2020: 246). More broadly, I linked the findings—as they emerged during my coding—back to the timeline of events given in Figure 1. This enabled me to reveal the relationship between key events, process steps and process mechanisms, and stages of MNE identity formation.

Building on the discovery of these relationships, in a third step, I developed a conceptual model of how an MNE forms an organizational identity *as an MNE*. The process model depicted in Figure 2 in the Discussion section is a tangible outcome of this third analytical step. Kriz and Welch (2018: 501) remind us that a process study “seeks to build an explanation as to why and how events proceeded as they did.” In this study, I build an explanation relating to the formation of an MNE identity, and I show how events—located primarily at the level of headquarters or a foreign subsidiary—played a critical role in the co-creational process involving awareness, aspiration, and assimilation, as developments were made sense of, stories told, and practices standardized. More specifically, I show how key events constitute ‘breakpoints’ (Isabella, 1990) marking the transition from one stage to the next. Overall, I map how AutoCorp initially

experienced multiple identities when it set up its first foreign subsidiary, before identity reflection—the reflexive consideration of a new feature to the organizational self—triggered identity envisioning and ultimately the formation of an MNE identity.

THE FORMATION OF AN MNE IDENTITY IN AUTOCORP, 1990-2018

During the observation period, AutoCorp underwent significant identity change: from a German company firmly rooted in a particular local region into an MNE with a global presence and outlook. For example, a communications manager of the U.S. subsidiary described his experience as follows:

“When I joined, I went to Germany for some onboarding. And there I met a director, and I told him how excited I was to be working for a German multinational. And he laughed and said, ‘we are not a multinational firm’” (Subsidiary; Communications manager).

However, over time, this has changed. Correspondingly, in 2013, the chairman of the board of management called AutoCorp a ‘global company’: “Our Company has its roots at headquarters and in Germany. But, today, AutoCorp is a global company” (Annual Report, 2013: 15; statement of the chairman of the board of management). This change is also reflected in the name of the internal company newspaper, which used to contain a reference to the local region of the headquarters in Germany in its title. In this findings section, I zoom in on the process steps and mechanisms leading to the change, which, as the following excerpt summarizes, has also had implications in terms of a change in behavior:

“This has been a continuous process. You can’t pin it down and say that at this particular point in time someone flipped a switch and all of a sudden everybody said, ‘right, if we are an international company we should think differently, behave differently.’ I think that this is still a process that we have to keep making ourselves aware of” (Headquarters; Lead function vocational training).

The ‘continuous process’ of becoming an international company nonetheless involved some breakpoints, starting with the establishment of the first major foreign subsidiary, in the U.S., which constitutes a critical step in the internationalization process of a firm (Santangelo & Meyer, 2017).

Multiple Identities (1990-1997)

Separate units. In the early 1990s, AutoCorp made the decision to engage in its first foreign greenfield investment:

“For months there have been speculations, for weeks people have been writing about it. We have been discussing this topic for more than three years: Another—a totally new production site for AutoCorp” (Newspaper, 1992, 7: 1; quote from the chairman of the board of management).

With the creation of a ‘totally new production site’ in a foreign country, a process of multiple-identities formation within the organization was triggered. This means that the newly created subsidiary as a lower-level entity and headquarters as the higher-level entity developed ‘different conceptualizations’ about their identity (see Pratt & Foreman, 2000: 20). In particular, members of the organization viewed the units as separate, rather than belonging to one ‘whole.’ For example, members at headquarters emphasized the objective to sustain the identity of being firmly rooted in the local state in Germany, and argued that entities in the future growth markets would need to tap the market potential:

“We want to remain in the state. This important identity has to be sustained. At the same time, we will have to assume that the new growth markets in Southeast Asia and Latin America can’t be tapped into from Europe” (Newspaper, 1996, 4: 2; interview with the chairman of the board of management).

In a similar vein, a top manager at the time was quoted in the company newspaper as stating that AutoCorp’s ‘heart continues to pump’ in Germany, while other parts of the organization should ‘establish roots’ in foreign markets. Early on in the process, it thus became clear that headquarters and the foreign subsidiary perceived themselves as separate units. For example, one indicator is that the foreign subsidiary did many things differently, as observed by a senior-level manager who has been with AutoCorp since 1993:

“They decided to have everyone wear the same clothes, irrespective of hierarchy. They just wanted to try something new, and they showed this through artifacts like clothes as well” (Headquarters; Strategic HR).

Similarly, from the perspective of headquarters, the establishment of the foreign subsidiary created a division of labor, whereby the design and development of the products was performed in Germany, while only the actual manufacturing took place at the U.S. plant:

“AutoCorp is taking a big step from ‘made in Germany’ to ‘made by AutoCorp’: designed and developed in Germany, manufactured in the U.S. plant for the world market” (Newspaper, 1995, 11: 1).

In turn, members of the subsidiary viewed themselves as being ‘isolated,’ and they invoked the situation at headquarters to contrast their own experience against:

“The isolated location here is very different compared to when you are in Germany, where you are working in a network, where the locations are all within a one-hour drive” (Subsidiary; Production manager).

As such, mirroring what has been observed in previous research on organizational identity dynamics (Corley & Gioia, 2004), headquarters and foreign subsidiary constituted important social referents to each other. For example, the ability to hold meetings before the start of a shift because of the subsidiary’s small size was similarly contrasted with the scenario at headquarters:

“By AutoCorp standards we are a small plant. This enables us to all get together before the shift. During these meetings, management can discuss important topics” (Newspaper, 1996, 10: 11; interview with the head of HR at the U.S. subsidiary).

Importantly, the view was not only that the units were separate but also that they were independent, thus limiting the necessity for interaction and enabling the formation of multiple identities within the broader organization.

Independence. Even in the planning stage, it had already become clear that the newly created foreign subsidiary would be independent, and it was labeled as such:

“The new plant will be integrated into the production network, but it will be an independent site” (Newspaper, 1992, 7: 1).

For example, a strategic decision was made that both workforce and top management would be American. The underlying rationale behind this was that headquarters should have limited influence on the new plant:

“When we started here in the U.S., the idea was, and that was a guiding principle, they didn’t want to force German concepts onto an American plant. [...] And as a consequence the key persons, you know, I believe the first German CEO came some time in the late 1990s. Prior to that it was always Americans, people with experience in the American market” (Subsidiary; Former CEO).

Corresponding to the emerging view of independence from headquarters, the foreign subsidiary sought to become embedded locally and become a ‘citizen’ of the U.S.:

“We have been guests for a long time, who have felt very comfortable in your country. Thanks to our production facility we will become citizens” (Newspaper, 1992, 8: 1; quote from the chairman of the board of management).

Further reinforcing this belief in independence was the decision to replicate key corporate functions, such as purchasing and sales, at the level of the foreign subsidiary. Marketing and advertising campaigns were also the responsibility of the U.S. subsidiary, and they developed their own material independently:

“The Americans used to have their own web presence and their own marketing campaigns until the early 2000s. Their presence was radically different. They did their own flyers, they had their own slogan. They used to give themselves their own role, ‘we are something unique’” (Head of archive).

Back at home, AutoCorp employees continued to think of themselves as a German company, and at this stage many opposed international thinking and terminology, as expressed in this letter to the editor of the newspaper:

“Please be so kind as to explain to me the meaning of ‘just in time.’ [...] I do not understand why you are rashly and unnecessarily introducing English terminology” (Newspaper, 1994, 6: 17).

At the stage when the decision was made to build the U.S. subsidiary, members of the organization already felt that this constituted a defining moment in AutoCorp’s history, but that the future was unknown:

“With the decision to establish a production plant in the United States, AutoCorp is, once again, making its own path. [...] Every company must define its own way. The terrain ahead is unknown. We alone can tread out our own path” (Annual Report, 1992: 6-7; statement of the chairman of the board of management).

The next section unpacks how the ‘unknown terrain’ involved further internationalization, which triggered identity reflection, whereby members of the organization

engaged in reflexive consideration of a new feature to the organizational self, including corresponding implications.

Identity Reflection (1997-2006)

Awareness. Members of AutoCorp realized over time that sustained internationalization introduced a new feature to the organizational self. For example, a long-time employee at headquarters recounts how members of the organization slowly understood the development toward a qualitatively different ‘dimension of internationality’:

“For sure, this was a slow process. I came to AutoCorp in 1985. At the time, some probably thought that we were an international company already. But what we did was just sell cars in foreign countries. That was it. And over time, we realized that internationality has a totally different dimension” (Headquarters; Lead function vocational training).

This ‘slow realization process’ interrupted the formation of multiple identities. In contrast, there was an emerging understanding at AutoCorp that ‘new dimensions of internationality’ required a rethink, and that a ‘locally focused mentality’ was anachronistic, given the development of the organization:

“The truth is, we have become a globally active corporation. [...] [T]he formerly dominant, very locally focused mentality is not appropriate anymore in the face of global competition” (Newspaper, 1999, 10: 2).

This ‘truth’ was also echoed at the level of the subsidiary. For example, the subsidiary’s government and community relations manager recounts how “we weren’t really thinking globally so much in the 1990s,” and that the ‘locally focused mentality’ was replaced with the perception that “AutoCorp is not German-centric anymore.”

A number of key events were instrumental in the development toward becoming ‘not German-centric.’ For one, AutoCorp acquired and integrated another car brand, which also changed the mindset, according to a top manager in the finance division who joined around that time:

“When we did that [integrate the other brand], that was a critical juncture. It has changed the mindset of the organization toward thinking internationally” (Western Europe; Finance CEO).

