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WARWICK BUSINESS SCHOOL

Reconceptualising Organizational  
Identity: A Critical Realist and  
Historical Case Study of  
Walgreens Boots Alliance  
(1892-2002)

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## **Abstract**

What is organizational identity like? A simple question yet a complex issue since organizational identity has been conceptualised in multiple ways based on competing ontological paradigms, that when explored, reveal dualistic debates. My thesis makes an original contribution to these by circumnavigating ontological duality by using critical realism to develop an explanatory, but ontologically based account of organizational identity that addresses issues of temporal endurance vs. changeability alongside structure vs. agency. This was achieved by undertaking an historical and longitudinal embedded case-study of organizational identity at Walgreens Boot's Alliance, a multinational health and beauty corporation. Specifically, I thematically generated organizational identity from historical documents across four time units from 1892-2002, and explained dynamics across these time units using concepts from critical realism. From this, I was able to demonstrate that an historically situated and ontologically independent organizational identity explained empirical identity dynamics over time, allowing organizational identity to be conceptualised as a dual phenomenon. The result being, that previous ontological divisions in conceptualising organizational identity were syncretised, the endurance vs. changeability debate reinvigorated and calls for a more critical stream within organizational identity scholarship advanced. Additional to these theoretical contributions, were organizational-level reflections on management of organizational identity with limitations and opportunities for further research discussed.

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## **Declaration**

I have read and understood the rules on cheating, plagiarism and appropriate referencing as outlined in my handbook and I declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own, unless otherwise acknowledged.

No substantial part of the work submitted here has also been submitted by me in other assessments for this or previous degree courses, and I acknowledge that if this has been done an appropriate reduction in the mark I might otherwise have received will be made.

Signed candidate \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Abbreviations*

<b>OI</b>	(Organizational identity)
<b>NHS</b>	(National Health Service)
<b>CC</b>	(Corporate citizenship)
<b>CSR</b>	(Corporate social responsibility)
<b>VD</b>	(Venereal Disease)
<b>T.U.C.</b>	(Trade Union Congress)
<b>UK</b>	(United Kingdom)
<b>U. S. / U.S.A</b>	(United States – of America)

## Introduction

*“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”*

Søren Kierkegaard

This well-known quote by the existential Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, highlights the importance of engaging with the past for the development of understanding. Yet how often is history used as an approach for generating theory comparative to offering a narrative or rhetorical account of the past? This was a question highlighted by Booth and Rowlinson (2006) and others (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Zald, 2002; Kieser, 1994) who have claimed historical approaches to understanding organizational issues are rare with calls for this to be remedied. To an extent this call has been answered with some scholars attempting to use history to extend, generate or challenge organizational theories (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011; Trompette, 2011; Schreyogg, Sydow, & Holtmann, 2011; Clark & Blundel, 2007; Chreim, 2005). However this is still a nascent approach and history and organizational studies to an extent remain uncomfortable bedfellows (Greenwood & Bernardi, 2014; Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014). Thus, using historical approaches to develop a better understanding of organizational issues is a specific area in which further research has been welcomed.

One area of organizational research where history and organizational issues intersect is organizational identity (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Indeed, connected to notions of “who we are as an organization” is “who we have been as

an organization” (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). Moreover, in managing organizational identity, managers may revise an organizational history (Gioia et al., 2000); ignore history (Anteby & Molnar, 2012), or dress up current organizational practices in history (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993) suggesting that history and organizational identity share a common ground. Indeed, within the literature a way that history has been brought to bear on organization studies is by consideration of its use in how organizational identity is manipulated and constructed (Gioia, et al., 2000; Hansen, 2007; Mordhorst, 2014).

While previous work has looked at how the past is used in managing and constructing organizational identity, as an object of study there are a plurality of perspectives (He & Brown, 2013; Ravasi & Canato, 2013). In effect, there is considerable confusion about what organizational identity is like, leading Whetten (2006) to suggest that the very concept of organizational identity is of itself in the midst of an identity crisis. One of the most salient issues surrounding organizational identity pertains to whether or not it is enduring or changeable (Gioia et al., 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). During the mid-1980s, the concept of organizational identity was defined by Albert and Whetten (1985) as that which is central, distinctive and enduring about an organization and was based on realist assumptions that an identity is something an organization possesses. Some fifteen years later, what had been taken as a normative definition was challenged by scholars (i.e. Gioia et al., 2000), in which it was argued that organizational identity is an ongoing process rather than something belonging to a given organization.

Consequently, that organizational identity was a process rather than a property brought a challenge to the understanding that organizational identity was enduring.

Notions of endurance and changeability in organizational identity invoke notions of temporality (Brunninge, 2009) and calls for more temporal approaches to organizational identity research have been made (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Given this, it seemed that there was scope to better understand organizational identity by using an historical approach. Indeed, that research typically explores how history is used to construct organizational identity, rather than understand organizational identity as phenomenon which of itself is temporally situated (and thus historical), an opportunity became apparent in which an historical approach to gaining understanding of the ontology of organizational identity was surfaced. In particular, a central question that may be addressed by such an approach was whether organizational identity is enduring or changeable. It was to this objective that my thesis was oriented.

Central to the endurance versus changeability debate were notable differences in ontological perspectives. On the one hand realism, in which organizational identity is considered relatively enduring as an essential property of an organization that has causal powers (Whetten, 2006). Meanwhile, on the other hand, it is from social constructivist ontology that the idea of a malleable and negotiated organizational identity has arisen (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Embedded within this polarisation are issues of structure and agency (Reed, 1997), in which it can also be understood that

agents are determined by an organizational identity (Haslam, Postmes, & Ellemers 2003) of which they themselves also construct (Gioia, et al, 2000). Thus, complicating the picture further was the presence of an unresolved structure versus agency issue in which some agents are determined by an organizational identity while others construct it. In this case, the ontology of organizational identity can also be considered a psychological epiphenomenon (Haslam et al., 2003) in which endurance in organizational identity is perceived by some, and constructed to appear that way by others. Consequently, notions of endurance and changeability in organizational identity incorporated a third way to conceptualise organizational identity – a quasi-independent psychological phenomenon.

Entering into this arena it was clear that the picture has become clouded by divided ontological assumptions and disciplinary preferences which have prompted theoretical work to settle the situation and develop greater conceptual unity (Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Soenen & Moingeon, 2002; Ran & Golden, 2011). To date, development of a unified account of organizational identity has had some success but typically, realist perspectives have been excluded meaning opportunities remain to re-attempt conceptual integration (van Rekom, Corley, & Ravasi, 2008). This endeavour was the second objective of my thesis. Noting that ontological differences rather than epistemology have been a diversity driver, I adopted a critical realist position (Bhaskar, 1979; Archer, 1995; 1996), which has been suggested as able to steer between polarized ontological positions and be compatible with history (Steinmetz, 1998). Moreover, because I wanted to drill

down into whether organizational identity is enduring or changeable and constructed or independent of agents, then positioning my thesis within critical realism enabled me to take an ontological voice in answering these questions (Sayer, 1992; Reed, 2005). Thus, additional to using an historical approach to understand organizational identity, I explicitly adopted a critical realist perspective.

Critical realism is a relatively recent approach to research and lacks an associated method (Yeung, 1997). Consequently, there has not been a great deal of strong empirical work using critical realism with articles seeming to take a more theoretical perspective (for example: Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000). While I could have perhaps critiqued existing empirical research on organizational identity by using critical realism, given the level of conceptual and epistemological plurality (He & Brown, 2013; Ravasi & Canato, 2013), I wanted to undertake my own empirical study. On this inductive basis, I planned to advance a theoretically inclusive ontological account of organizational identity and one that addressed key questions of structure vs. agency and enduring vs. changeable. To enact my research objectives, I undertook an historical case study of organizational identity using a critical realist methodology. In particular, I adopted a critical realist approach to explaining empirical dynamics of change and endurance in organizational identity of a multinational, health and beauty corporate organization - Boots the Chemist (currently known as Walgreens Boots Alliance) - from 1892-2002.

Organizational identity was generated using thematic analysis of primary source data collected from the company's archive over four chronological time units. Starting with Boot's nascent organizational identity in 1892, these time units were generated inductively from the data itself, reflecting periods in which it would have been theoretically expected that organizational identity would have been likely to change. Periodisation of the data in this way, additional to reconstructing historical data with a theoretical construct in mind, resulted in what Rowlinson et al. (2014) have described as an analytical history. From this, the longitudinal identity dynamics of the company's identity were explained using the critical realist method of retrodution (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011) and incorporated ideas drawn from Archer's (1995; 1996) analytical dualism. In doing so, I was able to advance a new account of organizational identity, generating multiple theoretical statements that described organizational identity thereby enacting my research objectives and making a theoretical contribution.

As a whole, my thesis has eight chapters (followed by a conclusion) that were structured as follows. In chapter one, I reviewed the organizational identity literature to surface and articulate some of the issues that are present in existing organizational identity scholarship. Given the ontological differences in conceptualising organizational identity, I used this as a template beginning with realist accounts and bridging the distance to social constructionist perspectives with psychological approaches to organizational identity. I then critically traced integrationist theories before moving on to consider the relationship between

organizational identity and history. This led to the development of two research questions and proposing how they may be investigated. In the following chapter (chapter two), I then explored some of the methodological issues that were important in the study that I had envisaged. This included a presentation of the assumptions of critical realism, its relationship with case study (Easton, 2010), and discussion of some of the epistemological complexity surrounding the fusion of history and historical data with organization studies and critical realism (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Having established a methodological position, in the third chapter, I developed a detailed method. For historical research, method is typically assumed as a critical approach to sources when re-constructing the past (Donnelly & Norton, 2011). However, since my research was multidisciplinary and critical realism doesn't favour a specific method (Yeung, 1997), it was both pertinent and necessary to include a detailed method section. Thus, in this chapter, I developed a step-wise research framework and a research strategy. This was followed by a detailed outline of the case setting and how I developed my periodisation into analytical units before selecting and justifying a method for generating organizational identity from archival data (my principal data source). Moreover, because the very concept of organizational identity itself was under scrutiny, I also reflected on and selected an appropriate way in which to operationalise the concept. In closing, I finally considered the ethical issues relevant to my research since although historical; the company I used for my case study is still operational today and thus corporate

reputation was at stake. Despite this, the company were supportive of the research and did not restrict or manage use of their records.

The next four chapters (four to seven) presented the historical data in terms of the organizational identity themes I generated. These chapters related to each of the four analytical time units and were organised by the themes as sub-headings under which I offered primary historical data combined with elaboration and description. This resulted in development of a chronologically sequenced and narrative, but analytical account of the dynamics in Boot's organizational identity over the entire time period. Following presentation of themes, in a second section to each of the results chapters I used a retroductive style of reasoning to develop an explanation for the dynamics in the identity themes comparative to the previous generation. To do so, I drew on mid-range theories and critical realism to explain what had been empirically observed leading to incremental development of an explanatory account of organizational identity dynamics at Boot's for the whole analytical period.

In the final eighth chapter of my discussion I brought together the data and the explanations I developed for it, to bear upon my research questions. In doing so I was able to advance four theoretical propositions that described organizational identity from a critical realist perspective. This represented a novel theoretical contribution since an empirically based, critical realist account of organizational identity has not been offered before. Following this, I applied my account of

organizational identity to some of the issues surfaced in my literature review leading to three contributions to the literature. The first was development of a syncretic way in which to conceptualise organizational identity incorporating ideas arising from both realist and social constructionist ontology. A second contribution was by way of reinvigorating the endurance versus changeability debate by demonstrating that organizational identity is stratified and both of these things. Although the debate has been claimed resolved (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamiltion, & Corley, 2013), my research showed this is unlikely to yet be the case.

My findings also prompted a call for a more critical stream within organizational identity scholarship based on an observation that socio-political contexts had a notable relationship to organizational identity. For example, my findings suggested that adoption of neoliberal values are reductive and to be relevant to wider society, organizational agents construct identity to give social meaning to what would otherwise be an economic entity. Thus, in a neoliberal context, organizational identity is likely to be both encountered and understood as being somewhat more of a construction than a concrete, independent phenomenon. Moreover, given that scholarship of organizational identity has largely been conducted post-1980s in which a neoliberal environment has been widespread, what is known about organizational identity may also have been influenced by the socio-political context. This call to criticality within organizational identity scholarship was a third contribution my study made.

Finally, I considered the relevance of my research for organizational-level management of organizational identity which showed that my account had utility for what business organizations can reliably claim about their identity. To facilitate this, I used Boots as an example to demonstrate the importance of reflexivity and caution when attempting to gain strategic advantage by leveraging past organizational identity (Suddaby et al., 2010; Zundel, Holt, & Popp, 2016). Thus, the importance of my research was both academic and practical. In closing my thesis by way of a parenthetical conclusion, I summarised my account of organizational identity and the contributions made but also reflected on the potential limitations of my research. This was followed with recommendations for further work, which demonstrated that by purposefully looking backward to gain understanding; my thesis offered a potential springboard for propelling organizational scholarship forward.

# Chapter 1

## Literature Review

### *Introduction*

Until the mid-1980s, the concept of organizational identity (henceforth referred to as OI) received little scholarly attention but following Albert and Whetten's (1985) work on defining the concept, interest became rejuvenated. This was facilitated by their definition of OI as that which is "central", "distinctive" and "enduring" about an organization. Despite this concrete description being ubiquitously invoked since in the OI literature, the concept has become increasingly chaotic through a multiplicity of perspectives on OI leading to concerns that 'organizational identity is suffering an identity crisis' (Whetten, 2006 p. 220). Given this, it was important to review the literature to understand how OI has been conceptualised over the past two decades. Some reviews conducted previously by other scholars have looked at theoretical conceptions of OI (He & Brown, 2013; Corley et al., 2006), the research methods used in its study (Ravasi & Canato, 2013), as well as more general texts (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Through surveying the literature, it became apparent that there were debates centred on whether or not OI was enduring or changeable (Ravasi, & Schultz, 2006; Ran & Golden, 2011). Probing deeper revealed that this debate reflected differences in the ontological positioning of different scholars.

In particular, three dominant paradigms were identifiable: Essentialist perspectives rooted in a type of ontological realism with OI considered as an independent

property belonging to an independent organization. Social psychological perspectives follow suit but take a softer stance in that OI is conceptualised as an independent causal phenomenon to the extent that individuals perceive an OI to be “real”. This perspective acted like a bridge to social constructionist and post-modern approaches to OI which assume that the identity of an organization is discursive and relationally constructed. In this chapter, I initially traced these three approaches before reviewing others attempts to create conceptual unity through syncretic accounts. Further identified from the literature was that OI overlaps significantly with notions of organizational history because change and non-change in OI requires temporality (Brunninge, 2009). Thus, after discussing theories of OI, I went on to explore the relationship between OI and organizational history. To consolidate, at this point I offered a summary of the literature before concluding the chapter by focusing on the research questions that emerged and the importance of addressing them.

### ***Realist Approaches to Organizational Identity***

Central to a realist understanding of OI is the idea that like individuals, organizations are social actors. Whetten (2006) proposed that organizations could be best understood if they were conceptualised as social actors with independent collective-level identities that were non-reducible to organizational members. This was contra to a more common idea that OI is collectively shared beliefs held by members of an organization (He & Brown, 2013). The realist social actor approach has been justified on the basis that social and legal discourses about organizations

render them with powers of agency and responsibility. Further work has since developed this justification by arguing that the independence of an organization from its members stems from attributions of an organization's capability and intentionality to act (King, Fellin, & Whetten, 2010). In particular, organizations are regarded as legally accountable and possessing sovereign powers such as to select, reward or punish employees and allocate resources. Moreover, supporting the social actor view has been reliance on parallels drawn between organizations and individuals (Morgeson & Hoffmann, 1999) that support popular social discourses about organizations. For example, notions of corporate citizenship are an obvious one (Mele, 2008). Although these refer more readily to an organization than OI per se., ideas about the independence of an organization from its members, have been a primary argument for an organization to possess a unique non-reducible identity (King et al., 2010).

Possessing an OI has also been argued to be important for an organization enabling it to participate in wider social interactions beyond that of its own members (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Indeed, to these scholars OI was an essentialist and necessary property of an organization. Further, OI has also been understood to have a functional purpose in defining an organization's social space, and promoting self-governance; in that an independent OI guides goal directed organizational behaviour (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Meanwhile, others have gone on to suggest that an organization's identity reflects its irreversible commitments (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; King et al., 2010) and acts both as a guide and anchor equating to 'a

core theory of the entity' (Whetten & Mackey, 2002 p.396). Although this essential core of an organization is not directly observable, it can be contrived by self-referencing linguistic terms, or a set of socially approved categorical identity claims such as "we are X... or Y" that are assumed to be drawn from the wider institutional-level environment in a bricolage approach (Glynn, 2008; King & Whetten, 2008) and becoming independent of the idiosyncrasies of organizational founders (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

An interrelated strand of thinking departs from social actor theory by alternatively conceptualising organizations as moral actors (Barney & Stewart, 2000; Weaver, 2006). As such, organizations can be understood and made sense of from the perspective of moral theory which some work has attempted to do through the lens of Macintyre's virtue ethics (1985). In this ethical framework, business organizations are understood to be creators of goods. These can be external goods such as wealth, success and profits or internal goods, such as relationship, intrinsic reward, personal satisfaction and personal growth (Moore, 2002). Again, while seeming to focus on organization rather than OI, a link exists because the extent to which an organization creates different goods, it can be claimed to have a more or less "virtuous" character. Indeed, when virtue ethics have been empirically applied to a business organization (Moore, 2012), it was found that an organization's character could be classified as being "virtuous" based on the goods they produced as reported by key informants.

The idea that organizations can be described in terms of being virtuous or possessing a moral character has a basis in Aristotelian ethics in which virtues are trait-like characteristics that are not learned or taught, only developed through pursuing excellence in one's personal character and conduct. Thus, the link between organizations and notions of moral character implicitly suggested a somewhat anthropomorphic conception of organization (Moore, 2005). Although, this could be argued against on the basis that virtuosity arises from production rather than corporate personality, production of goods assumes that an organization possesses the intention and capability to self-determine which goods to produce. This same power to be self-determining was an assumption central to the social actor model of organization and identity, meaning that rather than social actors, organizations could similarly be conceptualised as moral actors, with power and agency to shape their own moral identity.

A further way that OI is shown to have an implicit foundation in ontological realism can be noted from the way in which OI has been measured. Capturing OI through empirical measures has been reported as common in marketing schools (He & Brown, 2013), that assume organizations have or possess an "actual" identity that can be uncovered through key organizational informants (Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Balmer, 2001; Olins, 1995; He & Murkerjee, 2009). The idea being that contra to notions of organizational culture, understood to be "what we feel we are", OI pertains to "what we indubitably are" (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p.735). Indubitably means beyond doubt, indicating that an OI can be understood to be the

indisputable centre of whom and what an organization is – its core theory of being (cf. Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

To access an “actual” OI a number of approaches have been employed that were reviewed by Ravasi and Canato (2013). One study of a Norwegian collection agency (Simcic-Brønn, Engell, & Martinsen, 2006) uncovered OI by engaging organizational members in psychotherapeutic regression exercises and then asking them to offer traits that described their organization. By cross-comparing results to the mode, an OI of six commonly shared traits was found. Other approaches have been to use focus groups to access an OI, which could then be operationalised in Likert scored surveys as an antecedent of organizational identification or attractiveness (Bartel, 2001; Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002). Finally, extended metaphor analysis has been used in which individuals score their organization against pre-determined ideal types of organizations such as a church, university, charity or business (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Foreman & Whetten, 2002). That an OI can be aligned with ideal types suggests an overlap with social actor theory in that OI is thought to be initially constructed from the institutional-level environment but over time becomes independent (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

That a “real” or “actual” OI can be accessed and measured is questionable for a number of reasons. First, by using focus groups to develop survey instruments (Bartel, 2001; Dukerich et al., 2002), assumes that OI is relatively monolithic. However, research suggests that multiple or dual identities may exist within a single

organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Albert & Adams, 2002; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Moreover, it has also been shown that there can be differences in perceptions of OI within an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Corley, 2004) and across stakeholder groups (He, 2012; Balmer & Greyser, 2002). For example, Corley (2004) found that organizational hierarchy explained differences in OI reporting, with senior managers basing OI on strategic identity markers, while lower-level employees relied on organizational culture and perceived enduring organizational values to articulate OI. Consequently, using informants to capture and measure an OI is not only highly individualised to a specific organization, but encounters sampling and reliability issues. Moreover, using informants has been noted to primarily capture *perceived* OI as opposed to the “actual” identity of the organization (Ravasi & Canato, 2013).

Another approach has been the use of extended metaphor analysis in identity research (for example: Albert & Whetten, 1985; Foreman & Whetten, 2002), which to an extent is a self-limiting method as to what kind of OI can be uncovered. By using metaphorical ideal types to discover what identity features an organization has, the approach relies on abstractions from stereotypical organizations in the available institutional-level environment. In effect, this means what an organization’s identity can be like is constrained by what can be constructed in terms of ideal types from the institutional-level environment. However, research shows that some organizations can deviate from stereotypical and socially accepted organizational norms and yet still flourish (Helms & Patterson, 2014). Thus, aligning

OI to what types of OI already exist in the wider institutional-level environment, may conceal as opposed to reveal some organizational identities.

Beyond issues of measurement, there were further critical issues with the theoretical conceptions of OI that I have covered above. For example, approaching OI or corporate character from the perspective of moral theory and virtue ethics could also be considered constraining since framing OI through a moral lens would limit interpretation of OI to moral categories. Thus, what can be understood of OI could become unwittingly fenced in by the boundaries of an investigatory framework or theoretical lens. For example, non-anthropomorphic or characterless identity markers such as “internationally focused” or “innovative” may be more likely to be overlooked, thereby offering an incomplete picture of OI and reinforcing notions of organizations as moral actors.

Another concern was that the social actor approach to OI reifies an organization and its identity through an uncritical use of metaphor (Cornelissen, 2002; 2006). This has been argued to have arisen from cross-level theorising from individual identity to the organizational-level (for example: Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) without establishing the credibility of using metaphor to generate knowledge of OI. Although useful as a device for sense-making (Weick, 1995), metaphors in scholarly work should move toward formal theories (Tsoukas, 1991). However, it is clear the social actor approach relies heavily on metaphorical assumptions that like an individual, an organization can possess an identity. The pervasiveness of this

approach is revealed by its transferability to other organizational discourses such as corporate citizenship (CC). Although popular in the business community by the relative ease with which CC enables sense-making (Mele, 2008), notions of CC have also been criticised for having a metaphorical as opposed to theoretical basis (Van Oosterhout, 2005; Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2005).

### ***The Social Psychological Perspective of Organizational Identity***

Counter arguments to the critique of OI as a reifying metaphor have arisen from the field of social psychology in which it is understood that individuals encounter organizations through their psychological capacities (for example: Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Haslam, 2004; He & Brown, 2013). From this perspective, individuals perceive organizations as actually having an independent existence and identity rather than *as though* they had an identity (Haslam et al., 2003). Importantly, within social psychology, OI is argued to be more than a metaphor since it is “real” in the eye of the beholder (*op cit.*). The scaffold for this understanding is social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Haslam, 2004), in which organizations are social groups with specific identities and to which individuals can identify with and integrate into their own self-concept or social identity depending on the comparative intergroup context (Hogg & Terry, 2000). To the extent that an individual identifies with a salient OI is then, the principal way in which an OI becomes an antecedent of individual behaviour (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Identification with an OI can be enabled by various means, including its comparative distinctiveness (Haslam, 2004), perceived

attractiveness (Dukerich et al., 2002; He & Mukerjee, 2009), its contribution to individual-level self-esteem (Bartel, 2001), or the prestige of the organization's identity (Peters, Tevichapong, Haslam, & Postmes, 2010).

Compared with social actor theory, the psychological approach to OI helps to move beyond the metaphor of organizations as social or moral actors to a more formal theory (*cf.* Tsoukas, 1991). It achieves this by accounting for the independent causal capabilities of organizations to direct organizational behaviours but explains this phenomenon in relation to perceptual and psychological processes rather than reifying an organization. To emphasise, in psychological approaches the independence of organizations is a perceptual phenomenon that can have real effects. On the one hand, this importantly introduces notions of agency into OI theorising which are largely absent in realist approaches. Yet on the other hand, it also limits agency since it has not been explained if and how organizational members can have effects on OI. For example, in the empirical literature OI has been linked with employee citizenship or deviance (Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010), employee creativity (Hirst, van Dick, & van Knippenberg, 2009), and turnover intentions (Peters et al., 2010). However, agents' behaviours have not typically been reverse-linked to OI development or change within this paradigm. Consequently, psychological conceptions of OI become over-deterministic whereby OI can be used and manipulated by managers (as entrepreneurs of identity – Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011) as a form of coercive power to achieve desired organizational outcomes (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002).

### ***Social Constructionism and Organizational Identity***

In contrast to the realist and social psychological approaches outlined above are social constructionist perspectives which foreground agency and have been influential in OI scholarship (Hatch & Schultz, 2004; Reed, 2005). However in similarity to realism, the social constructionist approach has also emerged from cross-level theorising as a way to understand collective-level identity. For example, Cooley's (1902) ideas about individual identity have been drawn upon by OI theorists (Gioia et al., 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In particular, Cooley developed the notion of the "looking glass self" in which a person's identity reflects social interdependence meaning that the self is made sense of through how one is perceived by multiple others. Thus, identity does not belong to an individual as an essential property but is co-constructed around the individual through relational processes. Other theorists drawn upon have included Mead (1934) who proposed that identity was fractured between an "I" which produced novel behaviours and a "Me" – the part of a self concept based on others people's perceptions. The work of Goffman (1959) on identity as performance has also contributed to social constructionist views of OI such as identity as narrative (Czarniaskwa-Joerges, 1994; Brown, 2006). In particular, Goffman argued that one's identity was a process of co-construction and management in response to audience's reactions to any given identity enactment. As a body of work these theories of individual identity have influenced social constructionist approaches to OI theorising (Hatch & Schultz, 2004).

Support for a social constructionist perspective of OI was garnered through a special edition of *The Academy of Management Review* (2000), in which two theories of OI were advanced (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton 2000). The first of these was a process model of identity-image interdependence (Gioia et al., 2000), that drew upon Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) case study of the New York Port Authority and a study of Royal Dutch Shell's response to criticisms over disposal plans for a disused oil platform (*cf.* Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). These cases revealed that OI was managed in relation to how others perceived the organization, otherwise known as corporate reputation or image meaning that OI and organizational image were understood to be interdependent constructs. The model proposed that an external event could trigger a comparison between a current OI and the construed external image of the organization by others. If these were congruent then OI would be strengthened and reinforced. However, if contradictions existed between image and OI then a condition for OI change was created. Multiple ways were put forward for how managers could manage image-identity incongruence, most of which resulted in adapting OI and re-presenting a new image to be evaluated by stakeholders. Consequently, Gioia and colleagues concluded that OI was a relationally negotiated and dynamic phenomenon.

The second theory proposed in the special issue followed a similar relational process model but took a different angle by employing a stakeholder model of organization (Scott & Lane, 2000). Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) assumes that organizations are at the nexus of and a vehicle for stakeholder needs and

interests (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). On this basis, the needs and motives of powerful and/or relevant stakeholders were argued to interact with those of organizational managers and from these discursive negotiations, Scott and Lane (2000) proposed an OI would develop. Through ongoing iterative processes of reflection and appraisal by stakeholders, representations of OI such as dress codes (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), logos and organizational philosophy (Balmer, 1995), could be adapted to maintain maximum congruence between the OI and organizational stakeholders. Further research has also highlighted there may be factors other than (in)congruence involved in identity processes of management and negotiation. For example, changes in the operating environment or comparative context can affect organizational needs to maintain legitimacy or positive distinctiveness (He & Baruch, 2010; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Mergers may also alter stakeholders' power and centrality in addition to organizational restructuring (Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, & Thomas, 2010; Kjaergaard, Morsing, & Ravasi, 2011).

The conception of OI embedded in the identity-image model and Scott and Lane's (2000) stakeholder model were largely the same. Namely, that OI arises from discursive and iterative social processes and thus is relationally constructed by multiple agents and actors. In effect, this addressed the unidirectional flow within psychological approaches since individual or group stakeholders were shown to have a role in determining OI. However, this also suggested OI is not a relatively enduring and essential property of an organization but instead a malleable and dynamic, adaptive and changeable construct with any evidence of stability or

endurance being illusory (Gioia et al., 2013). From this, a debate emerged in which Albert and Whetten's (1985) original definition of OI as "enduring" has become increasingly questioned (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Moreover, given that change and non-change occur only over time, this debate has also surfaced that a temporal dimension is important for OI theorising (Brunninge, 2009; Schultz & Hernes, 2013).

Support for Gioia et al. has come from the inclusion of temporality into OI scholarship. Indeed, the temporal stability of OI (or its dynamic changeability) has become increasingly talked about and resulted in some exploration of OI processes in identity construction and management over time (Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Chreim, 2005; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). From a narrative perspective, in which OI is regarded as a plurivocal construction and continuous reconstruction of identity (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994), Chreim (2005) explored the development of OI at a Canadian bank. It was found that endurance in identity over time was achieved through managers' use of abstract identity labels that could be interpretively applied to a wide number of organizational events. As such, the OI of the bank had an appearance of endurance in that the labels remained constant while their content changed. A more recent study has also shown that perceptions of identity stability over time could be manipulated by managers through strategically forgetting identity change events in a firm's rhetorical history (Anteby & Molnar, 2012). Thus, temporal and narrative research into OI management have added further support to social constructionist claims that OI is essentially changeable but appears to be enduring (Gioia et al., 2013).

### ***Moving Toward Conceptual Integration***

Given the array of different ways to conceptualise OI, some scholars have attempted to develop a unified approach in how OI is conceived. Of particular note was the five facet model of collective identities advanced by Soenen and Moingeon (2002) in which they attempted to bridge conceptual divisions between scholarly disciplines. For example, they claimed that in marketing schools, image, brand and reputation were key concepts while for organizational theory, behaviour and strategic management were central. To unite these different ways of conceiving of OI, they proposed OI was a multi-faceted construct situated at an intersecting space between five different facets. The facets proposed were *professed* (what the organization directly claims about itself), *projected* (organizational claims mediated through communications – or an organizational image) and *attributed* identity (a perceived OI). There was also *experienced* identity (related to collectively shared experiences of a given OI), in keeping with notions of OI as an embodied phenomenon (Harquail & King, 2010; Whetten, 2006). Finally, *manifested* identity referred to OI as reflected in embedded institutionalised practices, symbols and systems – a historically based type of organizational culture (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). While not overextending the possibilities of the five facet model for all organizational research, Soenen and Moingeon claimed their model integrated disparate work on OI and offered a framework for conceptual multi-disciplinary synthesis in an understanding of OI as a dynamic construct. This model was useful for epistemological integration, but lacked an ontological foundation and thus did

not succeed to theoretically unify different conceptions of OI, with realist notions of OI being notably omitted.

Similarly grounded in epistemology was a second model proposed by Balmer and Soenen, (1999) called the ACID test. The acronym stood for different types of identity: actual, communicated, ideal and desired identity but these distinctions have been dismissed on grounds of lacking theoretical underpinning and being empirically driven (Soenen & Moingeon, 2002). A third attempt to find an integrated way to conceive of OI was attempted by Hatch and Schultz (2000). Acknowledging the chaotic conception of OI in their aptly titled paper "*Scaling the Tower of Babel*" the authors attempted to develop an Esperanto for OI scholarship. Focusing on structuralist linguistics and the relational differences between words (Saussure, 1966), a binary logic was employed between the linguistic descriptors of organizational culture and organizational image. Specifically, culture was defined as "contextual", "tacit" and "emergent", while organizational image was suggested to be "external", "other" and "multiplicity". By considering the opposites of these words which were "textual", "explicit", "instrumental", "internal", "self", and "singular", Hatch and Schultz proposed that OI could be described in this way. To emphasise, their ontological claim was that OI is a linguistic construct generated from an interaction between culture and image. In positing this new description of OI derived from linguistic manipulation, the authors claimed to have offered reconciliation between marketing-led and organizational approaches to OI and yet still this model overlooked the possibility of OI through a realist lens.

Finally, a sense-making perspective has been employed as way to draw together different conceptions and strands of OI theory (Ran & Golden, 2011). By using socio-psychological theories of cognitive categorization, it was deemed that *sense-giving* was about how leaders construct an OI from linguistic categories to give meaning to organizational member's experience of their organization (Ran & Duimering, 2007). Conversely, *sense-making* reflected the other side of this coin in that organizational members receive or encounter a constructed OI through their perceptual capabilities allowing them to categorise and make sense of an organization (*cf.* Haslam, 2004). Finally, *sense-exchanging* referred to the way in which relational negotiation of identity occurs between the organization and stakeholders as they exchange and negotiate perceptions and categories across boundaries (Ran & Golden, 2011; Scott and Lane, 2000; Gioia et al., 2000). In effect, a sense-making approach to OI successfully incorporated both social psychological approaches alongside social constructionist accounts, in that OI is created by managers for sense-giving and negotiated through sense-exchanging. However, by making the assumption that 'as mental images, organizational identities are conceptual representations of organizations' (Ran & Duimering, 2007, p. 157), the approach excluded realist, essentialist perspectives on OI. Instead, in keeping with its psychological basis, OI was considered an epiphenomenon of psychological agency thereby negating its ontological independence from agents as typified in traditional realism.

Inasmuch as syncretic models have attempted to develop conceptual unity, they have only been partially successful because they have not attempted to include realist notions of OI. Given this lack of success calls for integration in OI theory still remain unanswered (van Rekom et al., 2008). I argue that integration has been difficult because attempts to achieve this have been made at the level of epistemology and developing conceptual cohesion at an ontological level has not yet been attempted. For example, the models surveyed above have typically addressed OI along epistemological lines and not explored ontological differences and thus, for the most part, have been grounded on social constructivist assumptions. Nevertheless, scholars have inadvertently proposed ontological claims about organizational identity which according to Reed (2005) is problematic. Indeed, Reed has argued that the ontological power of social constructivism is one-dimensional since necessarily it is assumed that social reality (including phenomenon such as OI) are socially constructed. Consequently, OI of itself must necessarily also be a social construction thereby struggling to be accounted for as independent of actors. This means that space for realist accounts of OI are unlikely to be found if social constructivism continues to be the primary ontological assumption underpinning development of OI theory.

Likewise, the social psychological approach also suffers a similar difficulty, by positing that OI is a perceptual phenomenon. This makes it difficult to regard OI as anything more than an epiphenomenon of psychological sense-making activity (Ran & Duimering, 2007). Although psychological approaches can account for OI as being

causal, its ontological status is only quasi-independent (cf. Haslam, et al., 2003). Moreover, Hatch & Schultz's (2000) treatment of OI as emerging from linguistics also suggests the concept-dependent nature of OI. Given this current emphasis on agency as central to understanding OI it would seem a difficult task to develop an integrated conception of OI that also includes Whetten's (2006) notions of OI as being an essentialist property of an organization. But does this mean that the project to develop an integrated approach should be abandoned in favour of adopting the dominant paradigm of social constructivist ontology? To do so would continue to reproduce existing scholarly effort and thus be unlikely to bring satisfying redress. Thus, to move beyond this situation it was clear that revisiting OI through an ontological perspective would be useful as a way to move forward and it was to this end that my thesis was directed. A central question being - what is organizational identity like?

### ***Organizational Identity and History***

In exploring the conceptual complexity in OI theory, I previously mentioned that temporality was important for OI. According to Brunninge (2009), temporality and history are of critical importance for understanding OI since changeability or endurance in OI, by definition, is only possible across time. Thus, I echo Rowlinson et al. (2010), by stating that history matters for OI. Indeed, any ontological claims about OI as enduring, or dynamic and changeable, must necessarily be framed by time; an historical OI that maps the boundaries of OI construction at any given moment in time (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). However, this is atypical of the way in

which the relationship between organizational history and OI are discussed in the literature. Rather than regard history as a linear passage of time in which the past constrains the future (North, 1990; Booth, 2003), organizational history is understood to be shared collective beliefs about an organization's past (Brunninge, 2009). In similarity with OI as "shared understandings about what an organization is like" (He & Brown, 2013), the collective belief approach to organizational history appears to be a preferred way to frame the relationship between history and identity within OI scholarship (Morhurst, Popp, Suddaby, & Wadhani, 2016).

The idea that organizational history is shared collective beliefs about an organization's past suggests that both organizational history and identity are interdependent and malleable (Gioia et al., 2000). For example, in a study of OI construction at Pennsylvania State University, Ran and Golden (2011) argued that the strategic goals of an organization in the here-and-now determine how past OI claims will be used by an organization in the construction of a current OI. Thus, the past is appropriated and invoked strategically by managers giving the appearance of linear endurance in OI, when in fact OI is an ongoing continual process of construction – in effect it is timeless. This same conclusion was made by a more recent study of OI at LEGO (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Similarly, the authors concluded that a past OI could break through into the present, but that OI as an object of study was 'suspended' outside of time between both the past and the future in an ongoing perpetual present. Essentially, although suggesting and drawing upon notions of time and history in their discussions of OI, these studies

have assumed that OI is ultimately ahistorical. Indeed, OI has not been regarded as a temporal phenomenon with a beginning, middle and a possible end, but rather as an ongoing constructive process that is independent of time but one in which authors of OI borrow from history and the past to create coherence (Czarniaskwa, 1997).

Likewise, within the narrative tradition in which stories do typically have a beginning, middle and end, OI of itself is not considered as an adherent to this format. Rather, any teleological account of OI is subordinated to strategic narrative or creative storytelling and not a reflection of OI as a temporal phenomenon in which some aspects of OI are enduring across time. For example, in a narrative exploration of OI at a Canadian bank, Chreim (2005) traced identity narratives in company annual reports over an 11 year period which showed how in the process of identity construction, managers used history. In particular, it was found that history was used selectively, along with expansive, descriptive labels to link the current activities of the Bank with their activities in the past. Thus, the appearance of the bank being the same as they were in 1817 comparative to who they claimed to be in 1986 was created. Linking the past to the present in this way was regarded as a rhetorical practice of managers rather than an example of endurance in OI in which the author stated that 'the continual appearance of a label in successive identity texts does not necessarily imply stability in identity, for the meaning of the label may shift over time' (p. 572). Thus, temporal endurance in OI has been overlooked in favour of a sense-making approach to identity, history and

temporality, in which the past is strategically appropriated to construct a story in current time rather than limiting what can be constructed.

Underpinning claims that the temporal endurance of OI is illusory has been an ontological foundation in a social constructionist paradigm, which as mentioned above conceives of both history and OI as interrelated and malleable (Gioia et al., 2000; Anteby & Molnar, 2012). In particular, organizational history has been regarded as revisionist (Gioia et al., 2000; Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010) and thus histories, like identities, are open to interpretation, reflecting a wider post-modern turn in History as an academic discipline (Donnelley & Norton, 2011). As a consequence, history within an organization is no better than myth that can be tweaked, added to, and edited (or even forgotten – Anteby & Molnar, 2012) in order to support managerial objectives in the here-and now (Suddaby et al., 2010; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993). Thus, OI and organizational history are typically understood through a functional sense-making lens wherein the past is strategically used by managers to support identity (re)creation. Consequently, the endurance of OI has been reframed as “continuity” between past and present and is accounted for as illusory, created by managers who ground current OI within an organizational history (Chreim, 2005). The implication of these claims is that understanding of OI as temporally enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985) ought to be revised which according to Gioia et al. (2000), should be in favour of OI as dynamic and changeable.

## *Summary*

As evidenced by my review of the literature, it was apparent that something of social constructionist monopoly on the understanding of OI exists meaning few possibilities for an alternative approach can be imagined. This is best seen in an assertion by Gioia and colleagues (2013 p. 126) in which they stated that:

The debate [of OI endurance and/or changeability] has effectively been resolved now by a substantial body of work that affirms that identity often changes over relatively short time horizons, albeit perhaps in subtle ways’.

Thus, it appears that the call from academic quarters is to accept the dominant social constructivist account that OI is changeable and in doing so also accept that OI is dependent on agents’ ongoing construction and thus, although referencing history, is ultimately ahistorical. The only alternative available at this time would be to adopt a social actor model of OI, yet scholars have been right to caution against theoretical reification of organizations and their identities (Gioia et al., 2000; Cornelisson, 2002). Consequently, it seems there are few alternatives but to accept social constructionist accounts unless an integrated theory of OI and/or a theoretically grounded realist conception of OI can be advanced. Hence, there was an opportunity to attempt this which if successful would be a challenge to the assumed dominance of social constructionist accounts of OI and may help to resolve a number of issues in OI scholarship.

The most salient issue in OI scholarship is a dichotomy in how OI is conceptualised dependent on ontological and disciplinary preferences. On the one hand realist conceptions of OI favour a view in which OI is regarded as an essential, measurable and independent property of an organization that relies to a greater extent on reification. On the other hand, from a social constructionist perspective OI can be understood as collective and shared beliefs about an organization that are continually created and recreated relationally. Between them, psychological perspectives of OI are situated, in which OI is socially constructed yet is simultaneously perceived as real. While this level of pluralism is welcomed by some (He & Brown, 2013; Corley et al., 2006), for others it remains problematic. For example, Whetten's (2006) concerns of an identity crisis, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, remain largely unaddressed by current developments in OI theory. Moreover, plurality in perspectives mean there are further issues such as whether OI is enduring or changeable, or is it best explained in terms of structure or agency?

