Toward an emotion-based perspective on organizations: how organizational practices drive emotions and strategic action

Suvi-Tuuli Vuori

Aalto University

Am I good enough?"

How do clients and everyone else think and feel?

How to stay confident and sell more?

Aalto University publication series
Doctoral Theses 96/2025

Toward an emotion-based perspective on organizations: how organizational practices drive emotions and strategic action

Suvi-Tuuli Vuori

A doctoral thesis completed for the degree of Doctor of Science (Technology) to be defended, with the permission of the Aalto University School of Science, at a public examination held at the lecture hall TU1 of the school on 18 June 2025 at 12.

Aalto University
School of Science
Department of Industrial Engineering and Management

Supervising professor
Associate Professor Jukka Luoma, Aalto University, Finland

Preliminary examiners
Professor Satu Teerikangas, University of Turku, Finland, and University College London, United Kingdom
Professor Maxim Voronov, Schulich School of Business, Canada

Opponent
Professor Satu Teerikangas, University of Turku, Finland, and University College London, United Kingdom

Aalto University publication series
Doctoral Theses 96/2025

ISBN 978-952-64-2554-2 (soft cover)
ISBN 978-952-64-2553-5 (PDF)
ISSN 1799-4934 (printed)
ISSN 1799-4942 (PDF)

http://urn.fi/URN: ISBN:978-952-64-2553-5

PunaMusta Oy
Helsinki 2025

Aalto University

ABSTRACT

Author Suvi-Tuuli Vuori

Name of the doctoral thesis Toward an Emotion-Based Perspective on Organizations: How Organizational Practices Drive Emotions and Strategic Action

Essay-based thesis

Number of pages 260

Keywords organizational practices, emotions, organizational action

My dissertation examines how organizational practices shape organizational members' emotions and how these emotions, in turn, influence strategic actions. Organizational practices refer to the established ways of working through which tasks are accomplished. These practices are crucial as they guide daily activities and shape the organization's behavior over time. Although the relationship between organizational practices and strategic actions has been widely studied, the role of emotions in this process has received less attention. Practices, such as post-action reflection or project work, are not merely cognitive processes; they also have a significant emotional dimension. For this reason, it is essential to study how organizational practices trigger emotions and how these emotions influence actions.

The main research question is: How do organizational practices influence organizational members' emotions, and how do these emotions shape their subsequent actions? My research data is based on a longitudinal case study conducted at a leading Finnish management consulting company from 2017 to 2024. The data includes 145 interviews, 1,630 hours of non-participant observations, and participation in 10 consulting projects.

In the first essay, I explore how emotions related to organizational identity shape strategy work. I study how emotions evolve at different stages of organizational growth and how these emotions influence the co-evolution of identity and strategy. In the second essay, I examine how organizational structure affects emotion work and, ultimately, individual and organizational actions. I found that the emotion work differs depending on the role within the organization and affects strategic actions accordingly. In the third essay, I focus on how the timing of practices affects organizational members' emotions and their ability to act. I found that the timing of reflection practices – whether before, during, or after a project – influences emotions and, consequently, organizational members' perceived ability to act. In the fourth essay, I expand methodological understanding of qualitative research by focusing on the researcher's use of their own emotions. I present a process model that helps researchers utilize their emotions in data collection and analysis.

My dissertation makes four key contributions. The first contribution relates to the role of emotions in the co-evolution of organizational identity and strategy. I argue that emotions such as frustration, pride, fear, and anxiety influence the development of identity and strategy at different stages of organizational growth. The second contribution is to show how emotion work is distributed across hierarchical levels within the organization. This offers a new perspective on the emotional demands of different roles and the success of strategic actions. The third contribution is the integration of emotions into the cognitive theories of organizational learning. I demonstrate that the timing of reflection practices significantly impacts emotions, which in turn influence organizational members' learning and actions. The fourth contribution is methodological: I create a process model that researchers can use to manage their own emotions at different stages of data collection and analysis. Through these contributions, my research provides a deeper understanding of how organizational practices influence emotions and how emotions, in turn, affect strategic actions. Additionally, it introduces new methodological perspectives for conducting qualitative research.

Aalto-yliopisto

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä Suvi-Tuuli Vuori

Väitöskirjan nimi Tunteet organisaation ytimessä: kuinka organisaation käytännöt synnyttävät tunteita ja ohjaavat strategista toimintaa

Esseeväitöskirja

Sivumäärä 260

Avainsanat organisaation käytännöt, tunteet, organisaation toiminta

Väitöskirjassani tutkin, miten organisaation käytännöt vaikuttavat organisaation jäsenten tunteisiin ja miten nämä tunteet puolestaan vaikuttavat strategiseen toimintaan. Organisaation käytännöt ovat vakiintuneita toimintatapoja, jotka ohjaavat päivittäistä työtä ja muovaavat organisaation toimintaa. Vaikka organisaation käytäntöjen ja strategisten toimien välistä suhdetta on tutkittu laajasti, tunteiden rooli on tässä prosessissa jäänyt vähemmälle huomiolle. Käytännöt, kuten toiminnan jälkeinen reflektointi tai projektityön tekeminen, eivät ole vain kognitiivisia prosesseja, vaan niillä on myös merkittävä emotionaalinen ulottuvuus. Tämän vuoksi on tärkeää tutkia, miten organisaation käytännöt aktivoivat tunteita ja miten nämä tunteet vaikuttavat toimintaan.

Yleinen tutkimuskysymys on: Miten organisaation käytännöt vaikuttavat tunteisiin ja miten nämä tunteet vaikuttavat strategisiin toimiin? Tutkimukseni aineisto koostuu pitkittäisestä tapaustutkimuksesta, joka toteutettiin suomalaisessa johtavassa liikkeenjohdon konsultointiyrityksessä vuosina 2017–2024. Aineisto sisältää 145 haastattelua, 1630 tuntia havainnointia sekä osallistumista 10 konsultointiprojektiin.

Ensimmäisessä esseessä tarkastelen, miten organisaation identiteettiin liittyvät tunteet muokkaavat strategiatyötä. Tutkin, miten organisaation tunteet kehittyvät eri kasvuvaiheissa, ja kuinka nämä tunteet vaikuttavat identiteetin ja strategian yhteiskehitykseen. Toisessa esseessä tutkin, miten organisaation rakenne vaikuttaa tunteiden hallintaan ja lopulta yksilöiden ja organisaation toimintaan. Havaitsin, että eri rooleissa työskentelevien jäsenten tunteiden hallinta on erilaista ja vaikuttaa strategisiin toimiin. Kolmannessa esseessä keskityn siihen, miten käytäntöjen ajoitus vaikuttaa organisaation jäsenten tunteisiin ja heidän toimintakykyynsä. Löysin, että reflektiokäytäntöjen ajoitus – ennen, aikana tai jälkeen projektin – vaikuttaa tunteisiin ja sitä kautta toimintakykyyn. Neljännessä esseessä laajennan metodologista ymmärrystä laadullisesta tutkimuksesta, keskittyen erityisesti tutkijan omien tunteiden hyödyntämiseen. Esitän mallin, joka auttaa tutkijoita hyödyntämään omia tunteitaan tiedonkeruussa ja analyysissa.

Teen väitöskirjassani neljä kontribuutiota. Ensimmäinen kontribuutio liittyy tunteiden rooliin organisaation identiteetin ja strategian yhteisessä kehityksessä. Esitän, että tunteet, kuten turhautuminen, ylpeys ja pelko, vaikuttavat identiteetin ja strategian kehittymiseen eri organisaation kasvuvaiheissa. Toinen kontribuutio on osoittaa, miten organisaation tunnetyö jakautuu hierarkian tasojen mukaan. Tämä tuo uuden näkökulman roolien emotionaalisiin vaatimuksiin ja strategisten toimien onnistumiseen. Kolmas kontribuutio on tunteiden integroiminen organisaation oppimisen kognitiivisiin teorioihin. Esitän, että reflektiokäytäntöjen ajoituksella on merkittävä vaikutus tunteisiin ja sitä kautta organisaation jäsenten oppimiseen ja toimintaan. Neljäs kontribuutio on metodologinen: luon prosessimallin, jota tutkijat voivat hyödyntää omien tunteiden johtamiseen eri vaiheessa datan keruuta ja analysointia. Näiden kontribuutioiden kautta tutkimukseni tarjoaa syvemmän ymmärryksen siitä, miten käytännöt vaikuttavat tunteisiin ja tunteet strategisiin toimiin, sekä avaa uusia metodologisia näkökulmia laadulliseen tutkimukseen.

Acknowledgements

This work has provided a pathway to better understand both leadership and life in general. Through the doctoral research, I've realized that emotions are not merely personal experiences but play a central role in maintaining structures, guiding change, and shaping the identity of organizations. By understanding how emotions influence actions, I can now better to understand how to manage complex human processes both in organizations and personal life. This has been a valuable insight for organizational development, but I also believe this research has made me a better person, partner, and mother.

I would like to thank many people who made this research possible. First, thank you to Professor Timo Vuori for your persistent and high-quality work on emotions and strategy. It made being your doctoral student clear and coherent. I am grateful for all the help you've provided, starting from when you brought me on as an interviewer and student coach for the 2016 ACS course. This course was the starting point for my understanding of the consulting world, which was still quite unfamiliar to me. My time as your doctoral student was highly educational: from the beginning, you were very demanding yet empathetic, which allowed me to study complex phenomena and contexts. Working with you was fun, easy, and I deeply appreciate the precise and, at times, brutally honest feedback. As a result, I learned an incredible amount from you.

Next, I would like to thank you Professor Jukka Luoma. You were consistently present during the dissertation process whenever I needed your help – especially during the most challenging times. Your openness about your own experiences made difficult moments easier and even brought a smile to my face. Your experience and assistance have been invaluable, and I have always been able to rely on your guidance. Thank you.

Thank you, Professor Saku Mantere, for the valuable discussions we had. They broadened my thinking. With you, I have been seen as the kind of academic I am, for which I am grateful. I feel that through our conversations, I began to better understand my professional identity.

A huge thanks to the Consulting Co. organization and its employees from 2017-2024. I spent countless days and nights reviewing the data I gathered from you, and at times, it felt like I spent more time with you than with those closest to me. I cannot thank you enough for all the conversations we have had and everything I have learned from you. You will always hold a special place in my heart.

Thanks also to Professors Esa Saarinen, Raimo Hämäläinen, Jens Schmidt, and Eero Vaara for supporting my dissertation process in various ways.

Thank you to the 2016 ACS course students for allowing me to interview you. The discussions we had were incredibly interesting and gave me valuable insight into what it feels like to work under pressure.

Thank you to various individuals who made conducting this research more enjoyable. Thank you, Black Panthers: Zeerim Cheung, Ruben Vicente-Saez, and Eero Aalto; you are all brilliant thinkers, and spending time with you, both at the university and beyond, was great. Special thanks also to Pardeep Maheswaree, Jane Seppälä, Sarri Nykänen, Joosef Valli, and Marianne Heiska for your collegial support.

Thank you to the SCANCOR 2018 visitors at Stanford University, especially Kristiina Lahdenranta, Benoit Decreton, and Aurélien Feix. My time at Stanford was unforgettable, thanks to you.

Thank you to the Systems Analysis Laboratory team: Vilma Virasjoki, Tuomas Lahtinen, Yrjänä Hynninen, Pekka Laitila, and Ilkka Leppänen. It was great to get to know you and share a small part of the research journey together.

Thank you, Lauri Pietinalho, for the wonderful discussions throughout the dissertation process. Thank you to my Pafos friends Miia Paakkanen, Jenni Laurell, and Milla Kaivola. Your ability to understand and accept is exceptional. Thanks also to Karla Lindahl for your playground friendship and the encouragement during the final weeks.

Thank you for the financial support from Aalto University Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, Liikesivistysrahasto, KAUTE

Foundation, and Emil Aaltonen Foundation. Thanks to your financial support, I was able to focus on research for several years, as well as participate in an exchange at Stanford University and attend numerous conferences.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for always being there to support me throughout my life. You have built a safe and loving home, from which it has been easy to launch into life. I am truly grateful for that. I've been able to share all my joys and sorrows with you, which has been invaluable. Thank you, Merkka and Pyry, for supporting me through different stages of my life. I am incredibly lucky to have such wise and amazing siblings. Thank you, Pauliina, for always being such an encouraging and dear friend, no matter what happens in life. Thanks to Sini for peer support and being an example of how to balance an academic career and family life—you are irreplaceable. Thank you, Mari, for supporting the development of my professional identity.

Finally, I want to thank you, my dear Timo, for the wonderful life we have created together during this dissertation process. We have managed to build something that makes me feel truly happy and grateful every day. My deepest thanks go to our beloved daughter, Venus, who has brought so much new creative energy—joy and love—into my life, making it easy to push this project to completion. Thank you for being exactly the wonderful Venus that you are.

Espoo, 4 November 2024
Suvi-Tuuli Talvikki Vuori

Contents

Acknowledgements...1
Contents 5
List of Abbreviations and Symbols... 9
List of Essays 11
Author's Contribution 12
1. Introduction 13
2. Theoretical Background 25
2.1 Defining Emotions 25
2.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions about Emotion in This Dissertation 26
2.1.2 Appraisal Process of Emotion 28
2.1.3 The Role of Ego Ideal in the Appraisal Process of Emotion . 29
2.2 Defining Key Constructs: Organizational Practices, Organizational Structure, and Strategic Action (Praxis), and Practitioners 30
2.3 Organizational Practices, Emotions, and Strategic Action ... 34
2.3.1 Organizational Identity, Strategic Action, and Emotions 34
2.3.2 Emotions and Strategic Action..37
2.3.3 Organizational Practices and Emotions 39
2.3.4 Researcher's emotions in qualitative research.................. 40
3. Methodology...45
3.1 Conducting Qualitative Single-Case Study..........................45

3.1.1 Selection of the Case Company, and the Case Company's Interest Participating in the Study 46
3.1.2 Researcher's and Co-Author's Role 48
3.1.3 Ontological Foundations of the Qualitative Single-Case Study 49
3.2 Single-Case study: Key Characteristics of Consulting Co. 50
3.2.1 Ego Ideal and Appraisal Process of Emotion at Consulting Co. 52
3.3 Conducting Grounded Theory Research 55
3.3.1 Data Collection 56
3.3.2 Data Analysis 64
3.3.3 Method of Essay 1: The Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy 68
3.3.4 Method of Essay 2: It's Not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations 69
3.3.5 Method of Essay 3: An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption.. 71
3.3.6 Method of Essay 4: Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research..74
3.4 Analysis of Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness 74
4. Findings 77
4.1 Essay 1: The Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategic Actions in a Finnish Management Consulting Firm 77
4.2 Essay 2: It's not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations.. 80
4.3 Essay 3: An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption 81
4.4 Essay 4: Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research 83
5. Discussion 86
5.1 Contribution to Emotions in Strategic Management Literature 86
5.1.1 Additional Contribution: Organization's Strategic Emotions93

5.1.2 Additional Contribution: Understanding the Organization's Ideal Ego Helps to Understand Practices and Their Applicability to the Organization 94
5.2 Complementing Qualitative Emotion Research 96
5.3 Managerial Implications 97
5.4 Boundary Conditions 97
5.5 Future Directions 98
Appendices 111
Appendix 1. Key terms of the doctoral thesis 111
Essay 1 114
Essay 2 115
Essay 3 116
Essay 4 117

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

A	analyst
AC	analysts and consultants
ACS	Advanced Case Seminar in Strategy -course at Aalto University
AM	associate manager
BD	biological determinism
Big 4	Deloitte, EY, PwC, & KPMG
BOD	board of directors
C	consultant
CEO	chief executive officer
CFO	chief financial officer
COB	chairman of the board
COO	chief operating officer
D	director
GT	grounded theory method
M	manager
MBB	McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, and Bain & Company
MRQ	main research question
OI	organisational identity
P	partner
PM	project manager
PSF	professional service firm

RQ	research question
S	sociological approach
SAP	Strategy-as-Practice
SC	social constructionism
T	trainee

List of Essays

This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and of the following essays which are referred to in the text by their numerals

1. Vuori, Suvi-Tuuli. Emotions in the Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy: A Single Case Study of a Finnish Management Consulting Firm. Previous version presented in Academy of Management Annual Meeting 2021 (Virtual), and in SMS Annual Meeting in Montreal, 2022.

2. Vuori, Suvi-Tuuli. It's not you, it's the role: Hierarchically distributed emotion work in organizations. Unpublished manuscript. Selected for the Best paper proceedings at the 2025 Academy of Management Annual Meeting. Nominated for William H. Newman Award 2025. This award recognizes the best annual meeting paper based on a dissertation in Academy of Management's Annual Meeting.

3. Vuori, Suvi-Tuuli; Vuori, Timo. An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption. Best Student Paper Award in SMS Annual Meeting in Montreal 2022. Best Student Paper Award in Academy of Management Annual Meeting 2022, MOC-division. Finalist in Best Student Paper Award in Academy of Management Annual Meeting in 2021.

4. Vuori, Suvi-Tuuli; Mantere, Saku; Vuori, Timo. Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research. Presented in Academy of Management Annual Meeting 2023 in Boston.

Author’s Contribution

Essay 1: Emotions in the Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy: A Single Case Study of a Finnish Management Consulting Firm

Sole author.

Essay 2: It’s not you, it’s the role: Hierarchically distributed emotion work in organizations

Sole author.

Essay 3: An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption

Project lead. Responsible for data collection (95%), data analysis (100%), and theorizing (60/40). Timo Vuori contributed to the theorizing of the paper, hence in introduction, theory, and discussion sections. Suvi-Tuuli was responsible for 100% of the writing. Timo commented on the text and helped refine it through his feedback.

Essay 4: Using Researcher’s Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research.

Project lead. Responsible for the idea of the essay, the section building on fieldnotes, and writing all sections of the paper. Saku Mantere contributed to theory development. Timo Vuori contributed to theory development and the reflection and analysis of the fieldnotes.

1. Introduction

Organizational practices shape people's daily experiences, yet these experiences often remain invisible in strategic discussions. This absence is striking given the increasing recognition—both in academic research and in broader societal conversations—that strategic decisions made in organizations profoundly affect the lives of employees. Decisions such as mergers, investments, leadership appointments, and restructuring are not merely economic or operational in nature; they are also deeply human, reshaping how people feel, act, and make sense of their working lives. While societal discourse increasingly critiques top-down decision-making for overlooking human impact, much of strategic management research has mirrored this gap by focusing primarily on structures, processes, and outcomes (March & Simon, 1993; Ocasio, 1997; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007).

Two dominant traditions illustrate this emphasis. The cognitive school of strategy has long analyzed how decision-makers process information, attend to stimuli, and form judgments (March & Simon, 1993; Ocasio, 1997). Meanwhile, the strategy-as-practice perspective has emphasized the everyday activities, routines, and interactions through which strategy is enacted (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). Yet, despite these valuable contributions, both traditions have often underexplored how organizational members' emotional experiences shape and are shaped by strategic action. In particular, the emotional consequences of strategic decisions—and the ways emotions influence how strategy is interpreted and enacted—have received limited attention.

This dissertation addresses this gap by emphasizing that human experiences—particularly emotions—are not peripheral but central to strategic action. Employees are not passive recipients of strategic decisions who merely implement associated practices. Rather, they actively interpret these decisions, form emotional responses, and enact them through their daily actions. Hence, emotions are not obstacles to rationality but integral to human agency in organizations. Although previous research acknowledges that organizational practices shape emotions (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017; Sutton, 1991), less attention has been given to how emotions, in turn, influence strategic action and recursively shape organizational practices. Furthermore, emotions are often treated as episodic responses to major events (Vuori & Huy, 2016), rather than as ongoing, cumulative forces shaping strategy over time and across levels.

By bringing organizational members' experiences into the core of strategic action, this research advances the strategy-as-practice perspective, which sees strategy as a dynamic, interactive process shaped by everyday actions and emotions (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Seidl, & Balogun, 2022). Emotions are conceptualized not as isolated reactions but as forces that link organizational practices and strategic action in a continuous feedback loop.

I examine organizational members' experiences through the lens of emotions, as emotions reflect how individuals make sense of and respond to organizational situations (Lazarus, 1991). I investigate how organizational practices influence emotions and, in turn, how these emotions shape strategic action. This provides a deeper understanding of how organizations influence members' feelings and how those feelings guide actions.

Organizational practices are defined as established ways, routines, tools, and procedures used in everyday work (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). Emotions are defined as processes that "begin with a focal individual exposed to an eliciting stimulus, which triggers meaning-making, a feeling state, physiological changes, and behavioral consequences" (Elfenbein, 2007: 315). Strategic action is defined as the deliberate and emergent activities that shape the organization's direction, such as client selection, project execution, and learning processes (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007).

While the primary focus is on how practices influence emotions and emotions shape strategic action, the dissertation also acknowledges the recursive nature of this relationship. Strategic actions can reshape practices over time, illustrating how practices, emotions, and actions co-evolve. This interplay contributes to a dynamic view of strategy, where organizational realities are actively constructed through emotional and practical engagement (Whittington, 2006). These three concepts—organizational practices, emotions, and strategic action—form the analytical framework of this dissertation (Figure 1).