As a result of the acquisition, AutoCorp all of a sudden had a number of additional foreign locations, which contributed to an emergent ‘international thinking’ and a ‘change in the mindset.’ Furthermore, with the acquisition and subsequent integration of the other brand, AutoCorp was forced to reflect and revisit its company name:

“When we acquired that company, all of a sudden we had many brands. And so we had to give ourselves a new official name: the AutoCorp Group. In all our communication, we are the AutoCorp Group” (Head of archive).

In addition to its formal name, AutoCorp also reflected on some key objectives and principles, and it developed guidelines called ‘We at AutoCorp’:

“In 1997, in addition to the definition of technical and economic targets, AutoCorp developed guidelines for workforce and management, entitled ‘We at AutoCorp.’ These guidelines contain the Company’s expectations of employees’ personal behavior” (Annual Report, 1997: 157; quotation marks in original).

This ‘We at AutoCorp’ got a new member when another foreign subsidiary was established, this time in China. At the time this was already considered an ‘important milestone’:

“Production of AutoCorp cars in China began in 2003—this is an important milestone in AutoCorp’s expansion strategy” (Annual Report, 2003: 9).

Indeed, members of the organization realized the relevance of this step, and the following interview excerpt illustrates how this event was reflected on and perceived to ‘change the world’ within AutoCorp:

“Of course, it is also the case that maybe not the political pressure, but somehow the whole world within AutoCorp has changed. All of a sudden, there was a plant in China” (Subsidiary; HR manager).

Reflecting this new world, the annual report of the year 2004 contained a section on ‘internationality’ (Annual Report, 2004: 6). More broadly, questions around the identity of the organization moved to the forefront during this time. One indicator of this is that the 2005 annual report contained a new section entitled ‘Portrait of the Company’ (Annual Report, 2005: 2).³ One

³ This section was discontinued, beginning with the annual report of 2013. I interpret this as an indicator that during this time, AutoCorp was grappling with an emerging identity shift, while by 2013 it had attained more clarity on its newly formed organizational identity.

year later, AutoCorp made the identity claim that “[g]rowing profitably—worldwide” is one of three key phrases that describe “the character of the entire Company” (Annual Report, 2006: 8).

Sensemaking. The awareness that internationality was an important emerging attribute of their organization coincided with corresponding sensemaking by members at both headquarters and foreign subsidiary. In particular, members of AutoCorp interpreted the establishment of the subsidiary in China as a critical event. Furthermore, retrospectively, they made sense of the creation of the U.S. subsidiary as a key event, which was viewed as having shifted the ‘central pivotal point’ of the organization:

“Today, ten years later, it is clear that the decision taken on the U.S. plant was one of the most important decisions for the internationalization of AutoCorp. It is true that erecting a new plant is always a significant step, but the decision regarding the U.S. plant was about more than that. [...] Before this step, AutoCorp was an internationally active motor car manufacturer with a central pivotal point in a state in Germany. In locating in the U.S., AutoCorp decided to establish a firm presence in international automobile markets—and today possesses a second strong pivotal point in the most important automobile market in the world” (Annual Report, 2002: 19).

More broadly, the U.S. subsidiary was now more clearly framed as constituting an outcome of an expansion strategy, because ‘beyond the horizon there lie opportunities’:

“Beyond the horizon there lie opportunities. Going for growth means following the markets. Having clear goals. Watching the world closely. Probing. Analyzing. Being courageous. Going where the opportunities are. Putting down roots. And linking each site into a global strategy. Witness our plant in the U.S. Power ahead. Worldwide.” (Annual Report, 2002: 18).

In stark contrast to the time when the U.S. subsidiary was viewed as separate and independent, headquarters started to portray the foreign subsidiary as ‘having found its place’ within the wider organization, and as representing both ‘a symbol and a milestone’:

“The U.S. plant has thus found its place—within the company as well as within the region. [...] With the U.S. plant, AutoCorp has achieved a breakthrough towards a continuing expansion of the company. The plant is both a symbol and a milestone for the development of AutoCorp’s business—for the internationalization of the company, for the expansion of its product range and, once again, for the successful path taken by AutoCorp” (Annual Report, 2002: 27).

Going beyond the U.S. plant, the further integration of the acquired company triggered additional sensemaking processes. For example, the internal newspaper changed its name to better reflect the broadened portfolio of brands and companies under the AutoCorp roof. While

some employees voiced support and attached meaning to this step, such as when one employee argued that the new name “strengthens the ‘we’-feel,” other voices were much more skeptical and showed strong resistance. This prompted the newspaper to respond as follows:

“If the title of a company newspaper can really be responsible for a company seeming to lose its identity: that is for everyone to decide for themselves. Who actually creates the identity of a community of people? Is it a mere name or is it not more so the people—the employees of AutoCorp—who fill their company with life and with content?” (Newspaper, 1999, 10: 2).

By trying to make sense of a range of developments, such as the opening of a plant in China or the change of the newspaper’s title, AutoCorp collectively reflected on its identity. Over time, members of the organization came to perceive these developments as consequential, and subsequently, they started to entertain the idea of forming a ‘whole company.’ For example, in contrast to earlier, when production plants were labeled ‘independent,’ AutoCorp now sought tighter integration of its production network, as described by the board member responsible for production:

“For the production it is important to realize that we are no longer the AutoCorp Company from the past, but that we manufacture globally. [...] Under these conditions, plants cannot develop on their own anymore as they like” (Newspaper, 2005, 1/2: 3; interview with the board member responsible for production).

This marked the beginning of a stage involving more concrete identity envisioning around being an MNE.

Identity Envisioning (2006-2010)

Aspiration. From around the mid-2000s onward, AutoCorp began to present itself more as a multinational company. For example, it claimed to belong to the group of multinational companies that need to take on more ‘responsibility worldwide’:

“Around 65,000 multinational companies with 800,000 subsidiaries and millions of suppliers now operate worldwide. Never before have companies had so much economic power and size. Consequently, never before have they had so much responsibility: responsibility for jobs, for returns, for environment and society. [...] For AutoCorp, the answer is clear. [...] [T]he Company aspires to play an active role—both in shaping internal economic success factors and as corporate citizen in society. [...] This does not only apply to its German home market, for just as the Company competes worldwide, it also takes responsibility worldwide” (Annual Report, 2006: 38-39).

Playing an active role in ‘shaping internal economic success factors’ also involved the newly formed aspiration to better integrate foreign subsidiaries in key decision-making processes, such as product development:

“In product development, the various markets are now much more involved” (Latin America; Head of business segment).

Along similar lines, an understanding emerged that there was a ‘new truth’ that made centralized decision-making at headquarters obsolete:

“We used to make world-decisions on the 21st and 22nd floors [the location of the executive offices] here in headquarters. But there is a new truth, and we need to get out there more” (Headquarters; Head of marketing business).

In light of the substantial international expansion, AutoCorp was confronted with the task of creating integrative forces, now that it was a company dispersed across multiple locations in different countries. In response, the organization devised ‘twelve fundamental beliefs,’ which were meant to inform and guide behavior across different locations:

“Our twelve fundamental beliefs: customer orientation, high performance, responsibility, effectiveness, adaptability, competition for the best ideas, respect/trust/fairness, employees, good example, sustainability, society, independence” (Newspaper, 2007, 12: 9).

At this stage in the process, AutoCorp thus actively sought to align norms and values across its locations, and it also actively encouraged exchange and collaboration across countries. Correspondingly, one of my interview respondents recounts how the whole company underwent a period of ‘awakening,’ leading to increased international cooperation within the organization. A key event promoting this development was the adoption of a New Strategy, aiming for ‘cohesion’:

“The New Strategy also means cohesion—so that all in the company stand together as one and take responsibility for the goals” (Newspaper, 2007, 12: 8).

Importantly, this New Strategy also led to a closer relationship between headquarters and the U.S. plant, and it strengthened the position of the foreign subsidiary, instilling ‘pride’:

“The employees are clearly proud that their plant [...] plays an important role as part of the New Strategy” (Newspaper, 2008, 4: 1).

During this time, AutoCorp also actively engaged with its history, seeking to link the past with a vision for the future. For example, in 2006, for the first time, AutoCorp published a book about its history, with “[h]undreds of high-quality photos, sketches, and advertisement motifs from the past [...illustrating] the history of the Company on its way to an internationally active corporation” (Newspaper, 2007, 2: 15). In a similar vein, AutoCorp renovated and substantially extended its company museum. Reporting about the opening ceremony of the refurbished museum, the newspaper stated:

“For the employees the AutoCorp museum is a place of identification and orientation. It is similar to a family chronicle, where the past helps to shape the future and to know one’s own identity” (Newspaper, 2008, 7: 16).

More broadly, AutoCorp aspired to become ‘one,’ including developing a sense that members of the organization share the same goal. For example, in the following interview excerpt published in an annual report, the U.S. subsidiary’s CEO highlights how everyone in the organization is working ‘on the same project,’ and how employees of the U.S. subsidiary work alongside colleagues in China and India to achieve the shared goal of ‘optimizing the global value creation’:

“Some of our employees are currently assisting with the expansion of the plant in China; others are helping their colleagues in India, where the demand for AutoCorp automobiles is also growing steadily. The challenges, production conditions and markets are very different from one place to another, of course. But, at the end of the day, we are all working on the same project: optimizing our global value creation” (Annual Report, 2010: 57; quote from the CEO of the U.S. subsidiary).