A possible reason put forward by Whetten (2006, p. 220) for there being so many issues was an overly strong focus by scholars on what he called the 'ideational component of OI'. In Albert and Whetten's (1985) original formulation, OI had been stratified into an ideational component (member's shared beliefs about who they are as an organization) and a definitional component (an operational conception of OI) (Whetten, 2006). Thus, in agreement, there does appear to have been an overemphasis on the ideational component. This is confirmed since current social

constructionist scholarship typically defines OI as: '*relatively shared understandings concerning* what is central, distinctive and enduring about an organization' (He & Brown, 2013, p. 8). Moreover, in the absence of a realist theory of OI that escapes metaphorical reification of organization; social constructionist perspectives of OI have flourished. Thus, I wanted to address this imbalance by attempting to develop a syncretic conception of OI that *a*) did not reify an organization and rely on metaphor and *b*) that could also incorporate social constructionist ideas about OI.

Finally, it was also surfaced by my literature review that OI and history are related. However, if OI is in a continual process of creation and recreation with any temporal stability or endurance in OI being an illusion as social constructionist accounts indicate, then grounds for organizational identity claims based in history could be considered somewhat rhetorical and thus unreliable. However, grounding current OI claims in the past is important for organizations since it helps to legitimate an organization (Suddaby et al., 2010). For example, grounding corporate social responsibility in history confers legitimacy in the face of organizational crises meaning stakeholders are more likely to forgive "blips" (Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009). Grounding organizational strategy and change in an historical OI also facilitates the acceptance of new corporate policies (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993). Thus, historical grounding of OI contributes to the perceived comprehensibility and stability of an organization (Czarniawska, 1997); foundational aspects of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Consequently, by addressing issues and debates such as enduring vs. changeability and structure vs. agency, it was also likely that a practical

contribution could be made as to what organizations can reliably claim about their OI as concrete and enduring.

### ***Research Questions***

My thesis principally sought to address overarching ontological issues in understanding of organizational identity. Although somewhat ambitious, it was deemed an important undertaking in the face of conceptual plurality and debates combined with the dominance of social constructivist ontology in OI theorising. In doing so, I have proposed to develop a unified theoretical account of OI grounded in an empirical study that would attempt to bring conceptual cohesion between realist versus social constructionist approaches to OI. Moreover, achieving this was expected to re-energise and make a contribution to debates around whether or not OI is an enduring or changeable phenomenon. To this end, I asked two specific research questions. First, contra to an understanding of OI as dynamic and always changing but with the appearance of endurance (Gioia et al., 2000; 2013):

- 1) Is the reverse possible: that OI is essentially enduring as proposed by Albert and Whetten (1985) yet empirically appears to change?

Second, as evidenced by my review of the literature, OI is regarded as an epiphenomenon of psychological agents and thus is dependent on them for its construction and its perception (Haslam et al., 2003). Moreover, that as an ongoing social construction OI depends entirely on agents' construction of it and thus

cannot be conceived of as independent of them. The alternative for OI to be independent of agents currently relies on organization as a social actor (*cf.* King et al., 2010). Thus, I wanted to know if it was possible if there could be a way for 'guiding OI through aged adolescence' (Corley et al., 2006, p.85), to an ontologically independent adulthood that avoids reification of an organization. In effect, I wanted to ask:

- 2) Is it possible that while constructed by and dependent on agents that OI can escape agents to take on an ontologically independent existence?

The benefits of asking these questions were multiple since they present an opportunity to develop a conceptual account of OI that addresses the thorny issue of structure and agency (Reed, 1997). For example realist and social psychological accounts lean toward OI as a determining structure, while social constructivist accounts emphasise OI as an ongoing relational construction dependent on agency. By developing an integrated approach that included both perspectives, there was potential to bring structure and agency together under the same umbrella. Second, my questions were likely to lead toward development of an inclusive approach to OI that did not simply exclude realist perspectives on OI as in current syncretic theories. Indeed, by consistent exclusion of realist accounts in favour of social constructionist perspectives, significant challenges to the idea that OI as enduring have been raised. Thus, by undertaking this work it may also be possible to justify Albert and Whetten's (1985) original formulation of OI as enduring. Finally, for organizations, the grounds for enduring OI claims are weak when considered from a

social constructionist perspective. However, by challenging the hegemony of the social constructionist position in OI theory through reinstating the possibility of realism, a more stable platform from which organizations can make enduring identity claims may be generated.

To drill down into the research questions two features discussed in my literature review would necessarily have to be incorporated into my proposed research. My first question concerned the enduring vs. changeable nature of OI and thus my research would require inclusion of temporality. Indeed, given that endurance and changeability can only be understood and observed over time, my research was likely to need an historical component and thus also depend on archival data. My second question addressed the independence of OI from agents' which lent itself to realist ontology. However, to also incorporate that OI may also be understood as a social construction (i.e. epistemologically interpretivist), a critical realist approach which combines these together (Bygstad & Munklvold, 2011) seemed a pragmatic base from which to engage with this question. Consequently, I envisaged an extended longitudinal and historical case study of OI, enacted through a critical realist perspective as way to address my research questions. Based on the proposal, that my research should be historical and longitudinal; critical realist informed and centred on an organizational phenomenon, I explored how these might work together at a methodological level in the next chapter. In doing so, a foundation for a study that would reconceptualise organizational identity was being laid.

## Chapter 2

### Methodological and Epistemological Considerations

#### *Introduction*

Having proposed to answer my research questions using an historical and longitudinal case study of OI enacted from a critical realist perspective, it was important to explore how these would work together at a research-level. Therefore, in this chapter the objective was to explore and discuss a number of methodological and epistemological issues that were relevant to what I have proposed. First, since critical realism is a relative newcomer to social scientific research (Easton, 2010), I took time to outline its core assumptions. Second, given that the proposed research was also going to be reliant on historical data and overlap with history, it was also necessary to consider the epistemological issues that may arise from this. In particular, I addressed the relationship between history and social science as rooted in two very different epistemological paradigms and, the reliability of using constructed and interpretive historical data within a critical realist framework. By reflecting on these issues, the objective of this chapter was to lay a foundation on which to build my research.

#### *Core Assumptions of Critical Realism*

Critical realism was originally developed by British philosopher, Roy Bhaskar (1979), and a number of accounts have since been offered (Sayer, 1992; 2000; Collier,

1994; Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobson, & Karlsson, 2002; Archer, 1995; Fleetwood, 2005). It has also been discussed in a wide number of social science disciplines such as geography (Yeung, 1997), historical sociology (Steinmetz, 1998), management, (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000) and information systems (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011). Nevertheless, despite such discussion of its utility for research, critical realism has not been widely used as an approach to empirical research. Thus, outlining the assumptions inherent to this methodology was important to clarify my methodological position. At its core critical realism assumes that social reality exists independently of our knowledge of and ability to observe it (Sayer, 1992). For this reason, critical realism assumes realist ontology but an interpretivist epistemology (Bygtsad & Munkvold, 2011) in that what we know about social reality is concept dependent. Thus, according to Sayer (2000), in addition to explaining social reality we also need to understand and render it meaningful; a meaning which also comes to constitute an independent social reality (Giddens, 1984). To emphasise, in terms of realism and social constructivism, critical realism sits somewhere between the two with social reality being on the one hand ontologically independent of agents (realist ontology) while on the other hand what we can know of it is concept dependent and constructed – an interpretive epistemology (Holmwood & Stewart, 1993).

Given the scepticism of critical realism to what can be known about an independent social reality a second assumption is made: that empiricism is unreliable. This is because additional to epistemology being interpretive, social reality is also assumed

to exist in an “open system” meaning that explanations for what occurs are contingent and explanatory rather than conjunctive and thus predictive. Sayer (1992) offers an example to illustrate this. An object in a closed system would be something like a planet, its motion and existence predictably determined by physical laws. Conversely, phenomenon like weather cannot be understood in a law-like and predictive way since there are many contingent combinations that can result in multiple possibilities – an open system. Thus, social phenomenon, such as that which is the object of my study, cannot be explained in an axiological manner since they exist in an open system in which interactions with other social entities and human agency can affect outcomes in any number of ways. Thus, the goal of critical realism is not develop predictive theory, but to explain how empirical events could have occurred on the basis of what could exist in an unobservable social reality. Indeed, rather than couch explanations in terms of causal conjunctions (in that A necessarily follows B), critical realist informed research attempts to uncover what must exist, how it works and under what conditions for A and B to have occurred.

This is developed into the idea that causal explanations within social science are contingent. In particular, social entities existing in the open system of social reality interact in ways that both enable and constrain what can occur as an event. Moreover, agents, of themselves, also interact with entities in social reality and through their reflexive capabilities may also interfere with how social entities interact. Thus, events arise from contingent combinations of interactions between

social entities (and agents). Sometimes these interactions may suppress the occurrence of an observable event or conversely they may enable an event to happen. To reiterate, any causal explanations in critical realism are necessarily contingent and not from regularities. Importantly, if causality is contingent then what is observed to happen cannot be an accurate basis for determining what exists in terms of social reality. For example, events observed to happen could be explained by a combined interaction between multiple social entities under a certain set of conditions. Moreover, non-observation of an expected event also does not necessarily mean that a social entity does not exist. Therefore, according to Bhaskar (1979), epistemology cannot be a reliable basis for ontological claims which he terms as epistemic fallacy.

A central idea in critical realism that explains why an independent social reality and empirical observations are distinct is that ontology is stratified. At the most surface layer there is the “empirical” domain which represents the observation of an event. Meanwhile, at the next layer is the domain of the “actual” in which events “actually” occur. This distinction is made because although an event may occur it may not be observed, thus recognising the classic problem of induction (Gordon, 1993). At the deepest layer of social reality, or its base, is the domain of the “real” where social entities exist which constitute social reality (see fig 1 overleaf).

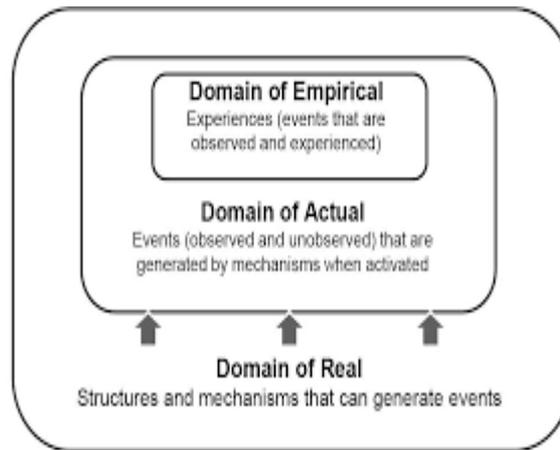


Figure 1: *Three Overlapping Domains of Reality in the Critical Realist Ontology (Mingers, 2004)*

The social entities that exist at the level of the real are comprised of structured relations so that a social object, such as slavery, comprises of a relation between master and slave (Sayer, 1992). This constitutes what Sayer describes as a necessary relation since without this relation, slavery could not exist. However, relations can also be asymmetrical in that one defines the other but does not depend on it. A further example Sayer gives was that of banking system, which depends on money, but money could exist without a banking system. There are also external relations, in which two social entities are independent of each other but may still interact. Finally, social reality also consists of ideas, values and beliefs (Easton, 2010) which according to Archer (1996), are cultural rather than structural yet both behave in similar ways (Hays, 1994). Importantly, a combination of necessary relations (structure) and external relations (conditions) are required to explain events otherwise events would be over determined by structure or too variable to have theoretical importance (Easton, 2010).

What is also central to explanation in critical realism is the idea that social entities have ways of working. That is their tendency to give rise to an event expresses notions of powers (which lead to events) and liabilities (susceptibility to be suppressed by other social entities). While this describes social entities it does not inform us of how they act. For this, Bhaskar (1979) introduces the concept of generative mechanisms that explain how social objects at the level of the real give rise to events at the level of the actual that are then observed in the empirical. Generative mechanisms are crucial to causal explanation and Easton (2010, p.122) offers a clear example:

A simple example of a mechanism would be a log jam or tipping point. When a buyer and seller have agreed on almost everything (structure and conditions), there is always the possibility of a deal breaker emerging. The crucial deal breaker condition then solely determines whether the event will take place. Recognising that the deal breaker is actually a deal breaker rather than just a part of the players' negotiating strategy then becomes crucial.

Although the above example identified a structural relation between buyer and seller, and the contingent conditions, it did not particularly take note of the role of agency. This highlights an important debate in social science – structure and agency (Archer, 1995; Reed, 1997). In brief, the debate concerns the differential weight given to either agency or structure explaining why things happen. If too much

emphasis is placed on agency, then explanation can become too voluntaristic to support theory development (Easton, 2010). Meanwhile, an over emphasis on structure can lead to explanations in which social reality and behaviour are over determined. However, agents are of themselves also social objects that have their own unique liabilities and powers and mechanisms alongside reflexive capabilities (Archer, 1995; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013). Further, it is agents that reproduce structural relations or alternatively may resist and even transform them (Archer, 1995). Thus, agents' are important within critical realist explanation since it is through them that structured social reality is enacted, reproduced, changed and its effects moderated.

A final assumption in critical realism is that of emergence in which higher-order social entities or properties *emerge* from patterns of organisation among social entities at a lower-level (Pratten, 2013). What emerges, while depending on this lower-level pattern of organization for its existence, is not reducible to its parts (Elder-vass, 2005). This principle can be applied to a business organization if one thinks of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984). Although primarily a management theory, it is assumed that an organization arises from a combination of different stakeholders' needs and values. Reframed in critical realist terms this can be thought of as the emergence of an organization; that while dependent on its stakeholders and their needs, values, ideas and beliefs it is non-reducible to them. To clarify, contingent combinations between social entities and/or cultural propositions can give rise to emergent social entities and properties that while

dependent on what underlies them, are not reducible to that from which they emerge.

There are an extensive amount of well-developed assumptions that critical realism relies upon. While it is acknowledged that some nuanced and complex debates exist around these (for example: Pratten, 2013; Collier, 1994; Archer, 1995), for the purpose of this thesis what has been offered here are the major central tenets of critical realist theory. Below, these have been summarised as a list that formed a methodological ground and interpretive framework for my research.

1. Social reality exists independently of our knowledge or ability to observe it.
2. Critical realism combines realist ontology with an interpretivist epistemology.
3. There is always a hermeneutical element to social science (see clause 2) since social objects are largely concept dependent.
4. Social science occurs in an open system meaning its objects are vulnerable to change by interactions with other objects and agents.
5. Causality and explanation in an open system is contingent rather than based on casual conjunctions of events.
6. The social world is ontologically stratified into three domains: The real, the actual and the empirical.

7. Objects in social reality (the real) are structured by relations, while culture (as ideas, values, and beliefs) also exists in this domain.
8. Social objects have powers and liabilities and the way in which they give rise to observable events is through their generative mechanisms.
9. Causal properties of some objects emerge from a configurative organization of objects and are non-reducible to, but dependent on this underlying structure.
10. Agents have reflexive capabilities and are those that enact, reproduce, elaborate or transform social structures and social reality.

### ***Critical Realism and Case Study***

Having outlined the core assumptions which underscored what methods I could use and how the research developed, I continued to reflect on and discuss some further methodological considerations. The first of which was the fit of critical realism with a case study approach. The relationship between critical realism and case study has been established by previous scholars (Easton, 2010; Dobson, 2001) and thus did not need to be covered in depth. Nevertheless, of importance has been the suggestion that critical realism is a good fit for case study research (Easton, 2010). In particular, Easton has argued that positivist and interpretivist epistemologies were difficult for case study research since the former is based on drawing inferences from multiple measures, while the latter can be too eclectic for drawing authoritative conclusions. However, critical realism sits between these poles and

goes beyond an interpretivist epistemology to identify what must exist to explain what has occurred. Thus, it is possible to invoke causal explanations without necessarily relying on repeated observations as common to positivist epistemology making critical realism suited to case study.

A second compatibility that Easton noted was in analytical style. The main approach used in critical realism is retrodution in which after having made interpretive observations of events, a researcher asks what must exist and how must it work to explain what has occurred (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011; Sayer, 1992). This does not mean that mechanisms are suggested *a priori* and then confirmed by data collection (Easton, 2010), nor are their identification reliant solely on induction from empirical data as in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather, an inductive approach is used to generate empirical data about events while abduction (retroductive reasoning) is employed to find the most plausible explanation for the events. Oscillating between these two approaches is well suited to case study since a researcher must move between theory and data iteratively to identify the most credible explanation for what has occurred and been observed (Yeung, 1997). Iterative data handling is commonly employed in case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2004) however, there is a subtle difference. Iterations in critical realism are not for the purposes of data saturation as in Grounded Theory, but for moving between data and theory and back again as part of the analytical process. Given that critical realism shares iterative processes in data handling and an acceptable epistemology and ontology, using a case study approach seemed appropriate.

### ***History, Social Science and Critical Realism***

Additional to using a case study approach, I previously suggested that notions of history and temporality would be relevant especially in relation to exploring whether or not OI is enduring or changeable (Brunninge, 2009). Thus, I proposed that my case study would need to be longitudinal and to some extent historical. This was contra to typical ideas about case study in which contemporary events are the subject of investigation (Yin, 2004). This particular issue is covered in the following chapter when selecting and justifying my case study. For now however, I wanted to explore further whether historical approaches and social science and critical realism were methodologically compatible. Indeed, it has been claimed that History and social science are not common bedfellows (Greenwood & Bernardi, 2014), that warranted further consideration before bringing them together within the same project.

The fusion of history and organizational research has been considered uncommon due to an epistemological split between the two disciplines (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004). This is reflected by history being typically regarded as hermeneutical, interpretive and narrative while organization studies are more concerned with developing generalisable theory using replicable methods (Zald, 2002). In reflecting on the epistemological differences between history and organizational research, Rowlinson et al. (2014), have discussed how these may be bridged. In particular, they identified four types of historical approach that were compatible with organization studies and a biographical “Corporate history” was stated as the most

classical yet problematic form. “Analytical history” was less problematic because it differs from the pure narrative of corporate history, in that a researcher uses theoretical constructs to search the archive and construct a narrative that is ‘driven by concepts, events and causation’ (p. 264). A third approach, “Serial history” was about analysing historical data looking for repeatable facts by using replicable techniques. For example, content analysis of historical data may uncover a patterned series of repeated incidents across a period of time (Anteby & Molnar, 2012). Finally, “ethnographic history” was mentioned that takes a somewhat more critical and observational stance such as analysing cultural practices, routines and rituals within an organization’s past (Childs, 2002).

It was considered important to take a stand with one of these approaches since Rowlinson et al. (2014) argued that to do so was a justification against potential critiques of being too narrative and interpretive when constructing from historical data. For example, narrative construction of the past could be argued to be rhetorical (Suddaby et al., 2010) or non-critical storytelling (Down, 2001). To avoid this, I needed to decide on which of the four approaches my use of historical data would be related to. In particular, because I proposed to look at OI within historical documents then this was to utilise any historical data with a specific theoretical construct in mind. Moreover, because I planned to take a critical realist approach then I would also be considering events (for example: change/non-change in OI) and explanation for them which are key to critical realism. From these, it was likely

that my research would fit into notions of conducting analytical history meaning it could be defended against criticisms of story-telling because:

Analytically structured history offers the possibility of constructing historical narratives using theories of organization that can be defended against social scientific objections to narrative construction (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p.268)

Aligning my research with this particular form of historical approach was helpful for positioning my research alongside current debates on epistemological differences between social science and History but was not strictly necessary. This was because critical realism already assumes an interpretive epistemology meaning the use and interpretation of historical data is acceptable without having to subscribe to relativism (Steinmetz, 1998). Indeed, although at an empirical level, events are interpretively reconstructed by a researcher from historical data, they are not then used as a basis to explain future constructed data or events. Instead, critical realist approaches conceive of the past being the temporally situated home of structure, social entities, and culture that contingently determine and can explain outcomes (Archer, 1995; 1996). Importantly, explanation is not over determined since in open system like society, contingency is the norm, a concept also common to historical explanation for events (Smith & Lux, 1993; Hewitson, 2014). Thus a critical realist approach to history avoids becoming simply a constructed and path dependent narrative of events (Booth, 2003), since events are contingently explained by a pre-

existent underlying social reality rather than from the events themselves (Collier, 1994; Steinmetz, 1998).

That critical realism situates structure within a past temporal space (Archer, 1995; 1996) means that a historical and temporal approach is actually useful for research informed by critical realism. Indeed, Archer argues that without inclusion of time, structure and agency are indistinguishable as in Giddens (1984) theory of structuration in which agents determine structures that simultaneously determine them. However, while she agrees that this reflects social reality at any given moment in time, when temporality is included it becomes possible to demarcate between structure and agency when explaining patterns of change and stasis in social phenomenon such as OI. Archer refers to this demarcation as analytical dualism, which is explained by her argument that structured social objects and culture are situated in morphogenetic cycles in which change or stability are always in relation to what pre-exists. Thus, temporality and notions of time in which cycles of change and non-change occur are of importance in critical realist explanations of dynamic events. Given that my research was concerned with OI as changeable vs. enduring (Gioia et al., 2000; 2013; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), temporality, and thus an historical approach was more than simply compatible with a critical realist methodology. Indeed, it would be essential to answering my research questions.

## ***Historical Data***

Any research which has an historical component draws upon documents, records, and artefacts that are deposited within an archive and are used to recreate the past (Mcdowell, 2002). Thus, it was also important to reflect on issues concerning archival data. As a data source, the archive has been brought into question since the development of subaltern and standpoint histories have highlighted its lack of objectivity (Rowbotham, 1973; Decker, 2013). Consequently, archival data have come to be recognised as limited by state power, and both communication and data technologies (Derrida, 1986 as cited in Manoff, 2004). Unsurprisingly, there is a mistrust of the authority of historical data and likewise historical accounts reflected in History's post-modern turn (Donnelly & Norton, 2011) as well as the suspicion of historical data by organizational scholars (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Indeed, a common expression regularly encountered is summarised by the well-known phrase "history is written by victors".

The inherent social and subjective biases of archival data however, were not problematic on this occasion. The interpretive epistemology of critical realism meant historical data could be accepted on its own terms as a previously constructed social reality rather than an objective and truthful record of what happened in the past. To emphasise, from the perspective of critical realism the past is not about previous events that explain a next set of events. Instead, it is the site of social reality that although co-constructed at one time, becomes structural or cultural as it becomes increasingly historically situated (Archer, 1996). Thus,

what exists in the past, irrespective of whether or not it is factually accurate becomes an accepted account of the way things were (and are) as opposed to what was actually the case (for example: Anteby & Molnar, 2012). Nevertheless, I did acknowledge that I would still be engaged in a double hermeneutic; interpretively engaged with historical data that of itself was also interpretive (Giddens, 1984). However, because my interpretive epistemology was combined with realist ontology this hermeneutic cycle was broken. By elevating above the data through using retrodution, I would be explaining the historical data as evidence to be explained in theoretical terms (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p.251), rather than only relying on interpretive data to explain interpretive data.

That historical data is something to be explained as well as being data that can be reconstructed suggests there is more to historical data than first meets the eye. Historical data is not simply a resource, or memories stored in an archive (as suggested by Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Instead, Archer (1996) argues that over time, the propositional contents of an archive (like libraries) become a cultural record of the past that is intransitive. By this, she means that over time the contents of an archive no longer depend on agents for their construction and are encountered by agents in future time as ready-made and historically situated. Thus, the contents of an archive (i.e. historical data) become a cultural phenomenon; part of a cultural-system that in effect has an ontological status of its own:

As an emergent entity the cultural system has an objective existence and autonomous relations among its components (theories, beliefs, values, arguments, or more strictly its propositional formulations of them) in the sense that these are independent of anyone's claims to know, to believe, to assert or assent them. At any moment the cultural system is the product of socio-cultural interaction, but having emerged (emergence being a continuous process) then *qua product*, it has properties of its own. Like structure, culture is man-made but escapes its makers by being able to act back upon them (Archer, 1996, pp. 104-107).

Given this, the archive and the data within it have an independence from their construction and whether or not they are an accurate or inaccurate record, in this case was relatively unimportant. According to Archer, a past cultural-system is a ready-made construct that agents encounter and in doing so, by nature of its emergent properties, it can act upon agents irrespective of its factual accuracy. Thus, historical data are not simply passive artefacts or memories for agents' constructive capabilities to create an OI or an organizational story. Rather, from the perspective of critical realism, the propositional contents of archival data are an ontologically independent cultural phenomenon that like structure, can be an explanation for the occurrence of events in the actual that may (or may not) be empirically observed. To emphasise, the truthfulness and/or objectivity of the past as a data source was not a pre-requisite for my use of historical documents to be credible.

## ***Summary***

In presenting and discussing my methodology and the associated issues surfaced by my particular research, in this chapter I have attempted to lay a foundation for my study of OI. Principally, I have proposed to adopt a critical realist approach that means my research used an interpretivist epistemology combined with realist ontology. Moreover, the use of critical realism has been demonstrated to be congruent with case study and to some extent is less problematic than adopting a positivist or solely interpretive research paradigm. Because I also envisaged using historical data, the possibilities and limitations of this have also been explored. First, by taking an analytical approach to history in which theory and concepts direct engagement with historical data, a slippage into corporate narrative and story-telling could be avoided. Second, both critical realism and historical approaches share an interpretivist epistemology and both uphold that causal explanations for events must be contingent rather than over-determined or too relativistic to be of theoretical importance.

It was also discussed that temporality (and thus history) is important for demarcating between structure and agency and essential for understanding change and non-change in socio-cultural phenomena which included OI (Archer, 1995; 1996; Brunninge, 2009). Finally, with regard to historical data itself, although it has been socially constructed at one time, over time it forms part of a cultural-system that has emergent properties and thus can be considered to some extent an ontologically independent reality irrespective of its original subjectivity. On these

grounds, it was methodologically justifiable to conduct a longitudinal and historical case study of OI using a corporate archive and primary historical data that could be enacted within a critical realist framework. Consequently, in the following chapter, the way in which the study was planned and actualised is fully explained.

## Chapter 3

### Devising, Constructing and Undertaking the Research

#### Method

##### *Introduction*

Following establishment of a methodological foundation and exploration of cross-disciplinary issues, it was to developing a method that this chapter is devoted. Indeed, critical realism has been argued to lack a method (Yeung, 1997) meaning this would need some consideration. Moreover, historical work also lacks a transparent method (Rowlinson, 2004) reflecting its epistemological difference to social science (Rowlinson et al., 2014). However, because the research used an historical approach to an organizational issue rather than being an historical study, I deemed it important to set out a clear research design and follow an established qualitative method for generating empirical data from historical sources. Adopting an explicit qualitative method did not preclude using historical method in favour of a more social scientific approach. Rather, historical method of reflexivity on authorship, audience, content and purpose of textual data (McAuley, 2004) was used in parallel to ensure a rigorous treatment of historical material.

The first part of this chapter was concerned with development of a research design and strategy which included adapting a critical realist research framework (Bygtsad

& Munkvold, 2011) to reflect my research objectives and include Archer's (1995, 1996) notions of temporality and analytical dualism. The structure of my research design provided a framework for the whole study. Following this, I discussed and described what was actually enacted around the research design. In particular this was the selection of my case and qualitative method, periodisation of the research and how to operationalise OI. I also went on to consider the ethical issues that would be involved in conducting the research. In the latter section of the chapter, I explained my data sources and how I extracted and organised textual data into a way in which the data could then be represented and analysed in subsequent chapters.

### ***Developing a Research Framework***

In outlining critical realism Bhaskar (1986) proposed a six-step model for critical realist research. In particular these steps were: resolution of observed events into components; redescribing components into theoretical terms; retrodution of the possible antecedents of the components; elimination of other possible explanations; identifying mechanisms and finally re-presenting the case. The model was termed RRREI(C); however, scholars have noted that its application to the social sciences is difficult since Bhaskar recommended that "elimination of explanations" should be achieved by experimental research (Steinmetz, 1998). This critique led Bhaskar to develop an adapted model which has been criticised by Collier (1994) for the same reasons. Alternatively, Collier proposed a simpler model of abstraction into components; describing components followed by retrodution

and elaboration. Simplification of Bhaskar's framework was also undertaken by Bygstad and Munkvold (2011), who proposed a clear and stepped framework outlined below:

1. Describe the events that have been observed.
2. Identify the key components – abstract from the data and theory what structures and entities are indicated by the events (Sayer, 1992).
3. Theoretical re-description – describe the case in terms of relevant theories.
4. Retroduction – argumentation to suggest interactions between structures.
5. Generating a number of mechanisms that explain the effect of structures on events.
6. Selecting the most explanatory mechanism.

Although these six steps acted as useful guidelines for conducting a critical realist study, I intended to enact a critical realist approach to understanding what OI is like rather than conduct a critical realist study to explain how OI may work. This highlighted a limitation of using these guidelines since steps 5 and 6 were focused on uncovering causal explanatory mechanisms. However, my research objective was not to develop a causal theory of how change and non-change in OI occurs but to use critical realism to offer a descriptive account of OI based on my empirical study. Thus, these six steps represented a starting point as opposed to a prescribed set of rules to follow. Moreover, since I had also proposed to include temporality and expected historical data to be foremost in the research, I needed to integrate

and draw on theoretical ideas from analytical dualism and the morphogenetic approach advanced by Archer (1995; 1996), which are absent from traditional critical realist research models. Thus, for pragmatic reasons, rather than follow the six steps of a critical realist framework, there was a need driven by the research requirements to construct an adapted research design.

Indicated by the first step was that an event or events needed to be observed and then explained, meaning that to begin with, I needed to identify what events I wanted to observe. Principally, this was organizational identity but because OI of itself is not an event, I needed to observe something about OI. My first research question was concerned with the dynamical but essential properties of OI – whether OI was changeable or enduring over time. Thus, the events I could observe were OI dynamics over time. When exploring temporal dynamics, Archer (1995; 1996) has recommended an extended period of time with more than two analytical points. This is because binary comparisons are conjunctive as in (T1) vs. (T2), thereby foregrounding change and not capturing temporality and thus notions of endurance. Thus, I needed to observe OI dynamics over a series of specifically chosen time points.

Moreover, a longitudinal design was useful for my second research question on whether OI could be considered independent from agents' construction of it since according to critical realism what is constructed at one time, over time becomes independent of agents (Sayer, 1992; Archer, 1995). Thus, I also wanted to develop

an empirical way to observe OI as it was originally constructed by agents in its beginning and then, if and how it became independent of agents over time. On the basis of this, combined with what I discussed in the previous paragraph, I considered my research should trace an OI from its inception and over multiple time points to make empirical observations of OI dynamics. From these observations it would then be possible to attempt to develop a credible explanation for what was observed in OI dynamics (as an event to be explained). Consequently, I intended to be empirically naïve, allowing my generation of OI and observation of its dynamics over time to be inductive and emergent from data (step one). Meanwhile, I could be theoretically analytical and descriptive through use of retroduction, thereby reflecting steps two, three and four of Bygstad and Munkvold's (2011) framework. Steps five and six were considered less important for my research since they focused on identifying mechanisms which was not the aim of my study.

From this discussion a way in which to conduct my research was forthcoming. First, because I wanted to observe OI dynamics over an extended period of time I needed an opportunity to access an organization with sufficient historicity and a corporate archive. Second, I would need to generate OI from their archival data for multiple time periods enabling me to comparatively observe OI dynamics. Having made empirical observations of events, by using retroductive reasoning I would then need to explain empirical OI dynamics to develop a theoretically grounded yet empirically induced analysis of what had been observed. On the basis of this it would then be

possible to develop an account of what OI could be like. In keeping with a stepwise framework, I constructed the following adapted research design:

1. Access an organizational archive.
2. Generate OI from textual sources across multiple time points beginning at the inception of the organization.
3. Comparatively describe the dynamics of OI across time points.
4. Using retroductive reasoning, develop a theoretically credible explanation of what was observed.
5. On the basis of empirical observation and theoretical explanation develop an account of what OI is like.

From these steps it was also apparent that a framework for what could be described as an analytical history of OI within a particular case setting had been outlined (Rowlinson et al., 2014). This reflected that my research was cross-disciplinary, weaving together both history and organization studies. As such, it was also expected that the resultant study would take on a somewhat more narrative style than a traditional qualitative study but would also be likely to retain elements of an analytical form, particularly around generation and analysis of OI dynamics. My framework also highlighted that there were a number of other important issues to address; in effect a full research strategy was outstanding (Eisenhardt, 1989). For example, first, I needed to select a case organization while second, to demarcate the case into multiple analytical time points known as periodisation (Rowlinson,

2004). Third, a qualitative method to generate OI from textual sources was required and fourth, I also needed to consider a way in which to operationalise OI, especially as the construct of itself was being interrogated.

### ***The Case Study***

According to Yin (2004), when undertaking a case study it is important to define and justify the case that will be used. Typically, case study deals in contemporary events that are investigated using a spread of sources and methods such as interviews, observations and documentary analysis. However, as I was using an historical approach to study OI then my research had more overlap with analytical history than case study. Nevertheless, case study is an empirical enquiry undertaken to provide an in-depth contextualised understanding of a bounded phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Thus, while not strictly doing a case study, notions of the case study approach to research had relevance. For one, a case was needed in which to study the phenomenon of OI, while second, analysis of OI across multiple time points would represent a kind of single embedded case study in which multiple analytical units exist within one case (Yin, 2004). Moreover, case study draws upon more than one data source (triangulation) to enhance the credibility of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989), which was similar to how historical researchers utilise a wide variety of primary sources (McDowell, 2002; Donnelly & Norton, 2011). Thus, although not restricting myself to study a contemporary event, the research could be framed as an historical case study of OI.

There were certain criteria I had for selecting a case. First, the organization would need a well-developed archive with a wide range of primary sources. Second, the organization would also need to have been in existence for an extended period of time during which change events had occurred. Finally, the organization would have to be willing to grant access. There were several UK-based organizations that may have been viable, for example Cadbury or Unilever. However, according to research conducted by Rowlinson and Hassard (1993) the Cadbury archive can be difficult to navigate and is not well organised. In discussion with various UK-based companies complete access was granted to the archive of Walgreens Boots Alliance (formerly Boots the Chemist) located in Nottingham, in which the Archive and Records Manager described the company as: “keen to obtain an objective academic view of any claims we can make about our history”. No restrictions were put on my use of the archive save for data protection with more recent documents. Added to unrestricted access was that the archive is extensive and of high quality (Scott, 2012), which was reflected in funding being awarded to the archive by Wellcome Trust while my research was being conducted. Finally, the company also had sufficient historicity having been operational since 1849 meaning all selection criteria had been satisfied. To introduce the company further, a brief general synopsis of the organization is offered below.

Walgreens Boots Alliance is currently a multinational health and beauty company that was created in December, 2014 from a merger between the private equity owned Alliance Boots and Walgreens in the U.S. The previous company, Alliance

Boots, had also been formed from a merger between Boots and Alliance Unichem in 2006. Thus, in its recent past the company has undergone significant change. Before 2006 however, the most salient aspect of the company was called Boots the Chemist with two other businesses: Boots Contract Manufacturing and Boots Healthcare International. For pragmatic reasons, throughout the research I simply refer to the company in the most part as a single entity - Boots. Before becoming the multinational corporation it is today, Boots began as an independent herbalist shop in the mid-nineteenth century in a slum area of Nottinghamshire. It rapidly expanded under the ownership of Jesse Boot to become a cash chemist and manufacturer, following his inheritance of the herbalists from his mother. The growth of the company was legally contested by the pharmacy trade of the day which led to the rise and development of chain pharmacy in the UK.

The company was also operational throughout both World Wars of which after the first, Jesse sold the company in 1920 to United Drug Company in the United States. By the early 1930s Boots had come back into British ownership under the leadership of Jesse Boot's son, John. Under his watch, the company opened its 1000<sup>th</sup> store in 1933, built one of the world's leading manufacturing plants at Nottingham and carried out extensive developments in the pharmaceutical production of Insulin and penicillin. Following the Second World War, the company were also faced with the inauguration of the *NHS* in 1948 and following Boots development of the drug Ibuprofen in 1969 also gained considerable international acclaim. After this time the company were also expanding overseas and diversifying

their merchandise range. During the 1980s this was taken to a new level with the company expanding rapidly into non-healthcare markets by purchasing Halfords car-parts chain, DIY and decorating chains, and establishing the retail chain, Children's World. However, into the Millennium Boots became more streamlined, selling these non-chemist businesses and focusing on holistic wellbeing services before merging with Alliance Unichem in 2006. Given such a rich and dynamic past, Boots represented an ideal organization in which to undertake my research.

### ***Periodisation of the Case***

Having satisfactorily found an organization in which to conduct my research, the next step was to consider how to split the case into multiple units of time to allow comparative observation of OI dynamics. Temporal splitting is known as periodisation and involves choosing where to begin, end and identifying significant junctures in the case (Rowlinson, 2004). There are no specific guidelines for how to achieve this and to a large extent it depends on the research objective. However, it can be theoretically informed or inductively generated from the case itself. The latter was especially appropriate since Whipp and Clarke (1986 as cited in Rowlinson et al., 2014 p. 263) claim for analytical history:

The periodization is derived from the sources, rather than imposed from an external historical context, and events in an organization constitute the turning points between one period and the next.

Nevertheless, there were also theoretical reasons for expecting OI dynamics that have been evidenced by previous research. For example: change in comparative context (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996); mergers (Clark et al., 2010); changes in operating environment (He & Baruch, 2010); external criticisms (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991); management aspirations (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); trans-national buyouts (Anteby & Molnar, 2012); and finally increasing size and maturity (Albert & Whetten, 1985) have all been implicated in OI dynamics. With these factors in mind, I scoped the archive for a period of two weeks, primarily looking at annual reports to establish how best to divide the data into analytical units of time and find an appropriate start and finish point.

From the scoping exercise it was decided that the research should be bracketed between 1892 and 2002, a period of 110 years. Selecting the initial time point later than the 'authorised' company start date of 1877 reflected the paucity of archival material before 1892. Meanwhile, the decision to finish at the turn of the Millennium was grounded on data protection concerns and restricted use of more modern records. Within this time span four distinctive sub-units of time were identified. The sub-units were as follows: *Time 1 [1892-1920]* was the genesis of Boot's OI and the business as a whole. Importantly, in 1920 the business was sold to

the United Drug Company passing from British to American ownership. This was seen as a significant event since international transfer could give rise to identity change (cf. Anteby & Molnar, 2012). Boots came back into British hands in 1933 and both expanded and developed while enduring World War II. Moreover, in 1948 the *NHS* was inaugurated, marking a significant change in the company's operating environment (cf. He & Baruch, 2010) since public health was now a nationalised affair. This combined with new-found peace across Europe helped to bracket *Time 2 [1921-1949]* as a period which a) may have changed from Time 1 and b) may have preceded an identity change in the following time period. *Time 3 [1950-1977]* followed chronologically and reflected peace-time, an established *NHS* and increasing public wealth. The business expanded further and developed the drug Ibuprofen.

At the close of this time period, Boots' marked its centenary in 1977 which coincided with the end of "company-grown", family-oriented management. Boots' launch into a new era was considered a suitable juncture for the final period of *Time 4 [1978-2002]*. During this time frame, Boots were increasingly more corporate and mature, navigating new social ideas such as neoliberal economics under Thatcherism and environmentalism. The organization went through rapid growth, diversification, and management changes but became increasingly more stable through the 1990s and into the Millennium. Despite multiple changes within this period, Time 4 was taken to represent a single (but dynamic) unit to follow the previous temporal division of the case. These four discrete blocks of time

represented chronologically ordered, comparative units of analysis (T1), (T2), (T3) and (T4) from which to make longitudinal observations of OI dynamics. Thus, periodisation of the data was driven by a combination of induction from the historical data itself that was further guided by, and had overlap with theories of when significant junctures in Boot's OI may have been likely to occur.

### ***Method Selection***

Choosing a qualitative method was not straightforward since critical realism supports an eclectic interpretive epistemology rather than points to any specific method (Yeung, 1997). Nevertheless, there has been some consensus that by having an interpretive epistemology, qualitative approaches are the most appropriate (Mingers, Mutch, & Willcocks, 2013; Yeung, 1997). In practice, it has been mentioned that when a critical realist approach is taken the types of qualitative methods used are not made explicit (Ravasi & Canato, 2013) with only a mere description of empirical events being offered prior to retroductive analysis (for example: Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011; Easton, 2010; Horrocks, 2009). This practice of "quick rather than thick" data handling can bypass how researchers' descriptions and observations were achieved which is important for establishing the trustworthiness of any qualitative data and its subsequent interpretation (Golafshani, 2003). To support the credibility of my research, I appealed to historical method as a way to be critically sensitive toward my data sources (McDowell, 2002; Donnelly & Norton, 2011) alongside adopting a transparent qualitative method.

Grounded Theory Method (GTM) combined with data triangulation has been suggested as a good method for critical realist based research (Yeung, 1997). However, because I was not dealing with contemporary events and opting for primarily an historical case study, data triangulation through interviews and observations were not appropriate. Moreover, while GTM (as conceived by Glaser & Strauss, 1967) appeared to offer a structured way in which to process and extract data from documents, it arguably overly privileges empirical data beyond the philosophical assumptions of critical realism. Indeed, critical realist research must at some point elevate above the data to explain events through retrodution (Sayer, 1992). Content analysis was also considered since this offered a systematic way to analyse documents by processes of coding and frequency counting (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). However, although content analysis works well at the level of a limited cross-sectional data set, it would be challenged by the changes in language over time that would occur in a longitudinal corpus of archival documents (Krippendorff, 1980). Further, being more useful for recording frequencies of specific codes rather than the interpretive meaning of codes (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), its use may have restricted any depth of engagement with the data. These limitations of content analysis led me to consider a related but more flexible research method – Thematic Analysis.