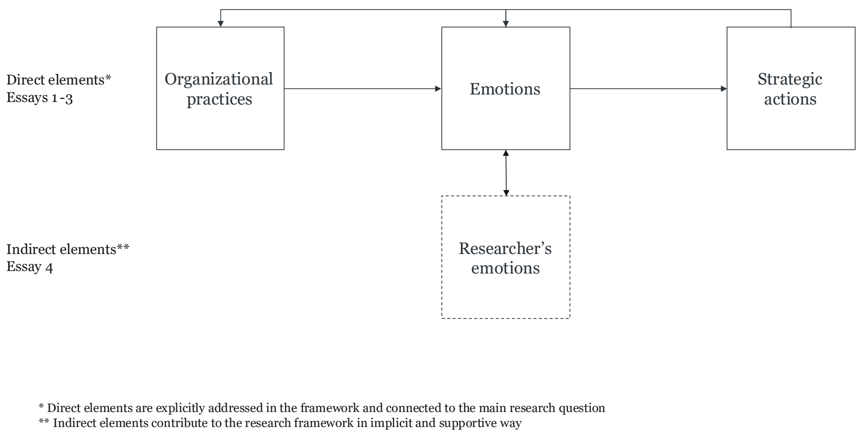

Figure 1. Research framework.

In addition to formalizing the relationship between practitioners' emotions and actions, the framework includes a meta-element that offers a methodological perspective. This perspective emphasizes how researchers' own emotions can serve as tools for studying the interplay between practices, emotions, and actions. The framework thus includes both direct and indirect elements: direct elements are central to the main research question, while indirect elements contribute in a supportive way. The first three essays examine direct relationships; the fourth essay explores the indirect, methodological dimension. These distinctions are elaborated further below.

This dissertation consists of four essays, each applying the research framework to a different organizational dimension. While Figure 1 provides a simplified overview of the interplay among key concepts, Table 1 specifies the focus and theoretical lens of each essay.

The first essay explores the emotional dynamics in the co-evolution of organizational identity and strategic action. It analyzes how emotions shaped by past experiences inform strategic choices and identity work. The level of analysis is how managers' emotions about identity influence organizational-level strategic actions, drawing on identity theory (Ravasi, Tripsas, & Langley, 2020; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and the literature on emotions in strategy (Vuori & Huy, 2016).

The second essay examines how role expectations in project delivery shape emotional experiences across hierarchies. It investigates how individuals respond emotionally and how emotions enable or constrain role enactment. Strategic action is viewed at both the individual and organizational levels (examining how individual emotion work influences organizational outcomes), informed by emotion work theory (Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021) and distributed cognition (Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1993).

The third essay focuses on the adoption of learning practices over time. It investigates how emotional engagement with new practices influences their implementation or rejection. The level of analysis is how individual emotions influence the organizational-level adoption or rejection of practices. The analysis draws on organizational learning theory (Chown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Valentine, 2018).

The fourth essay introduces a methodological perspective by reflecting on the researcher's emotions in qualitative fieldwork. It explores how emotions shape what is observed, interpreted, and theorized. The essay draws on reflexive methodology (Alvesson, 2003; Whittle & Reissner, 2024), psychotherapy research (Sletvod, 2015), and qualitative emotion research (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). Table 1 summarizes how the core concepts are operationalized in each essay.

Table 1. Research framework's concepts' empirical focus in essays.

	Organizational practice / strategic action	Theoretical lens	Analytical focus	Level of analysis
Essay 1	Identity work and strategic decision-making shaped by emotional dynamics	Identity theory (e.g., Ravasi, Tripsas, & Langley, 2020) Emotions in organizational action (Vuori & Huy, 2016)	How managers' emotions on identity influence organizational level strategic actions	Multilevel analysis *Individual:* Managers' emotions *Organizational:* strategic decision-making
Essay 2	Emotion work related to role expectations and hierarchy	Emotion work and emotional labour (Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021) Distributed cognition (Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1993)	How individual emotion work influences organizational outcomes	Multilevel analysis *Individual:* Individuals' emotion work across hierarchy levels *Organizational:* Connecting emotion work to strategic action

Essay 3	Adoption of learning practices over time in projects and organization	Organizational learning (Chown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Valentine, 2018)	How individual emotions influence organizational practice adoption / rejection	Multilevel analysis *Individual:* Individuals' emotions and behavior *Organizational practice:* Adopting organizational practices at the organizational level
Essay 4	Researcher's emotions as a source of insight into emotional dynamics in organizations	Researcher reflexivity (Alvesson, 2003; Whittle & Reissner, 2024) Emotions in qualitative research (Kouamé & Liu, 2021) Psychotherapy (Sletvod, 2015)	Individual researcher's emotions and their influence on knowledge formation process	Individual *Reflexive, epistemic level*

This dissertation employs a qualitative research design, specifically a longitudinal single-case study conducted from 2017 to 2024 in a leading Finnish management consulting firm. I wanted to understand how organizational practices and strategic action was perceived through the eyes of different organizational members. From early on, I was interested in examining multiple perspectives on the same organization, which is why I wanted to include participants from across the entire organization. My sampling strategy was inspired by studies such as Vuori & Huy (2016) and Alexandra Michel's (2007; 2013) work, which explore how organizational phenomena unfold differently across hierarchical levels. In the case organization I studied, hierarchy played a particularly central role, and this naturally shaped my theoretical sampling. The seniority-based lens was therefore both a reflection of the organizational reality and a deliberate methodological strategy to surface variation in emotional and experiential dynamics.

The empirical data includes 145 interviews with 54 consultants across all organizational levels (average of 3 interviews per person), 1,630 hours of participant observation, and engagement as a full-time organizational member from 2022 to 2023. In addition, I took part in ten client projects and maintained detailed research diaries, complemented by internal documents.

This research design provides the conceptual and methodological foundation for the dissertation. It integrates the core concepts and outlines their interrelations. Based on this framework, I developed essay-specific research questions to explore distinct aspects of the dynamics (Figure 2).

The main research question (MRQ) guiding the dissertation is: How do organizational practices influence organizational members' emotions, and how do these emotions shape their subsequent actions? To address this, the dissertation includes four sub-research questions (SRQs), each targeting a specific theoretical gap. Figure 2 illustrates how these SRQs align with the research framework. The questions are designed to explore how emotional dynamics manifest across roles, time, identity, and research practices.

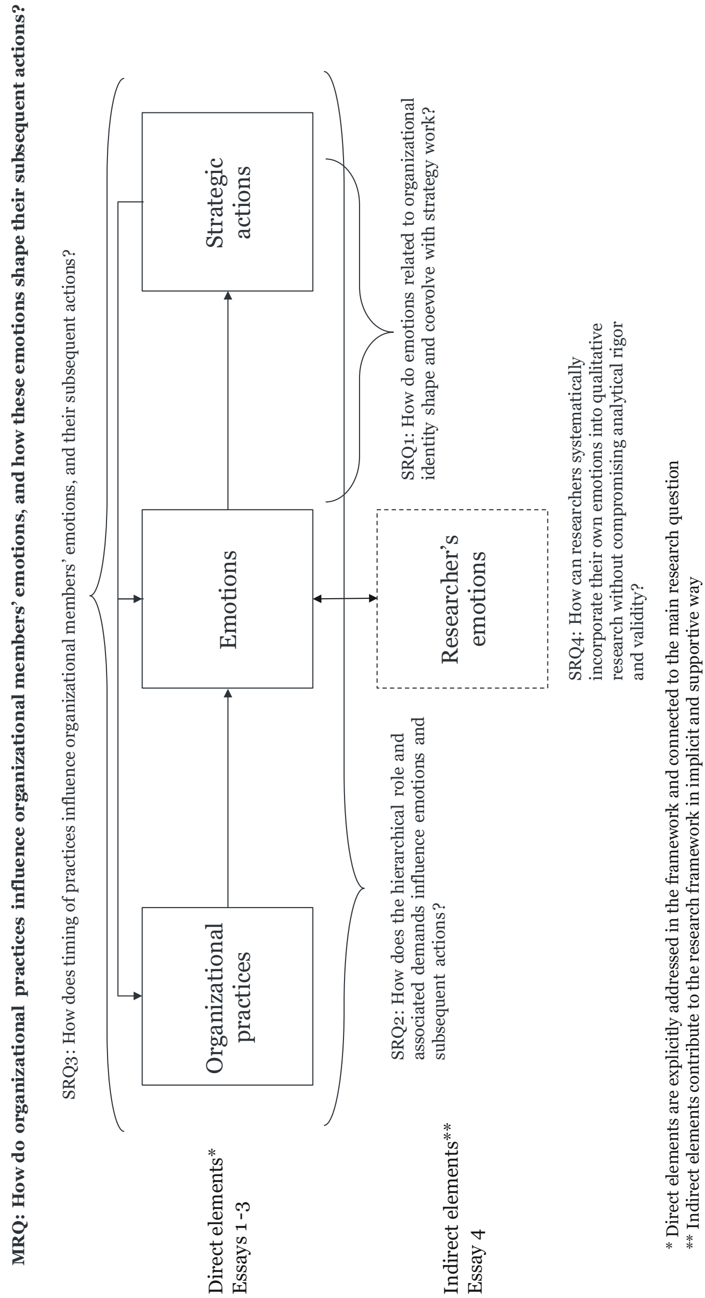

Figure 2. Main research question and sub-research questions within the research framework.

The first sub-research question (SRQ1) builds on the theoretical link between organizational identity and strategic decision-making (Ravasi, Tripsas, & Langley, 2020). Existing research shows identity is closely tied to emotions (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and that emotions significantly impact strategic actions (Vuori & Huy, 2016). However, identity can also lead to rigidity, limiting organizational adaptability (Tripsas, 2009). While scholars acknowledge the emotional dimension of strategic action and the constraints posed by identity, it remains theoretically unclear how diverse emotional responses dynamically influence the interplay between organizational identity and strategic evolution. Addressing this gap is crucial because failing to understand the emotional dynamics may lead organizations to underestimate the complexities involved in aligning identity with strategic change. Without acknowledging the variety of emotional reactions—from enthusiasm and pride to anxiety and frustration—scholars and practitioners risk oversimplifying how organizational identities evolve, potentially leading to incomplete or misguided strategic interventions. Particularly during critical organizational transitions such as leadership succession, emotional undercurrents significantly shape strategic coherence or fragmentation. Thus, gaining deeper insights into these emotional dynamics provides essential theoretical contributions by clarifying the mechanisms through which emotions influences organizational adaptability and strategic success, and practical implications by enabling leaders to better manage strategic transformations sensitive to emotional realities.

The second sub-research question (SRQ2) addresses a theoretical gap related to organizational roles and emotion work. Prior literature emphasizes role complementarity in driving strategic outcomes (Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1958) and acknowledges that different roles entail distinct emotion work (Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021). Nevertheless, theory has not fully clarified how organizational structures themselves shape differential emotional experiences across roles or how these experiences, in turn, affect strategic actions and individual career trajectories.

The third sub-research question (SRQ3) tackles a theoretical gap concerning the timing of reflection and its emotional implications. Scholars have established that reflective practices enhance learning (Chown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Valentine, 2018) and that psychological safety facilitates reflection (Edmondson, 1999). However, existing theory lacks clarity on how the timing of reflection specifically triggers emotional responses and subsequently influences the nature and quality of organizational members' actions.

The fourth sub-research question (SRQ4) addresses a methodological and theoretical gap in qualitative emotion research. Traditional qualitative studies primarily rely on participants' self-reported emotions or externally observed emotional expressions (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). While psychotherapy research emphasizes intersubjectivity and the relevance of the researcher’s emotional involvement (Sletvod, 2015), there remains a significant methodological challenge: how can researchers systematically integrate their emotional experiences into qualitative analyses without compromising analytical rigor and validity?

Together, these four SRQs create a comprehensive theoretical framework that explains how specific organizational practices, structures, and processes systematically shape emotional responses and, consequently, organizational actions. This integrated approach offers a deeper theoretical understanding of the complex relationships among organizational practices, emotional experiences, and behavioral outcomes.

This dissertation places human experience at the center of strategy-as-practice research within the broader field of strategic management, addressing a fundamental gap by elucidating how emotions shape strategic choices across multiple organizational levels. Positioned within strategic management, this research integrates insights from theories of organizational learning (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson et al., 1999), organizational identity (Ravasi et al., 2020; Tripsas, 2009), cognitive perspectives on organizational roles and information processing (March & Simon, 1958; Ocasio, 1997), and methodologies of qualitative emotion research (Alvesson, 2003; Kouamé & Liu, 2021; Whittle & Reissner, 2024), to deepen our understanding of how emotional dynamics both reflect and influence organizational cognition, learning processes, identity formation, and ultimately, strategic action.

By integrating emotional processes into strategic management discourse, this study advances knowledge on how organizations can systematically account for and leverage emotions as an intrinsic aspect of decision-making and identity formation. Through an examination of different organizational actors and contexts, this work deepens our understanding of the emotional underpinnings of strategic decision-making. Analyzing the emotions of founding partners illuminates tensions between identity and strategy, while a broader organizational analysis highlights how role expectations create distinct emotional experiences. Investigating specific practices sheds light on how emotions facilitate or hinder the institutionalization of strategic initiatives. Collectively, these insights demonstrate that organizations are continually shaped by emotional dynamics that influence strategic action. Recognizing and managing these dynamics proactively can enable organizations to integrate emotions into strategic governance.

The dissertation is structured as follows. First, it outlines the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and then presents the research context and methodological considerations (Chapter 3). Subsequently, each empirical essay provides distinct yet interconnected analyses that progressively build toward a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between emotions, organizational practices, and strategic decision-making. Additionally, a methodological essay deepens the understanding of the researcher's role in conducting qualitative emotion research (Chapter 4). In the final chapter, I synthesize insights from the essays to theorize the importance of integrating people's experiences into strategic management literature. I also evaluate the validity of the research, discuss its limitations and boundary conditions, and propose avenues for future research (Chapter 5). Overall, this structure supports a cohesive narrative that illuminates how emotions distributed across hierarchical levels both shape and are shaped by organizational strategies and identities.

2. Theoretical Background

In my dissertation, I examine how organizational practices influence the emotions of organizational members and, in turn, their actions. The key units of analysis are individuals and organizations (1) the relationship between practices (organization) and emotions (individual) and (2) the relationship between emotions (individual) and actions (organization). Since I am interested in both the impact of the environment (organization and organizational practices) on emotions and the impact of emotions on actions, I need to combine different ontological assumptions in my dissertation. Hence, I approach the dissertation's research question from both a sociological (S) (Thoits, 1989; Kouamé & Liu, 2021; Hochschild, 1983) and the biological determinism (BD) of emotions perspective (Kouamé & Liu, 2021; Elfenbein, 2007). I integrate these ontological approaches using the strategy-as-practice (SAP) approach, which enables the examination of organizational practices, emotions and strategic actions at daily level (Jarzabkowski, 2005). As Kouamé & Liu (2021) point out, different perspectives on studying emotions are not "incommensurable"; they "capture and analyze different dimensions of a multifaceted phenomenon" (Brundin et al., 2022; Jakob-Sadeh & Zilber, 2019).

2.1 Defining Emotions

In this dissertation, emotion is defined after a definition usually used in studies following biological determinism (BD), as a process that "begins with a focal individual who is exposed to an eliciting stimulus, registers the stimulus for its meaning, and experiences a feeling state and physiological changes, with downstream consequences for attitudes, behaviors, and cognition, as well as facial expressions and other emotionally expressive cues"

(Elfenbein, 2007: 315). This definition is particularly suitable for understanding emotions influenced by organizational practices and influencing strategic actions because it provides a comprehensive, processual view of how emotions unfold in response to specific stimuli, how appraisal takes place after that and leads to the subsequent behavioral consequences. The challenge of the definitions of emotion used in the sociological (S) approach is that they are too vague to allow for theorizing the mechanism by which emotions act as a mediator between practices and actions. An example of this is Gould's (2009: 20) definition, which defines emotions as "one's personal expression of what one is feeling in a given moment, that is structured by social convention and culture." This definition would not be suitable for defining the mechanisms through which practices affect emotions and emotions affect actions.

Hence, Elfenbein's process-based emotion definition aligns well with the dissertation's aim to explore how organizational practices influence emotions and, ultimately, strategic actions. In other words, organizational practices often serve as stimuli that employees encounter in their daily work lives (Vuori, 2024). The meanings attributed to these stimuli are constructed within the organizational context, shaped by the norms, values, and goals of the organization, as well as the individual's experiences and perceptions (see e.g., Sutton, 1991). This approach allows for a detailed examination of how specific organizational stimuli lead to emotional experiences that influence attitudes, behaviors, and strategic actions. By focusing on the sequence from stimulus exposure to emotional response and subsequent actions, this definition supports a nuanced exploration of the emotional dynamics in organizational settings.

2.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions about Emotion in This Dissertation

Before delving further into theoretical elaboration of emotion using appraisal theory, it is essential to address the ontological underpinnings that guide this research. Ontology, the study of the nature of reality and being, is crucial in understanding how emotions are conceptualized in this study (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). By clarifying the ontological assumptions, I can better articulate how emotions are viewed within organizational contexts and how these views shape the theoretical and methodological approach to studying emotions.

Traditionally, when studying the relationship between the environment and emotions, this research topic is approached from sociological foundations (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). Since my research focuses on both the interaction between the environment and emotions, as well as individual emotional reactions and their impact on actions within an organization, I combine different ontological assumptions in my essays.

I define reality as being constructed through the interaction between people and practices, as people enact organizational practices. In this view, emotions are socially constructed and emerge through interactions between people and the environment. However, this does not make the definition according to biological determinism (BD) invalid; rather, the way emotions arise in situations remains consistent with this perspective.

Similarly, in socially constructed view emotions can be seen constructed through appraisal processes, shaped by individual experiences, social contexts, and cultural norms within organizations. Therefore, emotions are not merely biological or individual experiences; they emerge and gain meaning through social and cultural processes. This approach emphasizes that emotions are flexible and changeable depending on the social and cultural environment in which they occur (Hochschild, 1983).

The socially constructed underpinning of this research is closely tied to the chosen definition of emotion as a process that begins with exposure to an eliciting stimulus, followed by the registration of the stimulus for its meaning, and resulting in emotional and physiological responses (Elfenbein, 2007). This definition implicitly assumes that emotions are not static entities but rather emerge from ongoing interactions and interpretations. The appraisal theory of emotion further elaborates on this by explaining how emotions are constructed through cognitive evaluations of stimuli based on individual goals, beliefs, and situational contexts (Lazarus, 1991). This theoretical approach aligns with a socially constructed view by acknowledging the subjective, context-dependent nature of emotional experiences.

By epistemological assumptions in this dissertation, I refer to the beliefs about how knowledge of emotions can be obtained and what is considered valid knowledge regarding the impact of emotions in an organization. In this study, the epistemological assumptions about emotions are based on a processual and context-dependent approach, where emotions are viewed as phenomena formed through cognitive appraisals and interactions. Thus, when I study emotions with these ontological assumptions, I assume that emotions can be identified and analyzed by examining people's reactions and meaning-making processes in both observable interaction situations and interviews, which occur through their interactions with organizational practices and the environment. This research model allows for understanding emotions as dynamic and socially constructed experiences. Essay 4 complements this perspective by addressing researcher reflexivity and the researcher's own emotional process. The essay demonstrates how my emotional experiences during the research process can influence data collection and analysis and provides a process model for how researchers can recognize and manage these effects to enhance the reliability of the research.

2.1.2 Appraisal Process of Emotion

Building on this definition, the *appraisal process of emotion* provides a deeper layer of analysis by explaining how individuals interpret or "appraise" the organizational stimuli they encounter. According to appraisal theory, emotions arise not directly from the stimuli themselves but from the individual's cognitive evaluations of these stimuli (Lazarus, 1991). This happens in two-stage appraisal process. In the primary appraisal, individuals evaluate how they will be impacted by events (Lazarus, 1991). Negative emotions arise if people perceive that events will impede their goals, but positive emotions arise if they perceive that events will benefit their goals (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2013). Strongly goal-relevant issues activate the most intense emotions (Kreibig, Gendolla, & Scherer, 2012; Oreg et al., 2016; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

In secondary appraisals, individuals evaluate whether they can cope with, control, or modify the situation (Folkman, 1984; Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989). Highly controllable situations evoke high activation emotions such as enthusiasm, exuberance, anger, and annoyance; uncontrollable situations evoke low activation emotions such as sadness and helplessness (Oreg et al., 2016). For example, if individuals perceive that they can cope with potential threats, they will feel hopeful and motivated to take action, but if they perceive that they cannot cope, they will feel hopeless (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Roseman, 2013). Hence, the appraisal process is a subjective and contextualized process where people pay attention to selected information and interpret it in selected views (Gross, 1998; Lazarus, 1991).

Organizational practices can influence the appraisals people form by directing their attention to select information or interpretations (Vuori, 2024; Vuori & Huy, 2016). For example, if practices make top managers attend to new information about a strategic option that they initially disliked, they may reappraise the option and their emotions toward it may shift from negative to positive (Vuori & Huy, 2022). Analogically, if practices direct organization members' attention to select past events and cause them to form new interpretations of the past events, they might develop new emotional reactions.