Indeed, the same CEO declared in a speech made in 2010 that “We are AutoCorp Team 10” (Subsidiary; CEO; Speech), where ‘Team 10’ signals that it is the tenth plant in the AutoCorp family.

Storytelling. Members of AutoCorp at both headquarters and the subsidiary engaged in storytelling to complement the aspiration to become ‘one’ and to envision an identity revolving around being an MNE. Storytelling and narratives “provide a coherent understanding of who we were, who we are, and who we will become” (Vough et al., 2020: 247). Similar to what has been

reported in previous research (Vaara & Tienari, 2011), storytelling occurred at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, and it also took on different forms. For example, some storytelling manifested itself in the annual reports, such as when the argument emerged that the supervisory board required appropriate international expertise, given AutoCorp's increased global presence and exposure:

“At least four of the members of the Supervisory Board should have international experience or specialist knowledge with regard to one or more of the non-German markets important to the company” (Annual Report, 2010: 153).

At the level of the foreign subsidiary, storytelling took the form of linking the development of the plant to a ‘human analogy,’ as presented by the CEO at the time during a speech in 2006:

“We still tend to think of ourselves as the new kid in the AutoCorp Group, and the AutoCorp production network. [...] If I may use the human analogy, those cars that we launched in the mid-1990s were the cars of our youth. But with the new model, we grew up as a factory, and we moved from being a niche facility to a serious volume plant” (Subsidiary; CEO; Speech).

As a ‘grown-up’ factory, it started to become a source of innovations, as reported in the following story of how a new technology developed in the U.S. plant was diffused and helped other plants to save costs and resources:

“For instance, American production engineers in the body shop at the U.S. plant developed an adhesive that works without the previously necessary 120-degree Celsius heat drying process. Hence the U.S. plant was able to avoid not only investing in a body shop dryer but also made huge energy savings in its manufacturing operations. Following their example other plants are now switching to this resource and cost-saving technology” (Annual Report, 2008: 58).

More broadly, stories emerged in the organization that portrayed internationalization as offering a number of ‘opportunities’:

“We can't just give the order to internationalize. We have to point to the opportunities” (Newspaper, 2009, 5/6: 5; interview with the board member responsible for HR).

For example, in an interview the board member responsible for production at the time makes the case for international assignments as an opportunity offered by a multinational company such as AutoCorp:

“As a company, we have to communicate more clearly to employees that an assignment abroad is not a disciplinary transfer, but a great personal opportunity. Experiencing and doing new things, attaining new qualifications, which will help one advance, getting to know foreign cultures—to be able to do this in one’s ‘own’ company is a great asset” (Newspaper, 2006, 12: 5; interview with the board member responsible for production; quotation marks in original).

Not all stories and narratives hinted positively at ‘opportunities,’ but some also discussed how an MNE-like international structure can protect the organization and minimize harm:

“We benefited from having a corporate financial structure with an international focus. We have our own financing companies in Singapore, New York and in Europe, where we are represented on the global capital markets round-the-clock, five days a week. This is one of the reasons we were able to fund our financial services business on attractive terms. During the crisis not only was access to many segments of the capital market limited, but investors were also demanding much higher risk premiums” (Annual Report, 2009: 54; quote from a representative of the finance division).

Meanwhile, members of the organization also employed stories that were ‘threatening,’ for example when a middle manager of the U.S. subsidiary drew attention to the new competition within the organization amongst the various foreign and domestic plants, which required the U.S. subsidiary to ‘rethink’ its previous approach, including in the domain of workforce recruitment and training:

“So we started educating [our workforce on] our own. But that is, of course, very expensive. But that is what we did in the early days. We hired people and then we ran them through fairly lengthy training programs to give them those skill sets. Why is that a problem? Because we are in competition internally, with other plants, for example plants in Germany, to build these vehicles. So AutoCorp has to make money at the end of the day, and if you can build these vehicles cheaper somewhere else you might want to consider doing that. So this competition ultimately helped us to really think about how we could find a way to ensure that we have this labor pool in the future” (Subsidiary; HR manager; Speech).

Through stories, members of the organization articulated the aspiration and concrete envisioning of being an MNE. Next, I unpack how the co-occurrence of events at lower-level and higher-level entities resulted in a fourth and final stage of the process of MNE identity formation, involving assimilation and standardizing.

MNE Identity (2010-2018)

Assimilation. At this stage, members of AutoCorp sought assimilation. For example, the company newspaper started to be published in both German and English, to reflect the development toward a ‘globally active multinational’:

“The newspaper has followed suit with the development of our company toward a globally active multinational. Today, our company newspaper is published in both German and English” (Newspaper, 2013, 12: 4).

Similarly, the top manager responsible for the Latin American market, who joined the organization in 1996, reports how English has become the main language of the organization:

“The top management meetings are held in English. Even in Mexico or Brazil, where everyone speaks Spanish or Portuguese, respectively, we hold our meetings in English, just because this is the official language of our business” (Latin America; Head of business segment).

Going beyond language, the supervisory board chose to have its meeting at the U.S. plant, thereby giving a very visible sign of ‘one’ MNE organization across locations:

“In summer a meeting of the Supervisory Board was held for the first time at the production plant in the United States” (Annual Report, 2011: 8; report of the chairman of the supervisory board).

More broadly, the U.S. plant now figured prominently on the intra-organizational radar. For example, when it grew larger than one of the traditional and iconic plants in Germany, this ‘changed the atmosphere in the company as a whole’:

“The atmosphere in the company as a whole, in particular for those employees who had been with the company for many years already, changed dramatically at the point when [U.S. location] overtook [one German location]. This was really a game changer in terms of the internal perception, for the whole company really” (Headquarters; HR manager).

The ‘internal perception’ changed substantially, and the previous thinking around ‘them’ and ‘us’ was slowly replaced by a view as ‘one’. Going beyond discrete events, such as the supervisory board meeting in the U.S. or the U.S. plant overtaking the iconic German plant in the same year, 2011, the new internal perception also led to an understanding of the need to constantly monitor and manage various processes within the organization. For example, AutoCorp hired high-profile advisors to navigate new levels of complexity on the global stage:

“As a multinational company, AutoCorp has to adapt to complex regulations across very diverse markets. Thanks to the cooperation with a business strategy company in Washington, D.C., we advise AutoCorp globally in this area, in particular in the U.S. and China” (Newspaper, 2010, 1/2: 3; interview with a high-profile advisor).

AutoCorp also realized that the shift of the organizational self toward being an MNE needed to coincide with a revised recruitment strategy for top management positions, and, consequently, it recruited a foreign-born board member, who made the case in an interview with the newspaper for further international recruitments:

“We are a globally active company with locations on five continents. Our sales markets are developing in particular outside of Europe. We simply have to accept that we have to think globally. We will recruit more internationally for leadership roles going forward” (Newspaper, 2012, 12: 3; interview with the board member responsible for HR).

In a similar vein, AutoCorp highlighted unity across the ‘locations on five continents,’ and how this unity was brought about by the ‘AutoCorp spirit’:

“Over 80 countries are represented at our headquarters. Worldwide, we have associates from 90 different nationalities. It is the AutoCorp spirit that unites us all” (Annual Report, 2011: 5; letter of the chairman of the board of management).

Reflecting this notion of unity, the employee survey in 2011 was rolled out simultaneously across the worldwide operations:

“65 questions and 24 languages: in the period between 2 February and 25 February 2011, the new employee survey will be conducted. For the first time, employees at all locations globally will be asked simultaneously to share their views” (Newspaper, 2010, 12: 8).

The broader development toward assimilation was accompanied by initiatives to standardize practices in a variety of areas across subsidiaries in the different countries.

Standardizing. In line with the process leading to increased assimilation, AutoCorp sought a standardization of practices. Accordingly, in 2012, AutoCorp described itself as ‘united by common standards,’ including in the area of sustainability and clean production:

“Our plants also collaborate with one another, as well as local partners, on new approaches for resource-efficient vehicle production. In this way, Clean Production innovations become worldwide standards—and solutions become the new point of reference. [...] United by common standards” (Annual Report, 2012: 44).

Correspondingly, the former CEO of the subsidiary in the U.S. makes the observation that headquarters has changed its role over time in the direction of a ‘standardizing role’:

“By now, headquarters tends to have less of an initiating role and more a standardizing role, meaning: how do we make sure that regardless of where in the world we are active, we have the same resources, the same boundary conditions, the same processes and procedures in place?” (Subsidiary; Former CEO).

This standardizing role also involved actively supporting the sustained implementation of the New Strategy across the globe:

“Whether in Singapore, Portugal, China, or the U.S., in recent months the international markets of AutoCorp have been characterized by the same picture: employees in blue shirts. In Germany, these shirts are already known from the New Strategy on Tour, an event with about 8,500 participants. Now 15,000 employees globally are wearing these blue shirts. Because New Strategy is going on a world tour. [...] The corporate communications team is happy with the international events: ‘We succeeded in transmitting globally the message of one voice, one team, and one strategy’” (Newspaper, 2011, 1/2: 6).

More broadly, “[t]he same quality, safety and sustainability standards apply [...] worldwide” (Annual Report, 2017: 35), and AutoCorp engages in the transfer of strategic organizational practices to ensure that those standards are met. For example, in 2011, AutoCorp transferred German-style apprenticeship-based workforce training to its U.S. subsidiary, and since then this training model has been ‘expanded worldwide’:

“Dual vocational training expanded worldwide: AutoCorp expanded its international training activities in 2015 with the addition of new vocational training centers in three countries” (Annual Report, 2015: 44).