The advantage of using thematic analysis was two-fold. First, it did not carry any epistemological or ontological commitments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was important since critical realism combines epistemological interpretivism with

ontological realism. Second, it permitted oscillation between inductive observation of the data and use of theory meaning that themes could be generated from the data but simultaneously be theoretically shaped (Yeung, 1997). This was important since historical data already exists and thus the reconstruction of it needs to be led with a specific theoretical construct in mind. Indeed, because I was undertaking a type of analytical history, then I needed to be guided by a prior theoretical understanding of OI to engage with the historical data. In the context of my research, thematic analysis would then help me to inductively generate OI themes from the historical data to surface OI in keeping with my interpretive epistemology, but generating OI could be guided by what is theoretically known about OI.

Despite its utility as a method there were some potential limitations to using thematic analysis. First, being reliant on what actually exists within the archive thematic analysis does not easily draw attention to silences that have their own story to tell (Carter, 2006; Decker, 2013; Anteby & Molnar, 2012). However, this difficulty was mitigated since comparative analysis of themes across units of time would show both elaborations and omissions of identity themes rendering silences somewhat audible. Second, thematic analysis could also be considered a rather blunt tool as it is reductionist and doesn't always offer a thick, contextualised description of all the data. However, in justifying the themes that I would generate and trace through chronological units of time, I would descriptively elaborate their content and in doing so would *qua product* create a narrative and contextualised account of OI. This would be contra to producing a rich, but overly excessive

biographical account of the entire organizational history of the company that may conceal data patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989).

### ***Operationalising Organizational Identity***

Having now established a research strategy, selected a case and method and undertaken periodisation of the case, there was one more requirement to address that was of central importance to conducting the research. Since the very concept of OI itself was being investigated, a theoretical way to operationalise OI was necessary. On the one hand this would need to avoid making ontological assumptions about OI while on the other hand, aide generation of OI from the data. According to Albert and Whetten (1985), OI can be self-referential statements an organization makes about itself that are central, distinctive and enduring – a realist position. However, a number of literature reviews (including my own in chapter one of this thesis) have highlighted that OI is both chaotic and ontologically pluralist (for example: Ravasi & Canato, 2013; He & Brown, 2013; Whetten, 2006). To proceed required an inclusive model of OI that took account of this complexity without an ontological bias.

One such model (that has been previously mentioned in my literature review) was the five facet model of OI (Soenen & Moingeon 2002, see figure 2. below). The facets were professed, projected, experienced, manifested and attributed identity. Other identity categories such as ‘conscious’ versus ‘latent’ identity have also been suggested (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). However, these levels could exist within each

facet of identity and notions of conscious identity suggest ontological ideas that OI can exist as a psychological construct that is available to organizational members (cf. Halsam et al., 2003). Conversely, the five facet model was ontologically silent, focusing instead on synthesising the different ways in which OI is manifested as an epistemological phenomenon. The combination of this inclusivity and breadth along with the absence of ontological assumptions commended the five facet model as a useful way to operationalise OI without taking a premature ontological leap and respecting its conceptual complexity.

- The *professed* identity refers to what a group or an organization professes about itself. It is the answer, the statement(s) or the claim(s) that organizational members use to define their (collective) identity.
- The *projected* identity refers to the elements an organization uses, in more or less controlled ways, to present itself to specific audiences. It notably consists of communications, behaviors, and symbols. The key distinction between the *professed* and the *projected* identity is that the latter is mediated.
- The *experienced* identity refers to what organizational members *experience*, more or less consciously, with regard to their organization. It consists of a collective representation held by members.
- The *manifested* identity refers to a specific set of more or less tightly coupled elements that have characterized the organization over a period of time. It may be conceived as an organization's "historical" identity.
- The *attributed* identity refers to the attributes that are ascribed to the organization by its various audiences. It differs from the experienced identity which is self-attributed.

Figure 2: *The five facet model of OI reproduced from Soenen and Moingeon (2002, p.17)*

Difficulties were also apparent from using this model. First, it gave no way to define OI and thus offer a workable criterion for identifying OI in documentary sources. However, since my epistemological foundation was interpretive, archival sources could be interrogated by asking a singular question: “what does this statement, action, material or artefact say about the organization”? This meant that all data could contain either explicit or latent identity text (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) within any given data source or facet of OI. A second difficulty was the compatibility of the five facets with the type of data available. For example, experienced identity would not be easily identifiable in a corporate archive since this would rely on accounts of Boot’s identity from multiple organizational members. Although some individual accounts did exist within the archive (e.g. interview notes from the 1970s of senior board members), these were individual rather than collective and also testimony, which is considered unreliable by historians (Megill, 2007). Manifested identity was also redundant since this referred to an historical identity (See fig 2.). Indeed, because my research was already considering OI through an historical lens, manifested identity would be more suited to research on OI informed by ‘current’ organizational members’ reference to an historical identity.

On the basis that manifested and experienced identity were not likely to be relevant or readily available within the archive, these two facets of OI were not used. This left behind professed, projected and attributed facets of identity. To this was added a fourth category I termed “Corporate Identity” (CI). In keeping with Cornelissen et al.’s (2007 p. 54) distinction between OI as analytical and CI as

'material manifestations of identity', I considered material aspects of the organization (such as information about products, buildings, uniforms and processes etc.) to be a potentially useful source of latent or symbolic identity themes. Thus, the original five facet model was adapted to now include four facets of OI that served an important function for operationalising OI. This was not so much along the lines of what did or did not constitute OI; such as only statements that only began with "we are..." could represent identity texts. Indeed, this would have overlooked the richness of the data and strayed from interpretive generation of OI. Rather, the facet model lent itself to identifying what could be a relevant OI text such as self-referential, or mediated, claims about "who we are" as well as expressions of identity that were less explicit. For example, OI could be encoded in claims to certain beliefs, ideas and values (Archer, 1996) that would sometimes be obvious "we believe that..." and other times evidenced through policies and practices, which may then be interpreted. While this arguably could have been captured more simply by notions of conscious and latent identity (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) there were a number of other benefits to using an adapted five facet model.

Three important benefits were added by using the facet model within the research. First, it helped with identifying sources that may be relevant to OI in what was an extensive corporate archive. An overabundance of sources can create dilemmas about which to use (Kobrak & Schneider, 2011; Fridenson, 2008; Rowlinson, 2004) and according to McDowell (2002), specificity is key when confronted with a large number of sources. Thus, the facet model acted as a navigational tool and

suggested potential sources. For example, professed identity may have been present in annual reports, while projected identity in promotional or communication driven documents. Attributed identity was likely to have appeared in trade journals and market research reports. Second, the model also supported the hermeneutical sensitivity required when using historical sources (McAuley, 2004; McDowell, 2002; Donnelly & Norton, 2011). Indeed, using the facets encouraged me to engage in historical method to identify the audience, author, and intended purpose of each document when searching for identity related texts.

A final benefit came from the fact that using four different facets of OI would enhance the credibility of my findings. To explain, if similar themes were generated in between two and four facets, then these could be accepted as strong and broadly evidenced themes, whereas themes only generated in one facet would have less breadth of evidence and thus could be excluded or treated with greater caution. Although this was not the type of data triangulation common to case study dealing with contemporary events (Yin, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yeung, 1997) it nevertheless enhanced the credibility of identity themes I generated from the thematic analysis. Indeed, having OI themes represented across multiple facets, generated from evidence across sources and not privileging any one source (Rojas, 2010), would give a robust and broad evidence base. Given such benefit to using an adapted five facet model, it was arguably superior to notions of conscious or latent identity, which if used alone did not offer credibility or archival strategy. Thus, the

primary way I approached the data was mediated through the use of this adapted model of organizational identity.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

In finishing my research design and strategy I also reflected on the way in which I *ought* to conduct the research in relation to ethics. Material within any archive, although collected for a variety of purposes pertains to people and ideas meaning that ethical issues surround the use of 'private' archival sources. For my research in the field of business, these issues concerned the tension between open-access vs. corporate privacy (Sillitoe, 2009; Danielson, 1989). Importantly, since Boots is currently operational in the present my research had to be sensitive to what was at stake – namely the reputation of the business (MacDonald, 1989). Moreover, there are currently no legal obligations in the UK for businesses to keep records for the purpose of preserving history (“Corporate Memory”, The National Archives, 2009). Thus, to have been granted access was a privilege meaning due regard for the reputation of the business was a priority. For example, inclusion of sensitive material pertaining to the organization or drawing unbalanced negative critique would be unlikely to foster a relationship of trust necessary for promoting access.

This relationship between access, privacy and reputation surfaced a second tension between academic rigour and truthfulness about archival contents vs. whitewashing the organization's past in marketing-style reporting. Indeed, the issue becomes particularly salient when addressing any historical records, be they

pertaining to either organizations or living persons. While unfiltered truthfulness runs a risk of posing a threat to organizational or familial reputation, censorship could be misleading and result in a loss of academic credibility and validity (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1998). To guard against either, of central importance were the research questions to be asked. In this project they were negotiated and co-developed between me as the researcher, the corporate organization and the supporting academic institution (University of Warwick). Through regular stakeholder meetings, the development of my research questions and the whole research process was shared with senior executive teams at Boots, and I was mindful of corporate reputation in the formulation of the whole project. Although this was no guarantee of what would be uncovered, it helped to build trust, provide stakeholder reassurance and generate corporate interest in the project. Such a collaborative approach has also been suggested by other historians when working in corporate archives (Kobrak & Schneider, 2011).

Because ethical management of the relationship between access, privacy and corporate reputation involved trust, I also reflected on more practical concerns in terms of my integrity and behaviour as a researcher working with potentially sensitive data. Toward promoting trust, the following personal code of conduct was developed out of the '*code of conduct*' of the Archive and Records Association UK and Ireland (ARA, updated in 2016) as an ethical guideline for my professional conduct.

1. Not seeking to gain any personal or private benefit for oneself based on the information available (for example, by selling information online or to a journalist).
2. Not attempting to access through manipulation or use any restricted sensitive information that may surround specific documents.
3. Allowing the archive manager and interested internal stakeholders the opportunity to access findings at any stage of the research process.
4. If original or replicated documents were removed from the archive (with permission) for further examination, then appropriate steps were taken to secure them (in a locked filing cabinet and password restricted computerised files) to minimise the possibility of access by third parties.
5. Not discussing aspects of the business, its operations or policies with members of the public.

There were also some final considerations around the personal information of individuals. These are subject to legislative Acts (Data Protection Act, 1998 & Freedom of Information (FOi) Act, 2000) and as such extensive guidance for handling any personal data was available from: [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Some personal data came from deceased persons within the company, in which case there were fewer restrictions. However, since the data remains the private property of Walgreens Boots Alliance, potentially sensitive information relating to named or recognisable individuals necessitated that permission from the organization would need to be sought in the event of any publications of work including this

information. Sensitive personal information is defined under Article 1 part 2 of the Data Protection Act (1998) as: 'racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religious beliefs, trade union membership, mental or physical health conditions, sexual life and the commission of offences and their related proceedings'. Moreover, since the scale of the research encompassed the latter end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, data concerning living persons were treated with greater caution. Given the complex nature of data protection and FOi legislation, archival sources that have been used from this time were subject to the professional supervision of the company archive manager.

## **Conducting the research**

### ***Data Sources***

The empirical data were entirely derived from over a century of primary sources within the Boots archive, an approach followed by Lusiani and Zan (2011) in their historical case study of an international ceramics museum. In contrast to their use of a limited range of documents, my analysis relied on a wide number of documents from multiple sources. According to Barr et al. (1992, as cited in He & Baruch, 2010, p. 49), annual reports 'provide a robust source for longitudinal studies and can provide insight for strategic and identity changes over time'. In addition, internal staff magazines were also used which according to Griffiths (1999), can offer a window into organizational culture (see also Phillips, 2008). Board minutes, newspaper accounts, memoirs, administration documents, trade press and

advertisements have all been suggested as useful for organizational history (Rowlinson et al., 2010; Armstrong, 1991). However, equipped with the adapted five facet model I identified a number of sources that were relevant to my research.

These were:

- *Professed identity*: Annual reports, trade journals, political documents, internal documents
- *Projected identity*: Shareholder brochures, prestige advertising, recruitment brochures, staff magazines, internal newsletters
- *Attributed identity*: Independent press articles, correspondence, trade journals (*Chemist & Druggist*), market research reports, governmental correspondences
- *Corporate identity*: Staff training manuals, merchandising guides, product guides, building articles

In practice, while there remained a tendency of a source to address one facet of identity (for example, annual reports contained many more professed identity statements than “mediated” shareholder brochures), there were often multiple facets of OI co-existing within the same document. Moreover, initial readings of documents led to identifying additional sources. For example, a brief mention of a meeting in an annual report would prompt tracking down the minutes of the meeting or associated documents. Thus, at times, sourcing data was iterative and also guided inductively.

A second point of note surrounding data was that sources were not available for all time frames reflecting the contingent and dynamic nature of the archive as a repository limited and 'shaped by social, political and technical forces' (Mannoff, 2004, p. 12). For example, recruitment brochures were not available as a source of projected identity in Time 1 (1892-1920), likely reflecting the way recruitment practices may have changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The size and development of the organization also played a role in what documents were available. For example, shareholder brochures became increasingly important only after the 1930s when Boots became increasingly owned by shareholders. In the opposite direction, prestige advertising became increasingly redundant through time as Boots advertising became more product based and brand-led. However, there were some strong, consistent sources providing a supporting foundation to any source fluctuations such as chairman statements in annual reports, staff magazines (*The Bee; Beacon; Boots News; Blueprint*) and more generally, wider corporate communication documents and brochures.

### ***Data Extraction, Organisation and Theme Generation***

Over all time periods I selected in excess of 1,200 documents to analyse across the sources listed above, spending about two years on collection, data extraction and analysis of documents. The work was extensive and labour intensive with many sources containing large numbers of separate documents. For example, staff magazines were bound into non-indexed annuals containing multiple-page weekly magazines. Meanwhile, shareholder scrap books contained several hundred

individual documents glued into A2 size volumes that had to be carefully processed page by page. Collecting data involved eight visits to the archive, which spanned on average two weeks per-visit to sift and identify primary material that would be relevant. Such a large corpus of material required systematic handling of the data and I focused on each time unit consecutively and chronologically. Thus, I processed all the data from Time 1 before moving on to Time 2 and so forth. At each pre-arranged archival visit, I requested archival material a week in advance as a starting point and from this would request more material as my search widened. After a period of initial immersion to visually scan documents, I selected individual items that were rich in identity related material. Where possible these were photocopied by the archive team allowing me to spend time manually transcribing statements from sources and documents that could not be copied. Following an archive visit the archive manager would mail boxes of photocopied documents for me to analyse away from the archive site.

To analyse the archival material, I pre-selected four colour codes to represent each of the four facets of OI. For projected identity I used red, for professed identity, green, attributed identity was coded pink and for CI, I used blue. Using these colours, I closely read each document critically reflecting on author, audience, purpose and content highlighting text that was appropriate to a given identity facet. Within one document there were often multiple colour codes used, however, there was a tendency for a document (for example: a newspaper advert to be coded predominately using one colour – in this case green). Having coded all documents

for one time period in this way, I then transcribed each segment of text to a master document in Microsoft Word using the appropriate colour as a type face. This resulted in a single document with multiple, colour-coded texts. Following this, I copy and pasted out of the master document all text excerpts of one colour code or identity facet which resulted in a series of four documents containing text categorised into each separate identity facet. Classifying into identity facets was not always straightforward. For example, a self-referential statement beginning with “we are...” might appear in a newspaper advert or staff magazine. Thus, when there was a conflict over which code to use, some excerpts were occasionally coded for twice reflecting their dual nature.

To retain track of sources each excerpt was titled with the document it came from following the statement and a personal cataloguing reference code posted at the front end. For example, if a piece of text was coloured red and from a Time 1 period document it was given a pre-fix code of: T1\_prf\_Id\_1, 2, 3 etc. which stood for Time 1, Professed Identity, Text 1, 2, 3. Following this, I employed Braun & Clarke’s (2006) guidance for conducting thematic analysis by formulating a lexical thematic descriptor for an excerpt by asking my interpretive question “what does this text say about Boots?” The descriptor was then written in the margin next to the statement. Not all statements selected were possible to summarise and these were simply marked with an X and not included further. At this point each sub-document now had a text, its referencing codes, title and a descriptive theme. Each descriptive theme was then copied into a thematic document for each sub-

document resulting in four redacted documents with reference codes and descriptors (now excluding the actual text itself). These pages were then printed and line-by-line each reference code and its descriptor were manually cut out allowing me to physically sort the descriptors for each document into groups.

At this stage, I had a number of reference-coded descriptors for each data extract, grouped together, to which I then applied thematic labels. When there were less than three descriptors in a group, I classified these themes as weak and excluded them. Where there were more than four descriptors for a theme these were considered strong. On occasion, some themes were overlapping and if appropriate these were re-thematised. For example: themes such as philanthropic, charitable and generous could be re-thematised as "Giving". This was only done when data were extremely rich and a number of similar themes had been generated. These exact steps were systematically followed for each facet (colour-coded document) in each of the four time periods in a structured step-wise fashion. In Appendix A, samples of this work have been given. Finally, to aid writing up my findings, I transferred the data into an Excel workbook thereby creating a working dossier of identity themes to draw upon. Each tab in the workbook represented a time unit and on each page, I recorded all the information ordered by each theme I generated (see Appendix B).

The data from Time 4 unit (1977-2002/3) were handled slightly differently, although they still represented a single time frame. This was because when generating the

themes it was noticeable there were several changes in Boot's OI. To avoid obscuring this by treating the data as a single unit, I increased sensitivity by adding the year of the text to the pre-fix (for example: 1989\_T4\_Prfl\_Id\_1). This additional step allowed me to parse the generation of themes by decades which were subsequently labelled as 1977-1989 (early), 1990-1999 (middle) and post 1999 (late). All the steps outlined above were still followed but T4 was analytically treated as three separate units, although to provide continuity in periodisation it was considered overall as a complete unit of time.

When thematic coding was completed the generated themes were collated into a matrix table grouped under their identity facet (see Table 1. below).

From this table, I then cross compared themes and selected only those that were represented across more than one facet rejecting those appearing in only one facet. In this way, I was able to generate global OI themes for each time period that were represented by more than one identity facet and had therefore been generated from multiple sources of primary documents. This was conducted for the themes in each time frame which led to development of a second matrix table (see Table 2. also below) that depicted global OI themes for each time frame thereby giving an overview of Boot's identity across the whole time period.

Table 1: *Identity Matrix Table for T1 with Themes From Different Identity Facets*

<i>Professed ID</i>	<i>Projected ID</i>	<i>Attributed ID*</i>	<i>Corporate ID</i>	<i>Global Themes</i>
The Best*	The best*	Desirable	Modern	<b>The Best*</b>
A leader	Big	Powerful	Capable***	<b>Capable***</b>
Capable**	Nationalistic*	Technological	Innovative	<b>Nationalistic</b>
*	*	ly advanced	Nationalistic	<b>**</b>
Safe	Courageous	Capable***	**	
	Capable***			
	Thorough			
Trustworthy	Communicative	Caring	Assured	<b>Trustworthy</b>
y/ Upright		Socially	Public	<b>Public</b>
Caring	Trustworthy	transformative	serving	<b>Public serving</b>
employer	Socially	Publically		<b>Socially</b>
Public	idealist	oriented		<b>idealistic</b>
serving	For the public	Assured		<b>Caring</b>
Socially	interest	(trustworthy)		<b>Economically</b>
idealistic	Altruistic	Economically		<b>responsible</b>
	Virtuous	just		<b>Assured</b>
	Economically	Inspirational		
	responsible			
A chemist	-	-	Female	<b>Chemist's</b>
			Chemicals	
			and Drugs	

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* Examples of identifying common themes across identity facets to generate global themes

(Table produced within each time frame)

Table 2: Matrix of Global Identity Themes across all Four Time Periods

<i>Time 1</i> <i>1892-1920</i>	<i>Time 2</i> <i>1921-1949</i>	<i>Time 3</i> <i>1950-1977</i>	<i>Time 4 (early)</i> <i>1978-1989</i>	<i>Time 4 (middle)</i> <i>1990-1999</i>	<i>Time 4 (late)</i> <i>1999-2002</i>
The Best Capable Nationalistic	National Capable Innovative	Innovative Expansionist Confident	No coherent global themes	Shareholder focused A business Competitive Knowledgeable Dynamic	An Authority Focused
Trustworthy Public serving Socially idealistic Caring (staff) Economically responsible Assured	A public /national service Relational Nurturing (staff) Assured Pro-social Trusted Service oriented (customers)	Trustworthy Nurturing (staff) Public serving Relational Assured Pro-social Customer service oriented Historically grounded	Offering quality Socially responsible	Community oriented Environmentally responsible Historically grounded Relational Supportive (of staff) Customer –led Socially responsible	Socially responsible Trustworthy Historically linked Communitarian Service-offering Relational (collaborative)
A chemist's	Health & medical service	A chemist's Large	Unclear given the diversity of Boots Group	Health et al. & Pharmacists	Health care & pharmacy

## ***Chapter Summary***

What has been laid out in this methods chapter has been the development of my research design and how I conducted my study. In the beginning section I discussed a critical realist framework for conducting the research. Through incorporating ideas from Archer's (1995; 1996) morphogenetic approach this led to the development of an adapted step-wise framework. Moreover, because I was taking a case-based approach, I also formulated a case strategy in which I selected a suitable case and demarcated it into four analytical temporal units. Aligned to this, I reflected on and chose a qualitative method to generate data from historical primary source material along with a way in which to operationalise OI. Ethical considerations were also explored, following a report of the data sources that were used in my study. Finally, in the second section to the chapter I also offered a transparent account of the procedures I used to extract data from documents and generate OI themes. In effect, this represented the first two steps of my research framework: to select a case with access to an archive and extract historical data to generate OI themes. In the following four chapters the data is both presented and explained in further detail relating to the third and fourth steps of my research design, which were to a) comparatively describe and b) explain the observable dynamics of Boot's empirical OI across time points.

## Chapter 4

### Results I: Identity Genesis

#### *General introduction*

The archival data were analysed using the method outlined in the previous chapter which generated a number of global identity themes for each of the four time units. In this next section, the empirical data generated over these four units of time were presented as individual chapters that correspond to their respective time frame. This chapter related to Time 1 which was the period of 1892-1920, while in the following chapter (chapter 5) I present the themes from 1920 to 1949. Chapter 6 relays the empirical findings from Time 3 (1950 – 1977) and the results section ended at chapter 7 which brought together the three sub-periods (early, middle & late) of the T4 period (1978-2002). The decision to order chapters chronologically was for pragmatic reasons since it worked better with my four time units than if ordered by themes of which there were too many to demarcate by chapters.

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to contextualise the time period and then using sub-headings; identity themes are expanded on and evidenced by offering a narrative account built around extracts of text that maximally represented the OI themes. This represented step three of my research framework. To end each chapter and enact my fourth research step, I used a retroductive style of argumentation by contrasting possible explanations of the data to develop a

credible account for what had been observed comparative to what had previously been evidenced in terms of OI in previous time frames. In this way, across the next four chapters I develop an analytical history (*cf.* Rowlinson et al., 2014) of OI at Boots that covered the entire case-period.

As a template to guide the chapters that followed, I reordered data from Table 2. in the previous chapter to highlight the dynamics of the identity themes more clearly. Thus, Table 3. offered below, depicts the global identity themes as they were generated for each time frame that can be traced across time beginning with Boot's records from T1. The following time frame revealed some expansion in themes which was continued through T3 but in the early period of T4, only two themes were generated due to a generalised lack of identity related texts within the archive material. This time period corresponded with multiple changes at Boots and the surrounding social environment which were explained in more detail in chapter 7. Finally, the last two periods within the T4 frame revealed somewhat of a recovery in identity themes and enabled a continuation of the analysis to its completion just after the Millennium. Detailed description of Table 3. has been purposefully avoided here since describing and explaining the dynamics in Boot's OI themes form the main content of my results chapters to which we now turn.

Table 3: Thematically Ordered Parallel Matrix of Global Identity Themes Across all Time Periods

<i>Time 1</i> 1892-1920	<i>Time 2</i> 1921-1949	<i>Time 3</i> 1950-1977	<i>Time 4 (early)</i> 1978-1989	<i>Time 4 (middle)</i> 1990-1999	<i>Time 4 (late)</i> 1999-2002
<i>Capable</i> → <i>Nationalistic</i> → The Best*	<i>Capable</i> <i>National</i> - <i>Innovative</i> →	Confident Expansionist - <i>Innovative</i>	- - → -	Shareholder focused A business <i>Knowledgeable</i> → Dynamic* Competitive*	- - <i>Knowledgeable</i> Focused* -
<b>Trustworthy</b> → <b>Public serving</b> →	<b>Trusted</b> → <b>A public/national service</b> →	<b>Trustworthy</b> <b>Public serving</b>	→ -	→ -	<b>Trustworthy</b> -
<b>Socially idealistic</b> → <b>Caring (staff)</b> → <b>Assured</b> → Economically responsible*	<b>Pro-social</b> → <b>Nurturing (staff)</b> → <b>Assured</b> → <b>Relational</b> → <b>Service oriented (customers)</b> →	<b>Pro-social</b> → <b>Nurturing (staff)</b> <b>Assured</b> → <b>Relational</b> → <b>Customer service Oriented</b> →	→ → → → →	<b>Socially responsible</b> → <b>Offering quality</b> → <b>Relational</b> → <b>Customer-led</b> →	<b>Socially responsible</b> - - <b>Relational</b> <b>Customer service oriented</b>
		<i>Historically grounded</i>	→	<i>Historically grounded</i> → <i>Community oriented</i> → Environmentally responsible	<i>Grounded in history</i> <i>Communitarian</i>
<b>Chemist's</b> →	<b>Health &amp; medical service</b> →	A chemist's  Large*	→	<b>Health et al &amp; pharmacists</b> →	<b>Health care &amp; pharmacy/chemist</b>

\*Identity themes not included in the analysis

**Enduring themes in bold**

*Shorter-lived themes in italics*

Stand-alone themes in type face

→ Linked across time frames

## ***Introduction to T1***

To contextualise the build-up to this time frame prior to 1892, a biographical account of Boots the Chemist by business historian, Stanley Chapman (1973), described the early development of Boots. Archival records were scarce before this time prompting me to rely heavily on Chapman's account as an introduction to the business in its earliest stage of development. Boots the Chemist began as a small herbalist and patent health-remedy retailer during the mid-nineteenth century in Nottingham, England. Later, it was owned by Jesse Boot, who following the death of his father and his mother's retirement had become the sole proprietor. The shop was located in a deprived area and the social landscape of the time was one of poverty and chronic poor health (Hill, 1985, p. 126). This was compounded by a chemist trade monopolised by independent chemists that kept prices high and thus unaffordable for many (Pearsons Weekly, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1897). A change in the law around dispensing in 1880 [*The Pharmaceutical Society vs. The London and Provincial Supply Association Ltd.*] meant that a company could call itself a chemists and dispense medicines through employing the services of a qualified pharmacist. Jesse Boot took advantage of this change and appointed his first qualified dispensing chemist Mr E. Waring in 1884. Thus, Boots the Chemist had been created. By 1886, Jesse had married Florence Rowe, the daughter of a bookseller based in Jersey. It was under her influence that Boots branched out to sell non-chemist merchandise such as stationery, gifts, fancy-goods and opened in-store lending libraries [1898]. By the years of 1892/93 Jesse Boot had established 33

chemist branches, a manufacturing and packaging factory for medicines, a print-works, and a shop-fitting department (Chapman, 1973).

## **Boots's Identity at T1 (1892-1920)**

### ***Boots as a "chemists"***

From a functional perspective, despite offering a range of merchandise unrelated to pharmacy (1014/5, Home Diary, 1917), Boots primarily regarded itself as a "chemist".

*...the chemist and druggist is still the main stream through which the greater part of the business flows (C & D, 1900, p.1927).*

This was supported by secondary data compiled from original company sources by Chapman (1973, p.71) which showed that in 1902, company expenditure on patent medicines and proprietary remedies was four times greater than for toiletries, photographic supplies, stationery and art (see Table 4.). That Boots were principally a chemist operation was also documented by G. R. Elliot who recounted the early days of the company in a staff magazine, *The Beacon* [1933]. Meanwhile, the manufacturing arm of the business was also producing "chemist" products such as milk of magnesia and toothpaste (341/1, Staff memoirs: 1908-1911), and by 1919, Boots were also producing medicinal chemicals and antiseptics (A18/50, British Made Chemicals, 1919).

Table 4: *Purchases by Boots Pure Drug Co., 1892-1902 (£000s)*

Year ending 30 Sept.	Patent medicines and proprietaries	Drysalteries, drugs and herbs	Toiletries, photographic	Stationery, art, fancy goods, etc	Total
1892	48	11	3	13	75
1893	53	15	4	15	87
1894	62	17	9	18	106
1895	80	23	11	22	136
1896	112	31	14	24	183
1897	151	34	21	40	246
1898	182	42	32	43	299
1899	217	48	34	64	364
1900	254	58	30	82	438
1901	315	81	60	93	549
1902	410	101	93	104	708

Chapman, 1973, p.71

For Boots, being a chemist was a primary functional identity. The company's claim to this created something of a stir among the independent chemist trade of the day since "chemist" was a professionally guarded title gained through a long apprenticeship and rigorous exams to gain entrance to the Pharmaceutical Society register [1868]. However, Jesse Boot had no pharmaceutical training, was not a registered member of the Society, and employed chemists as waged employees. Consequently, independent chemists felt that Boots should not be allowed to use the title of chemist leading to a protracted and lengthy battle through the House of Lords that resulted in the passing of the 1908 Pharmacy and Poisons Act. Central to the Act was a clause in which it had been decided that companies could indeed be called "chemists" and operate a chemists business if they employed chemists to sell and dispense medicines and poisons. The battle between Boots and the independent chemists (supported by regional-level and the national Pharmaceutical

Society) was played out with dramatic force in both the press and the Pharmaceutical Society's trade journal, *Chemist & Druggist* (C & D).

*It would be apparent how utterly unfair it was to the orthodox and examined person that he should be surplanted by the unlicensed pirate [Jesse Boot] who traded upon a reputation he had stolen and did not possess in his own brains the knowledge which ought to be the only passport either to medicine or pharmacy (465/7, Nottingham Daily Express, Fri, 24 Nov 1905).*

*Avoid these unholy alliances. Shun the stores as you would Satan (465/7: points regarding libel case, 1898).*

*Sir- Some common sense is being gradually evolved from this correspondence. We are beginning to see that the monster [Boots] which is disturbing our peace and prosperity has at least three heads, all of which must be lopped off by the reformers axe ere the trade can become what it ought in justice to be... Yours truly, a Liverpool Chemist (C & D, 1893, Dec, 16, p.874).*

A large number of articles, published letters and press reports in the build-up to the Act were documented in Boot's archive revealing that the chemist trade perceived Boots to be illegitimate, unqualified and an unfair, dangerous competitor. The latter of these concerns were because Boots had adopted a trading policy based on cash,

rather than account, which allowed the company to purchase in bulk and sell large quantities for a small profit. This was comparative to the independents who could not afford to buy such large quantities of wholesale goods. Further, by being able to mass-manufacture their own products in their factory facilities, Boots were able to produce remedies at lower cost than those of independent chemists who created small quantities of medicines in their individual premises (Chapman, 1973). Thus, Boots were able to offer the public fresher and more affordable pharmaceutical products than those of independent chemists. It was this level of competitive threat that initiated the dispute in which Boots put up their own fight accusing independent chemists of profiteering without concern for the public:

*The real point of issue is whether chemists should be allowed to again charge the exorbitant prices which formerly made the purchase of medicines so heavy a drain on the small resources of the people. Stores and companies dealing in chemist's and druggist articles number their customers by the millions because they have brought the price of medicine down to a natural and moderate figure. An attempt is now being made to undo this good work and deprive the poorer classes of the benefit which competition has conferred upon them by the prices of drugs having been reduced to half those formerly charged, and that without in any way affecting their quality – Jesse Boot (C & D, 1900 Mar 10, p.416/7).*

Throughout the duration of the dispute Boots frequently made strong assertions about their identity as a chemist in both apologist and polemical documents (File: 441/1; A45, 1906). In one typical example the company professed:

*Reasons to call itself [Boots] a chemist: We are a chemists. We do a chemist business. We are publically accepted as a chemists (Y37, C1905, advert).*

### ***Boots as a “public service”***

Related to Boots being a chemist and challenging the price monopoly of an independent chemist trade was evidence that enabled a theme of “public Service” to be generated. This was epitomized in an article written by the company that was published in *The Times* newspaper on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> 1904 (465/7):

*Boots Cash Chemist may with justice claim to have done a great public service in reducing the cost of Drugs and dispensing of prescriptions.*

Indeed, Boots trading style of cash purchasing, bulk-buying and small profit mark-up with high turnover was a novel approach which broke with the traditional trading model of pharmacy at the turn of the century. Cheaper medicines were decidedly in the public interest as revealed by Jesse Boot’s address to shareholders at the company’s fifth Annual Meeting:

*Mr Boot said that he felt at that time there was great force in the expression of John Stuart Mill, to the effect that competition as then carried on did not benefit the public, but simply divided the business into small proprietors, each making a huge profit compared with their small turnover. He claimed that by [Boots] breaking through the traditions of the trade as regards profits they had not only served the public, but had made a splendid business for themselves (C & D, Dec 4, 1897, p.889).*

Similar sentiments were echoed in Boots response to the Pharmacy Acts Amendment Bill in 1905 (441/1), in which the company claimed that its trading approach was *'a modern system and a public boon'...* that answered *'a general call for medicinal drugs at reasonable prices'*. To emphasise the point, Jesse also appealed to the company's extraordinarily rapid growth as evidence that Boots *'had met the requirements of the public'* and thus was in effect offering a public service (A45, Pharmacy & Poisons Bill flyer, 1906). Indeed, the company had expanded massively by this time having developed from 33 shops in 1892, to 126 just five years later [1897] and by 1906, the time the flyer was written, Boots owned 329 shops taking over £1, 505, 011 in that year alone (Chapman, 1973, p.77/90).

Additional to declarations of being a public service, Boots also projected a public service identity in the media. For example, in *Pearson Weekly*, a widely circulated magazine of stories and curiosities, an account was published that described the

rise of Boots the Chemist (17<sup>th</sup> July, 1897). The article portrayed a public service identity realised through Boot's commercial operations:

*Old fashioned chemists largely have themselves to blame for their downfall. Their profits were enormous, outrageous – such, indeed, as to make very difficult, sometimes impossible for the poorer classes to afford proper medicines... they decline to budge one jot from their ancient position... the companies have rushed to their present position of extreme popular favour – a favour which they really deserve – because now the working man with a sick wife and child can for 9d. a prescription which would have cost 2/- twenty years ago...this one company [Boots] alone is saving its customers every week about £3, 200.*

Meanwhile, in *The Times* newspaper the company were advertising themselves as 'Boots Cash Chemist: Allies of the Public' (Sat 17<sup>th</sup> 1904) and promoting through their pricing policies that they were classless, being for 'PEER AND PEASANT ALIKE' (*The Trader*, vol III, no 69, Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 1910). Over in different publishing quarters, writers for the independent but liberal leaning magazine *TRUTH*, established by Henry Labouchere in 1877, had nothing but praise for Boots stating...'*The firm [Boots] which has deservedly won the right to the title the People's Chemist'*(*Truth*, Industrial Supplement –no 26). Further comments described Boots as being of '*considerable advantage to the public*' and '*a business which ministers to the national health*'. This was considered an independent opinion since the periodical

*TRUTH* was oriented towards investigative journalism and experienced frequent libel actions (Walker-Smith, 1934). Thus, praise from a magazine as sceptical as *TRUTH* was both high, and likely to have a degree of credibility.

On a final note, Boot's non-chemist offerings could also have been regarded as a public service since they were providing the public so much more than simply a chemist's service. Within many Boots stores were '*first-class circulating libraries*' that supported affordable access to literacy and attached to some, were '*first-class cafes*' enabling easy opportunities for people to socialise (Home Diary, 1917). Moreover, by selling gifts, art, fancy-goods and cameras alongside medicines and toilet-goods (Home Diary, 1917), Boots were attempting to offer the broadest appeal to all and thus cater to the public in as many ways as possible.

### ***Boots as "nationalistic"***

Notions of public service outlined above intersected with a 'nationalistic' identity. This was unsurprising given that within the geographical boundary of a nation-state such as Great Britain, the public also represent the Nation. Thus, by serving the public Boots were also serving the nation. However, this was not the only ground for this theme since Boots nationalistic identity was further evidenced by the way in which Boots projected its identity during the First World War, particularly through product development. For example, in newspaper adverts published in 1914, Boots described itself as a patriotic army:

*Boots 800 qualified pharmacists giving the enemy the order of the BOOT... Boots the chemist have declared War on German and German owned food, drugs, and toilet articles. Science equal to the best has been brought to bear. German and other alien formulae, secret or otherwise have been unmasked and equalled or excelled (Advertisement, Daily Mail front page, Oct 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914).*

Meanwhile, in own publication material such as Boot's Diaries, the company were boasting of wresting from German markets products such as grease paints for stage actors (1917, Home Diary). Within this publication Boots listed many different German products it had taken over production of:

*Extensive manufacture of fine chemicals and medicinal preparations in large quantities formerly made by German chemists...by the production of identical or superior articles Boots have supplanted the German made Sanatogen, Asprin, Formalin, Formamint, Urotropine, Lysol, Eau do Cologne, and Grease Paints.*

This culminated in 1919 with Boots publishing a pamphlet "BRITISH MADE CHEMICALS" that listed all their 'British-made synthetic medicinal chemicals and antiseptic substances unquestionably superior to those previously from abroad'.

Drugs and compounds which were commonly used in Britain, for example, Aspirin, Saccharin and branded remedies such as Sanatogen health tonic, were typically imported from Germany; a powerful leader in the global pharmaceutical industry boasting large corporations such as Bayer (Jeffreys, 2005). Thus, by producing these products Boots were revealing a nationalistic and patriotic identity, taking full advantage of import bans to develop their business further. Given a government imposed ban on imports, production of German goods could have been interpreted as merely “good business sense” rather than nationalism. However, that war-time production was patriotic rather than simply business-led activity was indicated by the fact that Boots had originally planned to produce saccharin ‘*on a comparatively modest scale*’ but was asked by the government to do more leading Boots to become ‘*responsible for the bulk of British production*’ (Chapman, 1973, pp.97-98).

Boots’ war effort also extended further than purely replacing German products since the company were also developing specific products for front-line service men such as “Vermin in the Trenches”, “Foot Comfort” and “Tommy Cooker” fuel tablets (Staff Memoirs, 1908-1911, London Rd. Factory). Alongside these, box respirator production for gas attacks and munitions manufacture were also mentioned in the pages of an in-house magazine called *Comrades in Khaki* (1916, March, p. 386/7). The publishing of this magazine, of which the costs were borne entirely by the company, was also telling of a nationalistic identity since it was primarily for Boots’ staff fighting on the front-lines serving to promote morale, comfort and connection with the company back home in Britain.

### ***Boots as “socially idealistic”***

Although the First World War was a contextual opportunity for Boots to serve both the national and public interest, Boot’s public service identity appeared to be driven by a more personal undercurrent. Analysis of the archival data revealed that Boots was a ‘socially idealistic’ enterprise with a basis in the personal character and philosophy of the founder, Jesse Boot. The company solicitor, Ald E. Huntsman, recounted Jesse once saying “*I am a man of action, but I have always had so much ideality*” (334/1, PSC 4/8/5/1, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1931, ‘The Lord Trent as I knew him’). That Jesse was an idealist and social reformer was confirmed in a magazine called *The Trader: An Illustrated Journal for Business Men*. In an extensive report on Boots, the article leant on speeches given by Jesse Boot himself, in which he claimed:

*I do not desire more personal profit than I am now getting out of the business. I am in business solely to carry out my ideals of how business should be carried out. I have a personal work to do that no-one else can do....If I live to get through all I want to do for the comfort of our workers in the works I would like to do something better for the housing of the unskilled labourer. Commencing with those in our employ. The housing question weighs heavily on my mind (Vol III, no 69. Jan 29<sup>th</sup>, 1910).*

Similar sentiments were echoed in a speech Jesse gave to the T. U. C. recorded within Boots Athletic Club (BAC) staff journal (October, 1908), that placed Jesse’s sentiments with the cause of the worker:

*Mr Boot who was received with the utmost cordiality replied addressing his audience as "fellow workers", He said...I claim to sit with you representatives of labour as the son of a man who belonged to the lowest rank of workers...is it any wonder that my sympathies are with the cause of labour.*

Jesse's father, who had originally been a poor agriculture worker, appeared to have influenced Jesse Boot's ideals (Chapman, 1973), but from a number of other speeches it was clear he was further influenced by Methodism (BAC, 1908), the socialist Arts & Crafts designer William Morris (C & D, 1902, Feb 15<sup>th</sup>, p.260) and John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism (C & D, 1897, Dec 4<sup>th</sup>, p.889). Connected to these inspiring socialist figures were projections of organisational sentiments such as '*humanity is for everyday use*' (Home Diary, 1917) and even one advert for Cod Liver Oil intimated: "*Support Boots, the TRADE REFORMER!*" (The Beacon, 1933 – The early days of Boots). The publication, *Home Diary* (1917) went further linking Boot's commercial activities to Jesse's social reformist ideals:

*Realising how such reform would be of popular benefit [cf. Mill's Utilitarianism], set to work to cheapen many daily necessities by purchasing and selling on a large scale, and by eliminating the middleman and so bringing commodities directly to the customer. Cash had always been the basis of his trading: no discounts are lost and no bad debts made.*

While Boot's policies of cash trading and bulk purchase contributed to the social reform of the chemist trade, manufacturing of Own Goods that could be sold cheaply was also a factor. The decision taken by Boots to manufacture was accounted for by Bob Elliot, an employee from Boot's earliest days, as stemming from: *'a determination to pay a fair wage and not deal in sweated goods as from any view of saving by manufacturing'* (The Trader, vol III, 1910), a further illustration of Jesse's reformist beliefs.