Potential new emotional reactions are relevant because they influence people's actions. Emotions activate action tendencies that define the mental and physiological activity characteristics associated with each emotion; these characteristics prepare the individual for actions that are typically adaptive in the triggering situation. Each action tendency has various behavioral, cognitive, and attentional elements that focus attention, memory, and actions depending on goals (Gross, 1998; 2015). For example, anger activates tendencies to attack those perceived to be offenders (Creed et al., 2014; Lazarus, 1991), which can be adaptive in some conflict situations but destructive in others (e.g., Grant, 2013; Lebel, 2017). On the other hand, love activates compassion, "warmth, tenderness, interest, and concern" (Lazarus, 1991: 279), qualities that are essential in healthcare settings (e.g., Barsade & O'Neill, 2014) but can also contribute to personal exhaustion (cf. Schrabam & Maitlis, 2017). Hence, emotional reactions triggered by organizational practices may either harm or benefit future actions, depending on both the emotion and expected future behaviors.

2.1.3 The Role of Ego Ideal in the Appraisal Process of Emotion

The ego ideal plays a significant role in appraisal process (Lazarus, 1991). It serves as a reference point that influences how individuals interpret and emotionally react to experiences. When appraising a situation, individuals evaluate how it reflects their progress toward, or deviation from, their internalized ideals. For example, when a person achieves a goal that aligns with their sense of competence and ambition, they are likely to experience positive emotions such as pride or fulfillment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These emotions are a result of the appraisal process highlighting the congruence between the event and the ego ideal.

In contrast, when there is a discrepancy between one's current state and their ego ideal, negative emotions such as guilt, shame, or inadequacy may arise (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). These emotions are part of the appraisal process, as individuals assess their failure to meet their internal standards.

Furthermore, the role of the ego ideal in the appraisal process extends to anticipatory emotions. When individuals anticipate future scenarios, their ego ideal influences their emotional responses based on the perceived likelihood of achieving or failing to achieve their ideals. Positive appraisals that reflect alignment with one's ideals evoke emotions like hope or optimism, while negative appraisals may trigger anxiety or fear (Carver & Scheier, 1990). This dynamic illustrates how the ego ideal not only shapes emotional responses to current events but also affects how individuals emotionally engage with the future.

In sum, the ego ideal serves as a central evaluative standard in the appraisal process, guiding how individuals interpret and emotionally react to various situations. It influences both positive and negative emotional experiences, depending on the degree of alignment between external events and one's internalized ideals. This connection highlights the significant role the ego ideal plays in shaping emotional experiences through the lens of personal goals, moral values, and future expectations.

2.2 Defining Key Constructs: Organizational Practices, Organizational Structure, and Strategic Action (Praxis), and Practitioners

Organizational practices, praxis, and organizational structure are three interconnected but distinct concepts that shape strategic action in organizations. While they all influence how strategy unfolds in practice, they operate at different levels and play different roles in the process.

Organizational practices refer to the established ways of working within an organization. These include routines, tools, techniques, and procedures that guide how work is carried out (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Practices can be both formal, such as strategic planning processes and sales meetings, and informal, such as discussions, negotiations, and decision-making methods (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). They are shared and collective in nature, meaning that they are not just individual habits but are learned, institutionalized, and passed on within an organization or professional community. Practices shape strategic work by providing structured ways of doing things, but they do not dictate how strategy is enacted in daily activities.

While organizational practices provide a structured foundation of the organization, praxis refers to the concrete, everyday actions through which strategy comes to life. Praxis includes the activities and interactions of individuals and groups as they interpret, adapt, and implement strategy in real-time (Whittington, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). It is not limited to formalized processes but includes all the moments in which strategy is enacted, whether in meetings, informal conversations, project execution, or problem-solving sessions (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). Praxis highlights that strategy is not just something that is planned at the top but something that continuously evolves through everyday work. In this dissertation, when I refer to strategic action, I specifically mean praxis—how strategy is realized through the lived activities of organizational members.

Both organizational practices and praxis exist within and are shaped by organizational structure, which defines how roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority are distributed within an organization (Ocasio, 1997). Organizational structure determines who attends to what and when, shaping both the flow of information and the allocation of strategic tasks (Ocasio, 1997). It provides the formal mechanisms through which organizational attention is directed, influencing both which practices are adopted and how praxis unfolds. Structure constrains and enables strategic action by defining the organizational hierarchy, reporting relationships, and communication flows.

To clarify the relationships between these concepts, the following Table 2 provides a structured comparison.

Table 2. Differences between organizational practices, organizational structure and praxis.

Construct	Definition	Level of Analysis
Organizational practices	Established routines, processes, and ways of working that guide strategic work	Organizational level – structured processes and norms
Praxis	The concrete actions and interactions through which strategy is enacted and adapted	Micro-level – individual and group actions
Organizational structure	The formal arrangement of roles, decision-making authority, and communication channels that direct and constrain attention and action	Organizational-level – hierarchy and organizational design

Each of these concepts plays a crucial role in shaping strategic action, but they operate at different levels and interact in complex ways (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Organizational practices provide the structured methods through which strategy is typically carried out, but praxis represents how individuals actually engage with and modify these practices in real-life work situations (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Praxis can challenge and reshape organizational practices over time (Jarzabkowski, 2005). For instance, if employees find that a formal strategic planning process does not capture emerging market trends, they may begin informally adjusting their approach (Balogun, Best, & Lê, 2015). If these informal practices become widely adopted, they may eventually be institutionalized as a new organizational practice (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

Organizational practices, in turn, are shaped by the organizational structure, which determines how resources, authority, and attention are allocated (Ocasio, 1997; Joseph & Gaba, 2020).

While organizational structure provides the framework for strategy work, praxis represents how individuals navigate and adapt within that structure (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Praxis can also influence organizational structure over time.

Practitioners are defined widely, “to include both those directly involved in making strategy—most prominently managers and consultants—and those with indirect influence—the policy-makers, the media, the gurus, and the business schools who shape legitimate praxis and practices” (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008: 101-102). In this dissertation, I consider all members of the organization as practitioners. This approach of treating the entire organization as practitioners is not typical, especially in emotion in strategic management research. In a review conducted by Brundin et al. (2022), they highlight the following (highlights are my own):

> *We found that many papers indirectly assume that engagement in strategic activities is primarily reserved for the **upper echelon of an organization** (e.g., Haag and Getz, 2016; Kisfalvi and Pitcher, 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2000), for **middle management** (e. g., Huy, 2002; 2012; Netz et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2012), **or for both** (e.g., Huy, 2011; 2014; Korsgaard et al., 1995, Vince, 2006, Vuori and Huy, 2016 Samra-Fredericks, 2000). An option for moving away from the assumption that strategic actors are members of top management would be to **ascribe strategic responsibility to employees and explore how their emotions have an impact on strategic management in a more straightforward fashion** (Jarzabkowski, 2005). This implies that **any person in an organization is a strategic actor** if his or her actions or behavior have an impact on the strategic outcome.*

In this dissertation, I examine only internal actors within the organization. Consultants operate in client projects as external actors (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006), but in this dissertation, I do not examine this relationship. Instead, I focus on the consultants' practitioner relationship within their own organization.

2.3 Organizational Practices, Emotions, and Strategic Action

Organizational practices can evoke emotions in people (Creed et al., 2014; Daniels & Robinson, 2019; Carton, 2018; Vuori & Huy, 2016). On the other hand, emotions influence people's thinking and behavior (Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Brundin et al., 2021; Healey & Hodgkinson, 2017; Huy, 2012; Vuori, 2024). Together, emotions and behavior shape organizational practices that, in turn, influence strategic action (Carton, 2018; Huy & Zott, 2019). The interplay between these elements—organizational practices, emotions, and strategic action—is central to this dissertation.

Although research has acknowledged that organizational practices influence emotions and that emotions shape behavior, significant gaps remain in the literature that this dissertation aims to address. The following sections review the key literature streams that inform this dissertation and further develop the theoretical foundation for the empirical essays.

2.3.1 Organizational Identity, Strategic Action, and Emotions

In this dissertation, I define Organizational Identity (OI) as the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Organizational identity is a continuously evolving construct that changes as a result of organizational identity work. Organizational identity work can be defined as the actions of organizational members "to form, repair, maintain, strengthen, or otherwise influence understandings of the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of a specific organization" (Basque and Langley, 2018).

Organizational identity can serve as a guiding framework for decision-makers within the organization, influencing how managers interpret and make sense of their environment (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). At the core of identity are those characteristics that are central to an organization's self-definition. These attributes can guide strategic decision-making. These factors can create path dependencies, where identity shapes or limits strategic choices (Gioia et al., 2000). Because identity is inherently long-lasting and enduring, it can provide continuity for strategic decisions, and enable the organization to adapt to changes. This continuity can enable the maintenance of coherence even as the organization adapts to new challenges (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Companies with a strong identity can better adapt to changes in the external environment by developing strategies that align with their values and assumptions (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). The distinctive characteristics of an organization set it apart from other competitors, and this distinctiveness can drive the company towards strategic directions that reinforce its identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Thus, organizational identity can offer consistency by providing a stable foundation for strategic decision-making.

Organizational identity can also hinder the organization's adaptation to changes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Tripsas, 2009; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Strong organizational identity can lead to strategic inertia making it difficult for organizations to adapt to technological changes (Tripsas, 2009) or resistance to change, making it challenging to respond to identity threats (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

When an organization needs to change its operations, for instance due to mergers, acquisitions, or changes in market conditions, it may also need to potentially redefine its identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, & Thomas, 2010). In the redefinition of identity, it is essential to consider those elements that build stability and those that are targeted for change.

Emotions have a significant impact when discussing organizational identity. Emotions influence organizational identity by shaping how individuals perceive and interact with their organization, particularly in the processes of identity formation, maintenance, and change (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Basque & Langley, 2018). Organizational identity, in turn, affects emotions by providing a framework through which individuals make sense of their experiences, influencing their emotional reactions and coping mechanisms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996).

Emotions play a central role in the processes of organizational sensemaking because they help construct narratives that guide individuals' understanding of their organization. This emotional engagement affects the perception of organizational identity and can drive changes within the organization when a mismatch is perceived between individual experiences and organizational identity (Basque and Langley, 2018; Gioia et al., 2000). For example, emotions such as pride, shame, or anxiety can be pivotal in how employees commit to the organization's identity, either reinforcing it or leading to identity adaptation or change (Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Pratt, 2000).

Organizational identity affects emotions by providing a sense of belonging and purpose, which influences how organizational members emotionally respond to different situations. A strong and coherent organizational identity can lead to positive emotional experiences such as pride and commitment, while conflicting or ambiguous identities can result in negative emotions such as frustration or disillusionment (Elsbach and Kramer, 1996; Corley and Gioia, 2004). For instance, when organizational practices align with members' perceptions of organizational identity, it can lead to positive emotional states that enhance motivation and collaboration (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Also, emotions related to founders past experiences, such as passion for innovation or frustration with bureaucratic constraints, can play a crucial role in shaping their vision and organizational culture. These emotional imprints can create a strong motivational drive that influences the company's strategic direction and cultural environment (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009). For example, Steve Job" previous experiences at Apple and NeXT, as well as his emotional journey, heavily influenced Apple's culture. His emphasis on design, innovation, and a certain level of perfectionism became core values of Apple's identity (Isaacson, 2011). Another example is Patagonia: Yvon Chouinard's experiences as a climber and environmentalist deeply impacted Patagonia's values and culture. His personal commitment to environmental sustainability is reflected in the company's mission and practices, fostering a culture of responsibility and activism (Chouinard, 2006).

These mechanisms highlight a bidirectional relationship where emotions can drive changes in organizational identity, and organizational identity can shape emotional experiences and expressions within the organizational context.

Hence, while emotions have been examined in the context of moments of crisis or strategic change—such as fear during organizational threats or pride following success (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Tripsas, 2009; Vuori & Huy, 2016)—less attention has been given to how emotions shape the long-term co-evolution of organizational identity and strategy. Strategic change is rarely a one-off event, but an evolving process shaped by identity tensions, emotional reactions, and ongoing reinterpretation. This dissertation contributes by theorizing how evolving and sometimes contradictory emotions—such as pride mixed with anxiety, or frustration coupled with enthusiasm—shape strategic direction and identity work over time. It draws on and extends existing literature on identity work and emotional sensemaking (e.g., Gioia et al., 2000; Basque & Langley, 2018), providing a more dynamic and temporally sensitive account of how emotions contribute to the alignment or fragmentation of identity and strategy.

2.3.2 Emotions and Strategic Action

Emotions can influence members' thinking and behavior within organizations (Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Brundin et al., 2022; Healey and Hodgkinson, 2017; Huy, 2012; Vuori, 2024), and therefore, they influence people's thoughts and actions, which ultimately can affect the organization's strategic action (Vuori & Huy, 2016).

Emotions activate action tendencies that define the mental and physiological activity characteristics associated with each emotion; these characteristics prepare the individual for actions that are typically adaptive in the triggering situation. For example, anger activates tendencies to attack "the agent held to be blameworthy for the offense" (Lazarus, 1991: 226), which might be effective for challenging dominant beliefs or disrupting social orders (e.g., Creed et al., 2014), as illustrated by the #MeToo movement and its consequences. Companionate love activates tendencies to show "psychological warmth, tenderness, interest, and concern" (Lazarus, 1991: 279), a reaction effective for adapting in healthcare work settings (e.g., Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Each action tendency has various behavioral, cognitive, and attentional elements that focus attention, memory, and actions depending on goals (Gross, 1998; 2015). However, sometimes emotions can activate maladaptive actions; for example, when a student is aware of an important exam the next day but watches a favorite TV show instead of studying.

As emotions influence people's actions, the emotions they experience in various work situations could influence firm-level strategic action. For example, when NASA initiated open innovation practices to enhance innovative capabilities, the strategy caused some R&D professionals to feel a "sense of fear and discomfort" in threats to their professional identity; many therefore rejected the practices, to the detriment of NASA's strategic adaptation (Lifshitz-Assaf, 2018: 757). On the other hand, emotions can generate potentially adaptive bold actions. For example, "CEO hubris, manifested as exaggerated pride or self-confidence," is something that can be utilized in acquisition processes (Hayward & Hambrick, 1997: 120-121).

Negative emotions can also be energizing. For example, when individuals fail to meet social standards, the resulting shame motivates them to take reparative actions (Lazarus, 1991), particularly in organizations that highly value social standards (Creed et al., 2014; Daniels & Robinson, 2019).

Emotions can also shape organizational practices. For example, Huy (2002) illustrates how middle management practices can affect employees' emotions and how these emotions, in turn, can guide or modify practices related to organizational continuity and change. Thus, the emotions associated with practices can significantly influence how practices are developed and adapted over time. This perspective highlights how emotions arising from certain practices can impact actions occurring within other practices.

Past research has mostly focused on the emotions of top management teams or middle management (Brundin, Liu, & Cyron, 2022). In a review conducted by Brundin et al. (2022), the authors performed a systematic review on the role of emotions in strategic management. In this review article, the researchers included 78 publications (68 articles and 10 book chapters). They listed who had been considered strategic actors, and the majority (64%) focused solely on the emotions of top management teams, other senior managers, or middle management. A third of the articles also included employees (36%), but out of these, only two articles considered employees as strategic actors at all levels of the organization (Huy & Zott, 2019; Erkama & Vaara, 2010).

In addition, the research context for studying emotions has been one-sided, with a few exceptions. "Research has mainly focused on large or multinational companies, and much less effort has been made to investigate small businesses and family businesses" (Brundin, Liu, & Cyron, 2022). In small companies, interpersonal relationships can be closer, and the effectiveness of organizational practices is crucial for the organization to be able to compete alongside larger players. For this reason, research is also needed on smaller companies.

Hence, while emotion work has been studied in relation to individual roles or occupational groups (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021), few studies have examined how emotion work is distributed across hierarchical levels in a way that supports organizational functioning. Much of the existing literature assumes a uniform experience of emotional labor across organizational roles, overlooking how different expectations and practices across seniority levels shape emotional demands.

Drawing from recent calls to examine context-specific dynamics of emotion work (Brundin, Liu, & Cyron, 2022; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), this dissertation contributes a novel perspective by demonstrating how emotion work is distributed in a complementary manner across roles, aligned with role-specific requirements and organizational goals. In doing so, it links theories of emotional labor to organizational structure and strategic coordination.

2.3.3 Organizational Practices and Emotions

Organizational practices that generate emotions can include both formal procedures and informal verbal influencing by leaders. Formal procedures can include practices such as performance reviews, which show employees where they have deviated from organizational expectations and trigger various emotions such as shame (Creed et al., 2014; Daniels & Robinson, 2019). Informal practices can also generate emotions. For example, when President Kennedy spoke to NASA in 1961, his words generated "positive emotions that connote significance (e.g., pride)" (Carton, 2018: 330). Leaders can also motivate employees through more aggressive approaches. For example, Nokia's chairman was told to energize meetings by "shouting at people 'at the top of his lungs' [...] 'so hard that [the target's] balls shrank'" (Vuori & Huy, 2016: 24; Laakso, 2018).

Organizational practices can influence emotions by influencing what information enters appraisal processes, by focusing employees' attention to some information and issues over others (Ocasio, 1997). For example, "routines that overly focus on planning for the negative consequences of events are likely to heighten negative affect and threat rigidity and ultimately induce avoidance behavior" (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011: 1505).

Thus, organizations can adopt practices that direct employee attention to information that generates emotions that benefit rather than harm adaptive actions. For example, highly uncertain situations can paralyze employees with anxiety. By providing simple routines, organizations can help employees make sense of situations and feel "confident enough to act" (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000: 1112). In another context, the U.S. Navy instructed sailors and their spouses to avoid negativity in emails: "Never draft and send an emotional message" and "try to limit venting your frustrations so your sailor looks forward to his/her communications" (Beckman & Stanko, in the in-press version: 19).

Organizations can seek to dampen negative emotional arousal by influencing how individuals appraise the situations in which they are. For example, a company solved tensions between business and sustainability strategies by practices of compromising, sacrificing, or synergizing (Hengst, Jarzabkowski, Hoegl, & Muethel, 2020). And a hospital used patient advocates, who engaged in "emotion work" to resolve conflicts between patients and hospital staff and devise practical solutions. (Heaphy, 2017: 660).

On the other hand, organizational practices can generate emotions that activate new behaviors to benefit strategic action (e.g., Carton, 2018; Huy & Zott, 2019). Middle managers can engage in practices that produce "emotional effects whose objective is to 'sell' the new strategic orientation to the client" (Rouleau, 2005: 1428). Narratives formed during strategic change can generate emotions that encourage change promoting actions (Balogun, Bartunek, & Do, 2015). And organizational dream building practices can inspire positive emotions: "by allowing members to pick dreams that are familiar to them, distributors get very excited and enthusiastic about them" (Pratt, 2000: 466).

Hence, prior research has largely focused on the cognitive aspects of reflection and learning in organizations while neglecting the emotional consequences of these processes (Edmondson et al., 2001; Keiser & Arthur, 2020). Cognitive frameworks often assume that reflecting on past actions leads to improved future performance through increased understanding. However, this perspective overlooks the emotional impact of reflection, such as shame or frustration, which can influence motivation, engagement, and ultimately learning. This dissertation contributes by integrating emotions into organizational learning theory, theorizing how emotional responses shape the timing and outcomes of reflective practices (Chown, 2020; Edmondson & Dimmock, 2020). In doing so, it links emotion theory to established concepts in organizational learning and practices. This gap leads to the third research question: How do organizational practices generate emotions that shape members' behavior and learning?

2.3.4 Researcher's emotions in qualitative research

In recent decades, qualitative research has significantly advanced our understanding of how emotions influence organizational life. Scholars have shown that emotions affect strategic decision-making (Huy, 2002), shape boardroom dynamics (Brundin & Nordqvist, 2008), and influence organizational members' responses to change (Vuori & Tushman, 2024). These studies have typically relied on participants' self-reported emotional experiences collected through interviews (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004; Vuori & Huy, 2016), as well as researchers' observations of verbal and non-verbal emotional expressions in the field (Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Liu & Maitlis, 2014). Because many emotions are difficult to articulate—or even to consciously recognize—qualitative fieldwork has been considered particularly valuable for studying emotion-related phenomena in organizations (Padavic, Ely, & Reid, 2020; Vince, 2006).

Despite he close involvement of researchers in the field, the methodological literature has tended to treat the researcher as a neutral instrument of data collection and analysis. While scholars have acknowledged that fieldwork can evoke strong emotional responses in researchers (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), these emotions are often framed as biases or background noise to be managed, rather than as potential sources of insight. Reflexive approaches to qualitative research (Alvesson, 2003; Cunliffe, 2003) have argued that researchers' subjectivity should be acknowledged, but few studies have provided concrete tools or frameworks for how researchers might systematically use their own emotions in emotion research. In parallel, developments in related fields such as psychotherapy and enactive ethnography have demonstrated the epistemic potential of embodied experience, empathy, and reflexivity in understanding others (Sletvold, 2015; Del Rio, 2021), yet these insights have rarely been integrated into organization studies.