Corresponding to the idea that an identity improves learning (Kogut & Zander, 1996), an MNE identity improves knowledge exchange, and as a result apprenticeship is now considered a ‘blueprint,’ and it is implemented at new plants right from the start, whereas transfer to the U.S. subsidiary occurred after a time lag of almost twenty years:

“We have developed a blueprint process. And this is standard. In [South America location], the first apprentices have just been taken over from the departments. So the first apprentices are ready, they have graduated. The plant is not even erected, we haven’t produced a single car yet, but we have already trained apprentices” (Headquarters; Head of education).

Toward the end of the observation period, AutoCorp developed a shared understanding that being an MNE is a key feature characterizing the organization. For example, a member of the board of management who also has an executive role in operations in China says in the newspaper, “Our home is the AutoCorp Group. No matter where we manufacture, in the UK, the U.S., Germany, or here in China. [...] We all feel as if we belong to the big AutoCorp family” (Newspaper, 2012, 6: 2).

Another indicator of feeling ‘at home and part of the AutoCorp family’ is that the company’s strategy is widely known across locations, as has been confirmed by a recent employee survey:

“More than 80 per cent say they are familiar with the target and content of our strategy. This shared understanding will give us even greater momentum” (Annual Report, 2017: 23; statement of the chairman of the board of management).

Similarly, while toward the beginning of the observation period AutoCorp made a clear distinction between the facilities in Germany responsible for designing and developing cars, and the U.S. plant responsible for merely manufacturing them, in a commercial that ran during the 2011 Super Bowl AutoCorp presented a more equitable relationship: “Designed in America. Built in America” (Commercial, 2011). Mirroring this changed relationship, the current CEO describes the role of the U.S. subsidiary as follows:

“Today, we are co-creating the product. At the early stages we are already involved in deciding on what’s feasible. And once I’m a member of these circles, once I play the game too, together with headquarters, that’s when I’m a full member. And this network is critical for a global player” (Subsidiary; CEO).

In this findings section, I mapped the process of the formation of an MNE identity in AutoCorp. As summarized by a former corporate affairs manager of the U.S. subsidiary, who was with AutoCorp from 1993 through 2011, this involved a ‘learning curve on both sides of the ocean’ (Email exchange), hinting at the co-creational nature of the MNE identity formation process. Next, I discuss how these findings advance our theorized understanding at the intersection of identity and international business literature.

DISCUSSION

Tackling the theoretical puzzle of how members of an MNE organization develop a shared view, over the course of internationalization, that being an MNE is central to ‘who we are as an organization,’ my study of AutoCorp makes several contributions to the literature. My primary contribution is in the field of identity in the MNE, revolving around the unpacking of how an identity *as an MNE* is formed at the interface of a foreign subsidiary and its headquarters. My secondary contribution is in the field of MNE organization and coordination, revolving around the implications of the formation of an MNE identity.

The MNE Identity as a Meta-Identity

First, I complement existing literature, which has largely emphasized the plurality of identities in MNEs, materializing, for example, in the ‘identity duality’ faced by foreign subsidiaries (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). In contrast to this previous focus, my study shifts the view toward the ability of MNEs to form a shared understanding of ‘who we are,’ here coalescing around the view that being an MNE is key to the organizational identity. More specifically, my study maps the process of how an MNE identity is formed over the course of internationalization at the interface of a foreign subsidiary as a lower-level entity and its headquarters as the higher-level entity. I reveal how this process involves awareness, aspiration, and assimilation as key process steps, and sensemaking, storytelling, and standardizing as process mechanisms. My case material illustrates how MNE identity formation unfolds along a set of discrete events, which are interpreted by members of the organization in particular ways (Isabella, 1990), thereby triggering and driving the process of MNE identity formation. Building from this observation, I advance our understanding of identity dynamics by arguing that a possibly disruptive event needs to be interpreted as such to trigger changes in the identity. This strikes a middle ground between the findings that identity often changes in response to key events (Corley & Gioia, 2004) and that it can also undergo dynamics if such a disruptive event is absent (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020).

Figure 2 below maps the conceptual process model developed on the basis of my case study of AutoCorp's evolution over a period of almost three decades. It illustrates the pairs awareness-sensemaking, aspiration-storytelling, and assimilation-standardizing as process ingredients, and it shows how the identity formation process is driven along a set of discrete 'breakpoints' (Isabella, 1990) marking the transition from one stage to the next: from multiple identities via identity reflection and identity envisioning to MNE identity. Importantly, I conceptualize that these critical break or inflection points are located at different levels, with a lower-level event constituting the point of transition from multiple identities to identity reflection, a higher-level event from identity reflection to identity envisioning, and, finally, the combination of lower-level and higher-level events to MNE identity. While these events took particular forms in the case of AutoCorp, such as the creation of a foreign subsidiary in China or the development of 'twelve fundamental beliefs,' I theorize that the role of lower-level and higher-level events constituting breakpoints (Isabella, 1990) can be generalized analytically to the population of MNEs as they internationalize. Through events, members of an organization notice an emerging feature to the organizational self, think it through, and come to live and experience it.

---Insert Figure 2 About Here---

I further theorize that an MNE identity constitutes a meta-identity, meaning that it involves "multivocal symbols that are shared by many but are interpreted differently by different individuals and groups" (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009: 402). Conceiving of the MNE identity as a meta-identity helps to solve the theoretical puzzle of how MNEs can form a 'whole' despite the geographical separation of their units, which makes it challenging to develop "shared norms and values" (Vora & Kostova, 2007: 328) and a "cohesive, single identity" (Corley, 2004: 1146). Furthermore, the largely emergent process of MNE identity formation fosters the kind of 'unified diversity' (Eisenberg, 1984) that enables situational agency. For example, the MNE label can take on different meanings across foreign subsidiaries (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), similar to what has been observed in the relationship between industry and organizational identities

(Stigliani & Elsbach, 2018). In the case of AutoCorp, for example, during the identity envisioning stage, the organization restructured the corporate communication function, and, mirroring the notion of a ‘unified diversity,’ the newspaper reported that “[f]ollowing the principle of ‘Unity with Diversity,’ the communication processes within the company can now be coordinated better and also be made more efficient” (Newspaper, 2009, 4: 2; quotation marks in original). As a meta-identity, an established MNE identity thus affords the necessary room for maneuver for organizational members across different foreign subsidiaries to craft their organizational self (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017) and navigate their minority identity strategically (Edman, 2016a), because, as an umbrella identity, it is relatively weak (Peteraf & Shanley, 1997). An MNE identity constitutes “a tent big enough to accommodate a range of entities [...] [yet where] members see themselves (and have others see them) as belonging inside the tent” (see Patvardhan, Gioia, & Hamilton, 2015: 429). The discovery of how an MNE identity, as an organization-level construct (Mees-Buss et al., 2019), is formed at the interface of headquarters and foreign subsidiary complements previous work in international business (Edman, 2016a; Pant & Ramachandran, 2017), which has focused largely on the subsidiary as the main unit of analysis.

The Formation of an MNE Identity as Emergent Process

A second contribution of my study is that it challenges the assumption that nested identities are cascading (Ashforth et al., 2011). Rather, and leveraging the MNE as a research context (Roth & Kostova, 2003), my case material suggests a more recursive relationship between lower-level identities and higher-level identities. More specifically, I reveal how identity dynamics, including the formation of an MNE identity, can evolve in interaction and over the course of the development of the relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) between lower-level and higher-level entities. This empirical observation shifts attention away from formal identity claims, as found in speeches (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017) or corporate mottos (Sasaki, Kotlar, Ravasi, & Vaara, 2020), and instead emphasizes how identity is accomplished over time (Oliver & Vough, 2020). Rather than strategic and planned identity claims, my study reveals interactional processes across

levels as the ‘motor’ (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) for identity formation. More broadly, my study thus contributes to an emerging research stream, which conceives of “identity as ‘a work in process’ rather than as a ‘thing’” (Patvardhan et al., 2015: 430; quotation marks in original). Tackling the theoretical challenge of how nested identities become linked and possibly isomorphic over time (Ashforth et al., 2011), my study emphasizes “the co-evolutionary identity dynamics across different levels in a nested structure” (Patvardhan et al., 2015: 427) by unpacking a largely emergent and co-creational process leading to a shared identity across levels. The non-teleological perspective emphasizing emergent processes is particularly apt in the MNE setting, where top-down identity management often proves a ‘quixotic task’ (Storgaard et al., 2020).

My study reveals as process outcome the understanding of different units within the MNE organization that they are proto-typical members of an MNE (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). While there is a strong assumption in much existing literature that multiple or nested identities need to be managed (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), for example during the course of “forming, maintaining, revising, deleting, or strengthening identity claims” (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017: 669), my study illustrates how nested identities can transform into a whole during more emergent interaction and over long stretches of time, marked by events at the level of headquarters and foreign subsidiary, respectively. These events can occur beyond the focal dyad, triggering identity reflection; include the focal dyad, triggering identity envisioning; and occur between the focal dyad, triggering MNE identity formation. As such, my study of AutoCorp’s MNE identity formation complements existing literature on identity work or identity management (Kreiner et al., 2015; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011) by revealing a less deliberate or teleological type of process. I further theorize that the more co-creational and emergent process of identity formation as documented in this study is particularly likely to occur in cases where the question of who we are refers to the organizational form (Delmestri & Wezel, 2011) or membership in an organizational field, such as being a particular kind of company, as opposed to a specific corporate mission or

sought competitive advantage, such as being the technology leader in electric mobility, where more deliberate and strategic identity work is also possible in MNE settings (Hatch et al., 2015). Claiming and obtaining membership in the category or ‘class’ (Kostova et al., 2008) of MNEs appears to be a less actively steered process.