### ***Boots as a "caring" organization***

Allied with notions of social and trade reform were considerations of staff welfare, which supported generation of a theme that Boots were a 'caring' organization. For Boots, employees were regarded as key stakeholders in the business and thus ought to share in the company's success:

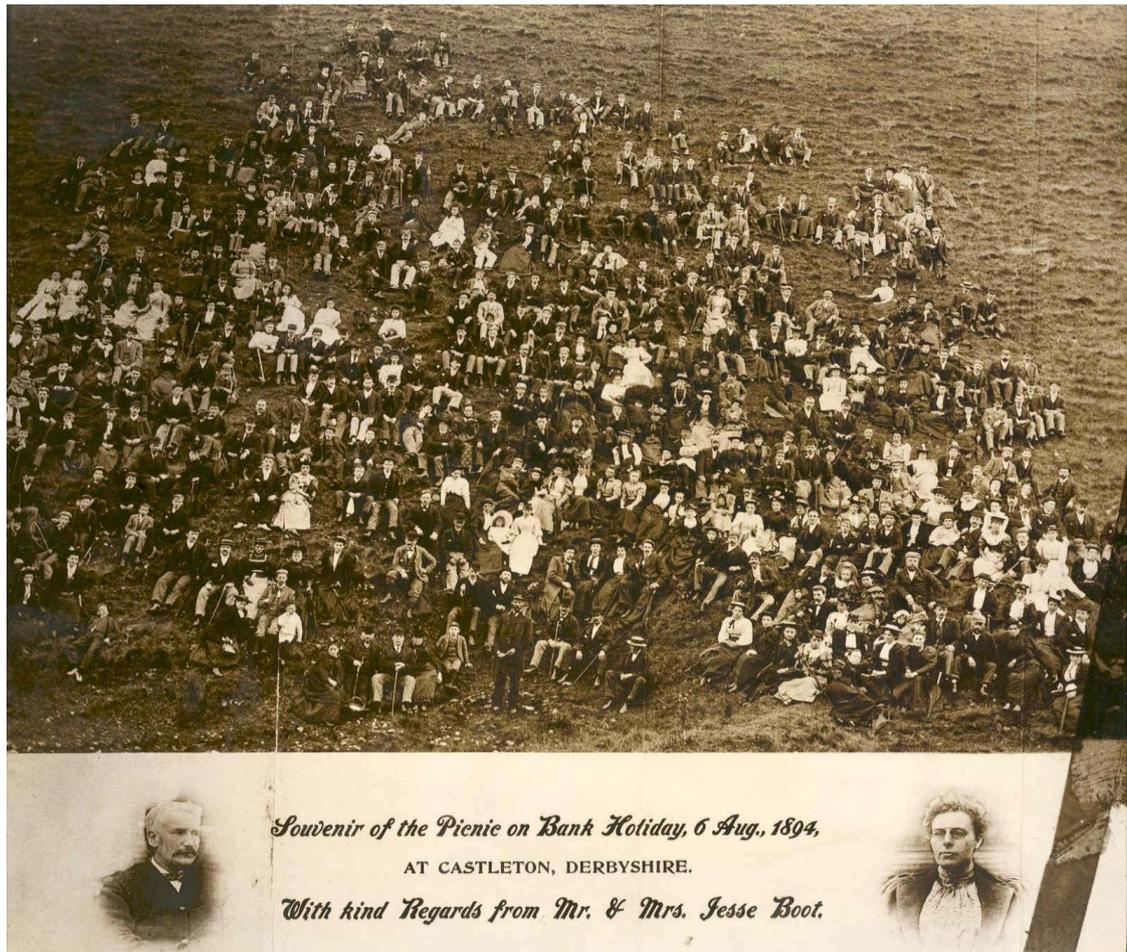
*I [Jesse Boot] want everyone in this business to feel its benefits individually – without favouritism – according to their merit and position. I could not detail tonight how I should like to accomplish this but it is to be done, and until it is done my ideal will be unaccomplished* (C & D, 1902, February 15th, p. 260).

That Boots cared about its staff was also revealed in the *TRUTH* magazine article, which outlined measures of staff welfare the company were taking such as offering pension funds for chemists, employing technology to improve labour conditions, providing opportunities to progress through pharmaceutical training scholarships

and encouraging a number of different leisure clubs. For staff, in their day-to-day work Bob Elliot's account in *The Beacon* [1933] also highlighted:

*...that Mr. Boot keeps the creature comforts of his employees well in view, a comfortable kitchen and mess and retiring rooms being fitted for the use of the female hands, the kitchen being equipped with stoves, fire-places, hot plates, etc., for their use'.*

Attributions and evidence that Boots was a caring employer were further supported across the archive with *The Boots Athletic Association Journal* revealing the number and range of sports and social clubs that Boots offered, as well as annual reports frequently discussing the Chemist's pension fund. Day trips and staff excursions were also a feature with photographic materials depicting a staff picnic in Castleton, Derbyshire in 1894 (see below).



In 1908, almost a thousand women employees were taken by Boots on a specially organised train to visit the Franco-British exhibition in London. Meanwhile Jesse's wife, Florence, concerned herself with the welfare of the female staff which was later extended by employing an industrial welfare team of four beginning in 1911 with Miss Eleanor Kelly (Chapman, 1973). Staff education and learning were also supported by the company through Boots offering a free evening school programme for young employees less than 16 years of age (The Trader, 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1914). Later, the school developed into Boot's College. Indeed, there were an abundance of documents evidencing Boot's care for their staff. Although this theme

was not strongly represented through textual affirmative declarations of being a caring employer, there were many documents pertaining to Boot's paternalistic care for their employees that justified this identity theme.

### ***Boots as "capable"***

Inasmuch as Boots were occupied with pursuing matters of social justice and a concern for both the nation and fellow man, the company were also a highly 'capable' organization. From the perspective of social psychology, perception of capability pertains to the capacity to enact from intention and thus represents having power and agency through resources, skills and experience (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011). The archival data showed that Boots had such capability. For example, when projecting its identity through publications such as *Home Diary* (1917) the company claimed that:

*It is impossible to not realise why Boots is a household word even as it is impossible to realise thoroughly that the one firm not only provides for the myriad requirements of countless customers, but also performs for itself all the work of manufacture and all other associated duties, as well as collecting and distributing more commodities than any other firm of retail chemists in the world. They employ the finest printing plant possible...for Boots are their own printers...Boots are their own packers...there is a big fleet of motor cars, vans and trollies as well as horse drawn vehicles for the work of transport – and Boots do so comprehensively that they even draw their own coal. Boots*

*in short do everything possible for themselves, and so save expense while ensuring reliability.*

The company further claimed that its levels of organisation were '*clockwork*' and things were run with proper safety precautions, '*system and efficiency*' (Home Diary, 1917). This was reiterated in G. R. Elliot's report (The Beacon, 1933) in which he pointed out that Boots were a '*self contained establishment*'. Meanwhile, *Success Magazine* (1929), reflecting on the development of Boots, were heralding the company's shops as '*well-organised and attractive*' and their owner (Jesse Boot) as '*possessing vigour and brains*'. The independent magazine *TRUTH* (1912, No 26), again, drew attention to the same aspects of capability, such as being a '*self contained*', centralised organisation, that paid '*attention to every detail*'. In explaining Boot's success, the article also attributed to Boots the qualities of '*Foresight*' and '*Enterprise*' and possessing the '*power of organisation*' in the face of a long opposition by independent chemists. Indeed, during those days of dispute with the Chemist trade, in which the company policy was '*to go direct to manufacturers to buy what we want and sell it for what we like*' (an indication of financial power) (C & D, Dec, 4 1897, p. 889), Boots, of itself, professed to have an indomitable fighting spirit claiming in *Trader Magazine* (Jan 29<sup>th</sup>, 1910):

*So strong and bitter was the feeling of the trade against us in the past that it developed in us an equally strong fighting spirit. Looking back we rather*

*overdid the fighting. Certainly in those days we called a spade a spade without any superfluous adornments.*

Another contribution to Boot's capability was developed by choosing to manufacture at early point in the life of the business. This gave the company time to develop increasing capability and control over price competition and drug quality (A18/50, C1919: British Made Chemicals Booklet) and by embracing technology, Boot's manufacturing laboratories were:

*Organised on modern commercial lines and fully equipped with the latest scientific plant and machinery for rapid and economic production'*

Research staff at the laboratories also leant to Boots scientific capability since through their work; the company were able to develop complex processes of manufacturing under difficult war-time conditions for important medicinal substances such as Aspirin and Phenolphthalein (A18/50, C1919: British Made Chemicals; *cf.* Chapman, 1973).

### ***Boots as "assured"***

Expertise and control in manufacturing went hand-in-hand with the quality of Own Goods produced at Boot's factories and sold through its High Street chemist branches. Consequently, comparative to other chemists, Boot's products were 'assured'. This was adopted as a differentiating identity feature of the company

from smaller independent chemists that could not always guarantee the freshness of their products due to small scale production and sales. (C1900s, advertising articles file). *TRUTH* magazine (1912) wrote of Boots that:

*Cheapness alone would, however, by no means have sufficed to secure success. Purity is even more important in the case of medicines than cheapness and as to the purity and quality of Messrs. Boots' drugs there can be no doubt. It has been the fashion in some quarters to cavil at large companies like Boots, owing to the belief that supervision in a large business is more difficult than in a small one. Precisely the reverse is the case. In the case of Messrs. Boots, the safeguards for insuring the purity and reliability of their goods are beyond dispute.*

The text above was supported by a full page photograph depicting Boot's analytical department, which was centrally important for the company to maintain purity of products. At the Boots factory in Island Street, Nottingham:

*Samples of all the goods purchased by Boots [are tested] and before a certificate of quality is issued none of the goods are taken into use. Tests are made of materials at all stages of manufacture, so every preparation shall reach the public in perfect condition (op cit)*

The purity and assuredness of Own Goods were also heavily promoted in the booklet *British Made Chemicals* (1919). Their assured purity and quality were seen as a unique selling point and what made Boots own branded products, furnished with the familiar Boots script logo, stand out against other proprietary medicines. *TRUTH* magazine also highlighted this, stating:

*In each detail every possible care is taken in the [Boots] Pure Drug Company's [A Boots trading name] factory to ensure that the finished article which is supplied to the public shall be perfect as science and skill can make it. Skilled chemists analyse the ingredients before they leave the warehouse. When they get to the factory, every precaution is taken that no foreign substance shall contaminate them. The purchaser may absolutely depend therefore upon the article which bears Messrs. Boots label being in quality, weight, and condition exactly what it claims to be.*

Thus, the name of Boots was symbolically associated with assured quality from its very earliest days fuelled by promotion of Own Goods as scientific and of guaranteed quality and safety (Home Diary, 1917).

### ***Boots as "trustworthy"***

When assured quality in products was added to Boot's self-professed honesty in advertising (The Trader, Jan 1910):

*“say nothing but what is truthful in your advertisement” That has been a strict and invariable rule ever since I joined the firm; and it is never purposefully deviated from...*

...and combined with both the company’s identity as a public service (Nottingham Daily Guardian, Aug 19<sup>th</sup>, 1892 – shareholder report), alongside their concern for staff welfare (e.g. C & D, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1895, p.70) a final theme of Boots as ‘trustworthy’ organization was generated.

### ***Explaining Boot’s OI at Time 1***

The eight identity themes evidenced above marked the genesis of Boot’s OI within its archival records. Consequently, T1 represented Boot’s early cultural-system (Archer, 1996), in which both the company’s OI and its archive were initially constructed. The formation of nascent OI is a relatively new area of research but there did seem initial consensus that in its earliest stages an OI is constructed by organizational agents drawing on and emulating similar organizations within a given institutional-level field (Gioia et al., 2013; Glynn, 2008; Whetten & Mackey 2002). Other research supports this understanding since when new organizations conform to the identities of contemporary organizations they are more likely to be successful comparative to organizations that attempt to create an alternative identity (Czarniawska & Wolff, 1998). Although it is acknowledged that some degree of differentiation is necessary for creating positive distinctiveness between contemporary organizations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996;

Haslam, 2004; Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006), too much divergence could result in a lack of isomorphism leading to organizational failure (Czarniawska & Wolff, 1998). The implication of previous research is that for a given organization and their identity to be legitimately accepted, emulation of and conformity to the characteristics of existing contemporary organizations is likely to be the case (for example: Glynn & Abzug 2002).

For Boots, the empirical evidence suggested that their OI was formed somewhat differently. Rather than emulate the existing chemist trade at the time, Boots broke with the traditions of professional identity, high prices, high profits, and offering credit. Instead, Jesse Boot had no chemist qualifications, offered pharmacy goods at low prices for low profit mark-ups and traded on a cash only basis. This put Boots in opposition to the existing chemist trade in Great Britain yet still allowed the company to claim identity markers such as 'assured quality' and 'trustworthiness', without recourse to being a professional chemist. Instead, notions of quality and trustworthiness were tied to high stock turnover and large-scale manufacturing with careful analytical control. Boots also adopted an identity of being a 'public service', which was something traditionally claimed by the independent chemist trade. However, because of the social importance of Boot's trading and pricing policies, it was soon shown that Boots were offering a greater public benefit than that of independent, professional chemists. Given such a challenge it was unsurprising that an identity war erupted between Boots and the chemist trade in the 1900s resulting in Boots *the Company* being legitimately recognised as a

chemist through legislative Acts [1908]. Thus, evident from the data, Boot's identity had not been created by conformity to the chemist trade meaning an alternative explanation for the construction of Boot's OI must be found.

Clues to this were present in the data since in speeches given by Jesse Boot, references were made to progressive social thinkers of the time. Examples were John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, political Labour, welfare reformists and social critics such as William Morris alongside tenets of the Christian faith. From these values and ideas, Boots developed their business as a caring employer, offering a public service and attempting to fuse together Capital and Labour to bring maximum benefits to wider society. By doing so, the company were tapping into much wider social issues about class division and equality, fair treatment, good employment, and affordable self-management of health (Hill, 1985). The result was legitimacy, granted not only by the government of the day, but also by the wider British public as seen in many articles praising Boots (for example: *TRUTH* magazine).

That drawing from wider social values and concerns can provide the legitimacy needed for organizational identity has also been evidenced by research (Glynn & Watkiss, 2012). Thus, Boots possibly took advantage of what had been a conflict between the social ideas and values of wider society and those of an economically driven chemist trade. The company was not alone in this since during the early twentieth century other businesses such as Cadbury, Unilever and Rowntree were also attending to wider social needs and concerns in the way they conducted

business (Caroll, 2008). Indeed, although breaking from the traditions of the chemist trade, Boots aligned itself with the wider social public and other progressive non-conformist organizations which allowed Boots to gain legitimacy independently from the chemist trade. On a final note, the outbreak of World War I had also been influential in the creation of Boot's identity since through supporting the government in maintaining supplies, the company developed a nationalistic identity. Being nationalistic at a time of war would likely have been an essential component of maintaining legitimacy for many organizations.

Suggesting however that Boots may have actively constructed their identity from the wider institutional-level environment makes the formation of Boot's OI seem to have been strategic. However, when generating OI themes it was evident that Boot's identity was formed through the personal vision of the founder and not necessarily by strategically drawing on wider social values and institutions. Instead it was evident that Jesse's personal values, ideas and hopes for Boots were shared with, and thus parallel to the wider social context in which Boots existed. Moreover, as explained by Stanley Chapman in his biography of Jesse Boot (1973), the founder was autocratic and paternalistic. Thus, standing as the indomitable head of the Boots business, it was also more likely that the company's OI was shaped by his beliefs and not strategically assembled by senior managers within the organization.

This is supported by research which has shown that founders' values and beliefs are particularly important in the formation of OI (Kroezen & Heugens, 2012; Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010; Hannan, Baron, Hsu, & Koçäk, 2006). For example, founder beliefs have been argued to be so fundamental to a business organization that change in founding beliefs could be more destabilising than a change in management (Hannan et al., 2006). Meanwhile, Gioia et al. (2010) also claimed that founding organizational leaders are primary carriers and articulators of OI to stakeholders. This was certainly the case at Boots since Jesse articulated the company's values in a number of speeches and company communications, which were often personally interwoven with his own values, beliefs and experiences.

Bringing together both the empirical evidence and theories about OI formation helped to explain the formation of Boot's nascent identity. Its creation appears to have been a complex process involving multiple levels. Resisting the then current chemist trade, Boot's identity was aligned with wider-level social values, beliefs and needs and in being so was accepted and widely legitimised by being recognised as a public good. This was in parallel with other contemporary non-conformist businesses that had socially progressive policies. However, it was not as simple as Boots strategically borrowing from or emulating these existing businesses. Indeed, comparison to or drawing upon Cadbury, Rowntree and Unilever as exemplar organizations was not evidenced in archival sources. Instead, the data showed that Jesse Boot regarded the company as a vehicle for his own personal and humanistic values which were congruent with wider social movements of the time. Enactment

of these values through business activities created the company's early OI that because of its benefit to the wider public, was accepted and endorsed. Thus, Boot's nascent OI was formed by an interaction between Jesse Boot's personal agency and the wider social context into which Boot's OI was becoming embedded. Having established this it was then possible to move forward to consider what happened to Boot's identity in the following analytical unit of Time 2.

## Chapter 5

### Results II: Identity Elaboration and Emergence

#### *Introduction*

Following on from first evidencing and then explaining the generated themes for Boot's OI at Time 1, this chapter accounts for Time 2 and adhered to the same format. As discussed in my method, the Time 2 period was selected because the business was sold to the U.S. in 1920 and came back to British ownership in the early 1930s meaning that there was a possibility of identity change. At the start of this time frame, Jesse Boot sold his majority shares to the United Drug Company of America owned by Louis K. Liggett. Much of the £2.5 million profits were used philanthropically by Jesse to purchase land for the creation of a University of Nottingham and open park space for public use (Greenwood, 1977). Meanwhile on the company side, for the next 13 years Boots was under American ownership which resulted in a change in leadership style.

Under American control, Boots went from being an autocracy under Jesse Boot's sole leadership to a more distributed territorial management system. Nevertheless, the American period was barely documented in the archive and was described by Jesse's son John Boot, who was retained as a company director, that: '*the whole affair was very hands off*' (Y82, AGM, 1933, p.102). After the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the ensuing climate of economic recession, Liggett sold his shares back to UK interests and John Boot took over chairmanship of the company in 1933. This

particular year marked a milestone for Boots since they opened their 1000<sup>th</sup> branch in Galashiels, alongside building the acclaimed D.10 factory on the Beeston site in Nottingham that had been acquired in the mid-1920s (Clapp, 2011). Toward the end of this time period the company survived through World War II [1939-1945] that was soon followed in 1948, by the inauguration of a new National Health Service (NHS).

## **Boot's Identity at T2 (1920-1949)**

### ***Boots as a "healthcare and medical service"***

Under the headship of John Boot as director and later as Chairman, Boots extended its offering to the public beyond that of a retailing and manufacturing chemist to what could only be described as a 'healthcare and medical service'. Thus, this identity theme underwent elaboration comparative to the previous time frame. In an undated advert from the 1920s the company described itself as:

*We can fairly claim that a Boots branch is NOT MERELY a retail shop. It can in truth be called a local health centre, where the staffs are not only professional servants but also friendly personalities.... AND EVERY BRANCH A HEALTH CENTRE (Y82, p.103).*

This was a justified claim since the company opened its first 24 hour day-and-night pharmacy service in 1924 (Y82, *The Shop that Became a Service*, p.143), which by 1936 was operant in twelve stores in major cities. These all-night pharmacies served an important emergency service role for both the public and medical profession alike (441/3, Correspondence between Calvert & Wolmer on the Retail Trading Bill, 1936, *The Bee*, Jan 1926, p.80). Moreover, in all branches, Boot's staff administered free-of-charge first-aid to customers suffering minor injuries. This was evidenced by annual reports and a large number of thank-you letters published in *The Bee*, written by members of the public who had received first-aid at a Boots store:

*May I express through this letter my appreciation and thanks for the courtesy and kind attention of your assistants when I sprained my foot on Shields Road on Monday afternoon. I was greatly surprised when I learnt that this assistance was voluntary and I can only say in my case "Boots" were good Samaritans (The Bee, Jan-Mar 1933, p.74-75).*

*...To help in the work of healing the sick and keeping fit people well is even more important in war than in peace, and in addition our staffs have done their full share in giving first aid to the injured (Y82, Statement by the Chairman, 1941, p.125).*

*In every branch there were people skilled in first aid, and in many of the bigger branches qualified nurses were in attendance (Y82, Annual Report Chairman's Statement, July 1945, p.136)*

As documented in the source directly above, fully trained nurses were employed in larger stores to give advice and help to mothers on infant care, for surgical fittings, dressings and wound care. In a document titled *Shops Containing Special Services* (Y37, C1939), Boots listed themselves as having: 185 oxygen depots, 136 qualified nurses, 131 fitting rooms for surgical equipment and 12 day-and-night pharmacies. But it wasn't only the public who Boots were serving at this time since in collaboration with the Royal Institute for Public Health, the company offered specimen collection for doctors (Y83, Shareholders Annual Meeting, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1925, p.80, *The Bee*, April 1926, p. 196). Analytical laboratories and a medical information service were also cited in a promotional company brochure:

*An important part of the Boots organisation is the Information Service which is centred on an extensive laboratory and abstracting service. Scientific knowledge is carefully correlated and doctors' queries are answered (334/15, A World Famous Organisation, 1949).*

Although at this time Boots had developed services to compliment their chemist's goods, Boots still continued to vend non-pharmaceutical merchandise listed as No

2. Department. In response to critique from the media, Boots defended what it saw as its primary identity as a chemist:

*You occasionally see statements in the newspapers to the effect that we sell numbers of different articles not usually stocked by a chemist, and that the sale of drugs is a sideline with us; but the makers of these statements forget that we have hundreds of small drug stores where we sell nothing but drugs and toilet articles... over 80% of our total business is exactly the same nature as that carried on in the best Chemists' shops in the country... we have over 50 surgical departments under fully certificated nurses and every year we make up several millions doctors' prescriptions.... (Y83, 27th June 1924, FT newspaper reports AGM minutes, p.73)*

Several years later in 1929, the company also professed to shareholders at an Annual General Meeting that *'80% of our business is equal to that carried on by any good-class pharmacy and that two thirds of our shops carry only chemist's lines'*. This was supported by a document that showed year-on-year declining percentages of No 2. merchandise between 1928 and 1937 (C1939, *Shops Containing Special Services*, Y37) justifying Boots professed and projected identity claim that: *'In the title of Boots the Chemists there is the fundamental basis of the business'* (467/29, *With compliments of Boots the Chemists*, C1929).

### ***Boots as a “public service”***

That Boot’s could claim a ‘public service’ identity at this point needs no introduction since its wide-scale healthcare offering evidenced above provided ample justification for this theme. However, the theme was epitomised in the Boot’s publication: *The Shop that became a Service* (C1949). On page three of the document the text explicitly stated: ‘*Boots has become a service to the public*’. Other evidence supported this overlap, for example, in projecting their identity in 1929 the company claimed:

*Boots the chemist have been pioneers in many branches of service to the public. In none is this more evident than in the establishment of Surgical Services in the majority of our bigger branches which are under the control of fully trained certificated Nurses who have had experience in both hospital and private. In their great profession such service is of inestimable value to medical men and to customers in the provision of surgical items which need fitting and for which purpose built fitting rooms are built into those branches where a trained nurse is available. Mothers particularly appreciate the value of being able to discuss matters relating to their children with a practical trained nurse and midwife (467/29, with compliments of Boots the Chemist, C1929)*

Moreover, other data added to the generation of this theme. For example, during the Second World War Boots worked with the Government of the day to provide

public services such as *'defensive preparations against air raids'* (Y82, Annual Report, June 1938, p.118), which the company considered were: *'in no sense a commercial service and we regard them as an adjunct to our first aid surgical service to the public'* (Y82, Annual Report, June 1937, p.116). Indeed, the trade journal *Chemist & Druggist* (May 1, 1937, p. 511/536) confirmed this, documenting that Boots had installed model gas-proof rooms in Pelham Street and Sauchiehall branches. In further support of this theme, at Annual General Meetings, professions of Boots as a public service were made in numerous Chairman Speeches. For example, in his 1946 address, John Boot stated: *"We are proud to feel that we have a staff that is happy in the knowledge that in working for Boots, it is performing a service to the public"*.

Public and even medical service was also regarded by the company as manifested through their research and manufacture of pharmaceutical substances:

*Boots the Chemist, in co-operation with Research Departments of Universities and clinical sections of our great Hospitals contribute valuable service in the supply of such items such as Liver Extract, Insulin and many products of incalculable value in modern medical practice (467/29, with compliments of Boots the Chemist, C1929).*

During this time frame the company's research division were producing *'special medical products of considerable clinical importance... [such as] Novostab and*

*Sulphostab, both of which are approved by the Ministry of Health for use in Public Institutions* (334/1, Boots – A world famous organisation, C1949). Meanwhile at *'Daleside Road, a factory was specially built for the surface culture of penicillin and operated on behalf of the Government. By D-Day it was making one-third of the country's total supply'* (Y82/143, The shop that became a Service, C1949). Innovations were also being made by Boots under the research dept. headship of Jack Drummond [1891-1952] in the area of vitamins which were of vital public interest in light of food rationing (Y83, Annual Report, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930, p.91). Although much of this was “behind the scenes” at Beeston, Boots work did not go unnoticed by respected members of the public who also attributed to the company a public service identity. The Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor noted in a speech about Boots, published in the staff magazine *The Bee* [1926, p. 294], that Boots had reduced the price of health, developed life-saving drugs such as Insulin, and in closing said:

*“I end as I began by repeating that even more inspiring to me is the fine spirit of duty to the public and the nation generally, and the true Christian spirit which underlies all its [Boots] activities.”*

A sentiment and perception of Boots also echoed by an Imperial College Professor of Chemistry, H. E. Armstrong [1848-1937] whose words were also published in *The Bee* (pp. 257-259) that same year:

*Visitors to Nottingham, even those who pass through the town by railway, little realise how active and an important a hive of industry is the large factory they see close to the line bearing the name Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd – how considerable a work is going on there ministering to the medical service and to the public need.*

### ***Boots as “nationalistic”***

Services to the British public and medical profession were central to Boots offering and as such, they aligned with a strong ‘nationalistic’ identity even as early as the start of this time period. In an address to shareholders (Y83, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1920, p.55), Jesse Boot proclaimed: *‘We have made the whole concern a national institution’*. This notion of being a national institution led the company to adopt the slogan “Chemist to the Nation” in 1929 (M.B. 140a-188, Pharmacy Week, Sept 26<sup>th</sup> 1929) reiterated again over a decade later to shareholders:

*Shareholders can rest assured that they have a sound business, well distributed for retail sales, and an organization determined under all circumstances to live up to the slogan “Chemist to the Nation” (Y82, Annual Report, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1940, p.124).*

Indeed, because Boot’s services were operating at a national-level Boots described itself in brochures as a *‘national enterprise that is developing national progress’* (C1933, A Building that Never Stops Growing). Discourses of national progress in

1933 were also linked to the building of a new factory at the Beeston site in Nottingham that had been acquired some years earlier. According to Boots, the factory, known simply as D.10 was:

*Ahead of its time, this new factory sets a standard. Every device of craftsmanship and ingenuity has been used to make these buildings the most up-to-date factories in Britain for the manufacture of pure medicinal products. In them, Boots employees will work under ideal conditions – and the best work is better done when the conditions are perfect (MATGD22 – CAIS76 ad5677-s Adverts, 1931-1932).*

Continuing, the symbolic nationalism represented by this progressive factory was apparent since it was: *‘Planned by British enterprise, built by all-British labour and all-British materials’...and was ‘Boot’s contribution to the trade revival’ (MATGD22 – CAIS76 ad5677-s) in a time of global economic depression [1929-1939]. This also coincided with Boots’ return to British ownership which the company made evident to the public in their advertising by boasting that Boots now had ‘Over 50,000 BRITISH SHAREHOLDERS; Over 17000 BRITISH EMPLOYEES’ (Scribbling Diary, 1934; MATGD22 – CAIS76 ad5677-s).*

Returning to the time frame more generally, an identity as “a national service”, “The Nation’s Chemist”, and a “national institution” were dominant in archival documents. Nationalism continued to be displayed across the Second World War

[1939-1945] with the company heavily involved in penicillin manufacture, vitamin research, with Boot's factories also supporting the Ministry of Supply in production of orange juice for vitamin C (334/15, Boots: A World Famous Organisation C1949; Oral History Project, 2014). Meanwhile, in Boot's farming and agricultural division, the company were working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture to support national food production (Y82, Annual Report, 1941, p.125):

*We have collaborated with official plans to minimise the loss of valuable food crops through pests and diseases, by placing emergency stocks of certain chemicals at strategic points in our network of branches, and the use of our distribution facilities, both in this way and for disseminating official advisory literature among farmers (Y82, Chairman Statement, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1942, p.128).*

Attaining such a strong national-level position held the company in good stead for the launch of the *NHS* after the war in 1948. Rather than overwhelmed by this large change to the healthcare landscape in Great Britain, Boots were well placed as a national-level service provider, distributor and mass manufacturer (Y82, Annual Report, Aug 9<sup>th</sup> 1949, p.141). Indeed, in a company pamphlet titled, *The Shop that Became a Service*, Boots claimed that:

*As Chemists to the Nation: The introduction of the National Health Service Act has naturally caused a tremendous increase in the number of*

*prescriptions and purchases with which Boots branches deal daily. Boots resources have been well able to meet this sudden demand. In the service of the people's health, the first year of this scheme has proved Boots worthy indeed of the title "Chemist to the Nation" (Y82/143, C1949).*

### ***Boots as a "pro-social" organization***

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, extensive unemployment had become a severe social problem with this being strongest in the northern, manufacturing parts of England (Hill, 1985). With their head office located in the industrial heartlands of the Midlands, Boots were acutely aware of this nationwide problem. John Boot announced to shareholders in his annual address in 1932 (Y82, p.107):

*I would say that an organization like ours that has attained nation-wide developments cannot shut its eyes to the trend of social developments. Under present conditions, something like one sixth of the wage earning population is permanently unemployed. This means the purchasing power of the public as a whole – and therefore also of our potential customers is substantially lower than it might be and falls far short of the nation's powers of production.*

Concern over the problem of unemployment was somewhat more pragmatic and economic than under the social idealism of Jesse Boot, reflected in an independent opinion piece that stated: *'More significant in these testing times, is to find in Boots*

*an individual firm which is deliberately seeking to harness together the profit incentive and the public welfare* (Financial Times 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1934). This may be explained by Jesse's lack of education while his son John had been educated at Jesus College, Cambridge (Greenwood, 1977). Nevertheless, as a business, Boots demonstrated a concern for levels of national unemployment, one of the pressing social problems of the 1930s. It wasn't just a concern but was also regarded as a responsibility:

*It is unthinkable that any of us should rest content with the condition of things in which there are 2,000,000 persons at a time eking out their existences on insurance payments or State doles... I feel it is up to Companies, in our position, to make researches into the possibilities of absorbing more workers into industry* (Y82, Annual Report, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1935, p.111).

Thus, to economic thinking was added a moralistic, and thus 'pro-social', level of concern for the issue that resulted in Boots doing exactly that – making researches into the possibility of absorbing more workers into industry. This took the form of an experimental trial at the company's main factory site in Beeston where the working-week was reduced to five days.

*The announcement was made a few weeks ago that we were instituting a five day week in Nottingham during the summer months without reduction*

*of pay, naturally attracted a great deal of public interest. It is our belief that the data we shall obtain will not only be of value to ourselves in determining hours of work for the future, but will throw a useful light on the whole question of workers' hours and leisure (Y82, Annual Report, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1934, p.107).*

The five-day-week experiment was observed by Whitehall official, Sir Richard Redmayne, K. C. B. [1865-1955] and recorded in a government report: *A Review of the Experimental Working of the Five Day Week* (A2/BK0132). The results indicated increased productivity, reduced absence, reduced sickness, and a feeling of goodwill among the staff. Moreover, because of the reduction in working hours redundancies were avoided, enabling Boots to retain staff and not contribute to further national unemployment. When the five-day-week had become an industry norm, Boots were thus able to claim to the public that they '*were among the first to introduce the five day working week*' in Great Britain (334/15, A world famous organisation, C1949).

That Boots were a pro-social business and not a profiteering company was also evidenced in documents pertaining to an attempt by the company to expand their retail model to New Zealand in the 1930s (Box No. 38). In negotiations with the New Zealand Government and pharmacist trade, Boots iterated several times that the generation of profits were not the primary motivation for the company. Rather, Boots highlighted and professed that they were in business to confer a public

advantage and to extend its benefit not just within Great Britain but across the British Empire. In doing so they anticipated the same benefits for labour reform evidenced in a speech given by John Boot:

*I am one of those as you know who believe that the mechanisation of industry, if it is not to condemn an increasing number of men to unemployment, involves the gradual reduction in working hours, by shortening not only the working day or the working week, but also the working year and the working life. The goal to be aimed at thus includes more paid holidays, earlier old-age pensions, and later entry into industrial life. Such reforms mean the substitution of voluntary unemployment or leisure for the tragedy of involuntary unemployment. They cannot be attained merely because we think them desirable, but once industry recognises them as desirable it can set itself consciously to move in the right direction. That is what we are trying to do in this Company (Box 38, preliminary NZ negotiations, 1935).*

Added to nationwide unemployment was a second pressing social problem, public health concerns about VD. To address this, Boots actively worked with St Thomas' Hospital in London to create a new therapeutic substance called Stabilarsan. The previous drug of choice for VD treatment was called Salvarsan, which based on Mercury, had poisonous side effects. However, Boots new treatment was as effective as Salvarsan, but without the side effects meaning that the company were

also innovating new and improved medicines to effect relief from public health concerns (The Bee, June 1926). Reducing the cost of the life-saving diabetic drug, Insulin, was a second example where Boot's pro-social identity was at work through their commercial activity. An article in *The Times* summarising Boots Annual Report of 1935 (Y82, p.111) read:

*In connection with our special medical products, continuous research on Insulin has not only enabled us to perfect our product but the result of our investigations combined with the result of improving our plant, has enabled us to effect progressive economies which we have passed on to the consumer. In February last we were able to announce that the standard vial, which 12 years ago could not have been sold at less than 25s. would be sold to the public at 1s. while our price to hospitals and public institutions would be substantially less than this.*

When Boots drug and antibiotic developments and concern for national unemployment were combined with the company's wide offering of public health services (mentioned previously) there was a rich evidence base for generating a 'pro-social' identity theme for Boot's OI across this time period.

#### ***Boots as "nurturing" – to staff***

When turned inward, being pro-social was manifested by the company as being 'nurturing' toward their staff in which: *'it has become a tradition in our Company to*

*regard service to the public and the wellbeing of our workers as obligations of prime importance'* (Y82, Annual Report, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1934, p.107). The extent of wellbeing services that Boots offered were listed in a 1938 annual report under the heading 'Social Services for Staff':

*They include, for instance, pension schemes, a continuation school for juvenile workers, medical services, welfare departments, canteens, staff training classes, sports and social clubs, dramatic and other societies, house magazines, and educative films and a host of kindred activities.*

Examples evidenced by the archive material were too numerous to mention all, but one example were canteens about which the company stated:

*The subject of nutrition is attracting wide attention at the present time, and we have considered this question very carefully in its bearing on the physical condition and general health of our employees. Our medical officers have now taken steps to secure that the meals in our various canteens shall be designed on a scientific nutritional basis* (Y82, Annual Report, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1938, p.116).

According to Boots, all their company schemes were designed to '*have in view not only the creation of new employment but the security, the general wellbeing and the happiness of all those who work for us*' (Y82, Annual Report, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1935,

p.111). Further, Boots claimed that *'The Company has the interest of staff very much at its heart'* (Y82/143, The shop that became a Service, C1949) and appeared to be driven by the belief that:

*The people in our factories are not merely subjects for transfer and book entry but are each one entitled to the consideration which every good man or woman will always give to fellow creatures* (467/28, Welfare, C1924).

For retail staff spread across the country's vast network of branches, there were regional activities, clubs and outings. Alongside these, Chemists were reported by the company to receive higher than average wages (441/3) and all retail employees were granted up to one month's paid holiday (The Bee, Aug-Oct, 1933, p.261-265). Overall, across the branches, factories and head office, staff were regarded as an asset (Y83, Annual Report, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1930, p.91) and treated in a meritocratic fashion (The Bee, March, 1926, p. 156-157; Y82/143; 441/3; Y82, p.116), which appeared to result in outcomes such as loyalty and high staff retention:

*Few firms can boast of so many employees having such long terms of service and that is a credit both to the conditions which the firm has created and the service which the staff has rendered* (303/1, Training Dept Manual, C1930s).

Finally, confirming evidence that Boots nurtured and cared for their staff was apparent in independent articles published in *The Bee* that highlighted Boots cared

for its staff ('independent opinions', May 1926, p.257-259). To guard against criticism that these were published in a staff magazine and therefore could have been biased, an independent article which featured in *The Financial News* (1938) is offered to support a nurturing and caring identity was attributed to Boots by others:

*Those who have observed them will agree that it would be difficult to praise too highly Boots' treatment of its factory staff. Actual working conditions are comfortable and healthy as a result of the modern planning of the factory [D10]. The Company is on very good terms with the trade unions which cater for its organised workers – a situation easy to understand when its wage rates are for the most part well above the negotiated trade minima. In this connection it is worth noting that the Company was one of the first to apply the principle of the five-day-week to a large organisation... Finally, there must be mention of the spirit which infuses all this work. It is one of genuine good will and common sense with no trace of paternalism which has sometimes impaired welfare work in British Industry (Y82, The Background of Famous Companies V, p.119).*

### ***Boots as "service oriented"***

Marked by excellence in caring for its staff, Boot's identity was also marked by excellence in its external offerings to the public particularly through being a 'service oriented' business. This was allied to employee wellbeing in the following way:

*Now we have a duty of employer to employee. It is to this new conception of duty on the part of the employer to the employee that we owe the remarkable growth of welfare work over the past ten or twelve years. Alongside of this, employers are developing a new concept of duty to their customers – the duty of service (The Bee, 1926, p.156-157).*

In Annual Reports the company professed to have a service orientation and were striving to continually improve customer service (Y82, Annual Report, C1930s, p.95). Notions, of which Boots suggested, had begun in the previous time frame: *'During the war [WW I] Boots had a record of remarkable and conspicuous service' (A Record of Service (A83/41, C1923).* Indeed, their claim was somewhat supported by what has been seen of Boots around public service in the previous chapter. Further, in keeping with the spirit of Time 1, promoting equality through customer service was apparent at Boots drawing similarities with Jesse's early notions of classlessness by improving access to medicines for all through affordable pricing:

*We take pride in giving the same service to a customer for one pennyworth as to one who spends a pound (applause). Naturally we do not make as much profit, but we know that we are building up valuable good will for the company (Y83, Annual Report, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1930, p.91).*

The company were at this time also projecting a service orientation to staff, encouraging them to strive toward offering the very best in customer-care. For example in the staff magazine *The Bee* (Nov 1929, pp. 20-27), Boots told staff:

*On principle and as a point of business ethics, you owe all your patrons the very best possible service you can give. It is your most effective way of saying thank you for their patronage.*

Meanwhile, the importance and centrality of the customer was also echoed in staff training manuals from around the 1930s (303/1; 394/7) and to managers, through *Merchandise Bulletin*. To the public, Boots were also highlighting through their customer advertising ‘*the unusual spirit of service with which Boots staff carry on their work*’ (MATGD22 – CAIS76 ad8152-s, 1931-1932). But while proclaiming to offer excellent service is one thing, the proof is in whether customers experienced this aspect of Boots and attributed a service orientation to the company. Published regularly in *The Bee* particularly across the 1930s were hundreds of letters of appreciation for outstanding levels of customer service. Obviously, this was designed to set an example and inspire employees to greater heights of service, but their strategic intent does not diminish their evidential quality. Below are two representative examples:

*Dear sirs, I thought you would be interested to know my good impression of you assistants. I arrived in London a few days ago, having come from*

*Australia, and I had a bad cough. The hotel attendant directed me to your shop. I went in and was greeted by a very attractive young lady in white... This is my first experience of London and as I am travelling around England during the next few months I hope I shall be as warmly welcomed at all the other shops I go to as I was at this one (The Bee: Jan-Mar 1933, p.74-75).*

*Sir, while cycling in Lewisham I happened to get my knee slightly scraped, and as a prevention against further trouble I went into your branch there for some Iodine and a small bandage. I was most courteously received and taken to a dressing room where I was given expert attention by a nurse. Asking for the cost, I was told there would be no charge for the little service, and although I was not slow in expressing my appreciation I feel it likewise due to you as a firm to receive my personal word of thanks at both the courteous reception and prompt kindly care I was given by your staff in Lewisham this morning (The Bee: Jan-Mar 1933, p.74-75).*

### ***Boots as “assured quality”***

A second aspect of Boots’s offering of excellence to the public was through ‘assured quality’. This aspect of the company continued from the 1920s since following the Great War a surplus of stock had accrued threatening the quality of merchandise. To solve this Boots had a large public-sale of stock *‘thus carrying on the traditional policy of our [Boots] companies since their inauguration, of “Safety First”* ‘(Y83,

Quarterly Notes, No115, 1921, p.63). The company professed that their penchant for quality was enabled by their analytical facilities first developed during T1:

*We have a large pharmaceutical research laboratory where the standard of our drugs and preparations bearing the name Boots is under the most scrupulous control. In other words the same vigilant care in production and analytical control is exercised in the case of our simplest preparations as is given to products which are issued to medical men from our fine chemical department (Y82, Annual Report, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1934, p.107).*

The scientific safety and assured quality of Boots Own products were heavily promoted through an extensive advertising campaign in the early 1930s designed to reassure the public in the face of wider concerns that mass-manufacturing of pharmaceuticals was unsafe and inferior to smaller independent chemists. At its launch in 1931 Boots claimed:

*The present campaign seeks to disabuse the public of these notions [inferior quality] by submitting the actual facts of the extent and sureness of Boots analytical control in their vast laboratories in Nottingham, and by examples of the thoroughness and adequacy of the service Boots has given in the past and stand ready to give in the future. To these two main themes will be added, as and when opportunity offers, illustrations of the part Boots plays in Pharmaceutical Research. These prestige Boots advertisements will*

*appear in half page form weekly from now until the end of March 1932* (The Bee, April-May, 1931, p.182).