Recent methodological discussions have begun to challenge the idea that researchers can or should maintain complete emotional detachment from the people and settings they study. Scholars such as Michel (2011) and Bourgoin, Bencherki & Faraj (2019) have argued for more embodied, situated, and participatory forms of inquiry, in which the researcher's emotions and experiences are considered integral to the research process. Still, in the context of emotion research in organizations, a central question remains under-theorized: how can researchers consciously and rigorously make use of their own emotional reactions as part of the research process, without compromising analytic clarity?

Table 2 synthesizes the dissertation's four essays, summarizes cutting-edge theoretical insights, highlights unresolved theoretical puzzles, clarifies the SRQs, and details the data utilized.

Table 3. Summary table of the four essays in the dissertation.

Essay title	Cutting edge arguments from prior literature	Remaining puzzle	Research question	Data
Emotions in the Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy	Organizational identity guides strategic choices and actions (e.g., Ravasi, Tripsas, & Langley, 2020) Identity is closely tied to emotions (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, and emotions drive actions (e.g., Vuori & Huy, 2016) Identity is a source of inertia (e.g., Tripsas, 2009)	While existing literature establishes that emotions drive actions and identity is a source of inertia, it is unclear how the complexity and diversity of emotions influence the ongoing evolution of both identity and strategy. Specifically, how do emotional responses, which are tied to identity, create tensions or alignment in strategy, and how do these emotions affect strategic decisions across different stages of an organization's development?	How do emotions related to organizational identity shape and co-evolve with strategy work?	*
It's Not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations	Different organizational roles have different functions, and they complement one another for strategic action (e.g., Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1958) Roles have different type of requirements for emotion work (e.g., Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021)	While existing literature acknowledges that roles complement each other and have different emotional demands, it remains unclear how the structure itself drives these differences in emotion work and how this, in turn, impacts strategic actions and career progression within the organization. This gap calls for an exploration of the dynamic relationship between organizational structure, emotion work, and performance.	How does organizational structure influence emotion work and, eventually, individual and organizational actions?	*

An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption	To increase learning, teams should reflect on their past actions (e.g., Chown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Valentine, 2018) Psychological safety enables reflection (e.g., Edmondson, 1999) New action happens automatically after reflection (e.g., Edmondson et al., 1999, Keiser & Arthur, 2020)	It has not explored how and why the timing (before, during, or after an event may generate different emotional responses). Emotional responses can motivate or demotivate action, potentially altering the automatic link between reflection and subsequent action.	How does the timing of practices affect emotions and ultimately sense of ability to act?	*
Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research	Key data in qualitative emotion research has been participants' self-reported feelings and observed emotional expressions (e.g., Kouamé & Liu, 2021) Researchers are increasingly encouraged to reflect on and disclose their roles (e.g., Alvesson, 2003; Whittle & Reissner, 2024) Psychotherapy scholars have started to acknowledge the role of intersubjectivity in the quality of therapy (e.g., Sletvod, 2015)	How can researchers systematically utilize their own emotions during the different stages of qualitative research without compromising the scientific validity of the study?	How can qualitative researchers utilize their own emotions while collecting and analyzing qualitative data?	**

* 8-year longitudinal study: 145 interviews, 2 consulting projects as non-participant observer, 8 consulting projects as participant observer, Company documents

** Autoethnographic fieldnotes from 8-year longitudinal study

3. Methodology

In this dissertation, I have employed a theory elaboration research approach using the grounded theory method, which enables the study of organizational practices, organizational members' emotions, and strategic actions in the context in which individuals naturally operate (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this approach, theoretical insights and concepts emerge from the data collected and analyzed throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Howard-Payne, 2016). As a result of using this methodology, I became deeply engaged in the research, aiming to interpret and represent the world as the participants perceive it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.1 Conducting Qualitative Single-Case Study

This study is a qualitative single-case study. A qualitative research approach allows for theory elaboration by utilizing data that is collected and analyzed qualitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In a single-case study, the focus is on a single, specific case to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the mechanisms at play. Since this dissertation focuses on only one case, it aims to highlight the various dimensions of this case, including the organization's structures and practices, its history, and its culture, all of which influence strategic action.

3.1.1 Selection of the Case Company, and the Case Company's Interest Participating in the Study

I chose this case as the research subject because I wanted to study a high-performance, high intensity environment—to understand how high performance is created, the role of emotions in such an environment, and how learning occurs and is sustained in a high-performing context.

At the time, my supervisor[1] was collaborating with the consulting company and suggested this company as a research context. My supervisor and the case organization had conducted a preliminary study on organizational performance in 2016 (12 interviews).

Upon hearing about the opportunity for further research, they agreed to participate because they wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the core elements of their way of working—what truly defined them as an organization. They were particularly interested in identifying which aspects of their practices and culture should be preserved going forward. As they were approaching a generational transition, these questions became even more pressing: how to honor and institutionalize the legacy of the founders, while also ensuring the organization's continued relevance and adaptability. The company's leadership, in particular, was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of their own operations and the unique characteristics of their organization. During the research process, I presented my findings to the management team and the entire organization in 2017, 2018, and 2019. These findings consisted of descriptive observations about how the organization functioned. They did not include any action recommendations for the organization going forward.

I was given the freedom to interview the entire organization multiple times, which presented a unique opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of its operations. Additionally, I had read Alexandra Michel's articles (2007; 2011) on investment banks, which served as inspiring "precedents" for exploring what the consulting world might be like and what kinds of issues might arise there.

The consulting context was unfamiliar to me. I knew the names of the biggest firms, but I had never considered applying to work in those firms or known anyone who worked there. The consulting world felt foreign to me, especially at first, which made studying it even more fascinating.

[1] When I started my dissertation in 2017, my supervisor was Professor Timo Vuori.

Through various sources, I familiarized myself with the consulting industry, and the decision to study this particular consulting organization became increasingly appealing due to its unique characteristics. This following excerpt from Consulting Company's Core Values document truly sparked my interest in the company and helped me understand the factors behind their high performance:

> *Consulting Company sprung from great enthusiasm about creating something new and different in a market which was quite content with what was already offered against a set of competitors which – by any standards – rank among the most formidable one can imagine. It was idealism, not stone-cold rationality, which sparked the creation of Consulting Company. And perhaps more than anything else, it is passion to deliver superior results, partly through brilliant new thinking, but above all through hard work and dedication, that has forged Consulting Company's way from where it all started to where we are today in the eyes of our clients. From a complete nobody, to a gradual underdog, and finally a reputable player in the market.* [Core Values document]

The organization, Consulting Company, was established in 2001 by a small group of founding partners who sought to challenge the conventions of management consulting in Finland. It aimed to compete against major players like McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, and Bain & Company (MBB -firms[2]) and become the most respected consulting company in Finland. As a challenger in the national consulting arena, Consulting Company had to prove itself in every tender, lacking the established brand and reputation of competitors like the MBB firms. This made it particularly appealing to gain a deeper understanding of the organization's operations.

[2] MBB stands for the initials of the three most prestigious and dominant management consulting firms: McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group (BCG), and Bain & Company. These firms are collectively called MBB due to their global influence, leading market positions, and reputations for top-tier consulting services.

Their unique position in the market made Consulting Company an especially compelling context for study. Unlike their globally recognized competitors, Consulting Company operated locally with limited resources, without the backing of a global brand or access to international experts and projects. This context heightened the significance of the organizational members and their individual experiences, making their roles and growth particularly intriguing to examine.

Conducting an in-depth investigation of a single case—focusing on the organization and its consultants' daily activities over several years—provided a deeper understanding of how a consulting organization operates in practice. Having a comprehensive dataset and the ability to follow the same individuals, observe their development, and understand how they enacted the organizational practices over time offered a unique opportunity to study consultants in a real-time, evolving work environment.

3.1.2 Researcher's and Co-Author's Role

The roles of both myself and my supervisor in relation to the case company were carefully considered throughout the research process. My supervisor acted as an executive advisor to the organization between 2015 and 2019. During that time, he participated occasionally in client projects and collected data based on his interactions with consultants and clients.

From 2020 onwards, I worked in a participant observer role: I took part in client projects while collecting data from my own work. I was never formally employed by the company; instead, during 2022–2024, I invoiced for project work through my own business. For internal research, we had a clear agreement: I conducted two studies for the organization and was allowed to use the interviews for my dissertation, with full transparency regarding their dual purpose.

Although both of us had professional experience with the case company, we were not employed by the organization during the dissertation process. Our roles in the research were distinct, and I took care to document my reflections, methodological choices, and potential biases in a research diary.

This study differs from action research in that I did not seek to intervene in or influence the organization as part of the research design. While I participated in projects to deepen my understanding, I did not co-create solutions or feed insights back into the organization in an iterative way, as is typical in action research. The research questions I explored were my own, and the themes of learning, succession, and emotional dynamics developed independently of the company's agenda. Notably, the data for Essay 2, which focuses on emotion work, was collected before I conducted any paid work for the organization.

To address potential conflicts of interest, we ensured academic independence throughout the process. I took deliberate steps to mitigate bias through data triangulation, memoing, presenting findings in conferences, and by having critical discussions with colleagues.

3.1.3 Ontological Foundations of the Qualitative Single-Case Study

This study operates under the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed and is perceived differently by different individuals. In the context of a high-performance environment within a consulting firm, the study assumes that organizational structures, practices, emotions, and strategic actions are not fixed entities but are continuously shaped and reshaped through the interactions and experiences of organizational members.

In recognizing multiple realities, this research acknowledges that the experiences and perceptions of organizational members vary and are context-dependent. This ontological perspective aligns with the qualitative approach used in this single-case study, where the aim is to uncover the nuanced, context-specific understanding of how high performance is created and maintained, and how emotions and learning shape strategic actions in the consulting organization.

The ontological stance of this study is that reality cannot be separated from its context; organizational practices, structures, history, and culture are inherently intertwined with how strategic actions and learning are carried out. By focusing on the specific context of a consulting firm aiming to challenge established players in the market, this research views the organization's unique dynamics as fundamental to understanding its operations.

Given that the researcher's engagement is integral to this qualitative study, the ontological assumption here also considers the researcher as an active interpreter of reality. The unfamiliarity with the consulting context, for instance, influenced the curiosity and approach taken to explore the organizational environment, underscoring a reflexive process where the researcher's positionality shapes the unfolding of the research.

3.2 Single-Case study: Key Characteristics of Consulting Co.

Consulting Co. consists of approximately 30 consultants and is owned by eight partners. The organizational structure is hierarchical with three levels: junior consultants (analysts and consultants), project managers (associate managers and managers), and senior consultants (directors and partners). Each level typically includes around seven individuals.

Staffing at Consulting Co. is based on availability rather than expertise (see different examples in Michel, 2007). Junior consultants are staffed 100% on projects, while seniors contribute around 50%, depending on the project's needs. Juniors handle most of the analysis, while seniors lead the strategic thinking process. Projects, lasting from 2 weeks to 1 year, are closely coordinated with client organizations.

Project teams usually comprise 2-5 consultants. Goals are set at the beginning by the project manager and are specific to both the project and the individual consultant. At the end of the project, the manager provides feedback based on these goals. This structure allows for varied development depending on the project type and client needs. Table 3 illustrates the roles in the organization, the type of role they might have in project, and the type of role related skill and knowledge expectations that one should have on each hierarchy level.

Table 4. Role related skill and knowledge expectations at different organizational levels.

<table>
<tr><th>Role</th><th>Example role and goal in the project</th><th>Role related skill and knowledge expectations (d)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Analyst</td><td>“Analysts/Consultants should interpret and communicate their error-free analysis as well as take initiative.”</td><td rowspan="2">Basic consulting skills
▪ Analytical skills, structuring and problem-solving skills
▪ Oral and written presentation skills
▪ Producing material
▪ People skills and teamwork
▪ Integration to Consulting Co. and values</td></tr>
<tr><td>Con-sultant</td><td>“Analysts/Consultants should interpret and communicate their error-free analysis as well as take initiative.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Asso-ciate Mana-ger</td><td>“PMs run the projects but should also demonstrate strong own thinking and stakeholder mgmt skills.”</td><td rowspan="2">Leadership skills
• Project planning
• Project management tools
• Leading people
• Developing client relation-ships
• Developing Consulting Co.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mana-ger</td><td>“PMs run the projects but should also demonstrate strong own thinking and stakeholder mgmt skills.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Direc-tor</td><td>“Directors and Partners should focus on building role as trusted mgmt sparring partners and thought leaders.”</td><td rowspan="2">Expertise
• General knowledge and un-derstanding of economy and business life
• Industry and/or functional expertise.
• Understanding of business- and management models
• Strategic thinking</td></tr>
<tr><td>Part-ner</td><td>“Directors and Partners should focus on building role as trusted mgmt sparring partners and thought leaders.”</td></tr>
</table>

Consultants’ performance is traditionally evaluated annually by senior team members. In 2019, with a new CEO, this process was revised: consultants now self-assess their performance four times a year and propose promotions based on this self-assessment, rather than relying solely on evaluations from senior colleagues.

Each consultant has an internal mentor within the organization, with partners and directors serving as mentors. These mentors help guide career development.

Consulting Co. assigns dedicated partners to manage client relationships. While multiple partners may work on the same project, one holds primary responsibility. The company focuses on long-term relationships and limits itself to one client per industry, underscoring a commitment to deeper engagement with each client.

Consulting Co. was known in the national job market for its good organizational culture. The culture was described as "softer" and more "people-oriented" than was typical in the industry. A unique feature of the culture was that while the hierarchy in projects was very clear, with roles reflecting each person's area of responsibility, the social hierarchy at Consulting Co. was low. In interactions, people were treated as equals. Individuals could relax in social interactions, regardless of their organizational level. Twice a year, spouses were also invited to events, which provided a different insight into people and their lives.

Careers at Consulting Co. are longer than at its competitors. Competitors often had much shorter career spans, and especially at MBB, progression was often based on the "up-or-out" policy.[3] Consulting Co. did not have such a policy; instead, if an individual had the desire to develop, there was a belief in supporting their growth. People were provided with support and given opportunities to develop.

3.2.1 Ego Ideal and Appraisal Process of Emotion at Consulting Co.

In the appraisal process of emotion, the emergence of emotions is related to how a person interprets and evaluates situations (Lazarus, 1991). This evaluation is based on how the situation relates to the person's goals, values, and expectations, including the individual's ego ideal (Lazarus, 1991). The ego ideal refers to the perfection standards and goals that an individual adopts and strives to fulfill, which define their perception of what their "perfect self-image" should be (Lazarus, 1991; Higgins, 1987; Freud, 2010). This relates to how the individual experiences and evaluates emotions in relation to their personal expectations and values (Lazarus, 1991).

At Consulting Co., the perfection standards associated with the ego ideal were very high. This was evident at all levels of the organization in interviews. High perfection standards emerged both in project work and in discussions among partners regarding the strategy work done at the Consult-

[3] The up-or-out policy is a career advancement strategy commonly used in management consulting firms. It means that employees must either progress in their career within a specific time frame (move up) or leave the firm (go out).

ing Co. level. Self-criticism and high-performance standards were constantly highlighted in the data. Below are some examples from the interviews:

> *We have created a mentality here that everything always has to be tiptop in everything we do. The slides must be as stylized as possible, and we must always be well-prepared for every single meeting and anything else that comes up in our daily work. (Project Manage #5)*
>
> *In our competency grid, there's this depiction of a perfect terminator (practically speaking). Like, what a good consultant is. That's what I try to do, or try to be. And I've been doing it for four years, so I read it and I'm like, yeah, it's quite a tall order to push myself every day to that level. (Consultant #5).*
>
> *The expectations we have historically set for ourselves are perhaps what most influence our way of working. Secondly, there are the expectations that clients have for us. They don't pay as much per day for many other investments as they do for our projects, so that also brings quite a lot of expectations towards us. (Project Manage #4)*
>
> *Not all the expectations we have set for ourselves are necessarily what the client would expect from us. We have somewhat set the bar much higher than some clients have set for us. (Project Manage #3)*
>
> *We want to do everything absolutely perfectly. (Partner #4)*
>
> *We are used to doing everything with extreme thoroughness. (Partner #1)*

At Consulting Co., there was a perfectionist ego ideal that instilled a fear of failure in people. This emotional reaction leads to behavior where consultants conduct a lot of analyses and strive to comprehensively consider different perspectives. This results in an emotional experience where each individual and team can be satisfied with their performance, and ultimately, the customer is satisfied. Positive feedback builds self-confidence and reinforces the functionality of the perfectionist ego ideal in this context. The figure below illustrates the impact of the ego ideal on the daily activities of consultants at Consulting Co.

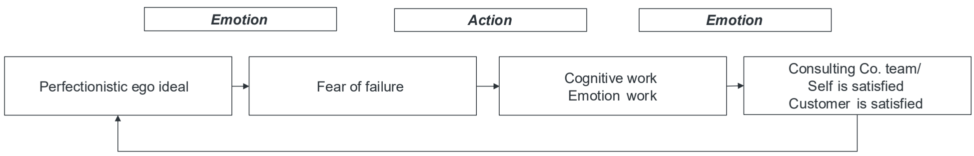

Figure 3. Influence of Ego-ideal on organizational performance.

It is important to understand the prevailing ego ideal at Consulting Co., as this makes it easier to comprehend why it was particularly important to the founders that Consulting Co. had a psychologically safe culture. At Consulting Co., the expectations for the level of performance were very high, which easily triggered a fear of failure. Words like "breiving" emerged in Consulting Co.'s culture. In the case organization, the term *"breiving"* was used informally to describe a particular kind of proactive behavior. *Breiving* refers to taking bold action in unfamiliar situations—doing something that has not been done before—without prior instruction, guidance, or seeking permission from others. It captures a spirit of initiative, experimentation, and self-directed problem solving. This behavior was valued in the organization, especially when navigating uncertainty or responding to emergent challenges in client work. Rather than waiting for top-down direction, individuals were expected to *"breiv"*—to take ownership, move forward, and figure things out as they go.

If the attempt failed, it was approached with a "brave attempt" mindset. Although interviews described how people approached difficult challenges with a "breiving" and "brave attempt" spirit, in reality, people did significant cognitive and emotional work just to reach some kind of outcome.

Understanding Consulting Co.'s ego ideal and how it influences everything in the background is essential when reading the empirical essays in this dissertation.

3.3 Conducting Grounded Theory Research

Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that involves generating theory from data collected and analyzed simultaneously during the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Unlike other methodologies, grounded theory does not start with predefined hypotheses. Instead, it allows findings to emerge as the researcher's understanding develops within the research context. This methodology is particularly useful when the aim is to generate a theory based on the data rather than confirming pre-existing theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is rooted in the epistemology of contextualism, which suggests that findings are constructed through the inter-subjective understandings of the phenomenon being investigated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This requires the researcher to be personally engaged in the research to better describe and understand the world as participants perceive it.

In this study, I had the idea that I wanted to explore a high-intensity organization—specifically, how learning occurs in such a setting. Since my supervisor had conducted a pre-study in the company in 2016, I had formed a certain understanding of the organization and of the questions that could be both theoretically and practically interesting. The organization was preparing for a generational transition, which seemed like a compelling process to study. However, I understood that this would be a time-consuming and evolving process, so I decided to include a few additional guiding themes for the research.

I was particularly intrigued by how an organization that serves as an advisor to top management and operates at the forefront of leadership trends engages in learning itself. At the same time, I was interested in the role of emotions in an organization or industry that, from the outside, appears to emphasize rationality. This was the starting point for the first round of interviews. There was a mix of both open-ended inquiry and theory elaboration. I had read some of the literature on organizational learning and had a basic understanding of the field. When the findings from the first round of interviews did not align with what I had read, my interest deepened, and subsequent interviews and observation focused more on understanding the phenomenon of learning.

During the first interview round, I noticed while coding that people's emotional experiences varied depending on their roles. This was the starting point for Essay 2. I sought to better understand these distributed experiences in later interviews as well. I developed the findings related to these themes by drawing on a theory elaboration process. Theory elaboration is a process, of conceptualizing and conducting empirical research by utilizing existing conceptual ideas or a preliminary model as a basis for developing new theoretical insights. This is achieved by comparing, refining, or structuring theoretical constructs and relationships in a way that explains and accounts for empirical observations. (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017).

3.3.1 Data Collection

Between 2017 and 2024, I conducted a total of 145 interviews, participated in two consulting projects as a non-participating observer, shadowed a partner, participated in ten projects as a participant observer, and attended 22 internal meetings as a non-participating observer. The Figure 4 shows how my role evolved over time. The x-axis displays the timeline from 2017 to 2024, while the y-axis first presents the different field periods, followed by each of the four essays.