A New Lens on Classic Questions in International Business

Third, my study changes the way we think about classic questions of MNE coordination and organization, such as the challenge of balancing global integration and local responsiveness (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), the decision to engage in knowledge sharing and practice transfer (Kostova & Roth, 2002), and, more broadly, the complex and dynamic relationship between headquarters and foreign subsidiaries (Brenner & Ambos, 2013). The identity lens developed in this paper enriches our understanding of these phenomena by offering organizational identity changes as a possible antecedent of various outcomes. For example, previous work has theorized that the implementation of total quality management often fails because the existing organizational identity constrains change efforts, including those involving the transfer or implementation of practices (Reger, Gustafson, DeMarie, & Mullane, 1994). Based on the idea that practices constitute a key ‘storage place of organizational memory,’ in which organizational identity resides (see Pratt & Foreman, 2000: 20), I theorize that identity dynamics in the MNE are a precursor to changes in the MNE organization, such as a shift toward global integration (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017) or the decision to engage in practice transfer. I encourage future research to test this critically. For example, zooming in on the processes leading to a transfer decision would meaningfully complement our existing knowledge, which tends to focus on the transfer process itself (Szulanski, Ringov, & Jensen, 2016) and the outcome of transfer (Kostova & Roth, 2002). Here, I theorize that an MNE identity shapes the problemistic search processes within the MNE organization (Monteiro, Arvidsson, & Birkinshaw, 2008), thus increasing the probability that a unit within the MNE network will search the wider MNE organization for solutions to local problems (Fortwengel, 2017). Furthermore, the presence or absence of an MNE identity, as well

as its relative strength, is likely to influence adaptation processes during transfer (Ansari, Reinecke, & Spaan, 2014).

My paper also offers a more nuanced understanding of how members of the organization experience and make sense of the process of internationalizing. This complements previous work on this key phenomenon, which has so far focused its attention on understanding how and why firms internationalize and what kinds of assets and resources enable them to do so (Santangelo & Meyer, 2017). Here, a key finding of my study is that critical steps in the internationalization process can interrupt the formation of multiple identities in MNEs, and instead trigger a period of identity reflection, which sets in motion a process of MNE identity formation. Previous research suggests that MNEs constitute a “global class of organizations” (Kostova et al., 2008: 998), and my study unpacks how an MNE collectively forms a claim of membership in this field over the course of internationalization.

More broadly, the identity lens developed in this paper advances existing theories of change processes in the MNE (Doz & Prahalad, 1991) by theorizing identity dynamics as an important antecedent of (changes in) MNE behavior. By introducing the notion of an MNE identity, my study paves the way for future research to explore the role of the presence or absence of such an identity, as well as possible differences in the identity’s strength (Bednar et al., 2020; Vough, 2012), as a largely ignored explanatory factor so far for MNE behavior, processes, and outcomes. For example, having an MNE identity might influence the process and outcome of attempts to build and maintain internal legitimacy within the organization (Balogun, Fahy, & Vaara, 2019), and it may also shape the extent and nature of the identity duality faced by foreign subsidiaries (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). Similarly, the formation of an MNE identity might be identity enhancing⁴ for a particular foreign subsidiary, meaning generating a more positive and self-confident perception of who we are at this unit. For example, an employee at AutoCorp’s plant in China is quoted as follows:

⁴ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this term and its possible implication.

“Now we are part of a global system and directly linked to headquarters. This means that we now really belong to this, and we are extremely proud of that. Now headquarters sees what we are doing” (Newspaper, 2010, 5/6: 4).

More generally, and building on the argument that identity “serves a coordinating role” (Tripsas, 2009: 444) in organizations, an MNE identity might function as an effective informal coordination mechanism within the MNE organization (Kostova, Marano, & Tallman, 2016). Exploring the implication of an MNE identity for a variety of outcomes of interest also corresponds to the recent development that identity scholars are moving toward “using identity as a useful theoretical lens for understanding other phenomena” (Gioia et al., 2013b: 167). Unpacking the process of how an MNE forms an organizational identity *as an MNE*, this study widens the scope for scholars by pointing to a new line of inquiry in international business research aimed at exploring the implications of the absence and presence, as well as relative strength and weakness, of an MNE identity.

Limitations and Research Frontiers

Like every empirical work, this study has limitations, which open up opportunities for future research. For example, this study focuses on organizational identity, ignoring the development of the external image of AutoCorp over time (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Future work could map the co-evolution of these two dimensions, identity and image, including possible misalignments. Similarly, focusing on both identity and image could reveal possible moments of agency (Edman, 2016a). Indeed, zooming in on this interplay, and how it is practically accomplished over time, offers an exciting research frontier that could be tackled using innovative methods such as multi-site ethnography (Lauring & Klitmøller, 2015). For example, the current CEO of the U.S. subsidiary states that “we want to be viewed as an American company, as bringing jobs. And we are quite successful at that. But behind the curtain we are 100 per cent AutoCorp” (Subsidiary; CEO). Future work could explore further how MNEs craft images to manage the liability of foreignness (Edman, 2016b), while at the same time foster an MNE identity ‘behind the curtain.’

Another limitation is that this single-case study has focused on the identity formation at the intersection of headquarters and a foreign greenfield investment. Future research could explore to what extent the findings of this study translate to the experience of subsidiaries that were merged or acquired (Clark & Geppert, 2011). Previous research suggests that the formation of an MNE identity may be a complex and contested process in settings involving a cross-border merger or acquisition (Vaara & Tienari, 2011), suggesting that there might be some important boundary conditions to the theoretical arguments developed in this study. For example, the formation process of an MNE identity could vary depending on entry mode. Not least in light of current trends toward anti-globalization and nationalism (Cuervo-Cazurra, Doz, & Gaur, 2020), future research could also unpack how important identity politics may lurk beneath the MNE meta-identity (see Vaara, Tienari, & Koveshnikov, 2019). More broadly, one exciting avenue for future research would be to uncover how foreign subsidiaries of an MNE might differ in how they interpret the MNE meta-identity and fill it with meaning, possibly depending on their role within the wider MNE organization (Meyer, Li, & Schotter, 2020). Here, subsidiary-specific archival data, such as transcripts of internal speeches and meeting minutes, could offer valuable comparative insights.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore possible scope conditions related to the more emergent process of identity formation revealed in this study, which contrasts with the dominant view in the literature emphasizing more purposeful and strategic identity work (Kreiner et al., 2015), for example, in the form of carefully placed identity claims. I suggest that such a more emergent process is more likely to occur when the question of ‘who are we as an organization?’ refers to the organizational form (Delmestri & Wezel, 2011) or field membership, rather than the vision or corporate mission. Future work could leverage the MNE setting to compare and contrast identity dynamics, as well as the underlying mechanisms, across these two content dimensions.

More broadly, there is considerable scope for leveraging an identity lens to advance our understanding of a number of phenomena in international business. For example, Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) show how two German MNEs engaged in ‘geopolitical jockeying’ during the interwar period in India, a time that witnessed a rise in nationalism on the subcontinent. Intriguingly, their identity as German MNEs enabled them to distinguish themselves from MNEs from colonial powers, in particular Britain. As a result, they were seen more favorably in nationalist India. Future work could further advance our understanding of the precise relationships between these national-level dynamics, organizational-level responses and strategies, and individual-level activities (see Ashforth et al., 2011). The MNE offers a uniquely promising research context to advance our understanding of these complex and nested relationships (e.g., Lai, Morgan, & Morris, 2020), and future research could explore how an MNE identity as a meta-identity enables a variety of responses at the various levels. By introducing the notion of an MNE identity and mapping its formation, this study paves the way for future work to uncover the implications of an MNE meta-identity for identity processes, activities, and dynamics at multiple levels.