Indeed, the campaign was extensive meaning that over the course of a year Boots consistently projected an identity of quality assurance and safety in its products and production methods. An example of text from an advert, alongside authoritative images of men dressed in white lab coats stated:

*Boots guard so jealously their reputation for supplying only the finest and most reliable drugs that they will reject drugs to the value of thousands of pounds rather than offer their customer any drug (whether used in dispensing or in Boots specialities) that does not come up to a standard which is often higher than the law requires* (MATGD22 – CAIS76 ad8154b-s: Adverts 1931-32).

Additional to print advertising, Boot's assured quality identity was also communicated visually. Through shop window displays it was symbolically demonstrated by showing a wide variety of clearly priced goods (303/1, staff training manual, C1930s). In company brochures, images commonly depicted factory staff dressed in white, working in hygienic workspaces and sterile conditions (A83/41 A record of Service, C1929; 334/15, Boots: A world famous organisation, C1949). Meanwhile, another example of quality assurance through visual communication was the distinctive Boots script logo. When an opportunity arose to

change it, the company: *'decided to retain the familiar script Boots sign which has served us for so many years as a guarantee to the public of the quality of our goods'* (Y82, Annual Report BPDC, Aug 9<sup>th</sup> 1949, p.141).

Finally, having an identity of assured quality was also claimed defensively by the company in communications over the Retail Trading Bill (6<sup>th</sup> Nov 1936 – *Hansard*) proposed by Captain Balfour. The purpose of the Bill was to protect small independent shops from multiple chains such as Boots. In an internal draft letter concerning the Bill between a member of Boots' staff named Calvert and Lord Wolmer, the Vice Chairman of Boots, a view was expressed that:

*We are able to produce in our very modern and up-to-date factories, drugs and medicines of the highest quality. This quality is ensured by means of a very strict analytical control. The Analytical Laboratories are extensive and in the Laboratories all the drugs are tested and retested to ensure purity. In this manner we are able to offer our customers these drugs at very reasonable prices and at the same time the customer can rest assured that he is obtaining a commodity of the highest standard (441/3, 1936).*

### ***Boots as "trustworthy"***

The quality of Boot's Own products was a central feature in generation of the company's identity as 'trustworthy'. The trustworthiness of Boots' products was typically assured by a rigorous testing process in which:

*'every package received there [was] affixed to it a label which bears the words "Under Examination"... and every intermediate product before it goes for further compounding must bear the magic title "Passed" (267/29, With compliments of Boots the Chemist, C1929).*

This was echoed throughout many archival documents where numerous references to Boots quality control processes were made (The Bee, Nov 1929 p.34-35; 334/15; Y82/143; 467/29; Y82, p.97). The wider public also agreed and attested to the trustworthiness, reliability and dependability of Boots and their merchandise in a marketing investigation (A48/1, Report of an investigation: men and women in the United Kingdom, 1929). Boots confidently claimed that this view of the company held by the public was self-evidential from the vast numbers of customers using Boot's pharmacies and branches:

*It is hardly necessary for me to point out once again that such a record of sales betokens the unfailing confidence of both the public and of the medical profession in the quality of our service and the scrupulous care taken in ensuring the purity of our products (Y82, Annual Report –The Times, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1935, p.111).*

As an identity theme, "trustworthy" was also derived from Boots approach to customer service. Throughout *The Bee*, Boots encouraged their staff, as the public face of the company, to emulate ethical and moral virtues. For example, in a

monthly forum published in 1929 (p.20-27), Boots told its staff that: *'Honesty, Ability, Tact and Punctuality'* were virtues staff should display *'but the greatest of these – our very cornerstone is honesty'*. Continuing in the forum, notions of honesty were elaborated further:

*So we come to our bedrock foundation, HONESTY, and SERVICE. HONESTY in business whatever cynics might say to the contrary, is becoming more and more essential to success and the honesty which is required is not the sort which is practised because it is best policy, but because it is intrinsically right.*

For Boots particular offering of pharmacy and medicine, honesty was regarded as even more essential:

*There should be honesty of purpose in Pharmacy, so that the credulity of the Public may not be an excuse for mere exploitation. There should therefore be restraint in making rash claims for merchandise, no overstatement, or exaggeration in description, and a clear estimation of value and prices in every article offered. The application of these principles from the general conduct of business to each particular sale over the counter is self-evident.*

Self-declarations of corporate-level honesty in the public marketplace were also evidenced in company communications with pharmacy managers:

*It has not been our policy in recent scares about epidemics to take advantage of that scare for sales purposes. We have assumed such action would not be helpful to the local authorities and indeed be resented by them. When such epidemics do occur we should remember that the chemist can and should and give what help he can (Merchandise Bulletin, 577-604a, 1938).*

Thus, an identity label of trustworthy reflected Boot's honesty over the counter, in service and in rigorous quality control of products ensuring their reliability and safety. Indeed, honesty and integrity were not merely abstracted principles, but regarded as a moral duty and a virtue that the business adopted as a "right way to do business". This was revealed through company adoption of a transparent pricing policy in which all goods were always clearly priced (303/1, Staff training manual, C1930s) and an overall drive toward ethical and humanistic business principles in which:

*Business dealings, actuated entirely by material considerations divorced from honesty of which are also the basic principles of life, are clearly indefensible, and are generally only carried out by those driven by the force of their own conduct to the most unsatisfying conclusion, that in business there is no sentiment (The Bee, Nov 1929, pp. 20-27).*

This virtuous package won Boots the royal patronage of King George VI (Y82, Annual Report, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1942, p.128); an unmistakable endorsement of trust placed in Boots the Chemist.

### ***Boots as “relational”***

Being ‘trustworthy’ is generally considered an important component of relationship building and in the archive material a new identity theme of ‘relational’ was generated. Evidenced in what follows, Boots were active in building relationships with the both the Government and medical profession, worked collaboratively in research and drug development and fostered an internal culture of teamwork and unity. One of the earliest examples for this time period revealed an increasing relationship with the medical profession. In 1926, Boots invited the British Medical Association (BMA) to visit their factories as part of the BMA’s 94<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Nottingham (The Bee, 1926, p.343). From this point onward, the company began to work more closely with the medical profession than it had done previously. For example, an ‘*agreement with The Royal Institute of Public Health*’ was established in which Boots held sterile containers and accepted G.P. patient’s specimens over the pharmacy counter (The Bee, Aug-Oct, 1933, p.260).

Further to this, the company’s research scientists began to work in collaboration with clinical ‘*scientific workers in hospitals and other centres of medical research in developing new methods for tackling disease*’ (Y82, AGM, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1933, p.102; see also: AGM 1936, p.113). Of record, these were with the Venereal Disease

Department at St. Thomas Hospital in London (Y83, p.90) and The Middlesex Hospital's Bland Sutton Institute (Y83, Annual Report, 1927, p.86). International collaborations were also apparent since Boots worked with the Sir Frederick Bunting Laboratories in Toronto to develop British Insulin manufacturing (TRC//591/2, Oct 1941). Levels of collaborative working were stepped up even further during the Second World War, primarily to deal with the problem of penicillin production. Among others, Boots were invited to join a knowledge-sharing, research-led group known as *The Therapeutic Research Corporation of Great Britain* which had a functional objective 'to accelerate the research and production of pharmaceuticals during the war years' (Nature, 1941, p. 658). Members of this group were the UK's largest drug manufacturers: Burroughs Wellcome, British Drug Houses, Boots the Chemist, Glaxo Laboratories, and May & Baker Ltd. Although the records for this group held at Boots were largely technical and related to formulae, test results, and taxonomies of specific substances, the group's collaborative nature was self-evident and confirmed in a Boot's annual report in 1942 (Y82, p.128):

*In connection with research it may be mentioned that we have joined with four other leading firms in the fine chemicals industry in forming The Therapeutic Research Corporation of Great Britain - but still retain independence but share research knowledge... I am glad to say that there is an increasing tendency for British Fine Chemical manufacturers to collaborate, and we have been able to pool information and unite in the*

*solution of problems with other manufacturers in several instances. While it is too early yet to report on substantive progress, the results so far attained give every promise of the collaboration bearing good fruit.*

Notwithstanding a relational approach to research, drug development and the medical profession more generally, Boots were also working closely with various Government departments on projects highlighted in the identity theme of “public service” and “nationalism” covered previously. To refresh, during the Second World War Boots worked with The Ministry of Agriculture (Y82, p. 124/136); The Ministry of Labour on retail employment conditions (Y83, p.73); engaged with the British Dig-for-Victory campaign (Y82, p.125) and supported Government endorsed, export expansion programmes (Y82, p.124). The Ministry of Supply were also worked closely with, particularly in penicillin production, vitamins and foodstuffs.

Although in the spirit of public service, these relationships were in some way commercially linked yet over this time frame, Boots also adopted an internal culture of relationship and collectiveness that contributed to a “relational” identity theme. This culture was facilitated by production and distribution of staff magazines such as *The Beacon* that were intended to be:

*A magazine for ALL... that shall ignore no class and injure no individual, but serving all interests which bind us together as one FIRM, shall become one of these strongest bonds (467/28, Welfare, C1924).*

Staff training was another area in which the company also promoted a culture of unity and team work, with training manuals informing new employees that: *'You also have to fit in with your colleagues to become a member of a team within your branch as well as a member of Boots employees* (303/1, Staff training Manual, C1930s). Indeed, notions of team work reflected what Boots perceived as a change in working relationships from traditional paternalism to *'joint responsibility and partnership'* between managers and employees (467/28, Welfare, 1924). Team work was considered a source of strength for the company's previous and continuing success:

*It is a record [history of Boots] which has no parallel in commercial history...and a great measure of strength is derived from the spirit of fellowship that exists in its many sections'* (303/1 staff training manual, C1930s).

This spirit of fellowship was not only evident among Boot's family of employees, but spread out beyond the organization to the surrounding community through charitable giving and fundraising among staff (for example: C & D, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1926, p.335). Even at the level of the organization itself, Boot's branches were understood to be an interdependent and related network in which *'the smallest of the 870 branches can call upon the largest and best-stocked at a moment's notice'* (MATGD22 –CAIS76 Ad9195-s, 1931-32).

### ***Boots as “capable”***

With such an extensive and large branch network in place across the whole country and with well developed manufacturing and research capabilities, Boot’s were a highly ‘capable’ organization meaning:

*Each branch – though it only be a small shop in an obscure village – has at its command all the resources of this great organisation. This means that not only sudden calls for rare drugs in remote places can be met, but that every customer has the benefit of standard quality and standard prices. The purity and reliability of the drugs issued is ensured because they come from Boots own factories (Y82/143, The Shop that became a Service, C1949).*

This ensured that each customer, independent of location and spending power had ‘*the whole weight of Boots, the policies, pride and service at their disposal*’ (The Bee, Nov 1929, p. 20-27). And Boot’s certainly did appear to carry considerable muscle, particularly in terms of scientific power through collaboration (see “relational” above) and by retaining a ‘*number of distinguished scientists in a consultative capacity*’ (TRC//591/2, 1941). Having and being the best in capabilities was inherited from Jesse Boot’s earlier vision for the future of the company in which he claimed to shareholders in 1920 (Y83, p.55): ‘*I want to get the best men in the country and the companies blended together*’. Such men were the likes of Jack Drummond [1891-1952], who before joining Boots as Research Director in 1945, was knighted, an elected Fellow of The Royal Society and a Government adviser on

nutritional health (Hollingsworth & Wright, 1954). Such skill and expertise served to enhance Boots credibility and capability, while the company's: *'strong position in relation to manufacturing of Fine chemicals and such drugs as Insulin and Stabilarstan'*\* made Boots attractive to the medical profession:

*Not only are they [doctors] interested in our ability to supply fine chemicals and special drugs...but they have had a demonstration of our ability to manufacture the ordinary requirements of medicine and the ability to manufacture the best possible type of things such as Asprin Tablets, Cascara Tablets, and the drugs in common use* (\*The Bee, Nov 1929, p. 20-27).

Noting the date of the above quotation, manufacturing of drugs before 1933 took place at a number of factories around Nottingham. However, once D.10 had been opened at the Beeston site most drug manufacturing was relocated to the new factory. Notwithstanding the building's *'functional efficiency which secures a maximum of economy at all stages of production and dispatch'* (Y82, Annual Report, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1934; see also Y82/143, p.7, 1949), *'a new factory such as this was an outstanding symbol of confidence'* (The Bee, Aug-Oct, 1933, p.261/65). This was because:

*...the Beeston factories were planned and started during the severe time of depression in pursuance of our [Boots] policy of creating employment when employment is scarce* (Y82, Annual Report, June 4 1937, p.116).

Thus, the erection of the D.10 factory at Beeston told a story of the capabilities, confidence and capital resources of the company that enabled building on such a grand scale during a time of deep global economic depression. Meanwhile, toward the end of the time frame a second large change in the national economy occurred with the creation of a Welfare State and the *NHS*. Once again Boots demonstrated their capabilities, by successfully managing the rapid increased demand for pharmaceutical dispensing (Y82/143, *The Shop that became a Service*, C1949).

### ***Boots as “innovative”***

A final and new identity theme of ‘innovative’ was generated in light of the company’s expansion from an analytics laboratory in Time 1 to what by now were extensive research facilities:

*Through recent arrangements abroad, this Company will have the support of the finest and up to date works and the best scientific brains in the world. We are proud of Research Department, but this new development will greatly strengthen our position on the scientific and medical side of our business* (Y83, Shareholders Annual Meeting, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1928, p. 87).

Having such facilities to conduct research enabled Boots to claim to shareholders that: ‘*our company is working on problems in the forefront on medical science*’ (Y83 Annual Report, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1929, p. 90). Key areas were in disinfectants and the crucial new field of antibiotic treatment:

*Of special interest was the discovery in our own Laboratory of Flavazole, a compound of Sulphathiazole and Proflavine, which has been found particularly effective against certain bacteria which are resistant to the known antiseptics and bactericides' (Y82, Annual Report Chairman's Statement, July 1945, p.136, see also C & D 1945, p. 188).*

*The Company has followed up on its pioneer work in developing the production of penicillin by making a comprehensive study of the new therapeutic agent known as Streptomycin, an agent that holds out promise of being valuable in the treatment of some human diseases that do not respond to penicillin (Y82, Annual Report, July 8th 1946, p. 137).*

Alongside such important research the company were also developing preventative health products such as "Vitamalt" vitamin tonic (Y83, Annual Report, 1929, p. 90) and actively exploring ways to turn the new chemicals the company's researchers were discovering into useful every-day health products:

*During the year our Research Department has discovered a number of synthetic chemicals suitable for use in medicine. One of these substances, amyl-meta-cresol, has 250 times the antiseptic value of phenol and is of low toxicity. We are actively investigating the possibility of extending its use in all those branches of medicine where antiseptics of this type are essential. We have already incorporated it as an ingredient of our Compound Glycerine*

*of Thymol Pastilles, which are having a phenomenal success. Many of our competitors have copied us in marketing a Compound of Glycerine Thymol Pastille, but our pastilles differ from all imitations in containing this new antiseptic, amy-meta-cresol. This substance is also giving promising results as an intestinal and urinary antiseptic' (Y83, 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1930, p.91).*

The level of innovation that Boots were demonstrating through their research activities was a new development in the organization's identity during this time. Although innovation was largely visible from only one identity facet – corporate identity – the company's research activity was central to Boots and evidenced in noticeable quantity suggesting it should be included as an identity theme.

### ***Explaining Boot's OI at T2***

That Jesse sold the company to U.S. interests in 1920 signified the first temporal cycle in Boot's OI. Apparent from Table 3., and the findings presented in this chapter were that over this period of change in ownership and a return to UK hands in 1933, all previous eight identity themes were repeated indicating that Boot's identity had both endured and been reproduced by agents. Three new themes were also generated meaning that Boot's OI had also undergone some elaboration. I now move forward to explain the endurance and elaboration of Boot's OI with reference to its presentation at T1, organizational agents, and the wider social context.

Much from Boot's previous OI was visibly reproduced within this time frame indicating that the company continued to enact what had previously been laid down by the organization's founder, Jesse Boot. A possible explanation for this was that John Boot reproduced the identity of the company because he was a family member. Support for this comes from research on OI within the context of family firms, in which OI is understood to be interrelated with family identity thereby making the organization a vehicle for family identity expression and maintenance (Carney, 2005; Dyer & Whetten, 2006). A further study has also suggested that family-firm identity coalesces around non-financial acts and goals of which Boots appeared to have many (Zellweger et al., 2013). For example, provision of free in-store health services such as nurses and first-aid treatment were non-financial business activities. So too were company efforts toward nurturing and caring for staff since many of these incurred costs, but were regarded as worthwhile. Thus, both theory and data suggested that reproduction of Boot's identity may have occurred through John re-enacting and protecting the identity of the Boot family. This was a plausible explanation given that Jesse Boot had also developed the business in accordance with his own personal values.

Despite theoretical support for this idea there were however a number of caveats for this to not be a credible explanation for endurance in Boot's OI. First, non-financial acts are considered to be beneficial for businesses since they promote a number of positive organizational outcomes. For example, engaging in non-commercial activities (typically referred to as CSR) have been linked with enhanced

economic performance (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003), maintenance of stakeholder trust and relations (Story & Price, 2006; Scott & Lane, 2000), alongside a host of other intangible advantages for an organization (Kurucz, Colbert, & Wheeler, 2008). The clear benefit now known to be associated with non-financial goals for organizations thus made it difficult to distinguish whether concerns about family identity were necessary for their reproduction. For example, continuing to reproduce what was already a socially valued and legitimised OI would have quite simply made good business sense.

A second caveat arose from the fact that John had not actually inherited the business from his father, who had preferred to sell the business and put the proceeds to use in the development of Nottingham University and for the wider local community. According to a former employee's account, the relationship between father and son was also strained with Jesse perceiving John as lacking ability to run a business (Greenwood, 1977). Such animosity between father and son may have offered little imperative to reproduce and protect the work of his father. Conversely, John may have had everything to prove and been motivated to extend his father's work. Without strong support for either possibility advancing an explanation for reproduction in Boot's identity at T2 based on family identity concerns was tenuous and could not be well-supported.

Looking beyond family identity as an explanation, the context was also considered. This offered a more credible account of observed identity endurance. At the

commencement of T2, Boots already had a successfully working and legitimate operation, business model and identity. Infrastructure such as pension funds, analytical laboratories, factories, social clubs and staff magazines were already in place as well as a celebrated identity as a public service that was patriotic to the nation. Indeed, Boots had both a commercial and cultural foundation and it was difficult to imagine a rationale for needing or wanting to deviate from this. This was further supported by the finding that during the American Period, interference in the company by American management had been minimal suggesting that what had been established in T1 had been recognised as a solid foundation. Thus, to continue to build the business on what Jesse Boot had already laid down in terms of OI and infrastructure was arguably a logical development.

A further contextual feature that helped to explain reproduction of OI was that many similarities in the wider social environment were evident across the two time frames. For example, in 1939 World War II occurred, which although different from World War I, was likely to have facilitated reproduction of Boots OI as a nationalistic enterprise. Indeed, in the first time frame World War I had seen the Government of the day approach Jesse Boot to help with securing Britain's chemical and pharmaceutical supplies, while during the Second World War, Boots collaborated extensively with Government on a number of issues. A second similarity was that in both time frames there were ongoing and widespread social problems. In T1 this had been a monopoly on health by independent chemists, while in T2 one of the most pressing social problems had been mass-

unemployment. Although these differed, they were nevertheless social issues that Boots continued to actively address meaning that early 'social idealism' had been reproduced as being 'pro-social'. To clarify, reproduction of wider social conditions such as war and social need were likely to have resulted in reproduction and strengthening of Boot's identity. An explanation supported by arguments by Gioia et al. (2000), that only when OI is threatened does OI change.

Despite, this being supported by work emanating from a social constructionist paradigm (*op cit*), a critical realist reading goes further to explain why this may be the case. That stability in one thing, equals stability in another is of importance within critical realism since it signifies the presence of a structural relationship (Sayer, 1992). Such relationships are argued to be foundational to social reality meaning that in some way Boot's identity was interdependent with wider social entities such as War, Labour, and the State. However, these could not be considered as necessary relations in that both were mutually constitutive, but were asymmetrical in that Boot's OI was dependent on wider social issues and values, but not the other way around (Sayer, 1992). To explain how the relational dependency of Boot's OI had come about, one need only think back to the formation of Boot's identity in T1. Through Boots earlier overlap with wider social values, ideas and beliefs, the organization had become interdependent on wider societal-level relations that supported its legitimacy. Thus, in similarity with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995), Boot's OI could be considered as being suspended at the nexus of wider stakeholders' needs,

values, concerns and beliefs. Given the dependence of Boots as an organization and its identity on a configurative pattern of wider social entities, values and beliefs it was also conceivable that Boot's OI was an emergent property of that combination.

Emergence is a central tenant of critical realism (see chapter two) in which combinations of structures at a lower-level give rise to higher-level social entities and/or properties that are non-reducible to their parts and are capable of causal action (Sayer, 2000; Elder-vass, 2005; Easton, 2010; Pratten, 2013). In this case, Boot's OI can be understood as arising from a contingent combination of its main stakeholders that were identified as Boots' staff, the wider public and shareholders. These were in addition to wider cultural entities such as stakeholders' values and beliefs, and structured objects such as war, health and industrial labour. Moreover, although depending on these underlying social entities for legitimacy and existence, Boot's OI could not be reducible to them. Emergence also requires time since Archer (1995; 1996), highlights that what emerges (in terms of culture as opposed to structure) only becomes emergent when it is historically situated. Without becoming historical, what arises from a combination of social entities and objects remains discursive and constructed by agents rather than a pre-existing reality that then shapes future discursive constructions (Reed, 2005). Thus, by T2, emergence in Boot's OI had begun to take place since it was increasingly becoming an historically situated identity that could influence the way in which Boot's OI developed.

That Boot's previous OI (T1) was now beginning to influence its current OI (T2) was evidenced by how the company elaborated their identity; empirically observed as the development of new identity themes. The elaborated identity marker of 'health and medical service', and new identity themes of 'innovative', 'relational', and 'service oriented' were largely enabled by Boot's previous OI at T1. For example, that Boots could claim to be 'innovative' was predicated on having previous 'capability' of analytical resources that were now turned toward scientific innovation. But innovation couldn't occur without building relationships with the scientific community – a sub theme in the generation of Boot's 'relational' identity. Development of a relational identity was further generated on grounds supported by a pre-existing identity as 'trustworthy' in conjunction with a previous identity as 'nationalistic' evidenced by collaborations with Government over the World War II period. The theme of 'service orientation' reflected an extended offering of Boot's earlier identity as a public service. Indeed, as access to cheap remedies was supplanted by an increasing need for public health services, Boots developed in a way to meet public need through becoming explicitly more service oriented. Of itself, this was related to an elaboration from being a 'chemist' at T1 to becoming a 'health and medical service' in T2. Given these links with Boot's past OI, it was clear that new and elaborated themes were not simply based on wider contextual factors but were also enabled by what had pre-existed the company in terms of its previous identity. With past OI enabling and shaping development of a current OI in this way, demonstrated that emergence in Boot's OI was beginning to take place.

To summarise, an explanation for endurance and elaboration in Boot's OI was forthcoming after demonstrating that concerns about family identity could not be verified as a plausible explanation for observed endurance and elaboration in Boots OI. Looking to the wider context suggested that there were many similarities between T1 and T2 that created a degree of stability in conditions across the two time frames. Developing this further and informed by critical realist theory, I proposed that that the stability in conditions was actually stability in the wider institutional-level environment in which Boots OI had been previously been constructed at T1. Thus, ongoing stability of the social entities which combined to support Boot's OI, gave rise to its reproduction by agents. This explanation was situated within notions of emergence and Boot's OI was argued to be dependent on a combination of wider social entities and ideas in the institutional environment. Importantly, emergence gives rise to causal properties and in reflecting on the appearance of new identity themes in T2, it was argued that construction of these had been influenced by Boot's preceding and emergent OI. Indeed, I explained and demonstrated that Boot's emerging OI had enabled (and thereby also constrained) what was produced in terms of new OI themes. Having thus offered an explanation for the findings at T2, it was then possible to consider the dynamics and developments of Boot's OI in the following time frame.

## Chapter 6

### Results III: Identity Under Threat

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I present the data and findings of the third time frame which was bracketed from 1951 to 1977. In the same way as before, generated identity themes were evidenced building a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics in Boot's identity over time. To set the context, an introductory overview is offered based on information found in company annual reports. The *NHS* had been operational for two years and John Boot (also known as the second Lord Trent) retired from the business in 1954 and was replaced by John Savage who was Chairman between 1954 and 1961. He was succeeded by Willoughby Norman (1961-1972) and toward the close of the time frame the company was led by the previous Director of Research, Gordon Hobday. Consequently, the loss of family leadership was a significant juncture that made this time period stand out from T2. Further, in 1968 the company also acquired the 600-strong UK chain of hardware/chemists shops, Timothy Whites and Taylors, which extended Boot's network of retail branches considerably. The following year, Boots successfully launched to market their most well-known drug, Brufen, which further supported new growth for the business.

Expanding was something the company were keen to achieve in this time frame but had bids rejected by The Monopolies Commission for both Glaxo Laboratories in 1972, and House of Fraser (1973) which would have also included acquiring Harrods. Nevertheless in 1972 Boots were able to purchase Crookes Laboratories which added to Boots' product portfolio. Largely blocked from expansion in the UK, Boots attempted to expand internationally and in 1977 took-over Rucker Pharmacol in the U.S. and Tamblyn Drugs Stores chain in Canada a year later. The company also had a 70% interest in the French "cosmetic" business Sephora. This was because company pharmacy was illegal in Europe which significantly hampered Boots in attempting to expand their retail pharmacy business more widely overseas. However, it did not arrest Boots from international activity since the company owned or had significant shares in pharmaceutical manufacturing companies overseas alongside a few stores in New Zealand and Fiji that had been established in the previous time frame.

### **Boot's Identity at T3 (1950 - 1977)**

#### ***Boots as a "chemist"***

That Boots were a 'chemist' was a theme that endured from T1 having been elaborated in T2 to a health service and but had now had been constricted back to being chemist. This dynamic was likely to have been influenced by the development of the *NHS* because:

*Since the commencement of the National Health Service, the major portion of our shop fitting programme has been the refitting and enlarging of branch dispensaries to cater for the greatly increased number of prescriptions. Between July 1948 and March 31<sup>st</sup> 1951, 263 new or enlarged dispensaries have been completed.*

Thus, in response to the *NHS*, Boots focus was on expanding their dispensaries rather than health services, a primary indication that pharmacy was central to Boots. However, alongside expanding pharmacy services, Boots were also enlarging the range and quantity of No 2. (non-pharmaceutical merchandise) so that the company was sometimes misunderstood as a more general retailer or department store which was noted by the company in 1965. In a general brochure, it was declared that despite this, being a chemist was primary:

*Although the company carries on a wide range of activities there is a single thread which runs through everything we do. We are first and foremost retail chemists and all our activities are related on more or less degree to that one objective. (334/20, The Development of Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd, C1965).*

The centrality of pharmacy to Boots' identity was further qualified in a contemporary annual report that mirrored the above quote:

*The importance of dispensing to our business cannot be too strongly emphasised. All our managers are pharmacists and thus professionally qualified. They therefore bring to their work the high standards of responsibility and service that this implies, in this they are ably supported by their pharmacist colleagues not yet in management (Annual Report, 1965).*

A strong focus on pharmacy was iterated later as part of an image study carried out by Boots in 1973. This was referred to in the annual report of that same year within which it was reported that: *'One in ten of all our customers visit our branches in connection with our traditional dispensing service which remains the cornerstone of our business.'* The bedrock of pharmacy to Boot's identity was further confirmed in company communications to its retail employees in relation to the priority given to both the pharmacy counter and goods when planning new stores:

*These [pharmacy goods] are called No1 department and when a new shop is being planned, they receive the first priority in the design and apportionment of space. Only when the full requirements of the No1 departments have been satisfied does the introduction of other types of merchandise into the branch receive consideration (334/7, About Boots, 1970).*

Meanwhile, retail managers were also being reminded that: *'as chemists first we must pay attention to the service we give our prescription customers'* (A92, Leadership circular, C1965), and through staff education and training manuals,

employees were left in no doubt that: *'the backbone of the Company's retail business has always been dispensing'* (3006/21, Newsletter No3, April 1950). Communicating a chemist identity to staff was also supported by *Boots News* (1973, 1977), the re-titled staff magazine which was formerly known as *The Bee*.

Conversely, in external communications the company were projecting to stakeholders and the public in no uncertain terms that: *'BOOTS WILL ALWAYS BE CHEMISTS FIRST'* (334/3, About Boots Business, C1970s). A further strong piece of evidence externally communicating a chemist identity was an interview recorded in the *Chemist & Druggist* (3120/1, 31<sup>st</sup> Aug, 1974) between Gordon Hobday (Chairman) and the journal editor which read:

*He [Gordon Hobday] emphasised the statement in the Company's Annual Report that "Pharmacy is the keystone of Boots business" and he added that many had overlooked that half of their branches were small shops of less than 1000 sq ft of selling area. As a Company therefore they were very concerned with the wellbeing of the smaller pharmacy for the small pharmacy was an essential part of their business....When it was suggested that Boots had begun in pharmacy but now had left that image, Dr. Hobday did not agree. So far as he could see Boots would always "relate to pharmacy". He and his colleagues did not want the Boots name to be associated by the public with any other operation than a pharmacy. They had shown their decision to hive off The Timothy Whites activities use that*

*name for non-pharmaceutical operation. If the Harrods/House of Fraser deal had gone through then the Harrods name would not have been replaced by Boots, it would have been a distinct and separate operation.*

The strong emphasis in claiming to be a chemist appeared to be somewhat defensive and related to increasing diversification in Boot's retail offering since there were noticeable increases in beauty product and household goods advertising. This was also coupled with the takeover of home-wares chain Timothy Whites and Taylors in 1968 that added to Boot's non-chemist inventory. Thus, Boots were attempting to retain, and continued to claim a chemist identity in the face of increasing diversification.

### ***Boots as a "public service"***

Added to the increased volume and diversification in non-chemist merchandise, was a change in emphasis around Boot's identity as a 'public Service' of which being a chemist had traditionally played a primary part. Now, emphasis was placed on offering value and affordability across all goods, not just chemist lines, coupled with a noticeable reduction in additional health services. Arguably, this change had been influenced by the development of the *NHS* which appeared to have had multiple effects on the company. On the one hand the development of '*the NHS had played an important part [Boot's expansion within pharmacy]*' (3006/54, Newsletter No 42, Sep/Nov, 1959) yet on the other hand prescription levies and reduced remuneration on dispensing by 1962 also led to a loss in public service:

*...because of this lower rate of profitability, we [Boots] have to re-examine the dispensing service in our day-and-night shops and have already had to eliminate at least one of the 10 (Annual Report, 1962).*

The following year two more day-and-night pharmacies were closed (Annual Report, 1963), and because people could make appointments to see a G. P. free of charge (3124/3, *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, October 13, 1979), in-store nurses were also increasingly phased out. Thus, Boots relationship with the *NHS* was something of two edged sword in that with one stroke it increased pharmacy expansion which was a key part of Boot's past public service identity, but with the other stroke, reduced Boot's additional public service offerings.

Although meeting public demand for dispensing remained core to Boots self-understanding as a public service (Annual Report, 1968), the company had also recognised that public needs were shifting away from health provision toward general affordability of domestic and "luxury" goods in an inflationary post-war economic climate:

*Our national income is growing, the standard of living is rising, and people have more money to spend. Commodities that were the luxuries of yesterday have become the necessities of today. In the face of such trends, the demand is for bigger or brighter shops with a wide range of merchandise (334/6, Building for the Future, June 1960).*

Thus, it would not be unreasonable to suggest the change toward offering a greater range and quantity of affordable non-chemist merchandise could also be regarded as a public service by virtue of continuing to meet wider public demands. For example, in a centenary brochure in 1977 (459/1), Boots claimed that they were now selling: *'new electrical aids to beauty, which the modern Boots has brought in reach of everyone, much as Jesse did with soap.'* Indeed, what was increasingly evident from the archival data was that the company regarded that "affordability" was a key component of giving public service irrespective of whether the product was health-related or otherwise. The idea that Boot's public service identity now coalesced around a generalised affordability policy was supported by further evidence. For example, in the process of national transition between Purchase Tax to VAT, Boots claimed in an article in *Boot News* [1976]:

*Boots walk away with cut price honours. At least we would be the first in the High Street cut-price rush which we knew was to follow the Chancellor's speech... These price reductions made fully three weeks before we are required to do so under the terms of the new tax are in continuance with our policy of always being extremely competitive in the High Street. More than this they should be seen as evidence of our willingness to play our full part in helping contain inflation in the economy.*

Thus, offering affordability was to serve the public through an economic rather than public health agenda since public health had now, in effect, been nationalised.

Serving the public through supporting economic as opposed to health issues was also evidenced in the decade preceding the 1970s by Boots actively supporting the post-war “I’m Backing Britain” campaign. In particular, the company claimed to be combating inflation through temporary price-freezing and price reductions (C & D, Jan 1968, p.52). That Boots were generally mindful of the publically supportive role their affordability policy played in the wider social landscape was evidenced by the following Newsletter excerpt:

*Signs of changed economic conditions have been visible in Britain where experts have discerned ‘a little slow down in industrial activity’ and point to steel and textile output as illustrations. Slackening output leads to lower incomes and lower spending... At such a time Boots consistent policy of low price for high quality merchandise comes fully into its own. (3006/50, Newsletter no. 37, Sep/Oct 1958).*

Emphasising this, the primary slogan adopted consistently by the company during this time frame was “Boots for Value and Variety” (Boots Archive/doc, A History of Strap-lines).

Although notions of public service were largely centred on economic issues for the time frame as a whole, Boots did still continue to offer health services at the front-end of the T3 period with numerous letters of appreciation for help rendered appearing in staff magazines. However, overall what appeared to have happened

during this time frame was that with the *NHS* overseeing public healthcare, Boots's public health services gradually declined. However, the decline was balanced by increasing focus toward socio-economic issues and improving wide-scale affordable access to modern luxuries and everyday items for the general public. Consequently, while Boots's identity as a public service stayed the same, what constituted that public service had changed in relation to wider changes in the healthcare and political/economic landscape of Great Britain.

### ***Boots as "pro-social"***

Because Boots's public services were increasingly less focused on healthcare there were less clear overlaps between public service and being 'pro-social' as there had been in the previous time frame. Nevertheless, the company were still reproducing a pro-social identity across the T3 period. Being pro-social was reflected by Boots' wider involvement in issues of social concern such as the economy and the environment. Rooted in the previous time frame, between the two world-wars, Boots had previously perceived itself, alongside other large businesses, as having made a contribution to solving unemployment while at the same time driving up retail standards for the wider public:

*In my opinion it is true to say that bad as though unemployment was between the wars it might well have been worse had it not been for the great effort made by the multiple shops of every sort to maintain demand by giving the public the best possible value, and by constantly improving their*

*product while at the same time lowering their price (Annual Report, 1949-1950).*

However, in this time frame the company were now beginning to show a wider concern for environmental issues by limiting both their externalities and consuming habits:

*All manufacturing operations particularly those involving the synthesis and formulation of chemicals inevitably gives rise to some wastes which require safe disposal. We are very conscious of our responsibility to the community and all toxic chemicals are effectively neutralised. Matters affecting the environment are of great moment to us and we have a senior member of the staff who is wholly concerned with our practice and reputation in this field (Annual Report, 1972).*

*BOOTS CUT A MILLION – off the water: The Boots Company are saving millions of gallons of water a week at their Beeston and Nottingham sites. Normal consumption is 430m. gallons a year, and now chief engineer Mr. Charles Scarth is looking for ways to make the total saving 3m. gallons a week to match Severn-Trent Water Authority's call for a 40 per cent reduction (3124/5, Evening Post, September 20, 1976).*

In addition to engaging in pro-environmental behaviours, Boots were also perceived as actively helping to cut the cost of living for the wider public and were thus supporting wider society toward having a better standard of living:

*One of the major contributions made by Boots to reducing living costs – and enhancing the Company’s prosperity – has been the manufacture of its own brand of pharmaceutical, toilet and even food specialities which are usually sold at much lower prices than nationally advertised products although their quality is at least as high (3120/1, Investors Chronicle, 11<sup>th</sup> Sept 1959).*

Indeed, this was also supported by the City view of the company that: *‘Boots is one of those shares of which it easy for the investor to be proud. He can see his money rendering useful public service in most towns of the country (377/20, Financial Times, Feb 25 1952).* But such public value attributed to a shareholder-based company such as Boots, also carried with it the spectre of nationalisation and rumours of such existed. Although nationalisation of a company may occur on account of its failure, it can also be a reflection of its necessity and centrality to public life. With an extensive branch network, manufacturing and distribution capability, the latter was the case and revealed in a report in the *Evening Post Business Review Section* headlined:

Boots - The Case Against Nationalisation:

*It might be difficult to find a better example than Boots of a company which bridges the gap between two of the most salient features of the British economy – the importance of a chemical industry on the one hand, and the existence of a huge mass of retail outlets covering almost every strategic street in the country on the other (3120/5, C1970s).*

Salient in the quotation above were Boot's retail branches, details of which featured in the archive that also revealed a generalised pro-social identity, particularly through shop design. For example, when rebuilding stores to rejuvenate high streets in a nation-wide programme of post-war regeneration, Boots claimed they had a '*responsibility to the towns and villages in which they intended to build*'. Notably, this was as a self-professed responsibility rather than a legal responsibility through newly introduced planning legislation [1947]. In planning for a branch, Boots claimed that '*each shop must create no offence – indeed if possible it should be a worthy addition to its surroundings*' (334/12, Welcome to Boots, 1950). However, in towns or cities that were heavily bombed (for example, Swansea, Plymouth and Southampton)...

*...the opportunity has been seized of creating new stores which are an inspiration to the shopper and a delight to the town planner and the architect (334/11, Come Behind the Counter, 1956).*

Pictures of shop interiors also showed Boot's stores were designed to be accessible (334/3, About Boots Business, C1970s) and make shopping as convenient and comfortable as possible for customers (Sales & Selling, July 1962). Thus, Boots were actively contributing to post-war urban regeneration and demonstrating sensitivity to the environment in which they were building (see also 334/3, About Boots Business, C1970s). When considered alongside a growing sense of responsibility for the environment and combined with their affordability policy for the general public, a theme of being 'pro-social' was generated.

### ***Boots as "expansionist"***

Corresponding with the shift in Boot's public service identity from health to wealth was the loss of the earlier theme of "nationalism". In the archive there was insufficient evidence for this theme to be generated with only a few, more reflective articles that referenced Boots as a national enterprise. Rather, the focus at this time was on 'expansion'. This theme was represented through technical documents of various mergers and acquisitions across the period that of themselves did not directly reference expansion but were key indicators of it. For example, mentioned in the introduction to this section was Boots bid for Glaxo Laboratories quickly followed by House of Fraser, that were both blocked by The Monopolies Commission:

*Dr. Hobday also points out that Boots rely on their retail business for about 90% of their turnover thanks to their growing market penetration. But he*

*says that it is now difficult for Boots to maintain their retail momentum given that they are already so powerful in certain merchandise groups. The answer is new merchandise groups. This is a tricky venture for Boots on their own. Therefore they have decided to merge with a successful group in other areas and in their opinion House of Fraser fit the bill, especially because Boots are precluded from expanding in Europe under their own steam. EEC regulations prevent Boots from extending their present UK type operation to Europe. But if they own House of Fraser... or a similar company...they can become a truly European group. So far as a possible Monopolies commission investigation is concerned the Boots chairman cannot conceive how the merger could possibly be against the public interest (3120/1, The Glasgow Herald, 5 Nov 1973).*

Later, Boots purchased Rucker in the U.S. (Company Circular, 11 May, 1977) and a chain of drug stores in Canada – Tamblyns (3118/2, Boots News, 1977). To deal with the unique European problem of chain-pharmacy being illegal, Boots purchased a 70% stake in Sephora, a French cosmetics group (3120/5, The Times, May 4, 1977). Other stakes were also held in international firms in South Africa (3006/33, Newsletter No 21, 1954) and a West German chemical firm (3118/2, Boots News, 1977). Meanwhile, on the ground back in the UK Boot's shops and home industry was also expanding:

*Boots is now not only a major manufacturer, but also one of Britain's leaders in the development of research-based pharmaceutical and agricultural chemicals, many of which are manufactured and sold all over the world. Boots shops have not stood still. In the 1970s development has been faster than any time in this century, with the shopping area in Boots increasing by 25% over the last three years to about 4 million sq.ft (459/1, 100 years of Shopping at Boots, Centenary Brochure, 1977).*

Thus, rather than cleaving to their past identity as a national institution Boots had adopted a new expansionist identity marker that was increasingly leading the business to create bigger stores and become engaged on a wider international stage.