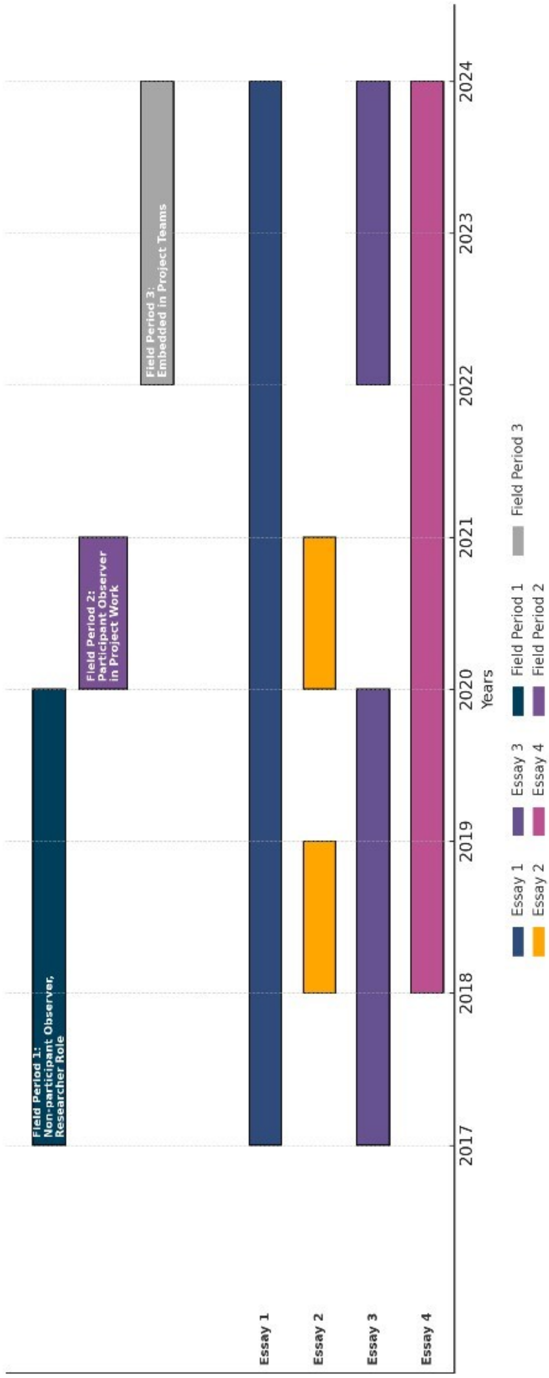

Figure 4. Process Model of Research Engagement, Data Collection, and Essay Scoping

I collected data in three different field periods. During Field Period 1 (2017-2019), I acted as an interviewer and non-participant observer, collecting data from the outside while maintaining a clear researcher role. In Field Period 2 (2020), I moved into a participant observer role, engaging directly in project work while simultaneously gathering data in a researcher role by making interviews. In Field Period 3 (2022–2024), I became embedded in project teams, fully participating in daily operations while continuing fieldwork.

The second half of the figure shows the timeline for each of the four essays.

Essay 1 was developed continuously from 2017 to 2024, drawing on insights accumulated throughout the study. Essay 2 was shaped between 2018 and 2021 and focuses on how employees at different levels of seniority experienced the organization. Essay 3 was developed in two phases—first between 2017 and 2020, and again from 2022 to 2024. Essay 4 spans from 2018 to 2024 and reflects a methodological perspective on the researcher's own role and emotions in the field. The autoethnographic work was conducted between 2021 and 2024. This phase marks the period when I used my own emotional and embodied experiences as a source of data, deepening the reflexive dimension of the research.

In addition to formal data collection, I continuously engaged in informal conversations with various members of the organization to better understand the demands of consulting work at different organizational levels. In the fall of 2022, I began working at the office and having lunch with members of the organization, which allowed me to get to know them even better. From 2022 onwards, I felt more like a member of the organization rather than a researcher, and I began to be invited to informal organizational events. I participated in running, walking, and cycling with members of the organization and attended crayfish parties and Christmas celebrations. Tables 3 and 4 list the key data sources used in my dissertation.

Table 5. Interview data.

Role in organization*		**Inter-view 2016***	**Inter-view 2017**	**Inter-view 2017**	**Inter-view 2018**	**Inter-view 2019**	**Inter-view 2020**	**Inter-view 2021**	**Inter-view 2022**	**Inter-view 2024**	**Total**
Partner	Founding part-ner 1		x	x	x		x Multiple validation discussi-ons	x			**5+**
	Founding part-ner 2	x	x		x	x	x Multiple discussi-ons				**5+**
	Partner 3	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	**7**
	Partner 4	x	x	Sha-dowing	x	x	x	x	x	x	**9**
	Partner 5		x		x	x			x	x	**6**
	Partner 6	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	**8**
	Partner 7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x Multiple validation discussi-ons	x	x	**9+**
Director	Director 1	x	x	x	x						**4**
Project Mana-ger	Project Mana-ger 1	x	x		x	x	x Multiple validation discussi-ons	x	x	x	**8+**
	Project Mana-ger 2	x	x		x						**3**
	Project Mana-ger 3		x		x				x	x	**4**

	Project Manager 4	x									**1**
	Project Manager 5		x		x						**2**
	Project Manager 6		x		x				x	x	**4**
	Project Manager 7		x	x	x						**3**
	Project Manager 8								x	x	**2**
Consultant	Consultant 1	x									**1**
	Consultant 2	x	x		x				x		**4**
	Consultant 3	x	x		x						**3**
	Consultant 4		x		x						**2**
	Consultant 5		x		x				x		**3**
	Consultant 6				x			x	x	x	**4**
	Consultant 7									x	**1**
	Consultant 8								x	x	**2**
	Consultant 9								x	x	**2**
	Consultant 10								x	x	**2**
	Consultant 11								x	x	**2**
Analyst	Analyst 1		x		x		x				**3**
	Analyst 2		x		x				x	x Multiple informal discussions	**4+**
	Analyst 3		x	x	x						**3**
	Analyst 4			x	x						**2**
	Analyst 5				x			x			**2**
	Analyst 6				x				x		**2**
	Analyst 7				x						**1**
	Analyst 8									x	**1**
	Analyst 9									x	**1**
	Analyst 10									x	**1**
	Analyst 11									x	**1**

	Analyst 12									x	**1**
	Analyst 13									x	**1**
	Analyst 14									x	**1**
	Analyst 15									x	**1**
	Analyst 16									x	**1**
	Analyst 17									x	**1**
	Analyst 18									x	**1**
	Analyst 19								x		**1**
	Analyst 20								x		**1**
	Analyst 21								x		**1**
Trainee	Trainee 1							x			**1**
	Trainee 2									x	**1**
Other	Chief Data Scientist		x		x		x				**3**
	Digital Expert				x				x		**2**
	Office Manager								x	x	**2**
	Office Assistant									x	**1**
Total	**54 informants**	**12**	**22**	**10**	**28**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**23**	**29**	**145**

* Conducted by my Supervisor (Professor Timo Vuori)

Table 6. Observation data.

Project	Project industry	Non-participant observation hours	Participant observation hours	Number of client interviews personally conducted	Project length in weeks	Project team
Project 1	Construction	550			8	Partner, project manager, consultant, analyst
Project 2	Food	90			4	Partner, project manager, analyst, trainee
Project 3	Sports and entertainment		120	19	4	Partner, expert*
Project 4	Business networking and advocacy		55	9	4	Partner, expert*
Project 5	Construction supply		40	10	4	Partner, consultant, expert*
Project 6	Architecture and engineering		40	5	2	Partner, director, expert*
Project 7	Telecommunications and information technology		180	10	5	Partner, project manager, analyst, trainee, expert*
Project 8	Beverage		280	7	8	Partner 1, partner 2, analyst, expert*
Project 9	Retail		255	17	6	Partner, project manager, analyst, trainee, expert*
Project 10	Food		20	4	2	Partner, consultant, expert*
Total	**10**	**640**	**990**	**71**	**47**	

The first round of interviews was conducted using an ethnographic interview method. I aimed to understand the thoughts and behaviors related to learning in the organization without any preconceived notions. The interviews were highly flexible and open in nature, allowing the organizational members to share their experiences on their own terms and to bring up topics I might not have thought to ask about.

Subsequent interview rounds were designed to explore in greater depth the themes that had emerged earlier—particularly those related to organizational learning, the succession process, and distributed emotion work. I was especially interested in continuing the research around the topics that elicited the strongest emotional responses from people, as these conversations felt the most meaningful and engaging.

I conducted interviews during the first year twice a year, and after that a bit more frequently. I aimed for at least one touch point per year. Conducting interviews annually felt like a rhythm that allowed me to stay close to the everyday life of the organization, while also giving me time to reflect on and analyze the data. I aimed to remain in dialogue with the case organization, especially when I encountered something in the data that was unclear or difficult to interpret. The individuals I interviewed varied depending on who was available and from whom I needed additional insight—often based on who had previously discussed a particular issue or phenomenon.

For example, in the context of succession, one emotionally charged theme was the organization's identity and the discussions surrounding it. The company had a strong and distinctive identity, and many employees felt a deep sense of identification with it. I wanted to trace how people experienced and expressed emotions related to this identity, and how those emotions evolved over time. I had the unique opportunity to interview the entire organization on multiple occasions, but in other cases, I focused on interviewing individuals with whom I had access or a stronger connection.

I took notes throughout the data collection phase. I began observing my own emotions while participating in project work, conducting interviews, comparing others' experiences to my own, and reflecting on my feelings in various formal and informal situations. I used my own emotions to gain a deeper understanding of the emotions that consultants experienced within the organization. This process is described in more detail in Essay 4.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

In conducting my grounded theory research, I began data analysis with open coding, a process that involves breaking down the data into discrete parts and coding these parts to identify significant concepts and patterns. The grounded theory approach, as advocated by Strauss, encourages the open coding practice, which includes conceptualizing even solitary occurrences (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Through this process, several major categories emerged from the data.

A key event in the data was the leadership succession process and the preparation for it. The founding partners were stepping back from operational roles and were concerned about the future direction of the company after their departure. Consequently, many discussions, practices, and artifacts focused on articulating and making the soul of Consulting Co. understandable for future generations. The tension between the new and old generations at Consulting Co. was characterized by a difference in thinking about whether Consulting Co., as an institution, should be more of a think tank or a performance- and execution-oriented consulting organization packed with projects. This analysis is detailed in Essay 3.

Another key event, detailed in Essay 1, involved efforts to enhance organizational learning. It highlighted the importance of maintaining self-confidence in consulting work, revealing that practices causing conflicting emotions around self-confidence were difficult to sustain. Understanding the importance of maintaining self-confidence was crucial for grasping the nature of consulting work. These categories were examples of occurrences that I explained with emerging concepts.

The third key finding related to the distribution of attention within the organization and the different distribution of emotions across organizational levels. The company's business depended on projects, primarily sold by the partners to their clients. The project pipeline was short, only a few months, which left little visibility into future projects. As a result, senior consultants' main focus was constantly on advancing client relationships rather than working on projects. Partners also mentioned in interviews that the highest positive emotions were experienced in sales situations, not project work, emphasizing their desire to focus on sales. This analysis is further elaborated in Essay 2.

Following open coding, I engaged in axial coding, which involves reassembling the data to highlight the linkages between the various categories of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this phase, I focused on understanding how different categories interacted, such as how organizational identity work and strategy work co-evolved or how implementation of new learning practices were linked to emotional responses. This process allowed me to conceptualize the data in a way that demonstrated the relationships between the various elements of the consulting organization.

Throughout the data collection process, I continuously reviewed relevant literature and used the constant comparative method to evaluate emerging findings against the existing research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach entailed an iterative process where I compared and contrasted examples from the data with theoretical insights from the literature. For instance, literature on organizational identity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Tripsas, 2009; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) and the identity-strategy nexus (Ravasi, Tripsas & Langley, 2020) helped me understand the ongoing discussions regarding the organization's strategy and identity. Similarly, literature on emotion regulation (Gross, 1998) emotion work (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Zapf et al., 2021) provided a lens through which to analyze individual emotion work, and cognitive organizational literature (March & Simon, 1993; Ocasio, 1997) helped explain the dispersed attention and cognition structure within the organization. Engaging with literature in this way helped me to refine the emerging categories and understand their theoretical implications better.

The conceptualization involved moving from raw data to higher-level abstractions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Concepts are the basic units of analysis, and theories are built not from raw data (e.g., "you did not always recognize whether the performance was good or not. [...] As a result of cumulative experience, you start to recognize whether the things you have done are shit or diamonds") itself but from conceptualizations of that data (the previous quote was conceptualized as "social self-reflection"). During my research, I developed concepts that represented the phenomena being studied, such as "acting despite of uncertainty" or "cognitive empathy." These concepts were generated through the analytic process of making comparisons for similarities and differences. Not all concepts became categories; those that did were more abstract, higher-level concepts that served as the "cornerstones" of the developing theory. Writing theoretical memos throughout this process helped me to refine these concepts and build them into a coherent theoretical framework.

A fundamental aspect of grounded theory research is the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I analyzed the data, I continuously compared incidents, events, and actions to identify similarities and differences and develop more precise categories and hypotheses about relationships among them. For example, I developed a hypothesis regarding how the organizational structure impacts emotion work through role requirements. I tested this hypothesis by presenting my findings to organizational members, who validated these insights. Similarly, I explored hypotheses related to learning practices and their emotional impacts through additional interviews and informal discussions with participants and peers who had experience in other consulting organizations. This process of constant comparison and iteration allowed me to refine my hypotheses and ensure that they were grounded in the data.

Interviews with consultants outside Consulting Co. and monitoring various social media channels (e.g., Instagram, Fishbowl) emphasized that I had identified emotion-related practices characteristic of the consulting industry that influenced people's actions. These discussions revealed that confidence is crucial in selling, and the projects sold with high confidence impacted the emotional labor of junior staff. Ten of eleven interviewees provided examples where they or their senior managers confidently committed to new projects despite limited experience, highlighting that consulting often involves subtle overstatements of expertise:

> *When you sell consulting, you must overstate because the world changes rapidly. If you try to practice before you sell, your competitors have already sold it. Whether you lie straight to the client's face or whether you are a "go-getter" is a gray area. (Non-Consulting Co. consultant #2)*
>
> *In all three consulting companies that I have worked at, partners overstated our expertise and claimed that we had done such projects before, even though it was not so clear that we had. (Non-Consulting Co. consultant #3)*

Data from Fishbowl also shows that consultants intentionally built confidence to compensate for their lack of substantive expertise and experience. As consultants discussed in Fishbowl:

Analyst Question: *I started my first project and feel so inadequate. Is this a normal feeling?*

Analyst 1 Answer: *Yes felt like an idiot first few months, on some projects still feel that way after 2 years – fake it till you make it!*

Works at Deloitte Answer: *It's all about confidence, and if you don't have it – practice it!*

These examples demonstrate how I continuously validated my findings through internal interviews and by trying to understand whether the phenomena observed were broader than just Consulting Co.

The iterative process involved theoretical sampling, where data collection is guided by emerging theoretical insights (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, in essay 1 and 2 when I noticed from the interviews that confidence was a significant theme, but emotion appeared differently across consultants with varying levels of experience, I conducted more interviews with consultants at different levels (juniors, project managers, and seniors) to clarify the different mechanisms through which emotion work occurs. These new interviews specifically focused on deepening and expanding the roles of "confidence" and "emotion work" until the concept was saturated.

There were instances when the initial hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually observed in the field. For example, some participants offered alternative explanations, which helped to understand the phenomenon in a more nuanced way. For example, in Essay 1, when I discussed the findings about the negative emotions arising from the reflection practice, he presented an alternative perspective. He emphasized the mindset of consultants, which is continuously focused on future actions rather than past ones.

> *After-project reflection may be beneficial, but you dismiss it because you focus on the future. You are too busy to think about failure. The future is highly uncertain and brings new problems to solve. Looking back doesn't help. You know what succeeded. You can't do anything about the failures* (PM#2_2020).

This understanding required revising some of my hypotheses to account for different perspectives on the same phenomenon (before and during the project reflection practices). By capturing multiple perspectives and comparing them, I was able to verify and refine the emerging theory. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

By following these steps in conducting grounded theory research, I was able to build robust theoretical frameworks in different essays that is grounded in empirical data, reflective of the participants' experiences, and capable of providing new insights into the dynamics of a consulting organization.

3.3.3 Method of Essay 1: The Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy

The ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying my study influenced the methodological choices I made in analyzing the co-evolution of organizational identity and strategy. These assumptions guide how I understand the nature of organizational reality and the knowledge that is generated from it, aligning closely with the evolutionary process methodology I employed in this research.

Ontologically, I assume that organizational identity and strategy are dynamic and constantly evolving rather than fixed entities (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000; Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). I view organizational identity not as a stable core but as something that emerges, changes, and adapts in response to various internal and external factors, including emotions, individual agency, and interactions with the environment. This aligns with the idea of *becoming* rather than *being*, where the organization is seen as fluid and continuously in flux (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). I also recognize that organizational identity is relational and co-constructed through interactions between individuals within the organization and external stakeholders. Given this, it is essential for me to adopt a methodology that captures the fluidity and relational nature of identity as it evolves over time.

Epistemologically, I operate under the assumption that knowledge about organizational identity and strategy is socially constructed, subjective, and context-dependent (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). I do not view knowledge as an objective truth to be discovered, but as something constructed through the lived experiences, emotions, and interpretations of the organization's members. I see emotions—such as pride, frustration, or anxiety—

as central to how individuals understand and shape the organization's identity and strategy (Gioia et al., 2013). This subjectivity requires me to use a methodology that accounts for the multiple perspectives and emotional dynamics influencing organizational life.

Based on these ontological and epistemological assumptions, I chose to use an evolutionary process methodology (Abdallah, Luisiani, & Langley, 2019). This methodology allows me to capture the dynamic and temporal nature of organizational identity and strategy by focusing on how they co-evolve over time. It is particularly well-suited to answer my research question about how Consulting Co.'s identity and strategy developed in tandem through different phases of its history.

In this methodology, evolving temporality is at the heart of the analysis. By focusing on the temporal progression of events, I am able to examine how organizational identity is shaped by key moments, individual actions, and emotional responses over time. My unit of analysis is at the organizational level, where I explore how identity and strategy co-evolve through significant milestones and contributions of key individuals. This approach enables me to identify patterns of interaction between identity and strategy across different stages of Consulting Co.'s development.

Moreover, the evolutionary process methodology aligns with my epistemological view that knowledge is subjective and contextually shaped by social interactions. I collected longitudinal data through interviews, observations, and archival documents, allowing me to incorporate the perspectives and emotions of various organizational members. This method enables me to understand how emotions and social dynamics have influenced the development of Consulting Co.'s identity and strategy over time, acknowledging that the knowledge generated is inherently subjective.

3.3.4 Method of Essay 2: It's Not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations

The methodological choices in this essay are grounded in ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of emotion work in hierarchical organizational structures. These assumptions guide how I conceptualize emotion work and its relationship to individual roles, organizational dynamics, and the knowledge generated from this process.

Ontologically, I assume that emotion work is distributed across hierarchical levels and is tied to the specific roles that individuals perform in the organization. Rather than viewing emotion work as a personal or individual activity, it is seen as an embedded organizational process that is shaped by structural role expectations (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). This assumption reflects a broader understanding that the emotional demands placed on employees vary depending on their position in the organizational hierarchy. Each role—from junior consultants to partners—requires different types of emotion work, and these differences are essential for the integration of organizational activities and overall performance (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

In this research, I view emotion work as fundamentally relational, distributed among members of the organization according to their roles. This assumption reflects the idea that organizational roles are dynamic, evolving with individual career progression, and that the emotional demands of each role change as individuals move up the hierarchy. Emotion work at each level is complementary, meaning that the emotional tasks of one level support and reinforce the tasks at another, contributing to the collective emotional management necessary for the organization's success (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013).

Epistemologically, I operate under the assumption that knowledge about emotion work is subjective and context-dependent. The way individuals experience and manage emotions is shaped by their specific role within the organizational context, and these experiences are inherently relational and constructed through interactions (Gioia et al., 2013; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Emotion work cannot be fully understood without considering the specific organizational demands placed on individuals in different roles. The subjective experience of emotion work varies based on the hierarchical position of the employee, the nature of their tasks, and their interactions with colleagues and clients.

This epistemological stance requires a methodology that captures the nuanced, contextual, and evolving nature of emotion work. It also emphasizes the importance of understanding emotion work from the perspective of those performing it, ensuring that their lived experiences and interpretations are central to the analysis. Therefore, qualitative methods that allow for deep exploration of these subjective experiences, such as interviews and observation, are particularly suited to this study.

Based on these ontological and epistemological assumptions, the methodological choices are focused on capturing the role-based distribution of emotion work across the hierarchy of the organization. I employed axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) to systematically analyze and categorize emotions and uncertainties as they relate to five key sources: self-related, team-related, project-related, client-related, and organization-related. This coding approach is essential for identifying how different roles manage emotion work and how the source of emotional challenges shifts as individuals move up the organizational hierarchy. For example, the study reveals how uncertainty shifts from self-related issues at the junior level to client-related concerns at the senior level, reflecting the evolving nature of emotional labor as consultants progress in their roles.

Longitudinal study design was another key methodological choice that supports the investigation of how emotion work changes over time. By following consultants over eight years, I was able to observe how their emotion work evolved in response to role transitions and increasing responsibility. This approach aligns with the ontological assumption that emotion work is dynamic and shaped by role growth. The within-person analysis, which tracked the same individuals over time, provided insights into how emotion work adapts to new challenges and expectations as consultants advance in their careers.

Additionally, I integrated reflexivity into the research by leveraging my own emotional experiences during the projects I worked on from 2020 to 2024. This reflexive approach enriched the analysis by providing a deeper understanding of the emotional complexities involved in consulting work. Reflexivity also aligns with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is subjective and co-constructed, acknowledging that the researcher's emotions and experiences play a role in interpreting the data (Alvesson, 2003).