REFERENCES

- Albert, S. & Whetten, D. A. 1985. Organizational identity. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, vol. 7: 263-295. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Albert, S., Ashforth, B. E., & Dutton, J. E. 2000. Organizational identity and identification: Charting new waters and building new bridges. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1): 13-17.
- Ansari, S., Reinecke, J., & Spaan, A. 2014. How are practices made to vary? Managing practice adaptation in a multinational corporation. *Organization Studies*, 35(9): 1313-1341.
- Anteby, M. & Molnár, V. 2012. Collective memory meets organizational identity: Remembering to forget in a firm's rhetorical history. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3): 515-540.
- Ashforth, B. E., Rogers, K. M., & Corley, K. G. 2011. Identity in organizations: Exploring cross-level dynamics. *Organization Science*, 22(5): 1144-1156.
- Balogun, J., Fahy, K., & Vaara, E. 2019. The interplay between HQ legitimation and subsidiary legitimacy judgments in HQ relocation: A social psychological approach. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 50(2): 223-249.
- Bartlett, C. A. & Ghoshal, S. 1989. *Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

- Bednar, J. S., Galvin, B. M., Ashforth, B. E., & Hafermalz, E. 2020. Putting identification in motion: A dynamic view of organizational identification. *Organization Science*, 31(1): 200-222.
- Brenner, B. & Ambos, B. 2013. A question of legitimacy? A dynamic perspective on multinational firm control. *Organization Science*, 24(3): 773-795.
- Burgelman, R. A. 2011. Bridging history and reductionism: A key role for longitudinal qualitative research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(5): 591-601.
- Chreim, S., Langley, A., Reay, T., Comeau-Vallée, M., & Huq, J.-L. 2020. Constructing and sustaining counter-institutional identities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(3): 935-964.
- Clark, E. & Geppert, M. 2011. Subsidiary integration as identity construction and institution building: A political sensemaking approach. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(2): 395-416.
- Cloutier, C. & Ravasi, D. 2020. Identity trajectories: Explaining long-term patterns of continuity and change in organizational identities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(4): 1196-1235.
- Corley, K. G. 2004. Defined by our strategy or our culture? Hierarchical differences in perceptions of organizational identity and change. *Human Relations*, 57(9): 1145-1177.
- Corley, K. G. & Gioia, D. A. 2004. Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of a corporate spin-off. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(2): 173-208.
- Cuervo-Cazurra, A., Doz, Y., & Gaur, A. 2020. Skepticism of globalization and global strategy: Increasing regulations and countervailing strategies. *Global Strategy Journal*, 10(1): 3-31.
- Delmestri, G. & Wezel, F. C. 2011. Breaking the wave: The contested legitimation of an alien organizational form. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(6): 828-852.
- Doz, Y. L. & Prahalad, C. K. 1991. Managing DMNCs: A search for a new paradigm. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(S1): 145-164.
- Dutton, J. E. & Dukerich, J. M. 1991. Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(3): 517-554.
- Edman, J. 2016a. Cultivating foreignness: How organizations maintain and leverage minority identities. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(1): 55-88.
- Edman, J. 2016b. Reconciling the advantages and liabilities of foreignness: Towards an identity-based framework. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 47(6): 674-694.
- Eisenberg, E. M. 1984. Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51(3): 227-242.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. & Graebner, M. E. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 25-32.
- Fortwengel, J. 2017. Practice transfer in organizations: The role of governance mode for internal and external fit. *Organization Science*, 28(4): 690-710.
- Gibbert, M., Ruigrok, W., & Wicki, B. 2008. What passes as a rigorous case study? *Strategic Management Journal*, 29(13): 1465-1474.
- Gioia, D. A. & Pitre, E. 1990. Multiparadigm perspectives on theory building. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(4): 584-602.
- Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. 2000. Organizational identity, image, and adaptive instability. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1): 63-81.
- Gioia, D. A., Price, K. N., Hamilton, A. L., & Thomas, J. B. 2010. Forging an identity: An insider-outsider study of processes involved in the formation of organizational identity. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(1): 1-46.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. 2013a. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1): 15-31.

- Gioia, D. A., Patvardhan, S. D., Hamilton, A. L., & Corley, K. G. 2013b. Organizational identity formation and change. *Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1): 123-193.
- Golden, B. R. 1992. Research notes. The past is the past - or is it? The use of retrospective accounts as indicators of past strategy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35(4): 848-860.
- Grøgaard, B., Colman, H. L., & Stensaker, I. G. 2019. Legitimizing, leveraging, and launching: Developing dynamic capabilities in the MNE. *Journal of International Business Studies*: forthcoming.
- Hatch, M. J., Schultz, M., & Skov, A.-M. 2015. Organizational identity and culture in the context of managed change: Transformation in the Carlsberg Group, 2009-2013. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 1(1): 58-90.
- Isabella, L. A. 1990. Evolving interpretations as a change unfolds: How managers construe key organizational events. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(1): 7-41.
- Johanson, J. & Vahlne, J.-E. 1977. The internationalization process of the firm - A model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitments. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 8(1): 23-32.
- Kogut, B. & Zander, U. 1996. What firms do? Coordination, identity, and learning. *Organization Science*, 7(5): 502-518.
- Kostova, T. & Roth, K. 2002. Adoption of an organizational practice by subsidiaries of multinational corporations: Institutional and relational effects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(1): 215-233.
- Kostova, T., Roth, K., & Dacin, M. T. 2008. Institutional theory in the study of multinational corporations: A critique and new directions. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4): 994-1006.
- Kostova, T., Marano, V., & Tallman, S. 2016. Headquarters-subsidiary relationships in MNCs: Fifty years of evolving research. *Journal of World Business*, 51(1): 176-184.
- Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E., Sheep, M. L., Smith, B. R., & Kataria, N. 2015. Elasticity and the dialectic tensions of organizational identity: How can we hold together while we are pulling apart? *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(4): 981-1011.
- Kriz, A. & Welch, C. 2018. Innovation and internationalisation processes of firms with new-to-the-world technologies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 49(4): 496-522.
- Lai, K., Morgan, G., & Morris, J. 2020. 'Eating bitterness' in a Chinese multinational: Identity regulation in context. *Organization Studies*, 41(5): 661-680.
- Langley, A., Smallman, C., Tsoukas, H., & Van de Ven, A. H. 2013. Process studies of change in organization and management: Unveiling temporality, activity, and flow. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(1): 1-13.
- Lauring, J. & Klitmøller, A. 2015. Corporate language-based communication avoidance in MNCs: A multi-sited ethnography approach. *Journal of World Business*, 50(1): 46-55.
- Lubinski, C. & Wadhvani, R. D. 2020. Geopolitical jockeying: Economic nationalism and multinational strategy in historical perspective. *Strategic Management Journal*, 41(3): 400-421.
- Mees-Buss, J., Welch, C., & Westney, D. E. 2019. What happened to the transnational? The emergence of the neo-global corporation. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 50(9): 1513-1543.
- Meyer, K. E., Mudambi, R., & Narula, R. 2011. Multinational enterprises and local contexts: The opportunities and challenges of multiple embeddedness. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(2): 235-252.
- Meyer, K. E., Li, C., & Schotter, A. P. J. 2020. Managing the MNE subsidiary: Advancing a multi-level and dynamic research agenda. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 51(4): 538-576.

- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. 1984. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Monteiro, L. F., Arvidsson, N., & Birkinshaw, J. 2008. Knowledge flows within multinational corporations: Explaining subsidiary isolation and its performance implications. *Organization Science*, 19(1): 90-107.
- Nag, R., Corley, K. G., & Gioia, D. A. 2007. The intersection of organizational identity, knowledge, and practice: Attempting strategic change via knowledge grafting. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(4): 821-847.
- Noorderhaven, N. & Harzing, A.-W. 2009. Knowledge-sharing and social interaction within MNEs. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40(5): 719-741.
- Oliver, D. & Vough, H. C. 2020. Practicing identity in emergent firms: How practices shape founders' organizational identity claims. *Strategic Organization*, 18(1): 75-105.
- Ozcan, P., Han, S., & Graebner, M. E. 2017. Single cases: The what, why, and how. In R. Mir & S. Jain (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies*: 92-112. New York: Routledge.
- Pant, A. & Ramachandran, J. 2017. Navigating identity duality in multinational subsidiaries: A paradox lens on identity claims at Hindustan Unilever 1959-2015. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48(6): 664-692.
- Patvardhan, S. D., Gioia, D. A., & Hamilton, A. L. 2015. Weathering a meta-level identity crisis: Forging a coherent collective identity for an emerging field. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(2): 405-435.
- Peteraf, M. & Shanley, M. 1997. Getting to know you: A theory of strategic group identity. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(S1): 165-186.
- Pratt, M. G. & Foreman, P. O. 2000. Classifying managerial responses to multiple organizational identities. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1): 18-42.
- Pratt, M. G. & Kraatz, M. S. 2009. E pluribus unum: Multiple identities and the organizational self. In L. M. Roberts & J. E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation*: 385-410. New York: Psychology Press.
- Ravasi, D. & Phillips, N. 2011. Strategies of alignment: Organizational identity management and strategic change at Bang & Olufsen. *Strategic Organization*, 9(2): 103-135.
- Reger, R. K., Gustafson, L. T., DeMarie, S. M., & Mullane, J. V. 1994. Reframing the organization: Why implementing total quality is easier said than done. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(3): 565-584.
- Roth, K. & Kostova, T. 2003. The use of the multinational corporation as a research context. *Journal of Management*, 29(6): 883-902.
- Santangelo, G. D. & Meyer, K. E. 2017. Internationalization as an evolutionary process. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48(9): 1114-1130.
- Sasaki, I., Kotlar, J., Ravasi, D., & Vaara, E. 2020. Dealing with revered past: Historical identity statements and strategic change in Japanese family firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 41(3): 590-623.
- Sluss, D. M. & Ashforth, B. E. 2007. Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(1): 9-32.
- Stigliani, I. & Elsbach, K. D. 2018. Identity co-formation in an emerging industry: Forging organizational distinctiveness and industry coherence through sensemaking and sensegiving. *Journal of Management Studies*, 55(8): 1323-1355.
- Storgaard, M., Tienari, J., Piekkari, R., & Michailova, S. 2020. Holding on while letting go: Neocolonialism as organizational identity work in a multinational corporation. *Organization Studies*, 41(11): 1469-1489.