### ***Boots as "innovative"***

Boots' focus on expanding the business did not coincide with a loss of 'innovation' which endured from the previous time frame in a number of ways. Most clearly, the research department at Boots was the hub of innovation at Time 2; however, in this time frame the company felt that the *NHS* were encumbering development of new pharmaceuticals:

*We in common with other large firms spend scores of thousands of pounds on research. The only way in which this money can be recovered is by putting out our own named products which are the outcome of the Research. But*

*nowadays when the State, through the National Health Service, is the main buyer, pressure is being brought to bear upon the doctor to limit prescribing to products appearing in official publications such as the British Pharmaceutical Codex in order to reduce expenditure. Unless British firms are allowed to recover the cost of Research in the products they sell, they cannot continue to spend money on research. This could only mean that more and more specialities would have to be bought from abroad, principally the United States, and Germany where immensely more money is spent on Research than this country (Annual Report, 1952-53).*

Despite this, expenditure in research continued to be made and was documented as being in the region of £750,000 p.a. and rising (Annual Report, 1961). Continuing to invest in research was driven by a belief that innovation was a key component of success:

*In many countries it is the same medical specialities which are rapidly establishing a name at home, that lead the way in a growing Boots business overseas. One almost universal formula for successful marketing has proved to be a drug, chemical or other preparation, based on Boots research or on original development. Such products are unique; they carry a tried and trusted brand name and the demand for them is often world-wide (334/6, Building for the Future, June 1960).*

On this basis, Boots were searching to develop an original drug that they could market internationally. In 1969, such a drug emerged from Boot's Research Laboratories – Brufen (Annual Report 1968; 1970) that was further developed into the milder anti-inflammatory, Ibuprofen (Annual Report, 1972). Although this was perhaps Boot's most famous innovation, other developments were also arising from Boots Research. One document in particular highlighted that:

*Between 1950 and 1961 Boots created 18 new products which received patents. These were a mixture of human drugs (eg. anti-histamine, antiseptic, amoebicide, anti-rheumatic, antibiotics), herbicide and fungicide, and veterinary products (318/3, Novel products originating from the research department: Dr. D. A. Peak, C1968).*

Parallel to innovation in chemical and pharmaceutical products, innovation was widespread right across the company. A key example was the introduction of an experimental new type of retail pharmacy, introduced in 1951 and based on American ideas of self-service (The Bee, April 1951, Vol 22 no. 2). In the two years following, a court case surrounding self-service pharmacy took place between the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and Boots [1953] on the contract of sale. The court ruled in Boots' favour paving the way for self-selection pharmacy stores to be adopted by the UK pharmacy trade as a whole. Other examples linked to innovation were Boots introduction of retail technology:

*A great deal of thought and energy is being devoted to the efficiency of administration, and we are studying, designing and installing various new administrative systems. Last year I reported that we had installed an Emidec computer... A great deal more work is now being handled by this equipment... In this way we are building up a centralised information and statistical service designed both to reduce our operating costs and to improve management efficiency (Annual Report, 1962).*

Combined with this computer system at head office for managing statistical data, Boots were also the first retail company in the UK to introduce EPOS till technology that fed into the increasing data-net Boots were creating:

*Boots have installed a Sveda Universal Product Code reading system to experiment with computerised point of sale information...The UPC installation is claimed to be unique because it is the first system to go live in the UK (C & D, September 1978, p.538).*

Thus, across the board, the company records evidenced an identity of being innovative which was both an expansion and reproduction of their previous identity as innovative. In the past this had been solely based on research and pharmaceutical product development but in this time frame there was an additional and wider-level of innovation in retail and selling.

### ***Boots as “self-confident”***

A theme predicated on the past but nevertheless new to T3 was Boot’s increasing “self-confidence”. For example, *‘the Company’s determination to be in the forefront of Retail and Business Methods’* (A33/26, RB, 1966) was a confident ambition rather than simply a reflection of their increased size. Such ambitions were arguably based on the success the company were achieving in their home market of Great Britain because of their historically grounded and competitive affordability policies:

*Boots watchwords have always been Biggest, Best, and Cheapest. The phrase was coined by the founder of the business and over a period of three-quarters of a century, can be seen to have paid off handsomely. The Company tried to offer goods on the basis of its equivalence value at a lower price than competitors offer, or better value than the competitor offer but at the same price (3006/41, Newsletter no 49, 1956).*

Moreover, success wasn’t just in the past but also being currently enjoyed by the company’s innovation of Brufen and an increasing success in international marketing of other Boots products. The spirit of self-confidence in success and achievement was evident in an article appearing in *Boots News*, 1974:

*The popular image of Boots as a highly successful retail organisation is only too obvious if one walks down any busy High Street in Britain. What is perhaps less obvious to the public is the very high degree of success the*

*Boots Company is enjoying internationally in the highly competitive pharmaceutical industry. In an industry which, in the UK alone, is worth more than £193 million a year, Boots are currently placed number 10 by annual turnover having moved up from 22<sup>nd</sup> place in 1969. Internationally Boots are one of the most rapidly expanding pharmaceutical companies and in 1974 overseas sales were worth £32.5 million having more than doubled since 1972. This notable achievement which includes sales in chemicals, agro chemicals and toiletries, gained Boots the Queens Award to industry in 1974... Leader: On this basis Boots were not only able to increase dramatically the sales of their products broadly against overseas competition, but in the case of their most successful product Brufen, to lift it to market leader in many markets around the world. It is with Brufen, a drug used in the treatment of rheumatic disease, that the success of Boots overseas is most closely allied.*

Noted in the text above, Boots had received the Queen's Award to Industry (1974) and although royal recognition had begun in the previous time frame under the theme of 'trustworthy', in this time frame patronage had been extended by three other appointments as: "Manufacturing Chemist to Her Majesty", "Chemist" and in 1965, "Suppliers of Horticultural and Agricultural Preparations" (Boots News, 1972). Thus, this level of endorsement now went beyond trustworthy to demonstrate even a royal confidence in the company's capabilities and products. Boot's new drug Brufen, was also mentioned above as being the company's leading

international product meaning Boots were increasingly able to *'control our own destiny in the market place'* and enabled them to be *'operating in all 26 European markets'* and *'in some Iron Curtain Countries'* (Boots News, 1973). This level of self-confidence within the markets was unsurprising given the importance and value of this new, globally successful drug:

*Brufen continues to be an outstanding successful export product. It has been a subject for discussion at major medical meetings in all five continents. At the XIIIth International congress of Rheumatology held in Japan last October, for instance, 68 papers about Brufen were read by clinicians from 22 different countries. Brufen is now available in no less than 90 countries of the world; it is established in most of the East European countries and following a successful symposium held at the institute of Rheumatology in Moscow we have now received our first order for Brufen from the USSR* (Annual Report, 1974).

The manufacturing of Brufen took place at the company's famous D.10 factory; which served as another historically grounded but continuing statement of self-confidence in which many years after its completion the company still proudly claimed was: *'one of the finest chemical plants in Europe [and] a triumph of industrial architecture and modern engineering'* (Y280, Advert Cuttings). Alongside D.10, other operations existed at the Beeston site such as the printing works which following its rebuild after the Blitz, was also referred to by Boots as: *'One of the*

*most modern printing works in the country'* (Annual Report, 1952-53). Importantly, both D.10 and Boots Print Works were operational previous to this time frame meaning that Boots' confidence and pride in their current capabilities were to some extent predicated upon what they had managed to achieve over the course of their past. At the organization's centenary this was highlighted in advertising that proudly proclaimed to the British public:

*1977 is our centenary year. It is just 100 years since Jesse Boot took over his mother's herbalist shop in Goose Gate, Nottingham – a shop that was to become the springboard for a huge pharmaceutical enterprise whose products now carry the name Boots across five continents. From that tiny shop has grown one of the largest organisations in the world with total outlets – Boots the Chemist, Timothy Whites, Boots Farm Service and others - numbering almost 1,500. From a work force of two – mother and son - the Company now has a payroll of almost 68,000, in 21 different countries. This indeed is a century of achievement (Boots News, January, 1977; see also Financial Times, Mar 1, 1977).*

### ***Boots as "assured"***

Self-confidence however, did not give rise to complacency and Boots continued to maintain an identity as 'assured' with respect to their offerings. Indeed, it was also professed by the company that the quality of Boots Own products were not sacrificed in pursuit of offering affordability: *'Whatever happens to the general level*

*of prices or margins customers may rest assured that our quality standards will never be debased'* (Annual Report 1964). This was reiterated a few years later in the company's annual report of 1967 as a cornerstone policy that reflected Boots' quality standards as set forth at the beginning of this time frame:

*The importance of ensuring that every item of merchandise prepared by Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd. for sale to the public conforms to a high, uniform and rigid standard of quality, makes it essential that the responsibility for maintaining this standard throughout the firm should rest entirely in the hands of one single department – the standards department.... The standards department is one of the key sections of the Company and, as can be seen from the number of tests carried out, tremendous efforts are made to ensure that Boots products are indeed of the highest possible quality* (Annual Report, 1951-52).

Assured quality of Own Products was a key factor when the company engaged in external communication meaning that “we are assured” was clearly an identity marker for Boots. In adverts (The Countryman has a Word for it, C1950s; Y280, Advert Cuttings) and brochures from the 1950s (334/11, Come Behind the Counter, 1956), the 1960s (334/6, Building for the Future, June 1960) and the 1970s (334/3, About Boots Business, C1970s), Boots drew attention to the high standards of quality exerted by the company. This was supported by self-professed claims that between the 1960s and 1970s the company were spending £30,000 annually on

analytical quality control (334/6, June 1960; 334/3, C1970s). A further crucial piece of evidence that showed the rigour and lengths Boots took in protecting their reputation for assured quality was the finding that the quality standards department in the UK had to approve products that were manufactured internationally. Evidencing this, in Newsletter, No 41 (3006/53, Apr/Aug 1959) it was stated:

*We can now report that thanks to Mr. Whalvin and Mr. Peatfield, initial difficulties have been overcome and Own Goods lines marked 'made in Pakistan' are being sold all over West Pakistan. A sample of every batch is flown to this country for prompt testing by Standards Department, so that Pakistan customers are assured of the same high quality whether the Boots product that they buy came from Nottingham or was made on the spot.*

Checking of internationally manufactured Own Goods was also reported to have happened with Laboratorios Coca who were manufacturing and distributing Boot's herbicides and human drugs such as heparin within Spain (3006/36, Newsletter No 24, Dec, 1955). Indeed, such quality control was highly rigorous and scientific. Some of the more technical details were highlighted to shareholders in annual reports (1951-52; 1964; 1965) that emphasised the extent of the quality control process for pharmaceutical products:

*Quality control is the responsibility of our standards department. Specialised methods are used and chemical, physical, micro-biological and bio-assay techniques are employed... Coupled with this control at the manufacturing end, a close watch is kept on retail stocks to ensure that any products which have reached the end of their shelf life as determined by the standards department are promptly withdrawn, and in this way merchandise in the shops is kept in prime condition. Whatever happens to the general level of prices or margins customers may rest assured that our quality standards will never be debased (Annual Report, 1964).*

Assured quality did not stop at pharmaceuticals but was also extended to non-chemist goods from radios to stationery. In short, if a product carried the Boots name, then both quality and value were assured (334/7, About Boots, Retail Dept circular, 1970).

### ***Boots as “customer service oriented”***

Building on a previous service orientation in the previous time frame, with a loss of focus on healthcare services was an increasing focus on generalised customer service. Indeed, central to Boots in this time frame was their claim: *‘We believe that our primary task lies in serving our customers’* (334/6, Building for the Future, June 1960). To emphasise, this philosophy was represented across the whole time frame since a decade earlier Boots had taken up a similar position communicating to staff that: *‘our customers are more than are guest – they are a paying guests’* (The Sower

33, C1950s). In staff magazines (e.g. The Bee, 1951, vol 22, No1; 1957, vol 28, No 3; The Mixture, 1955; Boots News, Nov 1972; Jan, 1977) all employees were admonished on the importance of giving the very highest levels of service (334/29 & 30, NTL, 1973). Meanwhile, branch managers were also being encouraged strongly in this direction (see also: Sower 1, c1950s:

*The two parts are interdependent. Service to the Customer obviously depends on service to the counter. Your service to the customer objective is of paramount importance and deserves all the analytical thought you can give it as an operation on its own. Good service to the customer will follow naturally if the service to the counter is right, 90% of good service to the customer in these days is having the stock when it is asked for (A92, Leadership circulars for Managers, C1965).*

To communicate what customer service actually meant in practice, the company sometimes published examples of outstanding customer service designed to spur employees on. One particular salient example was printed in Staff Newsletter No. 20 (3006/32, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1954).

*You may be interested to hear of a little incident which shows that Boots reputation for service is as high as ever... One lunch-time, recently, the chief pharmacist of a large general hospital rang up the office here to see if we could tell him the composition of proprietary home permanent-wave kit, as a*

*three year old child had been admitted to hospital in a serious state after consuming one of the bottles in the kit. The call was received at this end by one of our secretaries, Miss Peggy Millard, who managed to find out the telephone number of the makers from the toilet buying office; she rang the manufacturers and asked them immediately to get in touch with the hospital concerned. Fifteen minutes later she rang the hospital and found out they had received all the necessary information... it is interesting to note that the hospital concerned chose to ring up Boots on the assumption that we have the answers to all problems, and we are very pleased in the way that one of our staff was able to settle the enquiry promptly and efficiently.*

Communicating a customer service orientation to the wider public was not especially noticeable in the archive, apart from a few adverts suggesting Boots were aligned with customer needs (Y280, Advert Cuttings). The general lack of projection to the public of a customer service identity was likely to reflect that customer service is an experience only individual customers can qualify. To support that Boots were perceived as being customer service oriented by the public, was a plethora of “letters of appreciation” from satisfied customers that were published as exemplars for employees in staff magazines. Given the large quantity of these, which appeared frequently across many issues of *The Bee*, three have been selected and are offered below:

*May I bring to your notice my very sincere pleasure derived from being attended to by Mr. Hunter in your store at the corner of Union Street and Argyle street here. In these days when so many shop assistants adopt a "Take-it-or-leave-it" attitude, I feel I cannot let Mr. Hunter's courtesy, and desire to please to pass without a word of gratitude. It certainly made the world of a difference to my Saturday morning (The Bee, October 1951, vol 22 No.4).*

*As these days one finds so much to deplore in service, I feel it only just to write and commend the treatment your customers get in your shop in Queen's Street, Wolverhampton. It is always a joy to go there. No matter how busy your assistants are, they give to each one courtesy and consideration; in fact, my husband, son and I are always holding them up to other shops in Wolverhampton as the perfect store. I think your Lichfield branch may be just as good, but I do not shop there (The Bee, March 1957, vol 28 No.1).*

*Also please let me say very special thanks to the young lady who measured me for stockings. She was so kind and sweet and it is such a change to be treated as a human being and by one so young (The Bee, Jun/july, 1966 Vol 37 No.3).*

These letters, although published for the purpose of promoting customer service among staff, were nevertheless likely to have been genuine experiences of customer service. On the basis of these alone it was not sufficient evidence to claim that *all* customers' experience of the company were positive, but they were of sufficient quantity and frequency to support the idea that the company were perceived more widely by the public as caring for their needs. A care that was documented as especially valued in the face of apparent declining levels of customer care across the retail sector more generally. To an extent this comparative belies that customer service was a source of competitive advantage. However, this did not negate that customer service was a point of differentiation from contemporary retailers thereby rendering it as an identity marker.

***Boots as "trustworthy"***

Further to customers' perceptions and experiences of Boots as concerned for them, customers also attributed 'trustworthiness' to the company. This was mainly experienced by customers at the branch-level and was evidenced by the same source above – published letters. Across copies of *The Bee*, published correspondences praised staff for their honesty:

*I have always considered that Boots is a Firm which is reliable and trustworthy and once again this has been proved (The Bee, Feb 1956, vol 27 No.1).*

*I do not know how to express the pleasure that I have felt because of a member of your staff, who having given me short change was so honest as to send the 6d she owed by the very first post afterwards. It is rare to find honesty of this degree these days and there is no way that I can repay this except to acknowledge it and congratulate you on your choice of staff* (The Bee, March 1958, vol 29 No1).

Moreover, at a corporate-level, Boots were also seen with good regard as a trustworthy investment: *'Boots enjoy a fund of good will, especially among institutional investors who value the strong combination of a quasi-monopolist with a well earned reputation for being a fine retailer'* (3120/1, Business News, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1971).

That Boots were perceived as a 'fine retailer' may have been related to the seriousness with which they took customer safety – further support for the idea that the company were trustworthy. For example, in response to a health rumour concerning some types of baby lotions, Boots immediately stopped selling the products despite there being no scientific evidence they were of danger (3124/4, The Yorkshire Post, Feb 19<sup>th</sup>, 1972). Thus, rather than take risks Boots withdrew the stock. An alternative but equally strong example of the regard Boots gave to customer safety and assuring product quality was research into packaging integrity:

*By extensive testing the laboratory staff can determine the fundamental properties and potentialities of different forms of pack. Some supposedly airtight seals prove not to be so, some containers break up or distort in humid conditions, some colours fade badly, and some packs do not withstand transport hazards, and so on and so on. Conversely, a container may be especially chosen because it gives a first-class closure or offers outstanding resistance to moisture permeability (3006/46, Newsletter No. 34, May/July 1957).*

Such exacting efforts were designed to ensure the safety and reliability of Boots products that denoted notions of trustworthiness and reliability surrounding the Boots Company (*cf.* identity theme of Assured).

To other chemists in the trade that sold Boots products, the Boots name was sometimes a bitter pill since in selling Boots products they felt they were providing free advertising. In response to claims that this was unfair, Boots sought to find a solution to the problem. They did so by creating an alternative brand name for Boots products that were widely sold among all chemists to mitigate the fact that Boots' products were of themselves their own advertising for the company. Thus, even among competitors in the trade, the company were enacting a trustworthy identity by attempting at times to play fair and be ethical competitors by accommodating smaller retailers' concerns:

*In response to criticisms from several chemists that the inclusion of Boots name on the packs of Dulsils and Top Score had the effect of steering repeat purchasers into Boots branches, the Company is introducing from July 1 a new name, Lenbrook Laboratories Ltd., on the pack of those products. No reference to Boots will appear on the packs. Terms continue as present. A second change in policy is to make Boots artificial sweetener Sweetex a Lenbrook product and to widen its distribution to all chemists. Again no reference to Boots will appear on the pack. The manufacturers point out that Sweetex sells at exceptionally competitive prices and already, despite a hitherto restricted distribution, is considered the National brand leader in tablet sales. National advertising is continuing with the difference that henceforth customers are being directed to "all chemists." Independent chemists and Boots branches will benefit equally from all and promotion schemes and material produced for the product (C & D, June 1967, p.519).*

Taken together, the safety and quality measures Boots employed, alongside the company's honesty toward customers and sometimes fair, ethical stance to industry competition, suggested that Boots could be considered a trustworthy organization.

### ***Boots as a "nurturing" company***

Another theme continuing on into this time frame was that the company continued to be a caring employer. There were many documents that attested to Boots as

taking staff welfare as a serious obligation that led to generating a 'nurturing' identity theme. Annual reports were a particularly strong source in communicating this aspect of Boots' identity. For example, the company professed an organizational-level belief about staff that was communicated to shareholders as:

*We think that all these things [staff welfare] are important for the morale and efficiency of the 40,000 people who make up our staff and on whose skill and devotion the Company depends. Its strength is the strength of the people who compose it (Annual Report, 1962).*

Comments of gratitude were frequently extended to the whole body of Boots staff thanking them for their contributory efforts. A strong example was the grateful recognition by the Chairman of the support staff gave during the process of dispensary enlargement (1950-1951). In further annual reports, staff welfare initiatives were also documented. These included a profit-earning bonus scheme (1961), tributes to staff and mention of four full-time doctors for staff health (1962), a 25 year service award (1971), staff safety and works councils (1974), an occupational health unit (1974), staff training (1966), and a new management training scheme (1968). These were all in-work benefits for those currently employed at Boots; however, the company also greatly valued those who had retired from the business – a strong indication that nurturing staff was more fundamental to Boots than being a good employer.

*[Our] interest does not cease at retirement, Over the past few years we have been able to improve the pensions paid to most of our older retired people, particularly those with small pensions (Annual Report, 1962).*

*We as a firm care deeply about our staff and our pensioners; we must never become so immersed in the affairs of business as to forget those whose long and loyal service has contributed so much to the position we enjoy today (The Bee, Feb 1966 vol. 37 No1, p.20).*

Caring for retired staff was also evidenced across staff magazines *The Bee* and *Boots News*, which regularly depicted narrative stories of retired staff members and accounts of pensioner social activities supported by the company. Indeed, pensions were considered an important aspect of staff welfare, which had begun initially for male staff in 1935, but by 1956 were extended to women under the same scheme. Moreover, following the merger with Timothy Whites in 1969, all were placed on the Boots pension rates (Boots News, Feb, 1973):

*General Pension Scheme meeting: The meeting was historic because it was the funeral service of the Pension Scheme which commenced in 1935 and also its reincarnation as a new Boots General Pension Scheme with bigger and better benefits... Applicable to all members – both male and female members were now included in one Pension Fund instead of having separate Funds...a new principle has been adopted so that the Company contributes*

*twice as much as every pension fund member* (The Bee, June 1956 vol. 27 No 2, p.12).

This new pension scheme also suggested a desire to promote and support equality among staff. For example, as a company, Boots professed in the pages of *The Bee* they were committed to gender equality:

*Mrs Pankhurst would be proud of us. In these days when women are taking their place alongside men in all the top professions, we at Boots can claim a well established tradition of women in management, going back to 1932 when our first lady manager on the company was Miss Annie Souter 666 (Elgin). We now have 43 lady managers. The next logical step is a lady T.G.M, and in the words of Mr Derek Budge, deputy manager, Retail staff: "The sky's the limit for women in the company today." Not so long ago lady managers were something of a phenomenon. Now we accept them on equal terms with their male colleagues and, indeed, their opportunities and working conditions are exactly the same as for men. Similarly, the attitude of women themselves has changed too. Nowadays many girls joining the company as pharmacy graduates have management in mind as a career and with this end in view they have been given the chance of attending our training for management courses during their first year's postgraduate training. The statistics are already improving in favour of the future lady T. G. M. whereas a very small percentage of women entered pharmacy in the*

*immediate post war years; the figure is now as high as 35 per cent (The Bee Sept/Oct 1969, p.12).*

This was more than a rhetorical piece of text since further evidence confirmed the presence of three female Directors on the Boards of Lancashire, Southern and Northern Boots Companies (Annual Report, 1949-1950). Other sources such as *The Bee*, also depicted accounts of female pharmacy managers (1950, p.21) which was again reiterated in *Boots News* (April 1979 edition). However, discourse about gender equality sometimes still portrayed a certain amount of gendered stereotyping:

*A reference to “women’s lib” provided a topical talking point at the annual presentation of awards made at the Secretarial Training Centre, Beeston, recently. Addressing girls who had just completed their courses at the Centre, Mr XXXXXXXXXX, training services manager said: “There’s no doubt that we are moving towards greater equality. By 1975 the Equal Pay Act will have come fully into force and already a number of traditional barriers dividing the sexes have been broken down. Women are beginning to exert themselves – to an extent they always have of course, but now it is more noticeable. In secretarial jobs girls have an inbuilt advantage – for who would want a male secretary? But in general, the better her qualifications and the more skilled and effective she is in carrying out her secretarial*

*duties, the more chance she will have of gaining equality and gaining both satisfaction and success* (Boots News, March 1972).

Potential biases and discrimination were addressed formally by the company when they published their first “Equality in Employment” policy in 1976 (a year after the Equal Pay Act), that was designed to ensure ‘*marital status, race, colour or creed*’ were not barriers to ‘*pay, training, promotion and recruitment*’ (Boots News, Jan, 1976). Underpinning inclusive policy making besides UK law, was also an organizational-level belief in meritocracy in which Boots regarded staff as primarily people (The Bee, vol 35. No 1, 1963) to whom they could offer opportunities and a fulfilling career (Annual Report, 1968). This was achieved through staff training that was parallel with, rather than a response to the Industrial Training Act of 1964 (Annual Report, 1962, 1966, The Bee, Sept/Oct, 1966). Meanwhile, potential situational barriers to staff promotion and progression, such as difficulties of relocation, were mitigated through a House Purchase Scheme in which Boots helped employees buy a home by providing interest-free loans and one-off payments (House Purchase Scheme, Q & A, C1970s).

Overall, the amount of staff welfare activities and sentiments expressed by the company through T3 were of such extent that to include all references would be impractical. Indeed, Boots’ concern for staff welfare was projected and professed in recruitment brochures across the 1960s (Box A33), in adverts (Y280), and in a number of promotional brochures, and newsletters. These revealed there were

staff suggestion boxes on the Beeston site, showing Boots valued employees ideas and opinions (3006/41, Newsletter, no 23, July 1956), that notions of staff welfare were embedded and traditional (334/11, Come Behind the Counter, 1956), that staff facilities were provided for (A33/7, Recruitment Brochure, 1970; The Bee, 1950, p. 8-9) and health and safety was considered (3006/53, Newsletter No 41, Apr/Aug 1959). In sum, it was beyond doubt that across the archive for this time frame there was plentiful documentary evidence that Boots were a 'nurturing' and caring employer. Indeed, the evidence showed that Boots were committed to equality, supported staff to achieve their best, protected and provided for their needs while valuing them as core contributors to business success.

### ***Boots as "relational"***

Boots identity as nurturing by caring for staff welfare had overlap with the identity theme of Boots as 'relational'. For example, Boot's relationship with staff was synonymous with the concept of family:

*At all times we try to induce a family spirit in the firm and give everyone a personal interest in its progress. We arrange for all managers to spend a week in Nottingham periodically where they can see the Head Office organisation, visit the factories and meet the people to whom they write so often but never see (Review of Activities, 1953-54).*

This spirit of family inclusively also extended out to Boots's leavers, reflecting a type of Alumni relational practice marked by get-togethers held for former employees to maintain contact (The Mixture, 1958; Annual Report, 1962). Outsiders to the Boots family such as Timothy Whites staff were also integrated by placing them on the same rates of pay and service as Boots staff and providing access to joint training (Annual Report 1969). Generating inclusion to the family through personnel policy was reflected by Boots recognition of the importance of the '*human element*' about which the company claimed: they '*have always tried to maintain the highest possible standards in personnel relation and in the future this policy will continue*' (334/6 Building for the Future, June 1960). Moreover, even suppliers were considered as part of this human element to business, revealed in the following text:

*Many of these suppliers have served us well for a generation and some indeed from the earliest days of the Company. We value most highly the happy relations we enjoy with our suppliers and I would like to take this opportunity in expressing our grateful thanks* (Annual Report, 1962).

Interestingly, although the Boots professed to have cordial relationships with suppliers, they were not actively included in the company's stakeholder business model. Instead, Boots professed to have what they called an: '*eternal triangle of commerce*' (The Bee, March, 1954, vol 52 No 1) in which it was claimed:

*There are three partners in our business – our customers, our shareholders, and our staff. All three have an interest in our profits and our policy is directed to ensuring that all gain from the extension and improvement in our business (334/6, Building for the future June 1960).*

Mentioned in the quote directly above was a reference to expansion of the business, leading to a different example of the way in which Boots enacted a relational identity. With expansion also came reconsideration of the overall structure of the company that was guided by the consultancy firm, Peat Marwick Associates (now *KPMG*). They audited the firm in 1966 and published a report of their observations and recommendations for improvement in the company structure. The specific findings, too detailed to be offered here, suggested Boots ought to adopt a complex divisional structure reflecting the complexity of the various businesses and subsidiaries. While Boots did adopt some structural change by creating a number of “divisions” with their own separate Boards, their response was cautious since they understood themselves as a relational, interdependent entity:

*The great strength of this business in the past has lain in its unity of purpose. We do not consist of a large number of unrelated activities joined together solely by bonds of common financial ownership. Each parts of the business has an important role to play in supporting every other part. We must be careful in the changes which lie ahead to preserve this sense of common*

*purpose. Against the Company's background of achievement, no change is worthwhile unless it can hold out the promise of improvement. But if we are careful to preserve what is good in the old: while being willing to seize the opportunities offered by new ideas and concepts, I believe we can build up for ourselves and organisation which will give fuller scope to the energies and abilities of all our people at all levels in the Company; and which will enable us to match in the future the achievements (334/7, Shaping up for the Future, Peat Marwick Response, December 1966).*

That Boots reacted to the Peat Marwick Report in this way was unsurprising since the previous year the company had been talking about itself as: *'a single unit [with] no division of the Company as into autonomous or semi-autonomous units of the lines now so common in large organisations'* (334/20, The Development and Organisation of Boots Pure Drug Co, Ltd, C1965).

Understanding itself as a uniquely relational business, the company also fostered personal relationships with its international businesses and subsidiaries. From Australia to India, relationships were maintained through personal visits by the Chairman: *'to enable him to meet as many as possible of the Company's overseas staff... [that] and will serve to emphasise our inter-dependence'* (3006/41, Newsletter No 29. July 1956; see also No 20, 1954, & No 33, 1957). Other overseas relations were also developed, albeit for more strategic purposes. For example, a mutually beneficial manufacturing arrangement was established with UpJohn in the

U.S. (Newsletter, No 15, Jan 1953). On a final note, one may question where such a relational spirit emerged from and it appeared it may have been rooted in the company's past. Of note, Jesse Boot's relational maxim that '*the only satisfactory business is one that satisfies both buyer and seller*' was invoked during this time frame (Annual Report, 1968; 334/7 About Boots- Circular brochure for retail staff, C1970). A maxim that had also been adopted by John Boot (Lord Trent):

*Of all the many wise principles enunciated by Lord Trent in respect of the Company's business, there is one that seems worthy to be writ in letters of gold – 'No transaction that is unsatisfactory to the customer is satisfactory to us'. On that foundation Boots reputation for service has been built. Can we not see, in all this, clear proof that basis of Lord Trent's success was his genius for handling to the satisfaction of all parties, the eternal triangle of commerce – customer, shareholders and staff* (The Bee, vol 25 No 1, March, 1954).

### ***Boots as "historically grounded"***

References to the history of the company were noticeable throughout and contributed to the generation of a new and final identity theme for this time frame – 'historically grounded'. There were multiple references to the company's past included in Chairman Speeches to shareholders in annual reports. For example:

*Boots for value is basic to our trading policy. It is a valid claim confirmed over the years. Jesse Boot took as his slogan when he had achieved over a hundred shops, "Biggest, Cheapest, Best". This still applies and our slogan today is but the logical development of his, and one from which we shall not depart (Annual Report, 1971).*

Further references to Jesse Boot's philosophy or the historical grounding of certain current organizational practices covered a number of areas including: catalogue distribution (3006/30 Newsletter No 18, Dec 1953), staff welfare (Boots News, Jan 1973), philanthropy (Boots News, Sept 1977), customer centrality (334/7, About Boots, retail circular, C1970) and staff education through Boots College (334/3, About Boots Business, C1973). In these and other areas the company drew on its past as justification or explanation for what it was doing in the here-and-now. Using history as basis for justifying current practices, values and beliefs culminated at the end of the time frame in 1977 with Boot's centenary year, during which the company projected a historically grounded identity through mnemonic documents such as adverts and press releases (Rowlinson et al., 2010). These documents celebrated the successes of the business from its humble beginnings to something of an empire attributed to adherence to Jesse Boot's original values, ideas and beliefs (459/1-6, Boots Centenary Press Release – Barbara Attenborough Associates Ltd.).

In total, there were 47 individual textual references across all other identity themes and spread across the whole time frame that drew on the company's past heritage. Thus, by not simply coalescing around the centenary as a marketing-led activity, reliance on being 'historically grounded' appeared to be a component of Boot's identity and central to the way in which the business understood itself in this time period. On this basis it was considered appropriate to generate an identity theme that reflected Boot's self-professed dependence on their past ideas, beliefs, values and practices as they developed into their future.

### ***Explaining Boot's OI at T3***

It was calculated that around 70% of themes (nine out of a total of twelve) identity themes were reproduced in this next time cycle that was marked by John Boots retirement in 1954, the rise of the *NHS* and an absence of extensive war involving the UK. Thus, there was a strong empirical pattern of reproduction in identity themes in this time unit. For example: "innovative", "trustworthy", "public serving", "pro-social", "nurturing to staff", "assured", "relational", "customer service oriented", and a "chemist" were all themes which endured. New themes were also apparent such as: "self-confident", "expansionist" and "historically grounded". Accompanying expansion was also identity loss in which "capable" and "nationalistic" were no longer evident from archival sources. Consequently, although there was some dynamism in Boot's OI during this third time frame there was a recognisable level of stability that I now move on to develop an explanation for.

With Boot's OI previously argued to be rooted in a combination of entities in the wider institutional-level environment, it was expected that with the wider social changes in this time frame, that Boot's identity would also have changed. This prediction was suggested on the basis of previous research which has highlighted the contextual dependency of OI. For example, when the comparative context shifts changes in OI can occur to maintain positive distinctiveness from contemporary organizations (for example: Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Further, when the operating environment changes OI has been shown to be strategically adapted to maintain organizational legitimacy (He & Baruch, 2010). However, many previous identity markers that had been generated for Boot's OI in T2 were evident again in T3 meaning that Boot's identity had not changed. This was counter to theoretical expectations of what would have been likely to occur, prompting further discussion of how and why endurance and elaboration in Boot's OI did occur.

With the company being interdependent with the wider social context for its identity, social change could be considered a threat to Boot's emergent OI. For example, when evidencing OI themes the empirical data revealed that the creation of the *NHS* resulted in a loss of Boot's traditional public services of nurses and day-and-night pharmacies. Likewise, the loss of strong family leadership would also have been likely to destabilise Boot's sense of who they were since both Jesse and John Boot had been chief articulators and communicators of Boot's OI in the previous time frames (*cf.* Gioia, et al., 2010). Thus, a salient starting point for explaining the dynamics in Boot's OI was scholarly work relating to organizational

identity threat. Under conditions of identity threat, researchers have suggested that organizations have a number of options open to them such as to re-evaluate and change their identity in line with stakeholder demands (Gioia, et al., 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), change emphasis on which identity markers are fore-grounded (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), adaptively change OI (He & Baruch, 2010; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), or even do nothing and ignore the situation (Gioia et al., 2000; Fombrun & Rindova, 2000).

In enacting such options, leaders and managers may also draw upon the organization's past in a reflexive way to evaluate and reconstruct their OI (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Ericson, 2006; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Conversely, they may tear the past up to make a break for organizational change (Brunninge, 2009; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Implied by these studies were that history can be used by organizations in identity management in which 'the past is seen as increasingly salient during times of crisis or transition' (Schultz & Hernes, 2013, p. 1-2). For Boots, during this time of identity threat, their historical identity became salient. This was to the extent that a new theme of being 'historically grounded' was generated reflecting the company's reliance on who it had been in the past (see Table 3.).

However, as discussed in my literature review, history within the context of organizations is often regarded as something that is malleable (Gioia et al., 2000) and rhetorical – created for strategic purposes and thus not the past at all (Suddaby

et al., 2010; Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006). Increasingly, notions of path dependency (Booth, 2003) in which an actual past constrains the future (Ran & Golden, 2011) have been side-lined in favour of the view that organizations strategically reconstruct their past to serve corporate objectives (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Suddaby et al., 2010; Brunninge, 2009; Chreim, 2005). Given that an organizational history is constructed and revised in the here-and-now by agents to justify, create and manipulate a current OI (Gioia et al., 2000), what then can be said of a pre-existent historical identity that temporally precedes organizational members?

In their discussions of critical realism both Searle (1995) and Reed (2005), have argued what is constructed in the here-and-now must be referent to some independent and historically preceding reality from which to construct. In the context of OI, organizational agents' are therefore likely to draw upon a tangible organizational past to construct both organizational history and identity. Thus, what is constructed in terms of identity is both framed and shaped by the past (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011), meaning the past is inescapably reproduced in the present (Appleby, 1998). In Boot's OI at T3 their past OI was present since not only were historical referents empirically evidenced (leading to a theme of historically grounded) but many generated markers of the company's preceding OI were reproduced. To understand reproduction of OI as enactment of the past, Archer (1995; 1996) reminds us that the content of an archive, as an historically situated entity with emergent properties, is relevant. Indeed, during T3 Boot's past OI had been increasingly collected into an archive forming a cultural-system that was parallel to

the company's OI as an emergent property of the combination of social entities in the wider institutional-level environment.

However, on their own terms the archive and its contents are of themselves relatively benign and non-emergent. Importantly, Archer (1996) points out that the way in which organizational agents interact with what exists in the archive (or the past), is how the propositional contents of such cultural entities come to be enacted by agents (and therefore reproduced or elaborated) – an emergent property in present time. Thus, with Boot's past OI now also embedded in Boot's archival cultural-system, it was possible that agents' interactions with their past OI could explain the ongoing patterns of reproduction and elaboration, despite the presence of wider change in the institutional environment.

That agents engage with a past OI has been elucidated to some extent by research cited earlier in which it had been suggested that organizational members can both ignore and/or elaborate a historically situated OI. Thus, agents' engagement style with an organizational past seemed to be of importance. In the data from T3 several engagement styles with past OI were identified. First, agents engaged protectively with their past OI. In particular, when Boot's identity as a chemist and healthcare service was threatened by the *NHS*, the company's historically situated chemist identity was treated as sacrosanct by agents even when Boot's OI was becoming less like a chemist and increasingly like a department store. Second, agents engaged creatively with their past OI. When Boots as a 'public service' came

into competition with the nationalisation of health through the *NHS*, the company re-interpreted what it meant to be public service by foregrounding alternative aspects of Boot's past, such as offering value and making high-quality goods affordable for all. Indeed, with a loss of its more traditional public services, the company also had to drop a 'health service' aspect from their OI to return to their OI at T1 of being a chemist. This did not have to happen since the company could have embraced a new identity as a department store. However, because the company's past OI was engaged with protectively, this past OI marker was reproduced.

In some cases reproduction of identity was not based on agents interacting with their past OI but using it to adapt to loss and change in the underlying combination of social entities from which Boot's OI was emergent. For example, the marker of 'relational' seemed to have been reproduced through re-situating it within alternative and historically rooted aspects of OI. To explain, being relational at T2 had been generated from empirically observing a number of strategic collaborations to develop drugs. These had arisen from the presence of war and a national need to improve production methods, particularly of penicillin and to secure British supplies. Contributing further to collaborations for the innovation of new drugs was a relative laxity in State regulation for new pharmaceutical products before the *NHS* (Abraham & Shepherd, 2009, pp. 13-14). However, in T3, the State (through the *NHS*) were now the largest customer for drug purchasing in the UK and increasingly regulated and dictated terms to British pharmaceutical companies

(*op cit*). Thus, collaborations with other companies to develop new products would have become less appealing since the *NHS* decided what it would and would not purchase and new drugs were expensive. Meanwhile, the absence of war ended a need to be closely allied to and work with the Government. Thus, there was a significant change in the social entities that Boot's OI was dependent on and it was from these wider changes that the company's emergent 'relational' identity was threatened. However, the company responded to this threat adaptively by re-situating their relational OI internally within the business itself. Given that Boots' staff had been and continued to be an ongoing and relatively stable foundation for Boot's emergent OI in T1 and T2, achieving this at T3 was possible and explained the shift in the theme from external collaboration toward internal interrelations.

While protectionism and creative repositioning were notable active engagement styles, there was also evidence that agents disengaged from their past OI and in doing so did not reproduce it. The theme in which this had been observed was Boot's identity as nationalistic. With the absence of war, the company no longer needed to help secure Britain's pharmaceutical and chemical resources. Instead, the imperative for Boots (and the British economy more generally) was exporting goods to boost a damaged post-war economy. Given that Boot's national identity had been strongly related to both World Wars, now in the absence of war, reproduction and enactment of a strong national identity was likely to have been regarded as unimportant by agents. Thus, agents simply appeared to disengage with this aspect of their historically situated OI in T1 and T2. Indeed, there were

very few empirical data across T3 that revealed any mention of nationalism meaning the identity theme was not generated. Thus, the absence of war, (war being previously one of the entities on which Boot's emergent OI depended), meant that nationalism could no longer be reproduced as an emergent identity marker. Moreover, this condition also made it undesirable for organizational agents to engage with 'nationalism' as embedded within Boot's archive. Consequently, nationalism was not reproduced at T3, neither was it elaborated. Instead in the absence of contingent conditions for its expression at the level of events, the powers of this OI marker to be reproduced were suppressed.

Accompanying identity loss there was also creation of new identity markers that in similarity to T2 were enabled by Boot's past identity. 'Expansionism' was one such new identity marker that coincided with the suppression of Boot's nationalistic identity but nevertheless was expressed by organizational agents in relation to earlier notions of Jesse Boot's business philosophy in T1. Indeed, it was claimed that it had been Jesse Boot's vision and philosophy to "expand the business more generally", indicating that this new 'expansionist' identity marker had a basis in Boot's past. Meanwhile, Boot's identity as 'self-confident' also coincided with the non-reproduction of Boots as a 'capable' organization. In the previous two time frames, Boots had expressed an identity centred on their capabilities. However, non-observation of capability in T3 could not be explained through suppression as with nationalism. Instead, having built a proven identity as 'capable' for over 50 years previously, a 'self-confidence' in being capable rather than simply 'being

capable' was forthcoming. Finally, having an identity grounded in history was also evidenced and explainable on grounds that at this point Boot's had a lengthy past. However, without agents' engagement with their past to construct OI in T3, such a theme would not have been generated. This added further support to my argument, that what had been observed and generated in T3 was to some extent dependent on and related to who Boot's had previously been.