3.3.5 Method of Essay 3: An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption

The methodological approach used in this essay is shaped by specific ontological and epistemological assumptions about the role of emotions in learning processes and how these are temporally distributed across different phases of project work. These assumptions guide how I conceptualize the relationship between emotions, learning practices, and timing of reflection, and they are central to the methods chosen for data collection and analysis.

Ontologically, I assume that learning is a dynamic and evolving process, influenced by emotions that arise in response to organizational practices and project reflections. This assumption contrasts with traditional views that treat learning as a purely cognitive process. Instead, learning is understood as emotionally and contextually bound, with different emotional reactions emerging depending on when learning practices, such as reflection, take place. Emotions are not simply a by-product of learning but are central to shaping how individuals engage with learning practices and how they internalize organizational lessons (Lazarus, 1991).

This ontological perspective requires that learning be examined across temporal phases (before, during, and after projects), as the emotional reactions tied to reflection vary depending on when individuals reflect on their work. For example, reflection before a project can generate positive high-activation emotions, such as confidence and anticipation, while reflection after a project might evoke low-activation negative emotions, like disappointment or regret, particularly when performance has fallen short of expectations. These emotional shifts influence subsequent actions and learning, highlighting the dynamic and situational nature of learning within organizations (Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018).

Epistemologically, I operate under the assumption that knowledge is subjective and emotionally constructed. This means that learning and knowledge acquisition are deeply tied to the emotional states of individuals at different stages of reflection and project work. Emotions shape how individuals interpret and react to feedback, successes, and failures, making emotions a core element in the process of knowledge creation. As such, the subjective experience of emotions must be captured to fully understand how learning practices impact organizational members.

This epistemological stance requires a methodology that focuses on the emotional and subjective experiences of organizational members. It assumes that emotions are not incidental to learning but are essential to how individuals make sense of and engage with reflective practices. For instance, how a consultant feels after reflecting on a failed project may either inhibit or motivate future learning. Therefore, capturing the emotionally charged reflections of individuals is critical for understanding how learning practices are adopted or abandoned over time.

In line with the assumption that emotions and learning evolve over time, I mapped learning practices according to their timing in relation to project work—specifically identifying whether reflection occurred before, during, or after the project. This allowed me to observe how emotions differed depending on the timing of reflection and how these emotional reactions impacted subsequent learning actions. This method captures the temporal dimension of learning and reflects the ontological view that learning is a dynamic process influenced by both time and emotional context (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001).

I collected data using both participant and non-participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews with consultants at various hierarchy levels. During these interactions, I focused on how individuals expressed emotions in relation to their reflection practices and learning experiences. In addition, I reflected on my own emotions while working on projects, which helped to capture a more nuanced understanding of the emotional processes at play. This reflexive approach aligns with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is subjective and emotion-driven (Alvesson, 2003).

After identifying the emotional dynamics through preliminary open coding, I employed selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to focus on practices that either defined, enabled, or restricted attention, particularly in relation to emotions like confidence. Confidence emerged as a key emotional construct that consultants repeatedly emphasized in field notes and interviews. By analyzing how emotions such as confidence interacted with learning practices, I could explore the importance of maintaining positive emotions for ongoing learning and performance. This focus on emotional constructs is consistent with the epistemological view that emotions shape how individuals engage with and make sense of learning processes.

Throughout the research process, I wrote theoretical memos and mini-narratives that compared my findings to existing literature and generated theoretical insights. This iterative approach allowed me to build a more comprehensive understanding of how emotions, particularly confidence, shaped learning practices over time. The use of theoretical memos also enabled me to stay grounded in both the data and relevant theoretical frameworks, which is crucial when analyzing complex emotional and temporal dynamics (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.3.6 Method of Essay 4: Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research

From 2017 to 2024, I gathered fieldnotes at Consulting Co. Initially, from 2017 to 2019, I worked as an external researcher, conducting interviews and observations. This phase provided an outsider's view of the firm's dynamics. However, from 2020 to 2024, my role expanded as I participated in consulting projects, gathering professional and emotional insights from within the organization. As part of larger consulting teams, I accumulated a rich dataset, combining personal experiences with broader team dynamics.

Data was collected through fieldnotes, supported by a research diary, audio and video memos, and photographs. The diary allowed me to reflect on both routine interactions and emotionally charged moments. In addition, discussions with organizational members and my academic supervisor helped validate and organize my emotional reflections. These discussions, alongside my immediate emotional responses during interviews, helped guide follow-up questions and explore deeper emotional themes.

Throughout the study, I practiced emotional reflexivity by analyzing and separating my emotions from those of the organizational members, ensuring clarity in my analysis. My thematic analysis revealed key insights about professional identity, socialization, and emotional labor within consulting. The emotionally charged nature of consulting work became a central focus of my reflections, enriching the theoretical findings and enhancing my conceptual thinking. These observations contributed to a deeper understanding of qualitative research processes and revealed how emotions can shape professional dynamics.

3.4 Analysis of Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

The reliability of this study is supported by a long-term, multi-method data collection process. I collected data between 2017 and 2024, conducting over one thousand hours of participant observation. This extensive engagement provides a solid foundation for a reliable analysis. The data was analyzed iteratively using the coding software ATLAS.ti, following best practices from grounded theory (e.g., Vuori & Huy, 2016; Michel, 2007; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). I developed first-order codes and gradually grouped them into higher-level themes, eventually arriving at third-order codes, which strengthens the systematic nature of the analysis. To further enhance the reliability of interpretations, I triangulated findings through discussions with various stakeholders—including my supervisors, other academics, and members of the organization. Conversations with organizational members focused on verifying whether I had captured their experiences in a way that resonated with their own interpretations. These combined efforts improve the overall trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The validity of the study—how well the findings reflect the phenomenon under investigation—is supported by an autoethnographic approach, in which my own experience as a member of the organization served as both a source of data and understanding. My emotional experiences were not only treated as data but were also consciously analyzed separately from others' experiences, in order to distinguish my own interpretations from those of other participants. Emotions were examined across different organizational levels and over time—before, during, and after key projects, as well as across different leadership periods. This broad temporal and structural perspective strengthens the content validity of the study.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study is addressed through the dimensions of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is supported by the richness of the data, the use of multiple sources, and the prolonged engagement in the field. Additionally, analyzing my own emotional experiences enhances understanding of how interpretations were formed. Transferability is addressed through careful contextualization, including detailed descriptions of Consulting Co's practices, identity work, and the role of emotions. At the same time, I explicitly acknowledge that the findings are deeply embedded in their specific context and thus limit generalizability. Dependability is ensured through thorough documentation of the analytical process, including coding strategies and the progression of the analysis. Confirmability is strengthened by critical self-awareness of my positionality and influence on the analysis, efforts toward transparency, and the inclusion of external perspectives—such as those of my supervisor and organizational members—to support the grounding of my interpretations.

4. Findings

The research question of the dissertation is how practices influence organizational members' emotions and subsequent actions. I have divided the main research question into four sub-research questions, which I address through four essays: (1) How does the timing of practices affect the emotions of organizational members and ultimately their ability to act? (2) How do roles and their associated demands influence emotions and, consequently, actions? (3) How do emotions impact organizational identity and, in turn, strategic choices? (4) How can researchers leverage their own emotions when conducting qualitative research?

To answer research questions 1-3, I used a data set collected over 8 years, which included 145 interviews and 1,630 hours of observation. In the following, I present the main findings from each essay.

4.1 Essay 1: The Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategic Actions in a Finnish Management Consulting Firm

In Essay 1, I explored how emotions related to organizational identity shape and coevolve with strategy work. I examine the connection between these from the founding of the company, through the departure of the founders, and all the way to the aftermath (2001-2024). I used company materials dating back to its founding and conducted interviews with founding partners. During the 2019-2020 leadership transition, the founding partners sought to ensure that the organization's core values and identity were preserved. This transition provided a unique context to study how emotions related to organizational identity were managed to maintain Consulting Co.'s unique market position, despite leadership changes.

My evolutionary model shows how emotions related to organizational identity shape and co-evolve with strategy work from the firm's establishment to the first succession process. I identified three stages that demonstrate this process: founding, growth, and institutionalizing.

In the first stage, identity work took the form of anti-identity work—a deliberate contrast to other firms in the market—during which the founders focused on defining who they did not want to become as an organization. Negative emotions towards past experiences played an important role in defining boundaries and driving the initial strategic actions. The rejection of previous employers' identities served as a clear guide for what the company aimed to avoid, shaping the early strategic direction. As new partners joined, bringing diverse experiences from global consulting firms, Consulting Co.'s practices began to evolve, blending these new influences with its original identity.

In the second stage, identity work focused on comparative work on their social identity, centered on who they were not, based on their group membership. To be recognized as part of a desired social group, the partners directed their sales efforts toward top managers and adopted project delivery and management practices from this reference group. During this stage, the negative emotions driving them away from what they did not want to become shifted into a different kind of emotional energy—one that was more aggressive enthusiasm, characterized by a challenger mindset. They focused on who they wanted to become and the social group they aspired to belong to. However, as they began adopting practices from the reference group, tensions arose between those who had different views on strategic actions.

In the third stage, the focus of identity work shifted to emphasizing the organization's strengths, particularly in terms of successfully completed projects. These strengths became key in differentiating themselves from competitors. Pride in their journey and confidence from past achievements fueled both identity and strategy. However, early in the institutionalization phase, the older generation expressed concerns about becoming too similar to competitors. This anxiety redirected discussions toward leveraging Consulting Co.'s unique strengths to authentically compete with MBB firms. However, there was no consensus on the modes of operation, which led to the fragmentation of identity to reflect different individuals' strengths. This allowed people to operate within their areas of expertise, and while strategic action became fragmented, individuals remained functional through a strengths-based approach.

During the leadership transition, as founding partners stepped back, a sense of pride in the company's journey united both outgoing and remaining partners, who were keen to continue Consulting Co.'s legacy in Finland. However, strategic choices became more individualized, with each partner selling what they felt most confident about. This decentralized approach allowed the company to leverage its strengths and prevented identity from becoming a barrier to renewal. Consequently, people began identifying with different aspects of it, allowing for a more adaptable and inclusive strategy, though the identity had decentralized. The soul had begun to disappear from the company.

My study makes two contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the literature on the interplay between organizational identity and strategy by offering a dynamic and phased analysis of the co-evolution of emotions, identity, and strategy, particularly across different stages of the organizational lifecycle (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013; Huy, 2012; Vuori & Huy, 2016). When an identity is strongly shared, it generates positive emotions, resulting in strategic actions that closely align with the identity. However, when the strategic direction and practices are not commonly shared, it leads to feelings of frustration and a need for identity renewal or strengthening of identity. A decentralized identity allows individuals to identify with the organization for personal reasons, making it more inclusive. The downside, however, is that strategic actions become more fragmented due to a more individualized organizational culture, which can reinforce the fragmentation of identity.

Hence, while previous research has recognized the impact of emotions on organizational identity shifts and strategic actions (Tripsas, 2009; Altman & Tripsas, 2015; Vuori & Huy, 2016), my study shows how specific emotions—frustration, manic enthusiasm, pride, fear, and anxiety—evolve over time and influence the development of strategic actions and organizational identity.

Secondly, my research contributes to the literature on identity work. Previous research has broadly classified identity work as organizational efforts to shape or maintain the organization's core characteristics (Basque & Langley, 2018). My study advances this understanding by distinguishing between different forms of identity work—anti-identity, comparative, and strengths-based—showing how they vary depending on the organization's relationship with competitors and the emotions tied to those relationships. This nuanced perspective is crucial because it highlights the role emotions play in shaping identity strategies, offering deeper insights into how organizations evolve and differentiate themselves in competitive environments.

4.2 Essay 2: It's not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations.

In the second essay, I explore "how organizational structure influences emotion work and subsequent actions." The study finds that, just as cognitive capabilities develop over the course of a career, my research shows how emotion work is involved in cognitive development and how it differs and evolves across different hierarchical levels. More specifically, my study highlights how individuals at various hierarchical levels meet expectations and develop necessary skills through a phased emotional process. Junior members focus on social self-reflection to meet role expectations, striving to avoid negative emotions like embarrassment while performing analytical tasks. Mid-level managers incorporate cognitive empathy to understand and anticipate client needs, which is crucial for maintaining high standards and managing client relationships. Senior leaders concentrate on maintaining confidence and positive perceptions in client interactions, relying on collective emotional efforts across the organization to secure new engagements. This phased emotional work helps members fulfill role-related expectations and progress within the organization.

My research makes three contributions. Firstly, I extend the literature on distributed cognition (Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1993; Michel, 2007) with the concept of distributed emotion work. Just as knowledge, thinking, or decision-making is not the process of an individual leader or team member but is shared among many people and practices, my research shows that emotion work in an organization is not solely the process of individual people. I achieve this contribution by examining the entire organization in the data. Thus, my research extends the understanding of emotion work from focusing on individual organizational groups to considering the entire organization (Brundin, Liu, & Cyron, 2022; Zapf et al., 2021; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

Secondly, when examining emotion work across an organization, my research shows that emotional work is not personal but instead connected to the specific role that an individual performs. Previous studies often describe emotion work as a demanding and challenging process, especially in occupations where employees must manage their own emotions according to strict job requirements (Hochschild, 1983; Heaphy, 2017; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). My research reframes emotion work by demonstrating that certain emotions, while uncomfortable, can be constructive in achieving organizational goals, particularly when employees perceive them as part of their role rather than as personal burdens.

Thirdly, while emotion work has often been treated as a job stressor (Zapf et al., 2021; Hochschild, 1983; Heaphy, 2017; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017), it has not been explored as a mechanism that actively aids in career development. My findings reveal that emotion work is pivotal for role performance and career progression, showing how role-related emotions shift over time, guiding attention to new skills as individuals progress in their careers. This addresses Grandey and Gabriel's (2015) call for a deeper exploration of the context and dynamic role of emotion work, linking it to role expectations in a particular organizational context and making it more dynamic.

4.3 Essay 3: An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption

In the third essay, I examine why organizational members had difficulty maintaining a reflection practice, even though research suggests that it should promote learning within teams and organizations. In previous studies, reflection typically took place after performance. However, in a consulting context, when a consulting project concludes, both senior and junior consultants are often already engaged in their next tasks—either staffed on a new project or involved in selling new projects. In consulting, there is a constant need to sell new projects and to maintain a positive emotional state for the sake of well-being and sustaining self-confidence. Reflecting after projects did not seem useful, but when studying the organization, I noticed that consultants were reflecting quite a lot, albeit differently from what the literature suggests in terms of timing. My research question was to understand: how does the timing of practices influence organizational members' emotions and their subsequent actions?

The findings of the study show that the same practice can generate either obstructive or enabling emotions, depending on when the practice is undertaken in relation to strategic activities. Previous literature has not adequately considered the significance of the timing of a practice for its adoption. My research demonstrates how reflection affects organizational members' interpretations of past events, which in turn generate emotions. Reflection alters members' perceptions of their own skills and actions, which can trigger emotional reactions that either support or hinder further action. The timing of reflection, in particular, influences their perceptions of controllability.

My research makes three key contributions. Reflection on past actions and outcomes is widely recommended for learning (Edmondson et al., 2001; Keiser & Arthur, 2020). However, I find that reflection can have paralyzing emotional effects if it uncovers past mistakes and compels individuals to form negative interpretations of their actions (Keiser & Arthur, 2020; Lazarus, 1991). The literature has generally overlooked the possibility that reflection may have harmful emotional side effects. For instance, Edmondson and Dimmock (2020) emphasized the cognitive benefits of reflection, suggesting that individuals learn to be more attentive when they realize they have overlooked readily available crucial information. However, the cognitive perspective fails to consider that low-activation negative emotions, such as guilt and shame, may reduce the potential for learning by causing withdrawal from the situation or lowering goals to avoid future embarrassment.

As a second contribution, my model shows that the timing of reflection significantly influences its emotional consequences. Past literature has generally assumed that reflection occurs after performance, but I indicate that reflection before and during performance is more likely to activate action-promoting emotions. A key differentiator here is the sense of control.

My third contribution is that by considering the emotional aspects of organizational learning, my study also enriches the literature by questioning the creation of new actions. Scholars generally assume that employees always face new tasks (e.g., Chown, 2020; Edmondson, 1999; Keiser & Arthur, 2020). For example, medical teams constantly manage the inflow of patients arriving by ambulance or appointment. However, in my context, consultants actively reach out to potential clients to sell projects. They must first create an action before they can reflect on it. For tasks that occur automatically rather than being created proactively, cognitive understanding through reflection is likely to be crucial and to have fewer prominent emotional side effects. In contrast, for tasks that need to be created proactively, the emotional side effects of reflection can be more detrimental.

4.4 Essay 4: Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research

In Essay 4, I investigated how qualitative researchers can utilize their own emotions while collecting and analyzing qualitative data. For this essay, I used my fieldnotes from my data collection between 2017 and 2024. While conducting data collection and analysis over an extended period, I began to use my own bodily reactions during both data collection and analysis. This approach helped me better understand the emotional landscape of consultants and their experiences in consulting work.

The relevance of this study lies in its unique approach to qualitative emotion research by integrating the researcher's own emotions into the data collection and analysis process. While previous studies have primarily focused on participants' self-reported feelings or observed emotional expressions, this research emphasizes the valuable insights that can be gained from the researcher's emotional experiences in the field.

I developed a process model that enhances current qualitative data collection methods. This model is built on the traditional phases of data collection and analysis—preparation, data collection, and analysis—and expands them by examining how researchers can actively use their own emotions at each stage. By doing so, researchers can gain deeper insights into the emotional responses of the individuals they are studying.

My research enriches these phases with the following practices that utilize the researcher's emotions: attaching and identifying with the research site and its people, becoming an insider, and building boundaries. During the first phase, I used self-awareness to better understand the experiences of the participants. When participants shared their experiences during interviews or when I read about them in written materials, I could relate to some experiences more closely and empathize with the person's emotional state, while other phenomena felt more distant. I used my own emotional reactions in subsequent interviews to validate my intuitions and expand my understanding. In the second phase, this became one of the most important ways to validate findings and gather new data from the research participants. In the third phase, I had to consciously differentiate my own emotions from those of the participants. This separation was crucial to ensure that my emotions did not affect the interpretation of the data.

The central contribution of this essay is a detailed process model that researchers can use to collect qualitative emotional data. This model allows researchers to reflect on their own emotions within the research environment and, through this reflection, gain better access to understanding the “internal feelings” of the participants. It offers a way to address the problem raised by Kouamé & Liu (2021) regarding qualitative emotional data collection: "how to access felt emotions and measure internal changes in feeling states after organizational members are exposed to stimuli" (Kouamé & Liu, 2021: 100). If a researcher can spend time in the research environment and understand people's actions through their own emotional reactions, the emotional data can become more valid, and researchers can study more complex emotional phenomena. Figure 5 summarizes the findings of the four essays.

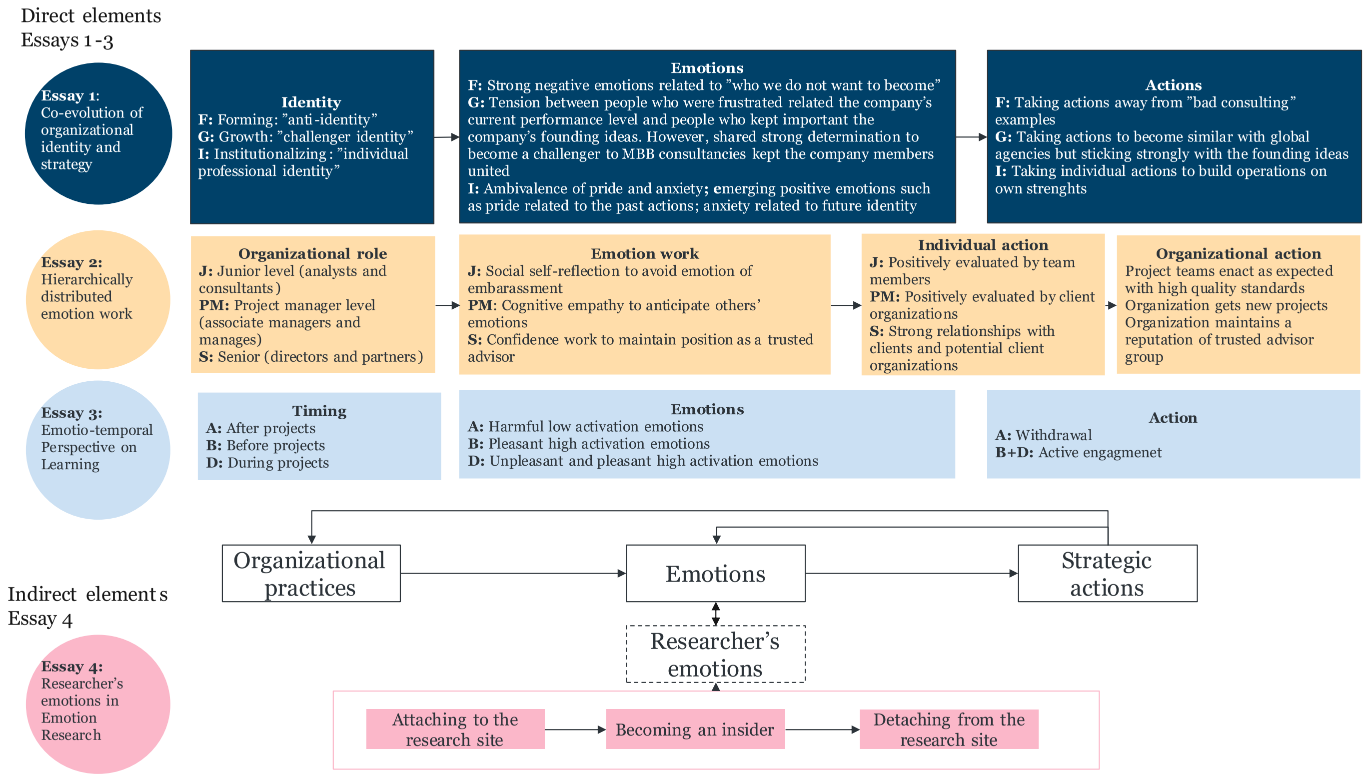

Figure 5. A Process model that illustrates how researchers can utilize their own emotions in qualitative data collection and analysis.