- Szulanski, G., Ringov, D., & Jensen, R. J. 2016. Overcoming stickiness: How the timing of knowledge transfer methods affects transfer difficulty. *Organization Science*, 27(2): 304-322.
- Tripsas, M. 2009. Technology, identity, and inertia through the lens of 'The Digital Photography Company'. *Organization Science*, 20(2): 441-460.
- Tsai, W. & Ghoshal, S. 1998. Social capital and value creation: The role of intrafirm networks. *Academy of Management Journal*, 41(4): 464-476.
- Vaara, E. & Tienari, J. 2011. On the narrative construction of multinational corporations: An antenarrative analysis of legitimation and resistance in a cross-border merger. *Organization Science*, 22(2): 370-390.
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., & Koveshnikov, A. 2019. From cultural differences to identity politics: A critical discursive approach to national identity in multinational corporations. *Journal of Management Studies*: forthcoming.
- Van de Ven, A. H. & Poole, M. S. 1995. Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3): 510-540.
- Vora, D. & Kostova, T. 2007. A model of dual organizational identification in the context of the multinational enterprise. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(3): 327-350.
- Vough, H. 2012. Not all identifications are created equal: Exploring employee accounts for workgroup, organizational, and professional identification. *Organization Science*, 23(3): 778-800.
- Vough, H. C., Caza, B. B., & Maitlis, S. 2020. Making sense of myself: Exploring the relationship between identity and sensemaking. In A. D. Brown (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identities in Organizations*: 244-260. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weick, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. 2011. Theorising from case studies: Towards a pluralist future for international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(5): 740-762.

Table 1: Data sources.

Type of data	Amount of data	Use in the analysis
Archival documents		
- Annual reports (yearly), 1990 – 2018	5,627 pages	Historical events
- Company newspaper (between seven and 12 issues per year), 1990 – 2018	4,387 pages	Identity claims, direct and indirect self-references
- Additional archival data	158 pages	
Semi-structured interviews		
- Headquarters representatives (8), U.S. subsidiary representatives (15), additional respondents (8)	31 interviews (375 pages)	Interpretation of historical events Accomplished identity
Videos of speeches		
	3 videos (74 minutes)	

Table 2: Data structure.

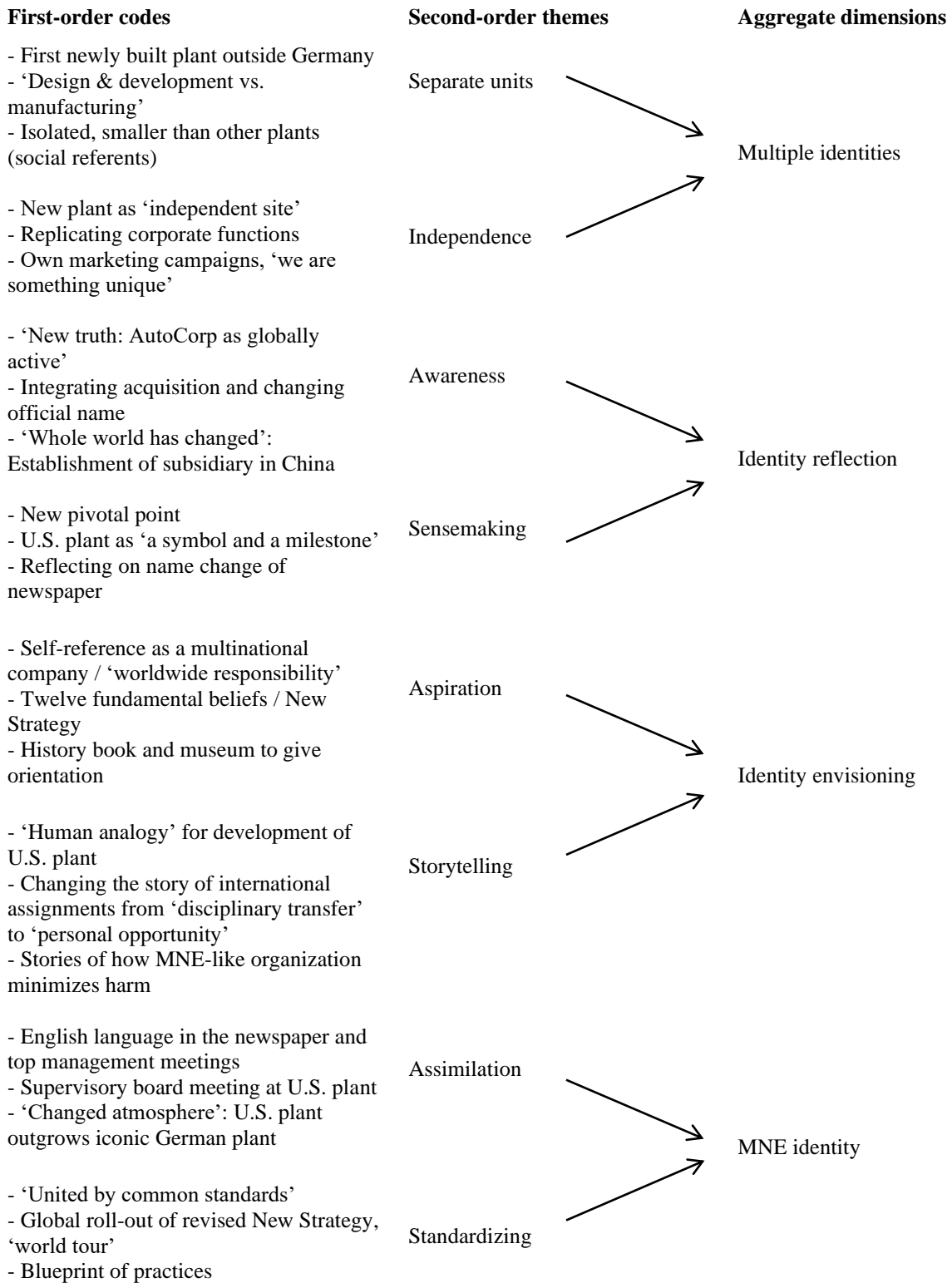


Table 3: Representative quotes.

Quote	Theme
Multiple identities (1990-1997)	
<p>- “At the time, this was the first real newly built plant outside of Germany. Where we said, ‘we want to build a plant,’ this was something entirely new to us” (Subsidiary; Former CEO)</p> <p>- “[At the U.S. plant], many things are different. There is only one canteen for all employees and there is no reserved parking either” (Newspaper, 1994, 11: 4)</p> <p>- “Short-term opportunism should not take priority over long-term opportunities. It should be disregarded if it is incompatible with the established identity of the Company [...]. The decision to build the U.S. plant was based primarily on long-term market expectations, rather than on advantages arising from wage costs or exchange rates. Thus, it fits in with our long-term view of the Company’s future. Our picture of the future is one of a Company which operates worldwide, while preserving its individual identity” (Annual Report, 1995: 4-5; statement of the chairman of the board of management)</p> <p>- “AutoCorp’s home is here, in Germany, in this state. Our heart continues to pump here, although we are active in many parts of the world. But, of course we have to establish roots in the world with parts of our company” (Newspaper, 1997, 5: 11; interview with a member of the board of management, who prior to that was an AutoCorp executive in the U.S.)</p> <p>- “At the start of the project it was already determined that the new vehicle would be manufactured at the U.S. plant, because the U.S. plant is responsible for niche products within the production network” (Newspaper, 1998, 12: 15)</p>	Separate units
<p>- “The new plant will start with a few hundred employees. It is to be expected that at the end of the decade there will be around 2,000 employees working at the U.S. plant. The workforce will be largely American; this will be true of the leadership, too” (Newspaper, 1992, 7: 1)</p> <p>- “AutoCorp was very cognizant of growing a local workforce” (Subsidiary; Former corporate affairs manager; Email exchange)</p> <p>- “A high degree of freedom within a shared network characterizes the cooperation” (Newspaper, 1994, 6: 1)</p> <p>- “We left the managers a lot of freedom. We just said to them, ‘go ahead and do everything differently’” (Subsidiary; CEO)</p> <p>- “Our engagement here is not temporary. We are not a foreign object here. Rather, we are now an integral part of the American car industry” (Newspaper, 1994, 12: 3; quote from a top manager at the U.S. subsidiary)</p> <p>- “Today, all AutoCorp’s corporate functions—development, purchasing and production, sales and financing—are represented in the United States, for it had become increasingly difficult, from a German base, to maintain the marque’s position in this market” (Annual Report, 1995: 101)</p> <p>- “AutoCorp will and must [...] sustain its identity. Because ‘future needs origin’—this is true of big companies as well” (Newspaper, 1996, 6: 1; quote from the chairman of the board of management; quotation marks in original)</p>	Independence
Identity reflection (1997-2006)	
<p>- “We shouldn’t fall back mentally into national borders, we need to remain a company with a global outlook. After all, we are selling about two-thirds of our cars outside of Germany” (Newspaper, 2000, 5: 3; interview with the chairman of the board of management)</p> <p>- “The AutoCorp Identity Handbook structures the presentation of the brand AutoCorp across different media. The objective is to ensure a globally harmonized presentation” (Newspaper, 2000, 6: 14)</p>	Awareness

-
- “For the first time in its history, AutoCorp has its own, exclusive font” (Newspaper, 2001, 11: 8; quote from the head of corporate identity)
 - “For our company, this is a fact: the increasing internationalization has strengthened the role of our locations here in the state. The more successful we are globally, the better it is for our domestic production sites” (Newspaper, 2003, 10: 1; quote from the chairman of the board of management)
-