The dynamics in Boot's identity during this time frame were somewhat more complex than the reproduction and elaboration of Boot's OI in the previous time frame since there were changes in the stability of the wider social milieu from which Boot's OI had been emergent from. Theoretically, it was expected that such changes would have also meant change in Boot's OI as the company adapted to these changes. However, this was not the case with many past OI themes being reproduced. The explanation I advanced for this was that Boot's OI had escaped dependence on wider social entities for its emergence and was now also present as a cultural entity, emergent from Boot's archive. Consequently, the company's OI was not only emergent from the wider social environment but also independent of agents and available to them as ready-made.

Nevertheless, for past OI (as part of cultural-system) to be reproduced requires socio-cultural interaction (Archer, 1996), meaning that agents had to have engaged with what pre-existed them in terms of OI for it to be visibly reproduced (elaborated and/or transformed). My findings showed that agents did engage with

their past OI in three different ways: protectively, creatively and through non-engagement and that this was able to explain reproduction, elaboration, and suppression of past OI. However, what was constructed was not voluntaristic or negotiated with stakeholders (Gioia et al., 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000), neither was it strategically rhetorical to create an appearance of continuity with the past to serve corporate objectives (cf. Suddaby et al., 2010). Instead, what was reproduced, elaborated and suppressed in terms of past OI was arguably contingent on wider contextual changes. For example, the absence of war, the creation of the *NHS* and a loss of family leadership conditioned what was reproduced and suppressed in terms of Boot's past OI. Thus, the dynamics of Boot's identity in this third time frame could be explained by contingent interactions between Boot's past OI and the current social context, enabling and constraining what agents could reproduce in this time frame in terms of their pre-existent OI.

## Chapter 7

### Results IV: Death and Resurrection of Identity

#### *Introduction*

In this results chapter, I present the evidence for Boots' identity during T4 which was the final time unit within the study. Organisation of the findings was somewhat different to the previous presentation since from initial analyses of the data, it was apparent that there were a number of changes in this period. To capture this, it was outlined in my method section that the data had been split into three groups which improved the sensitivity of the analysis and avoided losing identity dynamics by taking too panoramic a lens. In particular, data were divided into early (1978-1989), middle (1990-1999) and late (1999-2002/3) periods. These same demarcations have been followed in the way this chapter was constructed. However, despite being analytically divided, to maintain continuity with the previous time units T4 should be taken as a complete unit of time. Before looking closer at each identity theme in the three subsections of time, an overview of this whole time period has been offered to help orientation in what was an increasingly complex organization.

The socio-political landscape at this time had become particularly salient since two years after Boots centenary in 1977, Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party came to office following what had been a Labour Government under James Callaghan [1976-1979]. This change marked the march forward of neoliberal

political ideology in Great Britain that reduced taxation on business, deregulated monetary policy, encouraged privatisation of nationalised industries (Martinez & Garcia, 1997) such as coal, which led to the Miners strike of the mid-1980s. Thus, this time period represented a dynamic shift in the socio-political landscape of UK that saw business becoming increasingly privatised, competitive, international, and deregulated. It was into this environment that Boots emerged with a new Chairman at the helm, Peter Main (1981 – 1984), followed by Robert Gunn in 1985 who led the company for the rest of the 1980s. Sir Christopher Benson took up the position in 1990, but by 1996 had been replaced by Sir Michael Angus who took Boots forward for two years until 1988 (Nottingham Post, March 23, 2010). Lord Blythe adopted the position for another two years before John McGrath succeeded him from 1999 to 2003 taking us to the close of the time period.

Notwithstanding a number of changes in leadership, the business also underwent multiple changes during this time frame that were reconstructed from annual reports. During the 1980s the company had engaged in several acquisitions, for example, Optrex, the eye-product manufacturer was purchased in 1983, which through a process of mergers became Boots Opticians. Farleys Health Products were also purchased in 1986. A year later, Boots made a decision to open its own new chain of stores unrelated to pharmacy, called Children's World – a retail outlet for parents shopping with their children that exclusively sold children's products. Underwoods chain of Chemist shops was acquired in 1989, the same year in which the company made an aggressive bid for the Ward White Group which consisted of

Halfords (bicycle and car-parts chain stores), Payless DIY chain and FADS, a home decorating chain. At this time, the Boots business was also divided up since it had become too large and diverse to act as a single entity. This translated to the creation of several companies that operated under the banner of The Boots Group.

In the group were Boots the Chemist shops (BTC), Boots retail division (that all other retail business were subsumed under), Boots Pharmaceuticals and Boots Properties. However, during the 1990s many of Boot's non-chemist business were proving to be unprofitable so inasmuch as acquisitions had occurred, many areas of the business were also sold off including Boot's pharmaceutical research division which was bought by the German group BASF in 1994/95. This left behind at the turn of the century a leaner Boots consisting of three operational units – Boots the Chemist, Boots Healthcare International, and Boots Contract Manufacturing. It was evident that the dynamism of Boots over this time frame was complex which justified my pragmatic decision to treat the data with a higher degree of sensitivity by creating multiple sub-units. In what follows, generation of identity themes began with the early period, was repeated for the middle sub-unit and finished with the later period.

## **Boot's Identity at T4 (1978 -2002)**

### ***T4 Early Period (1978-1989)***

Surprisingly, interrogation of the archive material across this period did not offer up a sufficient quantity of identity related text to generate many OI themes. This was

represented in Table 3. presented at the start of Chapter 4 as a noticeable blank section within the table. There were of course some texts, but these were disparate and stood alone meaning there was not sufficient quantity of material to generate identity themes for the early period. Nevertheless, there were some data that allowed at least two themes to be generated.

***Boots offer 'quality'***

Visible across annual reports in the 1980s were increasing company-level steps toward maintaining quality control in the face of increasing non-pharmaceutical merchandise:

*We continue to develop our own Boots Brand ranges in many different areas of brought in merchandise, with increasing assistance from our new Quality Assurance Laboratories. They also check deliveries of these and proprietary products to ensure they conform to our specification and thereby enable us to supply customers with high quality goods in technological fields where faulty merchandise is all too common (Annual Report, 1980).*

It was a theme that had been repeated from all the previous time frames, although previously it had been labelled under 'assured'. In this time frame it was evident that merchandise consisting of both Own Goods and re-branded products that bore the name "Boots" had to be of the highest quality since assured quality was

something that had been professed to be the basis of Boots offering across time.

According to Dr. Main, who succeeded Gordon Hobday as Chairman:

*Boots brands have long been a source of corporate pride; with their combination of quality, price and product features they present to our customers an image of the Company which embodies the highest standards*  
(Annual Report, 1984).

It was apparent from the above text that the quality of Boot's own branded products was regarded as a material aspect of Boot's identity, that projected an image of what the organization was like to customers who used Boots' products. Given that this "image" was predicated on products (which pertained to corporate identity) and was mediated through products (projected identity), this text was deemed to relate to organizational identity as opposed to notions of organizational image (*cf.* Gioia et al., 2000). A focus on quality continued to be important to Boots when Robert Gunn took over the Chairmanship since he also continued to speak of Boot's quality. In his annual address to shareholders he spoke of the inherent quality and value within Own products to be a differentiator in the face of competition with other retailers (Annual Report, 1987). In the same report it was further mentioned that quality and value were traditional aspects of Boots Own products:

*A new and aggressive pricing policy with more positive efforts to promote our traditional standards of quality and value-for-money - particularly in the area of Own Goods - have more than paid off in the Battle for the High Street (Annual Report, 1987).*

Although efforts to project Boots quality were not apparent in advertising at the time (which was primarily related to specific individual products rather than general prestige) it was projected to potential employees that: *'As a company, we offer a name which for more than a century - has been associated with quality in the field of pharmacy'* (2582/4, A Fresh Look at Careers in Pharmacy, C1985). To customers, notions of quality were being subsumed and communicated under a much wider remit of a customer initiative called "Assured Shopping". According to Steve Russell, the Chief Executive of Boots at the time, Assured Shopping was: *'not so much as a public statement, but as an expression of the Company's guiding belief in Quality, Service, and truly caring for customers'* (Boots News, 1982).

### ***Boots as "socially responsible"***

The only other generated identity theme for which there were sufficient data sources within the early period of T4 was Boots as a 'socially responsible' company. In similarity with T2, this was in the direction of national unemployment levels which were rising. Under the political office of Margaret Thatcher unemployment rose considerably in the UK during the 1980s with over 3 million people out of work (BBC, The Thatcher Years in Statistics, 2013). In response to this a Youth Training

Scheme (YTS) was initiated by the British Government in 1983 designed to ease the problem by placing young people into a work-based training position. Boots were supportive of this project as evidenced in an annual report of that same year: *'the high level of unemployment greatly concerns us, and the Company has agreed to become fully involved in the new Youth Training Scheme'* (Annual Report, 1983). Although it could be argued that cheap labour was an incentive for businesses to be involved in the scheme, this appeared to be a genuine concern since Boots professed to be actively addressing youth unemployment before YTS had been initiated:

*In response to growing concern for the plight of unemployed youngsters, Boots has dramatically increased the number of work experience places for young people in the Nottingham area. Mr. Muncey (recruitment and Dev manager): "Managers throughout the Company are in agreement that employment for young people carries high priority and is a social responsibility which the Company is determined to shoulder"* (Boots News, 1981).

Concern and support for unemployment and job creation were also being expressed by Boots in other ways: *'We are also increasing our support for the Business in the Community to encourage development of new small business ventures'* (Annual Report, 1986). This began with supporting six local enterprise agencies in 1986 and rose to 108 just two years later (Annual Report, 1986/1988).

Alongside this, Boots also continued in charitable giving (£622k in 1988) through Boots Charitable Trust which had originally been established in 1970 during the previous time frame.

Environmental concerns were also coming to the fore during the 1980s particularly regarding the deleterious effects of CFCs on the Earth's ozone layer. Boots actively joined with other companies to manage this problem by taking action:

*Boots has added its name and support to a move by a number of toiletries manufacturers of CFC aerosols. The Company has pledged to eliminate CFCs from all its products (except medicines) by the end of the 1989 at the latest. The move follows debate over the possible danger from CFCs to the earth's atmosphere by damaging the ozone layer. A number of organisations like Friends of the Earth are increasing their campaigning activity to make the public aware of these possible dangers. Reductions in CFC levels in aerosols have been taken in line with an EEC directive of 1980 and Boots has been among industries leaders in reducing levels further than recommendations require (Boots News, 1988).*

This was not the only example of environmentalism since Boots also had adopted recycling initiatives around the re-use of cardboard packaging. However, since this was noted to be a cost-saving measure rather than social responsibility, it was not included as a theme generator. Neither was the company's concern for

environment sufficient for establishing an identity theme of social responsibility by itself, but when combined with Boot's involvement in YTS and "Business in the Community" there was a trend toward being somewhat socially responsible although the evidence for this was not particularly strong. It was also not clear the extent to which engaging in socially responsible activities were strategic for the business or driven by a more ideological position. While T4 early period was relatively silent with regard to OI themes, in the next decade there were a greater number of identity themes generated.

#### **T4 Middle Period (1990-1999)**

In the middle period of the 1990s there were a greater number of archival documents concerning Boot's identity as well as changes in leadership from Robert Gunn to Sir Christopher Benson who was later succeeded by Sir Michael Angus. Across this decade a greater number of identity themes could be generated which have been outlined below.

##### ***Boots as a "chemist"***

Having been carved off to stand as a separate business within the Boots Group, Boots the Chemist (BTC) was a distinctive operational unit in which it was claimed that: *'healthcare remains at the heart of Boots the Chemists and we have continued to improve the service we offer'* (Annual Report, 1991). Service improvements were to residential homes that took the form of introducing an innovation - monitored

dosage. The innovation was simple yet effective, a plastic tray in which pharmacists could pre-dispense tablets into different sections divided by times and days of the week to reduce the possibility of error when care staff administered medicines to patients. In talking about service development within BTC more generally, it was evident there were considerably more service improvements:

*We support the view that community pharmacy should be more active in providing primary healthcare, in parallel with the evolving role of general practitioners. To this end we are experimenting in a number of stores by offering services such as cholesterol testing, general health screening and chiropody. Our food business is closely linked with our healthcare heritage and it goes from strength to strength (Annual Report, 1991).*

By offering these kinds of services, BTC were asserting a primary identity as a healthcare and pharmacy-led business. The clear focus of BTC on being for health and personal care (Annual Report, 1993) enhanced its performance leading to: *'increasing its concentration on its core healthcare and beauty businesses'*. Meanwhile, BTC also became allied with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society *'to develop the pharmacist's role in providing healthcare advice'* (Annual Report, 1996). This took the form of developing a role in primary health more generally through repeat prescription monitoring and attempting to align the company with specific therapeutic groups as "Pharmacist of Choice" (2935/7, Task Force on Health Promotion in Pharmacy, C1995).

In projecting a chemist identity, Boots took the perspective: *'We see healthcare as very much the heartland of the business'* (Pharma Journal, Dec 9 1995, pp 817-819). This quote was made in an interview between Steve Russell, and the journal editor in which he stated a second time: *'I have long believed that pharmacy lies right at the heart of the business'*. The idea of the centrality of healthcare and pharmacy at BTC was reiterated to shareholders (Y45, Shareholder magazine, 1996; 1997; 1998) and to staff members in training manuals (2261/29, Stores Staff Handbook, 1996).

Of importance to remember is that BTC was but one part of the wider Boots Group in which there were also a number of non-chemist businesses. Many of these were underperforming and dispensing was no exception to this. However, rather than lose dispensing, the Boots Group chose to shed unprofitable non-health care businesses while protecting dispensing. This was evidenced by records that showed Boots sold their non-pharmacy businesses but when probed about the possibility of giving up pharmacy, Boots made the statement: *'Exiting pharmacy, even with declining unit dispensing profitability is not an option'* (2935/7, Task Force on Health Promotion, C1995). Thus, for the Boots Group as whole, dispensing was regarded as a protected aspect of what they were about even when dispensing as a revenue stream was losing profitability. Moreover, in the structure of annual reports that covered the activities of the whole Group, BTC seemed to have a privileged status always appearing first.

***Boots as a “shareholder focused” “business”***

The subtitle above indicated that these newly appearing themes of being ‘shareholder focused’ and ‘a business’ were interdependent and thus, although generated as two separate themes, the evidence for them was the same meaning they have been presented as co-generated. It was evident in many documents that by this time period, Boots had begun to frame their discourse in greater levels of corporate language suggesting that Boots understood itself to be a ‘business’ that was ‘shareholder focused’. This was contra to the data from previous time periods in which company records had demonstrated a more stakeholder oriented approach and inclusive language. “Business-speak” and a shareholder focus were epitomised in Boot’s mission statement which first emerged in the 1990s:

*The Boots Company embraces businesses operating principally in retailing, the manufacture and marketing of health and personal care products throughout the world and the development and management of retail property. Our objective is to maximise the value of the Company for shareholders. We will do so by investing in our businesses to generate strong cash flows and superior long term returns while vigorously pursuing our commercial interests...*

Boots’ leadership also put it another way as:

*The Boots Company now has a new structure and management philosophy which clearly links reward to improvement in shareholder value. We are driving this philosophy through every level of the Company – a considerable task but the results are already becoming evident...The absolute goal for this evolution in management is that the group and its constituent businesses all focus on sustained cash generation and the creation of shareholder value* (Annual Report, 1993).

Indeed, being a business, for shareholders, was manifested through further statements such as: *'We believe that the best overall measure of long term performance is total return to shareholders, comprising gross dividends paid and growth in share price'* (Annual Report, 1996). The sum of the quotes offered above demonstrated an uncompromisingly business-like approach and that Boots believed it was primarily a vehicle for shareholder wealth creation over and above its traditional stakeholders that included customers and staff. That Boots had actually “changed” in this direction was made clear by the Chairman, Lord Blythe:

*I sometimes hear people saying that Boots isn't the company it used to be. They are quite right. It isn't and it mustn't be. Anyone who operates in intensely competitive markets as we do, has to keep moving and changing to stay ahead of the game. Standing still simply isn't an option. The last ten years have been particularly challenging as the pace of change has accelerated. We work for a very different company now – leaner, fitter,*

*faster on its feet, with greater focus, clearer accountabilities, and better links between performance and reward. It may not be quite such a comfortable place to work but I believe that any risk of complacency has been replaced, throughout the organisation, by a new energy, creativity and above all a growing sense of pride and purpose. # The sense of purpose flows directly from the value based management (VBM) philosophy that we have adopted. VBM is a very simple idea. Everything we do has to maximise the value of the company for our shareholders. It provides a consistent framework for strategic planning and an unambiguous measure of our achievement. It harnesses the skills and knowledge of all our staff and it establishes a clear link between shareholder returns, the performance of our businesses and individual rewards. # Value based management is at the heart of the way we do business. I have no doubt that it is and will continue to be a source of immense competitive advantage (2661/16, The way we do Business, C1997/8).*

### ***Boots as “knowledgeable”***

This was also a new theme but appeared to have some grounding in Boot’s past. Having had time to develop mature capabilities in retail, marketing and selling, Boots had developed a ‘knowledgeable’ identity marked by expertise. This enabled Boots to be confident in attempting expansion into wider markets:

*The Boots Company already has highly developed core competencies in skincare through the huge experience of BTC and BCM. Now we are going to apply that expertise to other major markets in Europe (Y45, Shareholder magazine, Spring 1997).*

The knowledge gained by the company from its past experiences (for example, nutritional products during World War II – T2), extended beyond its traditional remit of pharmaceutical and beauty to include additional markets such as food:

*Boots has an advantage over other food retailers because we are recognised as experts on health and diet related matters. Now we are offering our customers a highly professional diet analysis service which is tailored specifically to the eating habits of the individual (Boots News, Jan 1992).*

The theme of knowledgeable was also generated from Boots' developed expertise in quality standards meaning when novel products came to market, the company were able to use their experience to devise their own quality standards (334/28, Quality Times, C1990s). Moreover, further to the company demonstrating and using its knowledge in entering markets and creating quality standards, there was further support derived from a marketing study that asked for the public's perception of Boots. The results of the study showed in particular, that the Boots name was associated with being: '*analytical, academic, and clever*' (2651, Market Research study Corp name change Crookes Healthcare, C1999). However, it seemed that in

practice this was not so much an academic knowledge in pharmaceutical development since Boots sold off their research division to BASF in 1995. Rather, knowledge was manifested as a market-based knowledge of retailing, enabling the company to take strong market positions: *'Boots the Chemists is market leader in many areas of its business including healthcare, cosmetics, toiletries, baby consumables and film processing'* (Annual Report, 1996).

### ***Boots as "socially responsible"***

This was a complex theme for the company in which they claimed a general socially responsible identity that was expressed through two arms of environmental and community concern. Inasmuch as Boots were now following a strong corporate business model in which shareholders were clearly a primary stakeholder, the company did not abandon notions of being 'socially responsible' which were embedded in the latter part of Boot's formal mission statement:

*...while vigorously pursuing our commercial interests we will, at all times, seek to enhance our reputation as a well managed, ethical and socially responsible company'* (Annual Report Cover, 1993; 1996).

This statement was intended as an orienting guide for business operations that was echoed by the Chairman, Christopher Benson who despite wanting Boots to be a competitive business recognised a commitment to enacting care and responsibility: *'It [Boots] is a company that is caring, committed to its objectives and*

*responsibilities and strongly competitive at the same time'* (Annual Report, 1991).

This sense of guided purpose was also integrated formally into Boot's model of corporate governance emphasising further Boots' commitment to ideals of ethical and socially responsible practice:

*The Company is committed to the principle of sound corporate governance.*

*We regard this as nothing more than an extension of our historic stance regarding ethical behaviour in the general conduct of our affairs* (Annual Report, 1993).

One area in which Boots were acting in a socially responsible way was through the company's philanthropic and charitable activities. For example, Boots were sponsoring charities such as Action for Children's Safety (Boots News, 1992) and in 1996 had contributed £4.1million to various charities and agencies (Annual Report, 1996). However, although the company regarded charity as connected to their heritage, they did not regard it as being socially responsible. Instead, Boots believed that their ongoing success as a corporate business was of itself their most socially responsible activity. Clarifying this, it was recorded in a document that the belief of the company was that wealth creation maintained and created employment, raised taxes for the Treasury and contributed to the economic life of the country.

*Charitable giving is part of the Boots heritage dating back to the personal philosophy of the Company's founder, Jesse Boot. Today the Boots Company*

*believes that the greatest contribution it can make is to build the business and create wealth for shareholders and the community as a whole – by contributing to economic growth and employment, by adding to the spending and saving power of its workforce and through the payment of personal and corporate taxes (Boots in the Community, 1996/97).*

This stance reflected a Friedmanite view of social responsibility in which businesses create social good as a by-product of their corporate activities to primarily create shareholder wealth (Mele, 2008). Although espousing such a position, in practice Boots were more actually more pro-active. A key demonstration of social responsibility in the face of being a competitive corporation was evidenced by Boots concern about the marketisation of medicines. While the company believed it could successfully compete in such a climate they deemed such competition as unsafe for the public. This was evidenced in the *Pharmaceutical Journal* (July, 1995, p.89-93) in which Gordon Houston the Managing Director of BTC claimed:

*If resale price maintenance were abandoned and we found ourselves competing in a deregulated market we would not be the losers. We have demonstrated our ability to compete vigorously and effectively in many other markets where this occurred 30 years ago. But we believe that the public safety is paramount. We do not believe that medicines should be treated as normal articles of commerce. And we have always accepted the*

*argument in favour of safeguarding the economic viability of community pharmacies.*

Even when deregulation of pharmacy would have increased competition and been likely to generate improved shareholder value, the company recognised that regulations were an important safeguard to both the public and local pharmacy trade compared with a race to the bottom. Thus, although pre-dominantly driven by shareholder interests, there was a realisation that some boundaries ought to be respected to protect the public interest which revealed a certain degree of consideration for the wider public good. Other ways in which Boots promoted social good alongside shareholder wealth creation was through community initiatives and environmental projects. As such, this revealed a level of contradiction between Boot's belief in the commonly termed 'trickle-down effect' and being pro-active in generating social benefits. The next two themes look more closely at these pro-active company activities that were interrelated with Boots claim to be a socially responsible organization.

### ***Boots as "community oriented" - CSR***

Allied to notions of being a socially responsible company, Boots claimed that: '*support for the community is central to Boots philosophy*' (Community, 1995) and this was demonstrated in a number of ways. The company supported the Government's "Tackling Drugs Together" campaign by working with police forces in the creation and delivery of strategy which saw Boots shortlisted for and win

community prizes (Annual Report to Staff, 1998). Additionally, the company was also a 'founder of Nottingham Development Enterprise, a partnership between public and private sectors' (Annual Report, 1993), permitted charities to use vacant Boots premises, and formed associations with specific charities such as the National Association of Carers (Quality Times, Nov/Dec, 1994). To emphasise their community work, Boots frequently cited and projected a concern for the community that they linked to their past (Community Review, 1998; 334/60 Planning for Tomorrow's Town and Cities, C1995). For example, to employees the company claimed about Boots Charitable Trust:

*Concern and commitment to the communities in which the companies operate and those further afield continue to be a fundamental part of Boots culture. Boots is one of the most longest established and generous Companies in the UK in terms of its corporate support for the voluntary sector, educational development and job creation. This philanthropy was begun by Jesse and Florence Boot, perpetuated with formation of a community relations department. Today the work of the trust and the community relations department are entirely complimentary... Between them they administer between £1.8 million per year which the Company provides in both material and financial support and in employees time to improve the social and economic health of variety of beneficiaries (Boots News, Jan, 1992).*

Consistently, across the 1990s, Boots both claimed and projected themselves as being community-minded and spirited that was typically supported with examples of their active engagement in community-level projects as justification.

### ***Boots as “environmentally concerned” – CSR***

Concern for the environment also formed a sub-identity theme for Boots' wider identity as a socially responsible company in which Boots claimed: '*We believe good environmental policy is not only socially responsible but makes sound business sense*' (Annual Report, 1993). Although Boots asserted to be '*committed to an open dialogue on environmental issues and practices*' (Annual Report to Staff, 1993) there was an inherent duality reflected by an economically driven mindset, making it impossible to ascertain between pro-social or shareholder wealth creation as a motivation. Nevertheless, Boots did adopt environmentally friendly and sustainable practices with enthusiasm.

The company initiated 'Save-a-Cup' scheme in 1992 for recycling plastic cups across the business (Quality Times, Mar/Apr 1995), joined the World-Wide Fund for Nature in 1992 and through this partnership, by 1995, had transferred to sustainable wood pulp and paper products. Boots also developed cradle-to-grave ratings for their products (334/61, Which Leading Employer, 1991), reduced energy and fuel consumption by improved branch management and goods transportation (Boots News), and collaborated with local authorities on waste disposal schemes for engine oil [Halfords] (Y45: Shareholder Magazine 1995). To consolidate their

environmental pursuits and to: *'ensure that Boots maintains momentum'*, the company: *'established a new Environmental Working Party which includes senior managers nominated by the Managing Director of each business* (Annual Report, 1996). To shareholders, Boots commitment to the environment was articulated in very clear terms:

*We are committed to four key principles – to reduce adverse environmental impact; to use materials and energy efficiently, to re-use and recycle where possible, and to follow the principles of sustainable development* (Y45, Shareholder Magazine, 1995).

To summarise, Boots as concerned for the environment (albeit likely to have been connected to a business case – Mele, 2008) and their level of community concern and involvement offered support to the more generalised theme of being 'socially responsible'. However, because these elements were represented in sufficient quantity there was also a strong enough case for their development as stand-alone identity themes.

### ***Boots as "relational"***

This theme, which had been evidenced in previous time frames was again present in this time frame. However, it was noticeably different to what had been previously generated. During T3, being relational had been more broadly spread throughout the business, but in this time frame a 'relational' identity theme was

generated through the way in which Boots enacted their socially responsible identity. Indeed, relationships were realised by forging alliances and partnering with charities such as the National Carer's Association (Annual Report, 1996). Another similar partnership was with the British Association of Early Childhood Education, in which Boots created and delivered four under-fives fairs and a series of follow-up workshops for parents (Annual Report, 1996). Having previously demonstrated a past commitment to education through Boots College, educative activities seemed a natural area for Boots to be involved in and the company stated:

*Relevant and timely educational opportunities offer a key to the future and Boots works closely with Government and education authorities to unlock the doors to lifelong learning and workplace skills' (Community Review, 1998/99).*

Thus, working together with others, Boots were actively involved in education for young learners and students entering working-age alike as outlined in *Community Magazine*:

*The Boots Company recognises the need to work with Government and education authorities to ensure people entering the workplace have the skills needed to be successful. We are also committed to develop the concept of life-long learning. We form partnerships with national and local*

*organisations to give students the opportunity to gain and insight into the world of work and use the business to provide teachers with access to additional resources...Almost 200 Boots Group employees signed up as voluntary tutors with "Success for All" a pilot literacy scheme launched by Nottingham City Education Authority in October, 1997 within schools in the city's most deprived Meadows area...This is believed to be the largest volunteer tutoring scheme in the world (Community Review, 1998).*

Through working both in partnership and engaging in teaching relations, Boots were able to support education, and in doing so demonstrate their 'community oriented' identity by direct involvement in social development projects. These were not limited to education but also included urban regeneration projects. Boots worked with over 70 different local authorities on this particular issue (Boots News, 1993). One example was the development of Nottingham City's tram system. The company contributed to this project by seconding a project manager from their own ranks, and provided both expertise and funding of £50,000 (Boots News, 1993). Other incidents of relational working were closer to Boots' identity as a Chemists, since the company were also working together with the NHS in health promotion initiatives (Community Review, 1998/99), and involved in collaborative dialogues around developing the relationship between pharmacy and primary healthcare services (2935/7, Task Force on Health Promotion, C1995).

### ***Boots as a “supportive” employer***

The idea of being relational linked to Boots’ identity as supportive employer since working with the UK government, Boots were a founding member of “Opportunity 2000”, a scheme to *‘to promote the role of women in British industry’* (Shareholder Magazine, Spring 1995). The creation of this initiative was reflective of Boots’ wider concerns about equality in the workplace that had begun to surface in T3.

*Boots is among leading employers committed to voluntary initiatives designed at recruiting and maintaining a balanced work force made up of skilled and dedicated people. Moves to attract more women to the Company, as well as more members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, have now become well established aspects of policy* (Annual Report, 1993).

To operationalise their concern for equality, the company undertook gender and ethnic monitoring programmes that were extended to include employees with impairments by the company becoming a *‘signatory to the Department for Employment’s agenda on disability that confirms this commitment’* (Annual Report, 1993). Notions of equality in personnel policies at Boots were underscored further by notions of monetised meritocracy since Boots claimed: *‘now more than ever we are striving to recognise individual performances and to make sure they are rewarded appropriately’* (Annual Report, 1993). Recognition was in the form of a new *“Pay for Performance”* strategy of accountability and performance monitoring

for staff (Annual report, 1993; 2261/14 Working in the Boots Company, 1998; 2261/29, Stores Staff Handbook, C1996). To help staff to achieve their best, Boots offered staff training that was recognised through receipt of *Investors in People* award (2261/29, Stores Staff Handbook, 1996). Training took the form of not only in-house sessions, but Boots were also '*a pioneer of the National Vocational Qualification*' (Annual Report, 1993).

It was unsurprising that Boots received recognition for being an outstanding employer since training investment was guided by Boot's belief that staff were of great value and worth to the business:

*If customers are the most important people in our stores then the second most important people are the staff who serve them. That is why high priority is attached to training within all the Company's retail chains to secure well-trained, skilful people who can adapt quickly to change...At Boots the Chemist, training is now regarded as an integral part of all business planning* (Annual Report, 1993).

*We recognise that our most valuable asset is staff and we are absolutely committed to a level of investment in training that will enable each individual to achieve his or her full potential* (Y45, Quality Times, Mar/Apr 1993).

However training could only bring staff forward so far. In a further demonstration of commitment to and understanding of staff needs, the company adopted a flexible approach to employment terms (2582/7, The Future in Pharmacy, C1995). For female employees in particular (*cf.* Opportunity 2000 initiative) there was the following recognition:

*We understand the pressures of combining work with family commitments – and we are frequently reviewing ways to ease them’ (334/5, An Open Minded Approach, C1988) such as ‘family friendly policies including flexible working hours, term-time working, job shares and career breaks (Annual Report, 1996).*

To provision was also added protection with one of the strongest examples being Boots supportive stance to employees with socially stigmatised difficulties:

*We regard problems such as alcohol or drug dependency as health rather than disciplinary issues, providing the individual seeks and maintains rehabilitative treatment. We will not discriminate against employees who are HIV positive or who develop AIDS and we will take appropriate steps to protect individuals from harassment because of their condition (2661/14, Working in the Boots Company).*

While concern for staff welfare was apparent, the style of approach was somewhat different to the company's earlier welfare model that came across with varying degrees of paternalism. Staff welfare in this more modern time showed an empowerment based approach consistent with the times that also intersected with notions of employees as assets and value generators as opposed to beneficiaries and key stakeholders.

***Boots as "customer service oriented"***

In keeping abreast with change in wider society, Boots were also mindful that what customers needed and wanted was also changeable meaning: *'every part of the Company needs to move quickly to keep up with consumer's appetite's for things new and different'* (Annual Report, 1998). However, as customers' appetites may have been changeable, Boots as 'customer service oriented' remained the same. Customer service was regarded by Boots as integral to who they were and what they offered, noting that a relationship between the company and customers had been built up over many years (Annual Report, 1996). Indeed, not just years but a century:

*For well over 100 years Boots has been developing products to meet the challenging needs of the consumer. One thing that hasn't changed however is our commitment to customer satisfaction and assurance and the quality of our merchandise (334/28 Quality Times, undated).*

Company discourse around customer service was prevalent in a staff magazine called *Quality Times*, specifically created to focus on this one aspect. Across issues of the magazine examples of excellence in customer care were showcased to retail staff as part of Boots's "Assured Shopping" initiative that was launched in the 1980s by Steve Russell (see T4 early). The idea behind this was decidedly customer service driven:

*Quality assurance is a commitment to total customer satisfaction. The quality process itself is regarded as the customer representation within the organisation... a way of seeing with the customer's eyes. That's why quality assurance is more than just a promise at Boots (334/28, Quality Times, undated).*

Customer care was thus an intrinsic component of Boots earlier identity expression of quality that was not represented in this time period as product quality. Rather, product quality appeared to have been assumed with the focus shifting to the creation of added value in quality through excellence in customer service. Indeed, where product quality had previously been reported to be a differentiator between Boots and its competitors, levels of customer service were equally defining.

*Customer service [which] should be at the top of our agenda because it is perhaps the most important point of difference between us and our competitors (Y45, Quality Times, Oct 1995).*

Added to *Quality Times*, a customer service identity was also communicated through recruitment advertising to potential new employees (2582/7, The future in Pharmacy, C1990s). Meanwhile to shareholders, customer service was professed to be a central part of the company's 'philosophy' (Y45 Shareholder, Spring 1995) that was manifested and enabled through staff training and embracing technology.

*Boots the Chemist has maintained its commitment to its long tradition of customer service by implementing the latest technology, embracing modern marketing principles and encouraging all staff to acquire a high level of knowledge relevant to their jobs* (Y45, Shareholder Magazine, Spring 1995).

Examples of technology were Boots Advantage Card which enabled the company to collect data about customer trends and thus keep retail offerings consumer tailored; Boot's MediLink database of patient records that facilitated cross-pharmacy service provision; and internet shopping. Uses of data technologies to improve customer service were also supplemented by strategic store planning and tailoring products and services to local community needs (Shareholder Magazine, Spring 1998).

### ***Boots as "historically grounded"***

The final theme generated for the 1990s was that Boots were 'historically grounded' which had also been the case at T3 previously. To some extent, this has already been demonstrated in some excerpts of text offered above indicating that more

generally across the period, there was an anchoring of identity claims and activities within the company's past. In total, 22 references to Boots history were made in documents that I analysed across this period. One source not yet mentioned was a series of information booklets called *Factfile* that regularly included a historical timeline of Boot's activities. *Shareholder* magazines also featured a history section (1995, 1996) and the company employed a full-time archivist, Katey Logan – an indication of Boots regard for their history. Her perspective of the company was summarised in *Shareholder Magazine*, 1996:

*It is uncommon for a business founded in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to be engaged today in more or less the same core activity. Katey explains "There is a wonderful continuity in the history of Boots as Chemists. Our records chart the company's development throughout the twentieth century – through periods of social unrest, wars, economic booms and slumps, and of course revolutions in technology"*

Other sources in which Boots expressed itself in relation to the past were recruitment brochures that included historical images and texts:

*Insisting on every latest technique, Boot (Jesse Boot) ... had telephones installed to connect him and his managers with all twenty one retail branches - Counter pages were photographs with relevant historical*

information: *photo of telephone operator* (A145/13 Graduate Opportunities, C 1995).

Boots history was also offered to shareholders as way to ground and justify the current form of the business, its activities, ideals and beliefs. In doing so the company were linking “who they were” in the past to “who they were” in the present and using this as a springboard for facing future challenge:

*A strategy built on value: Jesse Boot: “I had an idea that the herbalist and chemist at that time was very much out of date...I thought the public would welcome new chemists shops in which a greater and better variety of pharmaceutical articles could be obtained at cheaper prices.”... So wrote Jesse Boots as he looked back, after several decades, on the early years of the firm he had founded. At the heart of that statement was the key to a successful enterprise – providing value. If moving with the times was important then, it is even more so now – in age of competition and ever changing consumer demands. In the 1870s, years of rapid growth for the business, ownership was concentrated in the Boots family; now there are over 140,000 shareholders. But the drive for value persists, working in the long term interests of investors. In such a large organisation with diverse business streams, strategy is crucial in maintaining competitive advantage. Boots makes no secret of its aim to hold its place among the top retailing companies in terms of financial performance, while maintaining a caring and*

*responsive attitude towards customers and employees. So who are the inheritors of Jesse's entrepreneurial spirit and how do they plan the company's future? (Y45, Shareholder Magazine, Autumn 1995).*

As evidenced from the text itself, this linking between past and present was somewhat rhetorical. For example, linking Jesse Boot's vision to offer value was re-translated as related to the development of shareholder value. As has been evidenced in previous chapters, Jesse Boot's perspective on value was to the advantage of the public, through breaking an independent chemist price monopoly and bringing affordable health-care and medicines within reach of all. Here, value was reinterpreted as value creation for shareholders rather than value for the public, indicating that shareholders rather than the public were the principle concern to Boots. Moreover, the text confirmed this by highlighting the company's focus on creating strategic competitive advantage to enhance shareholder value and being "mindful" of customers and staff rather than regarding them as key stakeholders as Jesse had done. Thus, although it was possible to generate a theme that Boot's were historically grounded, their own use of their history as a company was for strategic communication and somewhat rhetorical and revisionist (for example: Gioia et al., 2000; Chreim, 2005)

#### **T4 Late Period (1999 -2002/03)**

Following the challenge to shareholders to look to the future, we can also join them in the last stage of this analysis in which no new identity themes were added.

Themes generated in this closing window were consistent with previous identity themes. However, since this period spanned only 2-3 years, textual evidence was limited and thus should be read as an extension of the previous section. Of importance during this time was Boots decision to dispose of its remaining non-healthcare business, Halfords, in 2002 at a loss of £123.3 million (Annual Report, 2003) and scale down its No 2. merchandise which included music, video, stationery, children's clothing and leisure goods (Annual report, 2001). This marked a change for Boots that saw the company move in the direction of "wellbeing" as opposed to healthcare. Under new leadership by Chairman John McGrath, Boots rebranded themselves as a wellbeing company and offered services such as hair removal, cosmetic teeth whitening, leisure centres, massage and complimentary therapies (Annual Report, 2001).

### ***Boots as a "chemist"***

The development of Boots as a wellbeing company was subservient to their primary offering of pharmacy, chemist and toilet goods in which it was claimed: '*BTC is the heart of the business and the Brand. Chemist still dominates reality*' (2650, Boots Tomorrow). Thus, although attempting to expand their offering through new wellbeing services, Boots continued to strongly maintain a 'Chemist's' identity. This was mediated through Boot's heritage in both pharmacy and retailing (Blueprint, 2002). A chemist identity was shored up further since wellbeing services were making significant operating losses (£20.7m, Annual Report, 2001). In response the company closed down its wellbeing centres 2 years later. Following their closure

and downsizing non-pharmacy led offerings, John McGrath described the business as being:

*...more focused than it has been for over a decade and a good deal leaner. We are now able to concentrate attention and investment on a single Company with two core businesses: BTC and Boots Healthcare International (Annual Report, 2003).*

To support this, increasing investment was made to in-store pharmacy as the company *'confidently expect[ed] our pharmacists to play an increasing role in Primary Healthcare and was perceived that 'customers trust [us] Boots to provide primary healthcare advice and services'.*

***Boots as "customer service oriented"***

Directing Boots short-lived development from healthcare to wellbeing was the company's continuing focus on 'customer service'. Notions of wellbeing were considered to be the epitome of an updated customer-led approach that encompassed as wide a range of customer needs within a healthcare remit by adopting an holistic approach (2650, The Boots Brand Corporate Model, 2000; 2651 Boots Corporate Brand Completion Process, June 2000).