5. Discussion

In this dissertation, I have studied the impact of organizational practices on the emotions of organizational members and, consequently, on strategic action. This qualitative study develops new theory by placing organizational members and their emotions across different hierarchical levels at the center of analysis. Specifically, it examines how organizational practices influence members' emotional experiences and how these emotional experiences shape strategic actions. This understanding is needed in the design, implementation, and management of practices.

5.1 Contribution to Emotions in Strategic Management Literature

The main contribution of this dissertation is to understand the mechanisms through which organizational practices influence emotions and emotions influence strategic actions. The first contribution of this dissertation is to show how emotions influence the co-evolution of organizational identity and strategic action. Essay 1 demonstrates how, at different stages of organizational development, emotions can serve as motivators for organizational identity work and strategic action. At different times different emotions such as frustration, pride, fear, or anxiety either strengthen or weaken organizational identity, affecting the organization's strategic coherence. Essay 1 provides a more dynamic view of the co-evolution of organizational identity and strategy compared to previous models, which often focus on singular crises or change situations (e.g., Tripsas, 2009; Altman & Tripsas, 2015; Vuori & Huy, 2016).

Additionally, I highlight how emotions influence the identity work that takes place within the organization. Previously, identity work has been generically classified as organizational activities “to form, repair, maintain, strengthen, or otherwise influence understandings of the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of a specific organization” (Basque & Langley, 2018). However, our research provides a more nuanced view, showing that the nature of identity work can vary depending on the organization's relationship with its competitors and the emotions that the organizational members have towards the others. Differences included the fact that emotions varied behind the different identity work.

The second contribution of this dissertation is that I show in Essay 2 how the division of tasks among individuals not only distributes organizational attention and cognition (Michel, 2007; Joseph & Gaba, 2020; Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1993) but also distributes emotion work within the organization.

Previous literate emphasizes that division of attention and cognitive workload improves organizational efficiency, allowing members to contribute their unique perspectives and abilities (Michel, 2007). Essay 2 extends this literature by showing how hierarchical roles not only distribute cognitive tasks but also shape emotion work within organizations. We demonstrate that emotion work is role-specific and complementary, meaning that different levels of hierarchy manage distinct emotional demands, which together support organizational performance.

When examining emotion work across an organization, my research shows that emotional work is not personal but is instead connected to the specific role that an individual performs. Previous studies often describe emotion work as a demanding and challenging process, especially in occupations where employees must manage their own emotions according to strict job requirements (Hochschild, 1983; Heaphy, 2017; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). Essay 2 reframes emotion work by demonstrating that certain emotions, while uncomfortable, can be constructive in achieving organizational goals, particularly when employees perceive them as part of their role rather than as personal burdens.

Hence, while emotion work has often been treated as a job stressor (Zapf et al., 2021; Hochschild, 1983; Heaphy, 2017; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017), it has not been explored as a mechanism that actively aids in career development. Our findings reveal that emotion work is pivotal for role performance and career progression, showing how role-related emotions shift over time, guiding attention to new skills as individuals progress in their careers. This addresses Grandey and Gabriel's (2015) call for a deeper exploration of the context and dynamic role of emotion work, linking it to role expectations in a particular organizational context and making it more dynamic.

The third contribution of this dissertation is to highlight how emotions generated by practices guided organizational members to engage in the practice before or during the action, contrary to what the literature has previously shown to be a useful way to act. Previous literature indicates that most often (cf. Luoma et al., 2016) after-action reflection promotes learning and performance (Allen et al., 2018; Edmondson et al., 2001; Keiser & Arthur, 2020; Konradt et al., 2016). After-action reflection can reveal causal relationships and increase cognitive understandings (Keiser & Arthur, 2020; Zollo & Winter, 2002), but it has potentially harmful consequences by activating negative low-arousal emotions (Shepherd, Patzelt, & Wolfe, 2011).

Hence, previous literature has generally failed to consider that reflection may have harmful emotional side-effects. Low-activation negative emotions such as guilt and shame may reduce learning potential by causing withdrawal from the situation or lowered goals to avoid future embarrassment (Lazarus, 1991).

Essay 3 emphasizes that by understanding how practices affect our emotions, we can modify practices to generate emotions that support the desired actions and thereby promote the achievement of strategic objectives.

The fourth contribution of this dissertation is methodological. It contributes to qualitative emotion research by offering a process model that illustrates how researchers can actively engage with their own emotions during data collection and analysis. While prior literature has emphasized reflexivity and emotional attunement (e.g., Alvesson, 2003; Sletvold, 2015), this essay provides a structured, three-stage model—attaching to the field, becoming an insider, and building boundaries—to show how researchers' emotions can serve as valid data sources and analytical tools (Vuori et al., 2024). This approach addresses a gap in the current methodological discourse, which has largely overlooked how researchers can systematically utilize and manage their emotional experiences when collecting emotion-laden data (Kouamé & Liu, 2021; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). By drawing on longitudinal autoethnographic fieldnotes, the essay demonstrates how embodied, emotional engagement enhances both the depth and reliability of qualitative emotion research, thereby advancing the methodological rigor of the field. Table 7 summarizes the four essays' research questions, key findings, and their contributions to the literature.

Table 7. An overview of the research questions, main findings, and their contributions

Essay title	Cutting edge arguments from prior literature	Remaining puzzle	Research question	Data	Findings	Contribution
The Co-Evolution of Organizational Identity and Strategy	Organizational identity guides strategic choices and actions (e.g., Ravasi, Tripsas, & Langley, 2020) Identity is closely tied to emotions (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, and emotions drive actions (e.g., Vuori & Huy, 2016) Identity is a source of inertia (e.g., Tripsas, 2009)	While existing literature establishes that emotions drive actions and identity is a source of inertia, it is unclear how the complexity and diversity of emotions influence the ongoing evolution of both identity and strategy. Specifically, how do emotional responses, which are tied to identity, create tensions or alignment in strategy, and how do these emotions affect strategic decisions across different stages of an organization's development?	How do emotions related to organizational identity shape and coevolve with strategy work?	*	The study outlines Consulting Co.'s identity evolution across three phases: founding, growth, and institutionalizing. Emotions—from frustration to enthusiasm, then pride and anxiety—drove identity and strategy co-evolution, moving from anti-identity to comparative and to strengths-based identity work	This study offers a phased analysis of how emotions, such as frustration, enthusi-asm, pride, and anxiety, co-evolve with organizational identity and strategy, shaping distinct identity work forms: anti-identity, comparative, and strengths-based

It's Not You, It's the Role: Hierarchically Distributed Emotion Work in Organizations	Different organizational roles have different functions, and they complement one another for strategic action (e.g., Ocasio, 1997; March & Simon, 1958) Roles have different type of requirements for emotion work (e.g., Grandey, 2000; Zapf et al., 2021)	While existing literature acknowledges that roles complement each other and have different emotional demands, it remains unclear how the structure itself drives these differences in emotion work and how this, in turn, impacts strategic actions and career progression within the organization. This gap calls for an exploration of the dynamic relationship between organizational structure, emotion work, and performance.	How does organizational structure influence emotion work and, eventually, individual and organizational actions?	**	Social self-reflection among juniors, cognitive empathy at the mid-level, and confidence work by seniors complement each other to enable strategic action	Complements the cognitive perspective from distributed cognition to distributed emotion work A stronger organizational perspective on emotion literature. We connect role-based emotional work to the overall organization and demonstrate how emotion work in different roles complements each other, enabling strategic action
An Emotio-Temporal Perspective on Learning Practice Adoption	To increase learning, teams should reflect on their past actions (e.g., Chown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Valentine, 2018) Psychological safety enables reflection (e.g., Edmondson, 1999) New action happens automatically after reflection (e.g., Edmondson et al., 1999, Keiser & Arthur, 2020)	It has not explored how and why the timing (before, during, or after an event may generate different emotional responses). Emotional responses can motivate or demotivate action, potentially altering the automatic link between reflection and subsequent action.	How does the timing of practices affect emotions and ultimately sense of ability to act?	**	The timing of reflection practice influences organization members' appraisals of controllability, shapes the emotional effects of reflection, and influences whether reflection benefits organizational learning	Timing of reflection matters because reflection evokes emotions that may either hinder or foster subsequent actions, depending on whether it occurs before, during, or after a project

Using Researcher's Emotions for Doing Qualitative Emotion Research	Key data in qualitative emotion research has been participants' self-reported feelings and observed emotional expressions (e.g., Kouamé & Liu, 2021) Researchers are increasingly encouraged to reflect on and disclose their roles (e.g., Alvesson, 2003; Whittle & Reissner, 2024) Psychotherapy scholars have started to acknowledge the role of intersubjectivity in the quality of therapy (e.g., Sletvod, 2015)	How can researchers systematically utilize their own emotions during the different stages of qualitative research without compromising the scientific validity of the study?	How can qualitative researchers utilize their own emotions while collecting and analyzing qualitative data?	***	We provide a process model detailing how researchers manage their emotions throughout qualitative emotion-related research	A complementary perspective on conducting qualitative emotion research. A process model on how a researcher's emotions can serve as a valuable source of information both during data collection and data analysis

* 8-year longitudinal study: 145 interviews, 2 consulting projects as non-participant observer, 8 consulting projects as participant observer, Company documents
** Autoethnographic fieldnotes from 8-year longitudinal study

5.1.1 Additional Contribution: Organization's Strategic Emotions

This dissertation has explored emotions that play a strategic role in the organization. Emotions that build self-confidence were strategically important for Consulting Co. This finding adds depth to emotional capability theory (Huy, 1999) by showing how specific emotions, like self-confidence, can be cultivated through practices that support positive emotional experiences, enabling employees to meet performance expectations and contribute to the organization's sustainability.

When I examined the data from different perspectives, certain emotions or the need to build actions to experience such emotions repeatedly appeared in the data, so that consultants could sustainably practice their profession. First, as I show in Essay 3 the implementation of the reflection practice was challenging because consultants needed to maintain good self-confidence, which could have been affected by a changed perception of a previous project generated through reflection. Secondly, as I illustrate in Essay 2, the emotion work done in project work aimed for the team or client to be satisfied, thereby enabling the sale of new projects. These successful project experiences were important inputs for developing people's self-confidence, and successful emotional labor thus facilitated the development of self-confidence. Thirdly, the identity work done in the firm over the years focused on building a position that required a great deal of self-confidence. In Essay 1, I highlight how each partner focused on areas where they felt strong self-confidence. Thus, building and maintaining self-confidence was, from many perspectives, an important emotional factor that practices and organizational culture needed to support for both the individual and the organization.

In essence, self-confidence was a critical emotional factor that the organization needed to nurture through its practices and culture. This emotional foundation was essential not only for individual performance but also for the overall success and sustainability of the organization.

The managerial contribution of this dissertation is to provide a deeper understanding of the crucial role that emotions play in the effectiveness of organizational practices. The better leaders understand the emotions that these practices evoke in themselves and others, the more effectively they can lead people. Additionally, understanding the emotions and reactions that changes elicit in employees can help leaders implement new practices more successfully. The better we understand the mechanisms through which practices affect people's emotions, the more humane and effective organizations we can build.

5.1.2 Additional Contribution: Understanding the Organization's Ideal Ego Helps to Understand Practices and Their Applicability to the Organization

The concept of the ego ideal in an organization refers to the collective aspiration of what the organization strives to be. It represents the "perfect self-image" that the organization and its members aspire to achieve (see e.g., Lazarus, 1991). This ideal is closely related to the standards of performance and behavior, which shape the culture and expectations within the organization.

At Consulting Co., the ego ideal manifested as extremely high standards, particularly around the quality of work and client interactions. Employees across all levels were expected to adhere to these perfectionist ideals. In Essay 2, I illustrate how the influence of ego ideal extended into the emotional practices within the organization. Employees at Consulting Co. engaged in emotion work to manage the emotions associated with meeting the role-related high standards.

The importance of recognizing what type of ego ideal an organization has lies in understanding how it influences both organizational behavior and employee wellbeing. The ego ideal, which manifests as extremely high standards, directly shapes how employees perform their roles and interact with clients. By setting such perfectionist expectations, the organization fosters a culture where employees are not only focused on technical excellence but also engaged in significant emotional work to manage the stress and pressure that comes with meeting these high standards.

What we learn from this is that the ego ideal extends beyond just performance metrics; it infiltrates the emotional lives of employees, shaping their emotional responses, behavior, and job satisfaction. Employees must constantly regulate their emotions to align with the organization's expectations, which can lead to emotional exhaustion but also drive skill development and career progression. This emotional work becomes a central part of how employees navigate their roles, manage client relationships, and maintain their own professional identity within the company.

Recognizing this dynamic is critical because it highlights the dual-edged nature of a perfectionist culture: while it drives high performance and maintains a strong reputation, it also imposes significant emotional demands on employees. Understanding these emotional practices allows for better management of the emotion work involved, helping to prevent burnout and improve long-term employee well-being. It also sheds light on how emotions reinforce organizational identity and success, making it a key consideration for leaders who aim to maintain high standards without compromising employee health.

Another way the perfectionist ego ideal influenced the organization's operations was by adopting practices that helped maintain a "positive self-image." In Essay 3, I demonstrate how reflection, which previous literature has identified as critical for learning, can be challenging for an organization with a perfectionist ego ideal. As I point out in Essay 3, reflection could have challenged this perfectionist self-image and reinforced a sense of failure on an emotional level.

From the perspective of personal development, reflection would undoubtedly have been useful, but in the fast-paced project context, reflection was not a good fit. It often generated feelings of shame or frustration, especially when it revealed performance-related issues that had not been recognized before. At Consulting Co., consultants were often reluctant to reflect deeply on their past performance out of fear that it would undermine their self-confidence or disrupt the positive image they had worked so hard to build. This reluctance to reflect deeply on mistakes or less-than-perfect outcomes could hinder the organization's ability to learn and adapt, especially when reflection challenged the ego ideal that drives performance. However, maintaining self-confidence was more important, as it enabled the selling of new projects.

In sum, the ego ideal serves as a powerful force shaping both the practices and emotional responses of the organization. While it drives employees to produce high-quality work, it also fosters a culture of perfectionism that can be emotionally taxing. Understanding the ego ideal is key to understanding how practices are developed and applied within the organization, as it determines both the goals employees strive for and the emotional landscape they must navigate to meet those goals. Ultimately, while the ego ideal pushes the organization to excel, it also poses challenges for reflection, learning, and emotional well-being within the workplace.

5.2 Complementing Qualitative Emotion Research

In Essay 4, I presented a processual description of how the researcher goes through a process of attachment to and detachment from the research site while collecting qualitative emotional data. This is the primary contribution of the methodology essay.

In previous qualitative emotion studies, the role of the researcher's emotions has been undermined. Past emotion research has mostly relied on informants' self-reported emotions or observations of the informants' emotions (Kouamé & Liu, 2021). In this approach, the researcher allows the informant to explain how they experienced a situation. However, when the researcher engages in the discussion with their own emotions, they can help deepen and expand the informant's experience and understanding of the case (see similarities with Sletvold, 2015). Therefore, the researcher's emotions should be considered part of the qualitative emotion research methodology because they contain valuable information that can enrich qualitative data collection. This research method can potentially lead to a better understanding of emotion-related topics in organizations. When the researcher collects qualitative emotional data and acknowledges their own emotions that arise during interactions, utilizing this information for further data collection, they can access the emotional core of the informants more quickly (Sletvold, 2015).

Indeed, people have the ability to attune to each other's emotions, which makes intersubjectivity, empathy, and identification possible (Barsade, 2002; Sletvold, 2015). The researcher can use attunement to understand the feelings behind the informant's actions – what the experience feels like to the informant (Stern, 1985). However, the outcomes of this research have not been implemented in qualitative research, where researchers are continuously influenced by other people.

Lastly, emotions influence researchers' work just as they do any other professionals' work. For the sake of research reliability, the influence of the researcher's emotions and their ability to distinguish their own emotions from those of the research participants should be acknowledged as part of the methodology. With this methodological addition, I aim to eliminate the bias that researchers are somehow immune to informants' emotions or their interpretations of the situations they study. For example, if a researcher personally dislikes some informants and likes others, how does this influence the data collection process? Do they give more attention to some data over others? Therefore, the same principles apply to researchers as to emotion research in general: the meanings given to emotions determine the intensity of the emotion and how it feels. This methodology paper aims to make this process more transparent.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The managerial contribution of this dissertation is to highlight the critical role that emotions play in organizational operations, normalizing their presence as a fundamental aspect of organizational life. Emotions are not merely byproducts of actions but actively sustain structures (Essay 2), influence the capacity to embrace change (Essay 3), and serve as forces that either build or fragment organizational identity (Essay 1). To manage emotions more effectively as part of strategic organizational activities, it is essential to understand how they operate and their impacts. The better we understand the mechanisms through which practices affect people's emotions, the more humane and effective organizations we can build.

5.4 Boundary Conditions

The results of this study are strongly tied to their context, and it is important to consider their applicability to other situations. Since the research focuses on a specific organization—a mid-sized Finnish management consulting firm—it is necessary to examine the limitations that may affect the generalizability of the theoretical conclusions. In the following, I address the contextual factors that constrain the applicability of the research and are essential to consider when evaluating and applying the findings to other settings.

This study is based on a single-case study of *Consulting Co.*, a boutique consulting firm operating in the Finnish market. The findings are embedded in the everyday practices, emotional dynamics, and identity work within this particular professional service firm. As such, they may not generalize to other types of organizations, such as industrial, commercial, public sector, or non-governmental organizations. In particular, the findings may not be directly transferable to larger global consulting firms such as McKinsey, BCG, or Bain, which operate under different structural, cultural, and institutional logics.

Several contextual features shape the findings. *Consulting Co.*'s smaller size, its flat organizational hierarchy, its emphasis on long-term client relationships, and its challenger position in the Finnish consulting market all influence how emotions, identity, and strategy interact. These dynamics are further shaped by the Nordic business environment, which is often characterized by egalitarianism, consensus-seeking, and restrained emotional expression. These cultural features may play a role in how role expectations, emotional labor, and strategic actions manifest in this context.

While the insights on emotions, identity, and strategic action contribute to broader organizational and emotion research, they are particularly relevant for contexts involving project-based, client-facing work typical of professional service firms. Therefore, future research could build on these findings by exploring similar dynamics in other consulting projects, project-based organizations, or professional service firms operating in different institutional and cultural environments. Comparative studies across industries or national settings could further clarify the extent to which these findings hold beyond the specific case analyzed here.

This dissertation deliberately focuses on emotional data. While this focus inevitably simplifies the complex array of factors shaping organizational life, it aims to challenge the persistent myth of rationality in organizational decision-making. Emotions are not merely irrational distractions; rather, they may be the very forces that sustain organizational practices, roles, and strategies. By foregrounding emotion, this study offers a specific lens on organizational behavior—not to exclude other important dimensions such as power or motivation, but to highlight how emotion structures action in ways that are often overlooked.

5.5 Future Directions

This dissertation offers an emotion-based perspective on organizations, shedding light on how emotions play a crucial role in strategic action and organizational practices. However, the insights presented here open up several promising directions for future research.

First, the role of emotions in organizations could be explored across different industries and cultural contexts. While this dissertation focuses on a specific organizational setting, expanding the research to include diverse industries, such as technology, healthcare, manufacturing, or high-performance sports, could reveal how sector-specific factors shape emotional responses and practices. In high-performance sports, for instance, emotions such as pressure, motivation, and resilience play a critical role in both individual and team performance, making it a valuable context for studying the intersection of emotions and strategic actions. Comparative studies across different national and cultural contexts would also be valuable in understanding how emotions are culturally constructed and managed in global organizations, potentially highlighting variations in emotional labor, leadership styles, and strategic decision-making.

Another fruitful avenue for future research is the design of interventions that help organizations better manage emotions. Given the findings that emotions significantly shape strategic actions, developing practical tools or frameworks for emotional management, such as emotional intelligence training or emotion-centered leadership development programs, could enhance organizational performance and well-being.

References

Abdallah, C., Lusiani, M., & Langley, A. (2019). Performing process research. In *Standing on the shoulders of giants: Traditions and innovations in research methodology* (pp. 91-113). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Allen, J. A., Reiter-Palmon, R., Crowe, J., & Scott, C. 2018. Debriefs: Teams learning from doing in context. *American Psychologist*, 73(4): 504.