- “In my view the new name of our newspaper emphasizes thinking as a group and it strengthens the ‘we’-feel. One thing should be clear to everyone: only if we are working together will we succeed in getting AutoCorp where it belongs—to the top of the auto manufacturers in the world” (Newspaper, 1999, 10: 2; quote from an employee giving feedback in the intranet; quotation marks in original)
- “The U.S. plant was the first major step in the internationalization of AutoCorp” (Annual Report, 2003: 35)
- “Last year, AutoCorp consistently continued opening up new markets and regions, thus underlining its firm conviction that excellent growth opportunities exist worldwide for excellent automobiles. It is this unique, authentic course which provides AutoCorp with freedom of action and independence, both today and in future” (Annual Report, 2004: 3)
- “Growth knows no bounds, or at least no geographical boundaries. [...] All this is part of a long-term internationalization strategy to open up key markets with production plants from the inside. In the U.S., for example, AutoCorp’s success story became more dynamic than ever once the plant was opened there” (Annual Report, 2004: 16)
- “The former world of the various ‘castles’ has developed into a highly flexible, international production network” (Newspaper, 2006, 12: 5; interview with the board member responsible for production; quotation marks in original)

Sensemaking

Identity envisioning (2006-2010)

- “On December 1st, the board member responsible for production held the first English-language production network meeting with representatives from foreign plants, including the U.S.” (Newspaper, 2006, 12: 5)
- “To coincide with AutoCorp’s strategic realignment, the Board of Management has formulated a set of core principles that are intended to serve as guidelines for managers and employees. In the opinion of the Supervisory Board, these core principles provide an excellent basis for open and objective-oriented cooperation throughout AutoCorp” (Annual Report, 2007: 6; report of the chairman of the supervisory board)
- “Within AutoCorp, the Board of Management, the Supervisory Board and employees base their actions on twelve core principles which create the cornerstone of the success of AutoCorp” (Annual Report, 2008: 138)
- “The first international conference on corporate communication and politics after this domain had been restructured took place end of July at headquarters. [...] The objective is to improve the efficiency of the communication and public relations work and at the same time strengthen the ‘one-voice-communication’ across all locations. [...] To strengthen the global cooperation of all communicators, the conference will now take place yearly” (Newspaper, 2009, 9/10: 2; quotation marks in original)
- “From about 2009/2010 onwards, this whole topic of international cooperation became more and more important. Departments changed their organization, the cooperation was intensified, there was more exchange, models were distributed in parts. Meaning one model is no longer produced at one site, but at multiple sites. I believe there was this awakening in the whole company, leading to more international cooperation” (Headquarters; Head of education)

Aspiration

-
- “As a globally operating enterprise, AutoCorp is confronted with numerous risks. Price fluctuations on the global currency, money, capital and commodity markets as well as shorter innovation cycles result in an ever-rising complexity which places great demands on enterprises with international operations” (Annual Report, 2007: 62)
-

Storytelling

-
- “I think the financial crisis was a critical event. That was the impetus for us to readjust our organization and our strategy” (Western Europe; Finance CEO)
 - “Many new and innovative technologies have been implemented into the new Paint Shop area. This is exciting for the entire AutoCorp Global Production Network as we are creating synergies and increased efficiency by implementing lessons learned from around the globe” (Press release, 2009; quote from U.S. subsidiary paint shop manager)
 - “AutoCorp is committed to adhering to the OECD’s guidelines for multinational companies and the contents of the ICC Business Charter for Sustainable Development” (Annual Report, 2009: 158)
 - “The U.S. plant has become the second home of AutoCorp” (Newspaper, 2010, 11: 4)
 - “The financial crisis clearly demonstrated how volatile markets can be and how difficult it is to predict economic trends. We aim for a good balance between Europe, Asia and the Americas in our business and sales activities. [...] This report features our U.S. plant as an example” (Annual Report, 2010: 7; statement of the chairman of the board of management)
-

MNE identity (2010-2018)

- “We don’t present ourselves as a German company anymore. We don’t emphasize the ‘made in Germany’ anymore, instead we say ‘made by AutoCorp’” (Head of archive)
 - “There was a shift in the internal perception, for the whole organization, really. [...] From the perspective of the employees here in Germany, if you ask them what has changed in the past 25 years, and their consciousness of the U.S. plant, then of course this has been a massive development” (Headquarters; HR manager)
 - “About ten years ago, AutoCorp said, ‘we are bilingual.’ That was during an event of the upper management, where we said that we are bilingual now. And some of us joked, OK, so the local dialect and German. But no, German and English!” (Subsidiary; CEO)
 - “We have German roots, but we are becoming more and more international” (Newspaper, 2011, 11/12: 3; interview with the board member responsible for production) Assimilation
 - “Today, AutoCorp is a stronger, more international and more future-oriented company than it was when we embarked on our New Strategy” (Annual Report, 2012: 16; statement of the chairman of the board of management)
 - “Numerous locations are distributed all over the world. To work efficiently, they need permanent exchange. Here the internal social network of AutoCorp helps. Currently there is a pilot, and next year there will be an extended pilot with 10,000 international participants. One can connect with colleagues, follow important themes, and work together in virtual groups—independent of space and time” (Newspaper, 2013, 12: 16)
-

- “Strategically implementing standardization has been going on for only a few years now. I can’t really say when exactly this started, because it was a development that emerged from different initiatives, which were then combined” (Headquarters; HR manager)
 - “For the first time in the company’s history, a new model is released not in stages, but simultaneously worldwide. This means new models had to be on display in AutoCorp showrooms from Auckland to Anchorage in time for the sales launch” (Annual Report, 2011: 46)
 - “AutoCorp is growing rapidly, and will continue to do so. Our company is entering new markets, so we are becoming more and more international. Our structures in HR, however, were still too much focused on Germany, on Europe. But this is not enough for a multinational corporation. That is why the international restructuring of HR was an important first step for me. [...] We have created four regional centers, so-called hubs. One each in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia” (Newspaper, 2013, 8: 6; interview with the board member responsible for HR) Standardizing
 - “In the new plant in South America, ‘We will work right from the start according to the work organization that is currently being implemented at all AutoCorp plants,’ says the plant director” (Newspaper, 2013, 10: 6; quotation marks in original)
-

Figure 1: Key events in the evolution of AutoCorp as an MNE.

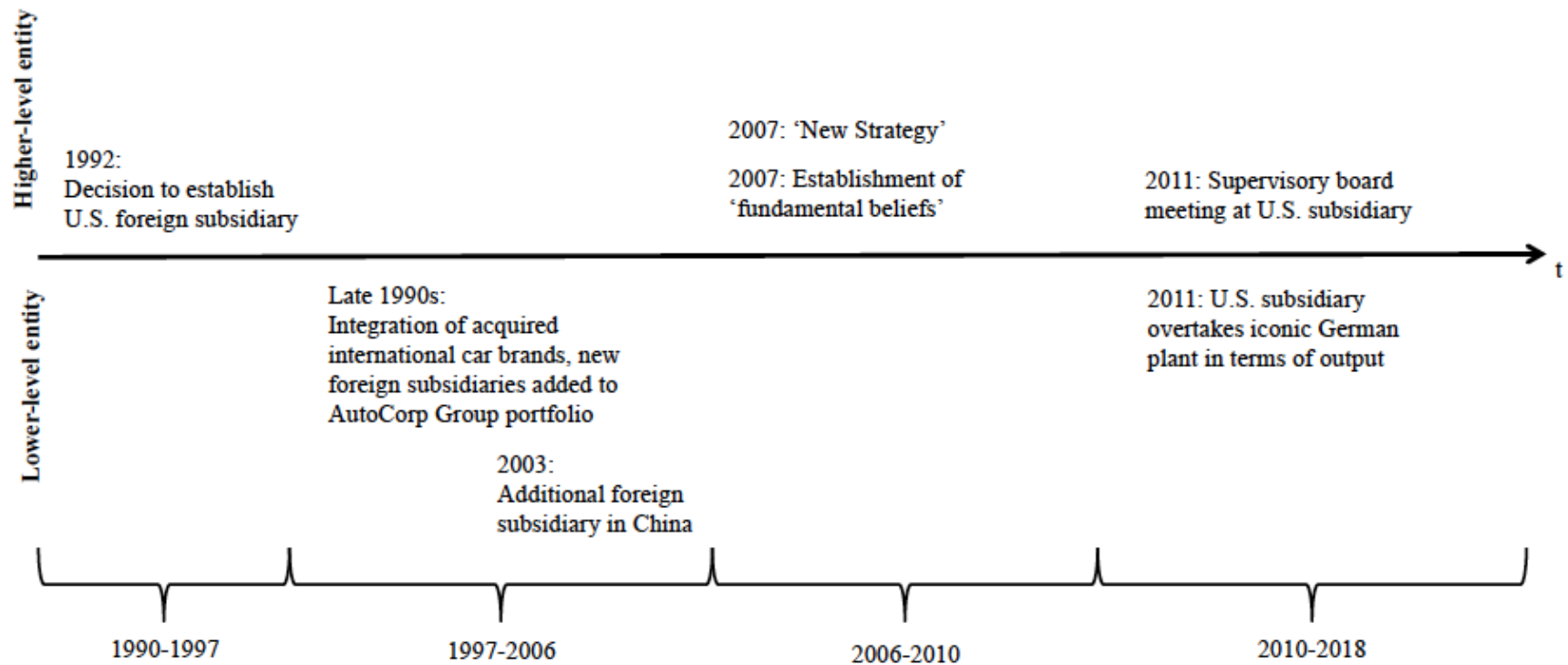


Figure 2: The process of the formation of an MNE identity.