Altman, E. J., & Tripsas, M. (2015). Product to platform transitions: Organizational identity implications. *The Oxford handbook of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship*, 379-394.

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of management review*, *28*(1), 13-33.

Argyris, C., & Schon, D. 1978. *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of management review*, *14*(1), 20-39.

Ashkanasy, N. M., Humphrey, R. H., & Huy, Q. N. (2017). Integrating emotions and affect in theories of management. *Academy of Management Review*, *42*(2), 175-189.

Balogun, J., Bartunek, J. M., & Do, B. (2015). Senior managers' sensemaking and responses to strategic change. *Organization Science*, *26*(4), 960-979.

Barsade, S. G. (2002). The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior. *Administrative science quarterly*, 47(4), 644-675.

Barsade, S. G., & O'Neill, O. A. 2014. What's love got to do with it? A longitudinal study of the culture of companionate love and employee and client outcomes in a long-term care setting. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 59(4): 551-598.

Barsade, S. G., & Gibson, D. E. (2012). Group affect: Its influence on individual and group outcomes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *21*(2), 119-123.

Beckman, C. M., & Stanko, T. L. (2020). It takes three: Relational boundary work, resilience, and commitment among navy couples. *Academy of Management Journal*, *63*(2), 411-439.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The reality of everyday life. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 33-42.

Bouquet, C., & Birkinshaw, J. (2011). How global strategies emerge: An attention perspective. *Global Strategy Journal*, *1*(3-4), 243-262.

Brundin, E., Liu, F., & Cyron, T. (2022). Emotion in strategic management: A review and future research agenda. *Long Range Planning*, *55*(4), 102144.

Cardon, M. S., Wincent, J., Singh, J., & Drnovsek, M. (2009). The nature and experience of entrepreneurial passion. *Academy of management Review*, *34*(3), 511-532.

Carton, A. M. 2018. 'I'm not mopping the floors, I'm putting a man on the moon': How NASA leaders enhanced the meaningfulness of work by changing the meaning of work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(2), 323-369.

Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1990). Origins and functions of positive and negative affect: a control-process view. *Psychological review*, *97*(1), 19.

Chouinard, Y. (2006). *Let my people go surfing: The education of a reluctant businessman*. Penguin Press.

Chown, J. (2021). The unfolding of control mechanisms inside organizations: Pathways of customization and transmutation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *66*(3), 711-752.

Clark, S. M., Gioia, D. A., Ketchen Jr, D. J., & Thomas, J. B. (2010). Transitional identity as a facilitator of organizational identity change during a merger. *Administrative science quarterly*, *55*(3), 397-438.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research* (Vol. 14). sage.

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.

Creed, D. W. E., Hudson, B. A., Okhuysen, G. A., & Smith-Crowe, K. 2014. Swimming in a sea of shame: Incorporating emotion into explanations of institutional reproduction and change. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(3): 275-301.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice, 39*(3), 124–130.

Daniels, M. A., And S. L. Robinson. 2019. The Shame of It All: A Review of Shame in Organizational Life. *Journal of Management*, 45(6), 2448-2473.

Deken, F., Berends, H., Gemser, G., & Lauche, K. (2018). Strategizing and the initiation of interorganizational collaboration through prospective resourcing. *Academy of Management Journal*, *61*(5), 1920-1950.

Detert, J. R., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of management journal*, *54*(3), 461-488.

Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative science quarterly*, 239-263.

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.

Edmondson, A. 1999. Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative science quarterly*, 44(2): 350-383.

Edmondson, A. C., Bohmer, R. M., & Pisano, G. P. 2001. Disrupted routines: Team learning and new technology implementation in hospitals. *Administrative science quarterly*, 46(4): 685-716.

Edmondson, A. C., & Dimmock, A. W. (2020). Don't get Blindsided by your blind spots. *Harvard Business Review*.

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: what are they?. *Strategic management journal*, *21*(10-11), 1105-1121.

Elfenbein, H. A. (2007). 7 Emotion in organizations: a review and theoretical integration. *Academy of management annals*, *1*(1), 315-386.

Ellsworth, P. C., & Scherer, K. R. 2003. *Appraisal processes in emotion*. Oxford University Press.

Elsbach, K. D., & Kramer, R. M. (1996). Members' responses to organizational identity threats: Encountering and countering the Business Week rankings. *Administrative science quarterly*, 442-476.

Erkama, N., & Vaara, E. (2010). Struggles over legitimacy in global organizational restructuring: A rhetorical perspective on legitimation strategies and dynamics in a shutdown case. *Organization studies*, *31*(7), 813-839.

Fisher, G., & Aguinis, H. (2017). Using theory elaboration to make theoretical advancements. *Organizational research methods*, *20*(3), 438-464.

Folkman, S. 1984. Personal control and stress and coping processes: a theoretical analysis. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 46(4): 839.

Frijda, N. H., Kuipers, P., & Ter Schure, E. 1989. Relations among emotion, appraisal, and emotional action readiness. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 57(2): 212.

Grandey, A. A., Diefendorff, J. M., & Rupp, D. E. (2013). Bringing emotional labor into focus: A review and integration of three research lenses. *Emotional labor in the 21st century*, 3-27.

Grandey, A. A. (2000). Emotional regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize emotional labor. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, *5*(1), 95.

Grandey, A. A., & Gabriel, A. S. (2015). Emotional labor at a crossroads: Where do we go from here?. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.*, *2*(1), 323-349.

Grant, A. M. 2013. Rocking the boat but keeping it steady: The role of emotion regulation in employee voice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(6): 1703-1723.

Gross, J. J. 1998. The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of general psychology*, 2(3): 271-299.

Gross, J. J. 2015. Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. *Psychological inquiry*, 26(1): 1-26.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*(1), 15–31.

Gioia, D. A., & Hamilton, A. L. (2016). Great debates in organizational identity study. *The Oxford handbook of organizational identity*, 21-38.

Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. (2002). On celebrating the organizational identity metaphor: A rejoinder to Cornelissen. *British Journal of Management*, *13*(3), 269-275.

Gioia, D. A., Patvardhan, S. D., Hamilton, A. L., & Corley, K. G. (2013). Organizational identity formation and change. *Academy of Management annals*, *7*(1), 123-193.

Gioia, D. A., & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative science quarterly*, 370-403.

Gould, D. (2010). On affect and protest. In *Political emotions* (pp. 32-58). Routledge.

Grandey, A. A. (2000). Emotional regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize emotional labor. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, *5*(1), 95.

Haag, C., & Getz, I. (2016). The InBoard emotional contagion model. In *Emotions and organizational governance* (pp. 143-167). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human relations*, *55*(8), 989-1018.

Hayward, M. L., & Hambrick, D. C. (1997). Explaining the premiums paid for large acquisitions: Evidence of CEO hubris. *Administrative science quarterly*, 103-127.

Heaphy, E. D. (2017). "Dancing on hot coals": How emotion work facilitates collective sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, *60*(2), 642-670.

Hengst, I. A., Jarzabkowski, P., Hoegl, M., & Muethel, M. (2020). Toward a process theory of making sustainability strategies legitimate in action. *Academy of Management Journal*, *63*(1), 246-271.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling. Berkeley (USA).

Hodgkinson, G. P., & Healey, M. P. (2011). Psychological foundations of dynamic capabilities: Reflexion and reflection in strategic management. *Strategic management journal*, *32*(13), 1500-1516.

Howard-Payne, L. (2016). Glaser or Strauss? Considerations for selecting a grounded theory study. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *46*(1), 50-62.

Huy, Q. N. (2002). Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: The contribution of middle managers. *Administrative science quarterly*, *47*(1), 31-69.

Huy, Q. N. (2011). How middle managers' group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation. *Strategic management journal*, *32*(13), 1387-1410.

Huy, Q. N. (2012). Emotions in strategic organization: Opportunities for impactful research. *Strategic Organization*, *10*(3), 240-247.

Huy, Q. N., Corley, K. G., & Kraatz, M. S. (2014). From support to mutiny: Shifting legitimacy judgments and emotional reactions impacting the implementation of radical change. *Academy of Management journal*, *57*(6), 1650-1680.

Huy, Q., and Zott, C. 2019. Exploring the affective underpinnings of dynamic managerial capabilities: How managers' emotion regulation behaviors mobilize resources for their firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(1), 28-54.

Isaacson, W. (2011). *Steve Jobs*. Simon & Schuster.

Jarzabkowski, P. (2005). Strategy as practice: An activity based approach.

Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J. & Seidl, D. (2007) Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. Human Relations, Vol. 60, No. 1, 5-27.

Jarzabkowski, P., & Whittington, R. (2008). Hard to disagree, mostly. *Strategic organization*, *6*(1), 101-106.

Jarzabkowski, P. & Spee, P. (2009) Strategy-as-practice: A review and future directions for the field. International Journal of Management Reviews, Vol. 11, No. 1, 69-95.

Jarzabkowski, P. A., & Lê, J. K. (2017). We have to do this and that? You must be joking: Constructing and responding to paradox through humor. *Organization studies*, *38*(3-4), 433-462.

Jarzabkowski, P., Seidl, D., & Balogun, J. (2022). From germination to propagation: Two decades of Strategy-as-Practice research and potential future directions. *Human Relations*, *75*(8), 1533-1559.

Joseph, J., & Wilson, A. J. (2018). The growth of the firm: An attention-based view. *Strategic Management Journal*, *39*(6), 1779-1800.

Joseph, J., & Gaba, V. (2020). Organizational structure, information processing, and decision-making: A retrospective and road map for research. *Academy of Management Annals*, *14*(1), 267-302.

Keiser, N. L., & Arthur Jr, W. 2020. A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of the after-action review (or debrief) and factors that influence its effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000821

Kisfalvi, V., & Pitcher, P. (2003). Doing what feels right: The influence of CEO character and emotions on top management team dynamics. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *12*(1), 42-66.

Korsgaard, M. A., Schweiger, D. M., & Sapienza, H. J. (1995). Building commitment, attachment, and trust in strategic decision-making teams: The role of procedural justice. *Academy of Management journal*, *38*(1), 60-84.

Kouamé, S., & Liu, F. (2021). Capturing emotions in qualitative strategic organization research. *Strategic Organization*, *19*(1), 97-112.

Kreibig, S. D., Gendolla, G. H., & Scherer, K. R. (2012). Goal relevance and goal conduciveness appraisals lead to differential autonomic reactivity in emotional responding to performance feedback. *Biological Psychology*, *91*(3), 365-375.

Laakso, L. 2018. Jorma Ollilan raivokohtauksista on kirjoitettu hyvin pitkään – KL kokosi 7 juttua vuosien varrelta. Kauppalehti, Retrieved from: https://www.kauppalehti.fi/uutiset/jorma-ollilan-raivokohtauksista-on-kirjoitettu-hyvin-pitkaan-kl-kokosi-7-juttua-vuosien-varrelta/3d0a53d1-8a41-364a-b644-96f4ff90b1ad

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaptation* (Vol. 557). Oxford University Press.

Lazarus, R. S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping* (Vol. 464). Springer.

Lebel, R. D. 2017. Moving beyond fight and flight: A contingent model of how the emotional regulation of anger and fear sparks proactivity. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(2): 190-206.

Lifshitz-Assaf, H. (2018). Dismantling knowledge boundaries at NASA: The critical role of professional identity in open innovation. *Administrative science quarterly*, *63*(4), 746-782.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Liu, F., & Maitlis, S. (2014). Emotional dynamics and strategizing processes: A study of strategic conversations in top team meetings. *Journal of management studies*, *51*(2), 202-234.

Luoma, J., Ruutu, S., King, A. W., & Tikkanen, H. (2017). Time delays, competitive interdependence, and firm performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *38*(3), 506-525.

Maitlis, S., & Ozcelik, H. (2004). Toxic decision processes: A study of emotion and organizational decision making. *Organization Science*, *15*(4), 375-393.

March, J. G., & Simon, H. A. (1993). *Organizations*. John wiley & sons. Second edition.

Michel, A. (2011). Transcending socialization: A nine-year ethnography of the body's role in organizational control and knowledge workers' transformation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(3), 325-368.

Michel, A. A. (2007). A distributed cognition perspective on newcomers' change processes: The management of cognitive uncertainty in two investment banks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *52*(4), 507-557.

Netz, J., Svensson, M., & Brundin, E. (2020). Business disruptions and affective reactions: A strategy-as-practice perspective on fast strategic decision making. *Long range planning*, *53*(5), 101910.

Ocasio, W. (1997). Towards an attention-based view of the firm. *Strategic management journal*, *18*(S1), 187-206.

Oreg, S., Bartunek, J. M., Lee, G., & Do, B. 2018. An affect-based model of recipients' responses to organizational change events. *Academy of Management Review*, 43(1): 65-86.

Pratt, M. G. (2000). The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: Managing identification among Amway distributors. *Administrative science quarterly*, *45*(3), 456-493.

Rafaeli, A., & Sutton, R. I. (1987). Expression of emotion as part of the work role. *Academy of management review*, *12*(1), 23-37.

Raffaelli, R., Glynn, M. A., & Tushman, M. 2019. Frame flexibility: The role of cognitive and emotional framing in innovation adoption by incumbent firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(7): 1013-1039.

Ravasi, D., & Schultz, M. (2006). Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Academy of management journal*, *49*(3), 433-458.

Ravasi, D., Tripsas, M., & Langley, A. (2020). Exploring the strategy-identity nexus. *Strategic Organization*, *18*(1), 5-19.

Ravasi, D., Rindova, V., & Stigliani, I. (2019). The stuff of legend: History, memory, and the temporality of organizational identity construction. *Academy of Management Journal*, *62*(5), 1523-1555.

Roseman, I. J. 2013. Appraisal in the emotion system: Coherence in strategies for coping. *Emotion Review*, 5(2): 141-149.

Rouleau, L. (2005). Micro-practices of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving: How middle managers interpret and sell change every day. *Journal of Management studies*, *42*(7), 1413-1441.

Sadeh, L. J., & Zilber, T. B. (2019). Bringing “together”: Emotions and power in organizational responses to institutional complexity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *62*(5), 1413-1443.
Samra-Fredericks, D. (2000). An Analysis of the Behavioural Dynamics of Corporate Governance–a talk-based ethnography of a UK manufacturing ‘board-in-action’. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, *8*(4), 311-326.
Samra-Fredericks, D. (2003). Strategizing as Lived Experience and Strategists’ Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Direction. *Journal of Management Studies*, *40*(1), 141-174.
Schabram, K., & Maitlis, S. 2017. Negotiating the challenges of a calling: Emotion and enacted sensemaking in animal shelter work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2): 584-609.
Shepherd, D. A., Patzelt, H., & Wolfe, M. (2011). Moving forward from project failure: Negative emotions, affective commitment, and learning from the experience. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(6), 1229-1259.
Shin, J., Taylor, M. S., & Seo, M. G. (2012). Resources for change: The relationships of organizational inducements and psychological resilience to employees' attitudes and behaviors toward organizational change. *Academy of Management journal*, *55*(3), 727-748.
Schippers, M. C., Edmondson, A. C., & West, M. A. 2014. Team reflexivity as an antidote to team information-processing failures. *Small Group Research*, 45(6): 731-769.
Sletvold, J. (2015). Embodied empathy in psychotherapy: Demonstrated in supervision. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, *10*(2), 82-93.
Smith, C. A., & Ellsworth, P. C. 1985. Patterns of cognitive appraisal in emotion. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 48(4): 813.
Soderstrom, S. B., & Weber, K. 2020. Organizational structure from interaction: Evidence from corporate sustainability efforts. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(1): 226-271.
Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research* (Vol. 15). Newbury Park, CA: sage.
Sutton, R. I. (1991). Maintaining norms about expressed emotions: The case of bill collectors. *Administrative science quarterly*, 245-268.
Tangney, J. P., & Dearing, R. L. (2003). *Shame and guilt*. Guilford press.
Thoits, P. A. (1989). The sociology of emotions. *Annual review of sociology*, *15*(1), 317-342.
Tripsas, M. (2009). Technology, identity, and inertia through the lens of “The Digital Photography Company”. *Organization science*, *20*(2), 441-460.
Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization science*, *13*(5), 567-582.

Vaara, E., & Whittington, R. (2012). Strategy-as-practice: Taking social practices seriously. *Academy of Management Annals*, *6*(1), 285-336.

Valentine, M. A. 2018. Renegotiating spheres of obligation: The role of hierarchy in organizational learning. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(3): 570-606.

Vince, R. (2006). Being taken over: Managers' emotions and rationalizations during a company takeover. *Journal of Management Studies*, *43*(2), 343-365.

Voronov, M., & Vince, R. (2012). Integrating emotions into the analysis of institutional work. *Academy of Management review*, *37*(1), 58-81.

Vuori, T. O. (2024). Emotions and attentional engagement in the attention-based view of the firm. *Strategic Organization*, *22*(1), 189-210.

Vuori, T. O., & Huy, Q. N. (2022). Regulating top managers' emotions during strategy making: Nokia's socially distributed approach enabling radical change from mobile phones to networks in 2007–2013. *Academy of Management Journal*, *65*(1), 331-361.

Vuori, T. O., & Huy, Q. N. (2016). Distributed attention and shared emotions in the innovation process: How Nokia lost the smartphone battle. *Administrative science quarterly*, *61*(1), 9-51.

Whittington, R. (2006). Completing the practice turn in strategy research. *Organization studies*, *27*(5), 613-634.

Whittle, A., & Reissner, S. (2024). Making Knowledge Claims from Qualitative Interviews: A Typology of Epistemological Modes. *British Journal of Management*.

Zapf, D., Kern, M., Tschan, F., Holman, D., & Semmer, N. K. (2021). Emotion work: A work psychology perspective. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *8*(1), 139-172.

Zollo, M., & Winter, S. G. 2002. Deliberate learning and the evolution of dynamic capabilities. *Organization science*, 13(3): 339-351.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Key terms of the doctoral thesis

Organizational Practice

Definition: Established routines, processes, tools, and informal methods that guide how work is carried out in an organization

Explanation: Organizational practices include formalized elements such as strategic planning procedures, sales meetings, and performance reviews, as well as informal behaviors like hallway conversations. These practices are shared, institutionalized, and socially transmitted within organizations. They structure how work is done but do not fully dictate individual behavior. Practices influence what organizational members attend to and how they interpret information, including emotional stimuli. Through these influences, practices shape both cognition and emotions, thereby guiding strategic behavior

Organizational Structure

Definition: The formal configuration of roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and communication pathways within an organization.

Explanation: Organizational structure determines who is responsible for what, how decisions are made, and how communication flows. It directs the allocation of attention by assigning tasks and information channels to specific roles. This influences both the distribution of cognitive tasks and emotion work, with different structural positions exposing individuals to different emotional stimuli and responsibilities. Consequently, structure not only shapes coordination and accountability but also guides the way people experience and manage emotions in their roles

Emotion

Definition: A process initiated by exposure to a stimulus, followed by subjective evaluation, physiological changes, and expressive responses.

Explanation: In organizations, emotions arise from appraisal processes where individuals evaluate how events affect their goals (primary appraisal) and their ability to cope with those events (secondary appraisal). Emotions influence cognition, attention, and behavior. They are not static but contextually constructed through interactions with others and shaped by cultural and social norms. Emotions can be adaptive or disruptive depending on how they are interpreted and managed, and they are fundamental to both individual decision-making and organizational functioning

Strategic Action

Definition: The concrete, everyday behaviors and interactions through which strategy is implemented and adapted in practice.

Explanation: Strategic action, referred to as *praxis* in strategy-as-practice research, captures the lived execution of strategy by individuals and teams. Unlike static plans, praxis reflects the dynamic and situational adjustments people make in meetings, conversations, and project activities. It emerges from both formal organizational roles and spontaneous problem-solving, shaped by both organizational practices and structure. Emotions play a key role in motivating or constraining these actions, influencing how individuals interpret their environment and choose to act

Professional Service Firm

Definition: A knowledge-intensive organization whose primary value creation depends on the expertise of its professionals

Explanation: Professional service firms (PSFs) are characterized by their reliance on specialized knowledge, client relationships, and reputational capital. Their primary value creation depends on applying the expertise of its employees to identifying and addressing problems and opportunities of the customer. Typical examples include consulting, law, and accounting firms. PSFs often operate in project-based environments,

where professionals must constantly learn, adapt, and manage client expectations. Emotions and identity are central to how professionals perform and evolve in such contexts

This dissertation reveals that strategy isn't just shaped in meeting rooms and PowerPoints – it's also shaped in people's emotions.

- An organization's identity sparks emotions that guide how strategy is actually carried out in daily work
- Structures define not only who does what – but also what kinds of emotional work different roles demand.
- Even well-designed practices can fail if their implementation triggers emotional resistance

Strategy is not just a rational plan – it's an emotional journey shared across the organization.

Business, Economy
Art, Design, Architecture
Science, Technology
Crossover
Doctoral Theses

Aalto DT 96/2025

ISBN 978-952-64-2554-2
ISBN 978-952-64-2553-5 (pdf)

Aalto University
School of Science
Department of Industrial Engineering and Management
aalto.fi