### ***Boots as “trustworthy”***

Being ‘Trustworthy’ continued to be evident for Boots OI throughout all previous time frames (T1, T2, & T3) and into this final one. Thus, trustworthiness appeared highly important to the company and it was:

*...perceived... as the Key Boots Value rooted in the Company heritage and assuring credibility for the future: A pharmaceutical heritage (White coated man, Pharmacist to the Nation) and a service heritage (relational, caring) and an ethical heritage (quality, efficiency and safety) (2651, Co-sight, Boots Socratic Approach branding presentation, Sep 2000).*

Notions of being trustworthy were also linked to Boots’ CSR activities (Annual Report 2003) and were announced in an environmental performance brochure (2927/33, 2001/2002) in which the company claimed:

*Much of the power of the Boots brand comes from the trust it inspires in people – and that trust has to be earned...that is why we take CSR very seriously’.*

The company logo was also seen as another point of trust between the public and the business (Boots logo guide, 2003) as well as the company’s heritage in being a chemist (2650, The Boots Brand, Corporate Model, Feb 2000). When senior managers were constructing the Boots brand it was argued in documents that:

*The Boots Company benefits from a paternal type of trust that the Company has historically developed through its pharmacy heritage. Despite this historical basis, Trust remains relevant and dynamic with audiences trusting the Company to forge new areas of innovation and ideas (2651, The Corporate Brand, CB Team Meeting, Eperon Wells, 2000).*

### ***Boots as “knowledgeable”***

This theme also seemed to continue over from Boot’s as a knowledgeable organization that first appeared in the previous decade. In keeping with a pharmacist heritage it was suggested that Boots were an ‘expert and authority’ but this was clearly linked with knowledge. An annual report in 2001 evidenced this since the Chairman stated:

*For many years Boots has been distinguished from its competitors by its expertise in helping people to take care of themselves, symbolised by the pharmacist – the ‘man in the white coat’. But the promise of dependability, integrity and authority remains the same: no one knows more about wellbeing than Boots.*

In particular, expertise and knowledge played a key role in brand development as already expressed in the quotes above but now also highlighted even further below:

*The Boots offer, derived from the Strategic Intent, can be simply stated as “An unrivalled knowledge and range of everyday health and beauty products and services accessible wherever you are” (2651, Boots Brand – progress update and key decisions, 2000).*

This was a point the company appeared to pride itself upon and communicated readily to stakeholder audiences in their CSR reporting:

*Within any Boots store is a wealth of knowledge on many health issues. This makes us perfectly placed to share our expertise with customers and the wider community enabling everyone to have access to the information they need to take greater control of their own health (3837/40, Community Investment Performance, 2000).*

### ***Boots as “communitarian”***

Boots’s expertise and knowledge in healthcare also provided a basis for their offering to the community and thus created a seamless link to a ‘communitarian’ identity. For Boots, being an active member of the community was related to notions of CSR in which the company claimed it had a strong tradition:

*Boots is one of Britain’s most trusted brands. The foundation for this is the company’s long established community investment programme and desire for continuous improvement in its environmental performance....Boots is*

*determined to live up to its proud social heritage and the trust that customers place in the Boots name (Annual Report, 2003).*

Community investment was described as working closely with Nottinghamshire *NHS* to deliver health promotion initiatives at a cost to Boots of £5 million (Annual Report, 2003). Meanwhile, other programmes of community investment were extracted and summarised from the Millennium edition of *Community Review* magazine\*:

*Boots recycling project; Patients benefiting from donations of surplus goods; Working with the National Trust; Financially supporting more than half of the town Centre Management regeneration initiatives in the UK during the year; Operation Respect (Partnership with Nottingham Police to combat juvenile crime); Safety Zone (promotion of personal safety among school children); A sensory garden for visually impaired in Wollaton Park, Nottingham; Supporting fostering and adoption publicity etc. (Community Review, 1999/2000) [\*summarised not verbatim].*

From this extensive list it was clear to see that Boots were actively involved in supporting and initiating community projects and were an exemplar among companies:

*Boots willingness to champion community issues has achieved recognition throughout the UK. We aim to extend that recognition to all the countries in which we plan a significant presence. With the help of our employees, we strive to promote healthy living and lifelong learning, support the environment and promote safe caring communities. The partnerships we initiate and support provide the catalyst that makes a difference both to our business and our communities (Community Review, 1999/2000).*

***Boots as “socially responsible”***

As earlier in the 1990s, the theme of communitarian outlined above was ultimately embedded within a greater identity theme of Boots as a ‘socially responsible’ business that now went beyond the local-level to global issues. That this was the case was evidenced by the following article that appeared in the staff magazine *Blueprint* (2001):

*Boots has recently been rated as one of the top 50 companies in the first FTSE4 good UK 50 Index of Companies. The Index helps investors to identify companies with good records of corporate social responsibility, reflecting the success of those working towards environmental sustainability and universal human rights. The Boots vision is to transform its global business in a way that can make a real difference to the social and environmental wellbeing of the workforce and local communities, now and in the future.*

A growing attention to global, in contrast with local community-level issues, was reiterated by Boots in their 2003 Annual Report in which the company stated it was adopting ethical sourcing:

*By building social accountability into our purchasing procedures we aim to ensure that we and our customers do no unwittingly support abuse of human rights, unsafe working conditions, unfair wages, child or forced labour.*

Indeed, CSR remained very much at the heart of Boots into the Millennium. It was intrinsic to the new branding development (2651, The Corporate Brand team meeting, 2000) and adopted as an all-encompassing philosophy since comparative to their earlier Friedmanite view of social responsibility (cf. 1990s) Boots were now claiming:

*We see a concern for social for social and environmental wellbeing, within a broader sustainability agenda as an integral part of the way we do business*  
(Annual Report, 2001).

### ***Boots as “relational”***

Once again carrying over from the 1990s, Boots also continued to enact a ‘Relational’ identity suggested by their ongoing commitment to developing community partnerships. Notwithstanding the relationships previously evidenced

as part of Boots's community investment programme, there were other larger scale collaborations with the Department of Health by linking the Boots Advantage Card with the *NHS* Organ Donor Scheme (Annual Report, 2001). Other collaborations involved working with the *NHS* to provide 7-day-week, walk-in health centres in 20 of Boots stores, the largest of which was located in Birmingham (Blueprint, 2002). The idea behind working in partnership with the *NHS* was offered in *Boots's Community Investment Performance* document (3837/40, 2002) as:

*...by actively contributing to health promotion and social inclusion, our initiatives support the NHS with its requirement to widen participation and improve access to services which promote positive health.*

Thus, it seemed that the *NHS* was naturally allied with Boots since they appeared to share common objectives to offer healthcare services, to be an active heart of local communities, and to promote positive health. However, it was also important to realise the strategic value of such collaborations with the *NHS* in what was a neoliberal socio-political climate. In particular, during this time frame, New Labour was in political power and had developed the concept of Public Private Partnerships (PPP), also known as Private Finance Initiatives (PFI). These had been established to reinvigorate public services by encouraging increasing investment from private industry into public services such as the *NHS* – in effect opening a backdoor for gradual privatisation (Pollock, 2005). Thus, Boots' collaborative allying with the *NHS*

must also be critically read in this light, as perhaps a somewhat more strategic positioning for the purposes of shareholder wealth creation.

### ***Boots as “grounded in history”***

Finally, across the identity themes and quotations of text offered for this time period, it was apparent that Boot’s identity continued to be ‘grounded in history’. Heritage was relied upon for rebranding, to inspire and encourage customer service (Blueprint, 2000; 2002), to justify family-friendly policies (Blueprint, 2001) and to frame community involvement (Annual Report, 2001). From these it was clear that to some extent Boot’s history provided a spring-board for the company’s self-understanding in brand creation and corporate communications in which there were continuing attempts to link the company’s past with its present.

### ***Explaining Boot’s OI at T4***

In the initial part of this time unit it was empirically demonstrated that almost no preceding identity themes had been reproduced. Indeed, within the archival data there was a generalised dearth of identity related text. However, in the following decade of the 1990s it was possible to generate a greater number of OI themes. In this middle period only six OI themes reproduced what was in the previous time frame while there were a number of new themes appearing such as being “a business”, “shareholder focused”, “community oriented” and “environmentally responsible”. The latter two themes reflected an increasing presence of corporate

social responsibility discourse and activities that had become a common feature within identity related texts during this decade. Toward the end of the time frame in which I generated Boot's OI around the Millennium, OI discourses largely became couched in terms of corporate brand with the company engaging actively in a brand creation exercise during this time. In doing so, many of the OI themes from the 1990s were reproduced; however, notions of being shareholder oriented and a business had become absent. Clearly, T4 was an interesting and complex time frame that moved from an almost total absence of OI to a renaissance of identity. In this final part of the results section, the focus was to explain these dynamics building on arguments developed over the previous time frames and drawing on both theory and the empirical data.

Beginning with the early part of the time frame which for the most part reflected Boot's OI during the 1980s, there was a notable absence of identity themes reflected as a primarily blank section in Table 3. This equated to an archival silence, which often have their own unique story to tell (Decker, 2013; Anteby & Molnar, 2012). However uncovering this silence was not about giving expression to a previously repressed voice as is common to the way archival silences are treated within history (Decker, 2013). Instead, I wanted to explain what was the non-production and non-observation of Boot's OI. In the previous time frame it had been argued that when past OI themes had not been reproduced this had been because agents did not engage with their past OI. Building on this same premise in

this time frame, agents' non-engagement with past OI was clearly widespread with only two themes of "socially responsible" and "offering quality" reproduced.

A possible explanation for non-production of identity may have been that agents' were naïve to Boot's past OI since the company were increasingly moving forward in time and thus becoming more temporally distanced from their past. However, naivety or lack of knowledge of Boot's past OI was unlikely to have been the case given that the organization had celebrated its centenary at the close of T3 in which many aspects of the company's history had been celebrated. Ignoring (Anteby & Molnar, 2012) or disengaging from past OI (Brunninge, 2009) was more plausible than organizational agents not having knowledge of their past in the early part of T4. A key question then, is why did agents disengage with Boot's past OI and not reproduce it? To answer this Archer (1996) reminds us of the factors underlying reproduction, or suppression of what exists in terms of a past cultural-system. In particular she identifies this as being based on complementarities and/or contradictions between elements of the propositional logics of the past and the current cultural status quo. Thus, what the current contextual situation of the business was like during the 1980s seemed likely to be a relevant factor.

As noted at the start of this chapter, during the 1980s was the rise of neoliberal ideology, promoted on a trans-Atlantic scale by leading political figures namely Thatcher in Great Britain and Reagan in the United States. Neoliberalism is a contested and poorly articulated concept in the social sciences (Boas & Gans-

Morse, 2009), but can be understood normatively as a socio-political and economic ideal that emphasises privatisation, reduces business regulation and public services while promoting individualisation of the social good (Martinez & Garcia, 1997). In common with contemporary businesses, this was an ideology that Boots embraced during the 1980s by adopting a single-minded focus on profit-making and market domination. This was evidenced by Boots rapid expansion and diversification into non-chemist markets such as home decorating, DIY, and children's products. Moreover, identity discourses were also replaced by an economic and corporate business language with much archival data focused on figures, targets, profits and acquisitions that limited generation of OI themes and also implicitly indicated that Boots had begun to adopt neoliberal values.

In reflecting further it became apparent that neoliberal values and ideas were also contradictory to the wider values, beliefs and ideas that Boots' identity had been parallel with at T1 and was emergent from in T2 (and to an extent in T3). In particular, previous company identity markers like being a 'public service' and 'pro-social' had been predicated on promoting the wider interests of society along with the wellbeing of staff and stakeholders. These identity markers had been previously sustained by Boots' "eternal triangle" of stakeholders (shareholders, the public and employees) who had been central to Boots' past OI. However, in this new neoliberal business environment, Boots attention had shifted to shareholders as their central stakeholder group and a belief that profitable return on investment was the principal objective of the business. Consequently, Boots' past OI ceased to be

relevant for the company and more strongly could even be considered contradictory to Boots adoption of a neoliberal corporate mentality. Given such contradiction between Boot's past OI and its current status quo of neoliberal values suggested a reason for why agents did not reproduce past OI. To do so, would have surfaced an ideological and identity conflict between who Boots had been and who they were now.

While this explained the absence of identity themes on the basis of the company's past OI as existing within the Boots archive, I have also previously argued that OI is emergent from a combination of wider social entities, values and beliefs in the wider institutional-level environment. Therefore, a second reason for the absence of identity themes at the early part of T4 was also forthcoming. Following my previous arguments that OI is an emergent property and thus, dependent on a combination of lower-level social entities and values etcetera, then Boots adoption of neoliberal values and a focus on shareholders would have had a disruptive effect on the combination that underpinned Boot's emergent OI. In particular, this narrow rather than broad focus would have supported only one relation – an economic relation between the company and its shareholders as vehicle for wealth creation. The effect of this would have been to render Boot's previous emergent OI as non-existent, thus also explaining why it was not produced during the 1980s. However, it is also important to note that although Boot's emergent OI had become significantly redacted, Boot's past OI continued to exist within the Boots archive. Nevertheless, as discussed above, agents did not engage with this past OI and

consequently did not reproduce or elaborate it. Taken together, both reasons can account for why Boot's OI was not visible during the 1980s.

Although non-visibility of identity was the primary observation in the 1980 period, two themes were generated that were reproductions of Boot's past OI. On the basis of what has already been suggested it was relatively simple to explain their re-appearance since both were complimentary with the company's neoliberal values, philosophy and their emergent OI as an economic. For example, 'offering quality', which followed from Boot's identity as 'assured' in T3, was continuous since offering good quality products would have been fundamental to maintaining repeated sales in consumable goods. Indeed, the congruence of this theme with creating shareholder value was self-evident. The second identity marker of 'pro-social' also re-appeared but in a different guise since it was more reflective of being 'socially responsible'. It is well known from research that being socially responsible adds value to a business in a number of different ways (see Kurucz et al., 2008 for an overview). Some scholars have gone further to claim that corporate social responsibility of itself enables capitalist relations to flourish since it conceals rather than reveals shareholders as the dominant stakeholder (Utting & Marques, 2010). Thus, to the extent that being 'socially responsible' and offering 'quality' contributed to shareholder value, meant that at least some elements of Boot's historically situated identity could be reproduced from emergence and/or reproducing past OI from an archive.

The death of Boot's identity in the 1980s was not the end for Boot's OI since during the middle-to-late period of T4 a resurrection of Boot's historically situated OI was evidenced. New identity themes were also generated such as a 'shareholder focused' and a 'business' identity. These new themes reflected the neoliberal ideas and values which had become central to Boot's emergent OI rather than were based on elaboration of Boot's past OI as had previously been the case with new OI themes. These two new themes were particularly evident in documents such as annual reports, in which the company's central mission statement was proclaimed as: *"our objective is to maximise the value of the Company for the benefit of its shareholders"* (Annual Report, 1993). The evidence for the 1990s also showed that Boot's were projecting, professing and enacting a socially responsible identity. At first, I considered that this may have been evidence of dual identity in which two or more competing identities co-exist in an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). However, given that enacting social responsibility is thought to support shareholder's economic objectives (Kurucz et al., 2008; Utting & Marques, 2010) the split between being socially responsible on the one hand and shareholder oriented on the other was self-reinforcing rather than reflecting a dualistic tension. Supporting this was the finding that the resurrection of Boot's past OI had been related almost exclusively to CSR.

During the 1990s reproduction of the past identity marker of being 'socially responsible' became articulated in a much broader way by organizational agents at Boots, leading to the development of new identity themes that were strong enough

to be independently generated but easily subsumed under a generalist CSR label. These were 'community orientation', being 'environmentally responsible', with 'supportive of staff' also increasingly coming under a social responsibility remit incorporating equality, diversity, sustainability and individual growth of employees. The theme of 'relational' had also changed significantly and was now related to strategic partnerships in community development projects. Although appearing to be a reproduction of Boot's past relational identity this theme could not be understood in this way. To clarify, previously this theme had been far wider and foundational to Boot's offering of public and national service in T2 and reflected an interdependent company-wide relational culture in T3. Specifically, in this time period 'relational' was constituted by community-level relations integrated within notions of CSR. Thus, although appearing to be reproduced, the resurrection of relational identity was not intrinsic to Boot's OI as an economic shareholding company but related to CSR.

Other past OI markers also seemed to have been reproduced, for example notions of "social responsibility", being "supportive of staff", "customer-led" and being a "pharmacist". In similarity with the previous time frame, history had also been used by the organization in articulating its OI and thus being "historically grounded" was also reproduced. However, comparative to T3 on this occasion history was less engaged with by organizational agents in the previously mentioned styles of protectionist, creative, and disengaged. Instead, it was strategically and selectively appropriated in company communications such as recruitment brochures and

shareholder magazines to justify and position current CSR activities. The observation that managers used Boot's history strategically to frame current OI and CSR, rather than be a point of engagement with the past that led to reproduction or elaboration of OI, meant that within this time frame, Boot's OI appeared rhetorical and constructed (Gioia et al., 2000; Brunninge, 2009; Suddaby et al., 2010). Thus, in what was a surprising twist, Boot's OI appeared to have become a socially constructed and rhetorical identity incorporating historical narrative (He & Brown, 2013; Czarniawska, 1997).

The final sub-section of T4 further supported this since notions of OI were finally abandoned altogether in creation of a corporate brand. In creating the Boot's brand, organizational agents perceived Boot's past OI as socially rich and thus drew upon it to generate brand claims such as 'trustworthy', 'socially responsible' and 'knowledgeable'. Of note was non-observation of Boot's OI as 'shareholder orientated' and 'a business' from almost all identity related texts. To emphasise, Boot's CSR credentials, healthcare heritage, customer focus, and community/relational identity were of relevance to a number of potential wider stakeholders than to their necessary and centrally defining shareholders. Thus, through creating a corporate brand at the Millennium, Boot's were attempting to reposition the organization in wider social relations by reconstructing parts of their historically situated OI to build the wider legitimacy and social relations that Boot's had previously experienced prior to T4. Thus, in the latter part of T4 reproduction of past OI also appeared to be strategic and rhetorical.

However, to claim that Boot's OI was now a socially constructed and malleable phenomenon with agents making it appear as though OI was enduring would make the epistemic fallacy (*cf.* Bhaskar, 1979). Indeed, to suggest that OI had now become a malleable construct on the basis of the empirical appearance of OI in this time frame alone, would conflate ontology with epistemology. Thus, we must ask again what could explain agents' strategic reproduction of past OI in the here-and-now of T4? On the basis of arguments from the previous time frames it was possible that Boot's past OI as emergent from the company archive may have had a role in what was produced in terms of OI. To remind, Boot's OI had not become ontologically voided when the relations from which their OI emerged broke down in the 1980s. Instead, Boots past OI was preserved in the archive as an ontologically independent entity. Thus, given that some of Boot's past OI appeared to have been reproduced, and that agents drew on the company's history, it was possible that Boot's OI as situated in the archive may help provide an explanation.

As mentioned previously, agents' reproductions and enactment of past OI (as a property of the cultural-system) are constrained and enabled by contradictions and complementarities that exist between its content and dominant socio-cultural values and ideas (Archer, 1996). In this case, the content of Boot's historical OI and neoliberal values were largely contradictory. However, where complementarities could be found, these elements of past OI were fore-grounded and expressed. For example, Boot's past OI as customer service oriented in T3 could be reproduced in T4 without contradiction since being customer service-led promotes shareholders'

interests. That such customer service was shareholder, rather than customer-driven was suggested by the way in which Boots regarded customer service as a point of competitive advantage against a backdrop of shareholder value, rather than articulated from a customer as stakeholder perspective. Thus, notions of customer service were complimentary with both neoliberal values and the company's emergent OI as economic.

However, there were less complementarities in Boot's claims to being "socially responsible" although these were ostensibly professed and projected to be a continuation of the company's past. Comparative to Boot's previous OI as 'pro-social' and a 'public service', at T4 Boot's were neither a public service nor particularly pro-social. Instead, Boot's past OI was conflated with current CSR activity as agents sought to justify and strategically make links with their past for competitive advantage and legitimacy (Vanhamme & Grobбен, 2009; Suddaby et al., 2010). To some extent this could be interpreted as rhetorical, and indeed, that agents at Boot's constructed their OI in current time is not disputed. However, what was reproduced were not past identity markers per se. but specific examples of previous enactment of a pro-social and public service OI. Thus, by drawing on examples rather than these past OI markers as a whole, complementarities were located between past OI and the present rather than full reproduction of being pro-social or a public service.

On the one hand Boot's OI appeared to be rhetorical and have become a social construction in which agents strategically drew on their past OI (*cf.* Ravasi & Schultz 2006; Ericson, 2006; Ravasi & Philips, 2011). However, on the other hand, it can also be argued that what agents constructed in terms of a socially responsible umbrella identity at T4, was a partial reproduction of past OI in which agents reproductions of it were contingently enabled and constrained by complimentary and contradictory interactions between Boot's past OI and its current OI as being primarily economic and shareholder driven. Of importance in this distinction were notions of temporality. From an ahistorical perspective, Boot's identity was socially constructed in T4 by agents using their past OI as a resource; however from an historical perspective, what agents constructed in terms of OI at T4 could be understood as a partial reproduction of their organizational past.

To summarise, given the dynamics of Boot's OI through the T4 period, 'death and resurrection of identity' was an appropriate chapter heading. In the early part of T4, under the contingent condition of a neoliberal State and socio-political climate, the combination of wider social entities from which Boot's OI had been emergent was broken-down. In its place was left behind an economic identity emergent from a single relationship between the company and its shareholders supported by neoliberal values. Under this situation, many aspects of Boot's historical OI became defunct. The effect of which situated Boot's previous OI into the Boots archive as organizational history. Although continuing to exist within the archive, Boots past OI was still not reproduced by agents. Indeed, because Boot's past OI contradicted

Boot's emergent and economic OI, agents ceased to engage with their past OI which explained non-observation of OI reproduction at the start of this time frame.

Progressing into the 1990s, Boot's historical identity began to be engaged with once again but rather than creatively or protectively, it was engaged with strategically, filtered through a lens of value creation making Boot's OI appear rhetorical and constructed – in its extreme a corporate brand at the Millennium. However, agents' use of their past OI to construct OI in the here-and-now of T4 was not voluntaristic. What agents produced in terms of OI at T4 was constrained and enabled by contradictions and complementarities of what pre-existed them in terms of OI. Therefore, the OI that agents constructed at T4 was a partial reproduction of the company's past OI. The most clear example being establishment of links between Boot's past OI as socially concerned and its strategic value for shareholder wealth creation, reputation and organizational legitimacy when re-framed as corporate social responsibility.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Discussion**

#### ***Introduction***

The previous four chapters formed the results section of my thesis in which I followed steps three and four of my research strategy to empirically observe and explain OI dynamics at Boots over multiple time units. In this chapter, I now progress to the fifth and final step of my research framework which was to develop an account of OI based on what has been both observed and argued for. It is to this end that the first part of this chapter is oriented and which resulted in generation of a number of theoretical propositions about OI. Following this, I then revisited what had been discussed in my literature review in Chapter one, applying my findings and account of OI to make a theoretical contribution to the literature. Three contributions were identified that a) addressed conceptual unity in OI theorising, b) the endurance and changeability debate and c) made a call for a more critical research stream within OI scholarship. Through further reflecting on my findings, I also considered how my account of OI may be useful for management of OI within an organizational context. Consequently, additional to a theoretical contribution I used my research to also make a practical contribution.

### ***Toward Developing a New Account of Organizational Identity***

Having discussed and explained the data, my findings and explanatory arguments were now brought to bear on the research questions I posed at the beginning of my thesis. These were centrally concerned with developing a clearer understanding of the ontological nature of OI with two questions raised. First, contra to a dominant social constructionist conceptualisation of OI, I asked if OI was essentially enduring but empirically appeared to change? The second question I asked was: could OI escape its makers (i.e. perpetual social construction) to become an independent phenomenon capable of being reproduced or elaborated by agents through acting back upon them? Addressing these questions was with the objective of contributing to organizational scholarship and theory development in light of unresolved debates about OI (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Gioia et al., 2000; 2013).

Grounded in my explanatory discussions of the empirical data an answer to the first research question was forthcoming. Over the course of three time frames, which covered a period of 84 years, Boot's OI was observed to be primarily enduring with some degree of changeability in themes. Omitting the creation of OI in T1, identity markers in T2 and T3 were largely reproduced being added to and subtracted from in relation to each preceding time frame. However, for me to claim that OI is enduring on the basis of empirical evidence alone could be criticised as making an epistemic fallacy. In my study however, the enduring nature of OI can be established from its explanatory power as *a*) an emergent property of a combination of social entities at the ontological level of the real and *b*) as a socio-

cultural emergent property of the contents of an archive which is also ontologically independent at the same level (Archer, 1996). Although, this suggested a difference between structure and culture, within critical realism they are both ontological constructs that behave in the same way (Archer, 1996; Hays, 1994). Thus, while it may have been worthwhile to explore this distinction, for pragmatic reasons I purposefully do not since it was tangential to my primary objective of developing an account of OI. Instead, of more pressing importance was to consolidate my findings and analytical arguments.

My empirical findings showed that Boot's OI appeared to be relatively stable and enduring in T2 and T3 which was explained on the basis that OI is an emergent property of an underlying combination of social entities (such as war, the State, stakeholders, values, beliefs and ideas etc.). This was predicated on earlier findings (chapter four) that Boot's OI at T1 had been constructed alongside such entities, comparative to emulating the chemist trade of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was further argued that because this combination remained relatively stable and intact into T2, Boot's OI also remained stable, was reproduced by agents and thus endured. During T3 however, this underlying combination became destabilised since extensive war involving the UK was absent and the State had adopted a welfare economy in which healthcare had been nationalised through the *NHS*. Thus, Boot's OI was threatened. To buffer against OI loss or change, the company engaged with their past OI (which had become increasingly situated into an archival-system) and in doing so agents reproduced past OI by being

protectionist and creative; repositioning OI markers in alternative aspects of their past. In this way OI was reproduced in T3 with many OI themes empirically observed to be enduring.

That OI was explained to be an emergent property of a combination of social entities means that OI can be considered enduring inasmuch as the combination from which it emerges is also enduring (*cf.* Elder-vass, 2005). This I refer to as *contingently enduring*. However, when that combination was destabilised as in T3 or as was suggested in T4, removed altogether, then OI would no longer be enduring since it would no longer be emergent. This was evidenced in the early part of T4 when Boots adopted neoliberal values epitomised as an economic relation between the organization and its shareholders. In this case, the company's previously emergent identity was for the most part no longer empirically manifested. This finding supported my argument that Boot's OI was an emergent property since when the combination that had held Boot's OI stable was destabilised, so too was Boot's identity destabilised. Importantly, in this case study, Boot's had also collected their past OI into an archive, creating a parallel OI as a property of the archive's contents. Given this, Boot's OI did not stop existing when its emergence from a combination of social relations broke down but it continued within the company archive and was ready-made, pre-existent, and available for agents to engage with.

Through different ways of engaging with their past OI, agents at Boots reproduced some aspects of it in both T3 and in the latter part of T4 which then explained why observation of identity endurance had occurred in the face of a breaking down of emergent OI. From this, it can be understood that when embedded within the contents of a corporate archive, past OI does not depend on agents for its existence but endures as a socio-cultural object that is not dependent on agents for its ongoing existence (*cf.* Archer, 1996). For example, in the early T4 period agents did not reproduce past OI during the 1980s, nevertheless, they were still able to reproduce elements of a decade later it in the 1990s. This long pause, followed by ongoing (re)production of past OI, demonstrated that past OI had existed (and thus endured) independently of agents' enactment and reproduction of it for around ten years. In this way, an historically situated OI can be understood to be *essentially enduring* and ontologically independent.

This is not to say that such a past OI is a fixed unchanging object, since over time, the contents of an archive (and thus OI) can be elaborated and transformed as what agents reconstruct and create in terms of OI in the here-and-now of itself additively feeds back into the archive over time (*op cit*). However, at any given moment in time, when constructing OI in the here-and-now, agents encounter a pre-existing OI that is enduring as an object independently of whether agents do or do not reproduce it. From these arguments it was then possible to summarise into the following two theoretical propositions:

- 1) Organizational identity is an emergent property of a combination of social entities that exist at the level of the real. Inasmuch as this combination remains relatively enduring then OI will also be enduring.
  
- 2) If collected into an archive, over time, OI becomes an emergent property of its contents that transcends dependence on agents for its existence. So long as the archive endures, then OI will also be enduring independently of whether agents reproduce it or not in their constructions of OI.

These two statements reflected that within this case study, Boot's had two forms of OI. Statement (1) reflected that Boot's OI was emergent from dependence on a combination of social entities existing at a lower-level of organisation (in the level of the real). Meanwhile, statement (2) showed that Boot's OI was also existent within the company's archive. This seeming duality of OI reflected that OI can be an emergent property of structural relations on the one hand, and on the other hand also be a socio-cultural entity. However, as aforementioned, because culture and structure are interrelated and behave in similar ways (Hays, 1994), the possible differences or similarities between them have not been explored further. Instead, the important point from these two statements was that irrespective of whether emanating from the structural or cultural domain, OI can be conceptualised as contingently and/or essentially enduring at an ontological level.

Having argued that OI is enduring at an ontological level, what then can be said about OI as only having only the appearance of endurance at the level of the

empirical? Indeed, it was claimed by Gioia et al. (2013) that OI only appears to endure but is of itself actually changeable. This argument was to an extent supported by my empirical findings which showed in the latter part of T4 that managers linked Boot's past with their present which created the appearance of endurance in OI especially in relation to being socially responsible. However, because I took a longitudinal perspective, this was not the only way in which data from T4 could be interpreted. Instead, it could also be argued that what preceded managers in terms of a past OI contingently enabled and constrained what they could reproduce of past OI, rather than voluntaristically making use of the past to construct OI.

In particular, when constructing an identity as socially responsible in T4, managers engaged with their past OI. However, they did so reflexively using exemplars from Boot's past OI as 'socially idealistic', 'pro-social', and 'a public service'. However, in doing this agents did not reproduce this past OI in its fullest sense since what they could reproduce was limited by the organization being a primarily economic and shareholder centred entity. To have reproduced past OI would have been contradictory to Boot's emergent OI as an economic entity for creating shareholder wealth. Thus, exemplars were used by managers to support an OI of being socially responsible, which as an identity marker is not the same as being socially idealistic, pro-social or a public service. Therefore, despite appearing to be related with Boot's past OI (and thus enduring), being socially responsible reflected that the company's OI had actually changed from being pro-social to becoming 'socially responsible'.

Consequently, at an empirical level Boot's OI was in fact changeable rather than enduring. This can also be confirmed by noting that the content of OI themes also changed. For example, notions of public service in T2 had changed in T3, so too had Boot's relational identity. Thus, despite appearing to endure because of the identity labels being reproduced, in content Boot's OI was empirically changeable. Initially, it therefore seemed that Gioia et al.'s (2013) assertions were correct; that although appearing to endure OI is changeable.

Such a claim is not unreasonable when looking at the empirical data alone. Indeed, my findings show that at the level of generated OI themes, OI can have the empirical appearance of endurance which can also be facilitated by the way in which managers' draw on history to construct OI (for example: Gioia et al., 2000). Conversely, OI can also be considered changeable if one considers the content of themes and how this changed over time. However, the claims of Gioia et al. (2013) are arrested at the level of the empirical and cannot be the basis for a claim that OI (at an ontological level) is changeable since such a claim makes the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 1979). Moreover, Reed (2005) argues that social constructionist ontology (which underpins Gioia et al's claims) is one-dimensional and flat and thereby unable to be a foundation to advance such an ontological claim about OI. Consequently, what can be reliably claimed on the basis of empirics is that OI appears to be changeable (or enduring) rather than *is* (at an ontological level) changeable.

This is precisely what was found by my research; that at an empirical level OI can appear to be both enduring and also changeable depending on how OI is generated. At a greater level of interpretive abstraction, for example by generating OI themes as I have done, then OI can appear enduring over time as my data showed. Meanwhile, from a more empirically driven and content-based perspective then OI could have appeared to be changeable over time. However, when I attempted to explain what I observed in the dynamics of Boot's OI through retroductive arguments and reasoning, it was surfaced that OI of itself was a credible explanation for the findings. Therefore, in this study, OI was simultaneously both *explanans* and *explanandum* (Donati & Archer, 2015). Indeed, as an empirically manifested phenomenon, OI is something that must be explained, but yet in explaining dynamics in empirical OI over time, the existence of OI as an ontologically independent entity was surfaced. That this was found to be the case and not be merely a circular argument was because of my analytical and theoretical inclusion of temporality. For what at one time is empirical and socially constructed in terms of OI, over time becomes independent of agents and emergent, acting back upon agents' construction of OI in current time. On this basis it was also apparent that my second research question had also been answered – that OI can escape its makers (i.e. perpetual social construction) to act back upon them?

Along the lines of this understanding, it can be claimed that OI is dual as opposed to being dualistic (*cf.* Giddens, 1984; Archer, 1995; 1996). More specifically, drawing on the language of critical realism, that OI as a phenomenon is both ontologically

and temporally stratified. First, in terms of Bhaskar's ontology, OI is contingently or essentially enduring (propositions 1 & 2) at the level of the real, while at the level of the actual (in which OI is enacted) and the empirical (in which OI can be observed), OI appears to be changeable, or in some cases could also appear enduring. Thus, the reverse to Gioia et al.'s claims can be stated: *that OI is essentially enduring but 'empirically' appears to change*. Second, OI is temporally stratified. Situated in the past, OI is an ontologically independent, emergent property of the contents of an archival cultural-system. Meanwhile, in the here-and-now OI is dependent on agents to enact and construct OI. However, in current time what agents construct in terms of OI is contingently enabled and constrained by what precedes them in terms of a pre-existing OI. In this way OI acts back upon both agents and itself, contingently determining agents' constructions of OI as of themselves, those same agents determine and construct an OI in current time. This can be summarised to develop two further propositions about OI that answer my research questions.

- 3) Organizational identity is ontologically stratified. At the level of the real, OI is essentially and/or contingently enduring as an emergent property. Meanwhile at the level of the empirical OI appears to be changeable (and in some cases enduring).
- 4) Organizational identity is temporally stratified. Situated in a past temporal space, OI is ontologically independent of agents as a socio-cultural property of an archive. Meanwhile, in the here-and-now OI is dependent on agents' constructions of it. However, agents' constructions of OI are not voluntaristic

since what they construct in term of OI is contingently enabled and constrained by an OI that precedes them.

These theoretical statements about OI constituted my original contribution to OI scholarship since they have been developed through combining concepts and ideas from critical realism with taking an historical approach to developing a theoretical understanding of OI. To my knowledge, such an approach has not previously been advanced in the OI literature. In keeping with my critical realist framework, while referent to the empirical data, the explanations for my findings were not grounded in the data of itself. Importantly, this guarded against a slide into both epistemic fallacy and narrative that could have occurred by over-depending on the data to explain the data and give up a theory. Instead, I developed a theoretical explanation for the empirically observed dynamics in Boot's OI, which through doing so surfaced that OI of itself was a credible explanation. In identifying OI as a structural/cultural explanation for OI dynamics over time, meant that OI could be conceptualised as an ontologically independent social entity which I have articulated through the four theoretical propositions. Although achieving this marked completion of the final step of my research framework, I continue my discussion by explaining the contribution that my conceptualisation of OI makes to issues in OI theorising that were surfaced in my literature review.

### ***From Chaos to Cohesion in Conceptualising Organizational Identity***

The account of OI advanced in my thesis made several steps toward conceptual integration in OI scholarship, which was the primary objective in undertaking this research given the conceptual plurality of OI (He & Brown, 2013; Ravasi & Canato, 2013; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2000). In attempting to bring about cohesion some have attempted to unite different strands of OI research under a single theory. For example, as explained in my literature review the five facet model (Soenen & Moingeon, 2002), the culture-image model (Hatch & Schultz, 2000), and a psychologically oriented sense-making model (Ran & Golden, 2011) have all been proposed as integrationist theories. However, as yet, full integration has been elusive and calls to achieve this have been made (van Rekom et al., 2008). The lack of integration has arguably been ongoing because unity has been sought at the level of epistemology, yet driving differences in OI scholarship has been a deeper ontological schism that has been overlooked and which I have attempted to address in my research.

Common to these unification theories have been an absence of ontological questioning and a leaning toward social constructionist and psychological paradigms. As a result realist conceptions of OI have largely been rendered mute meaning full integration of OI theories has been only partial. Arguably, bringing realist approaches under the same umbrella has been difficult through an absence of realist discourses that do not reify an organization (Cornelissen, 2002). However, the realist conceptualisation of OI I have advanced in my thesis did not require

drawing parallels with individual actors to make sense of the independence and non-reducibility of OI which are core to realism. Moreover, my dual conception of OI was also able to incorporate social constructionist views of OI as depending on agents. Finally, it was also possible to accept psychological understandings of OI in that agents experience and encounter an OI that determines them.

To illustrate how integration was facilitated by my critical realist informed account of OI, I move on to explain how my theory differed from but built upon each of the main approaches to OI. Starting with realism, reliance on metaphor resulting in reification was avoided by not drawing upon notions of individual agency that are common to discourses and interpretive observations of the way in which organizations appear to act (King et al., 2010). For example, social actor theory draws upon notions of the legal accountability of organizations, and perceived demonstrations of self-determinacy to justify an independent organization that has both capabilities and intentionality (*op cit*). On this basis it was also reasoned that if a social actor, then an organization must possess an identity. Further, it has also been claimed that possessing an OI guides and gives a rationale for self-determination and independent decision making (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Thus, social actor theory typically relies on deductive reasoning to conceptualise OI as ontologically independent.

Conversely, my approach did not attempt to develop understanding of OI deductively since I based my account of OI on inductive generation of OI and then

observed its dynamics over four time frames. From these observations, a retroductive style of reasoning was employed to account for what was observed meaning that what was theoretically generated about OI was based in empirical data and not on comparative metaphor or cross-level comparisons to individuals. Notably, it was found that while OI was socially constructed at each point in time, over time it was argued that these patterns could be explained by a preceding OI. On this basis, a theoretical understanding was advanced that in addition to being a social construction in the here-and-now, OI was also an emergent property of a combination of social entities, ideas, values and beliefs existing in the wider institutional-level environment or emergent from an intransitive archive cultural-system. As an account of the independence of OI and its non-reducibility, this was quite different to notions of OI as independent based on drawing parallels between organizations and individuals. Thus, reification of an organization was avoided while still being able to account for the independence of OI from agents.

It was further possible that social constructionist perspectives could also be included in my account. This was for two interrelated reasons. First, because I included temporality it was possible to separate structure from agency (Archer, 1995; 1996). In particular, what is historically situated in time is related to structure (and culture), while the present belongs to agency. Second, critical realism has a stratified ontology in which structure and culture exist at the level of the real, while agency is inherently empirical and interpretive (Bhaskar, 1979; Easton, 2010). On the basis of these two assumptions, OI could be conceptualised as existing in two

parts or as a stratified phenomenon that incorporates both realist and social constructionist ideas.

Based on my findings and theoretical arguments, in the ontological level of the real *and* in a past temporal space a preceding OI is emergent from a contingent combination of structured social entities, ideas values and beliefs, and/or the contents of a cultural system. Meanwhile, at the level of the empirical and the actual, which are situated in present time, agents construct an OI (Gioia et al., 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000) which to an extent may be based on referents emanating from the past (Gioia, et al, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011; Shultz & Hernes 2013). Indeed, it was my finding that when agents constructed an OI in any given time frame that a historically situated OI was one such referent.

However, I have gone further to argue that a historically situated OI is more than a reference point drawn upon by agents to construct OI, but one that contingently enables and constrains what can be produced in terms of OI in the here-and-now. Consequently agents' constructions of OI in the present are not voluntaristic in which they freely use history, but their constructions of OI are enabled and constrained by the past. When applied to my research, OI can thus be conceptualised to be both dependent on and constructed by agents in the present yet simultaneously ontologically independent of and influential over them through its situation in the past. An account consistent with both critical realist and sociological notions of social reality as dualistic, in which agents determine

structure that simultaneously determines them (Giddens, 1984; Archer, 1995). Thus, additional to including social constructionist and realist ideas about OI, questions of structure vs. agency in OI theorising were also addressed by this stratification.

Having discussed and located realist and constructionist perspective within my dual and stratified conceptualisation of OI, the next approach considered was the psychological account of OI. Core to this, is an understanding that the causal capability of OI arises from perceptions of organizations and OI as if they were real (Haslam et al., 2003). Consequently, OI is reducible to an epiphenomenon of cognition and perception lacking true ontological independence from agents. Such a stance is called central conflation in which a social entity determines agents while simultaneously is constructed by them rendering them mutually constitutive (Giddens, 1984; Archer, 1995; 1996). To demarcate between structure and agency, the psychological sense-making approach highlights that while some agents construct and negotiate OI, others perceive and encounter OI as ready-made (Ran & Golden, 2011). Thus, within psychological accounts the ontology of OI becomes a matter of power and perception. Some have suggested this approach to OI is popular because it privileges managerial hegemony within organizational settings in that managers' constructions of OI can be a coercive and strategic tool to advance organizational objectives (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; He & Brown, 2013).

While I do not dispute that OI can be constructed and manipulated by managers, and used as a tool of power, in practice my account moderates the idea that OI is wholly within the scope of managers' sense-giving capacity to construct an OI as they choose. In, particular, this was because I analytically demarcated between structure and agency by using temporality. As a consequence, although at one time OI is constructed by powerful agents as entrepreneurs of identity (Haslam et al., 2011), over time a preceding OI is encountered by all agents as ready-made in which even powerful agents' constructions of OI can be constrained (for example: Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Thus, ideas that OI can be manipulated through managerial powers alone (Gioia et al., 2000; Brunninge, 2009), are held in check by the contingently enabling and constraining effects of past OI on what can and cannot be successfully be constructed in terms of OI (Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). Moreover, in terms of inclusion within a unified approach to OI, it was evident that despite implying some moderation, my account could accept psychological accounts without challenge.

Yet to be considered was a final conceptualisation of organization as a moral actor (Barney & Stewart, 2000), in which organizations can be labelled as possessing virtuosity (Moore, 2002). This overlapped with social actor theory since notions of virtue are related to an Aristotelian discourse of individual human character (Mellahi et al., 2010). However, a "human-like" understanding of organization was not a necessary prerequisite for moral discourses about an organization. Reflecting

on Moore's (2002; 2012) virtue framework based on MacIntyre (1985), moral OI arose from the production of organizational goods with external goods (wealth and success) related to less virtue and internal goods (relationship, satisfaction etc.) to more virtue. Further, since "virtue" cannot be taught, being typically realised through self-determination and making ethical choices (Mellahi et al., 2010), then Moore's work implied that organizations possess autonomous agency – a social actor view. Nevertheless, when transposed onto my account of OI, it can be argued that agents' production of goods (rather than by the organization of itself), are determined by an OI. For example, as an emergent property dependent on a relational combination of stakeholders' values ideas and beliefs (and various social entities and institutions), organizational agents are constrained to produce goods to uphold these relations. Thus, production of external vs. internal goods would be mediated by the organization's emergent OI, rather than as an autonomous activity of a self-determining organization.

A number of divergent conceptualisations and approaches have been argued above as possible to integrate under a single, temporally sensitive and stratified critical realist informed account of OI such as I have contributed in my thesis. Realist notions of OI as independent from and non-reducible to agents can be accounted for through the emergence of OI from a contingent combination of social entities existing in the ontological level of real in which social reality is constituted by relations between social entities. Thus, realist notions of OI were justified without relying on metaphor or reifying an organization. Moreover, because of the passage

of time, this emergent OI also becomes historically situated and in doing so acts as a constraining and enabling referent on which agents base their ongoing constructions and enactment of OI in the here-and-now. Consequently, social constructionist perspectives of OI as ongoing project of production were also included, but are moderated to the extent that discursive constructions of OI in current time are enabled and constrained by an OI that precedes them. Finally, psychological notions of OI could also be integrated since my account accepted that in practice OI is socially constructed by those with power and received as ready-made by others. However, agents' "powers" to construct an OI are not absolute since over time, all agents encounter a ready-made and pre-existent OI that contingently determines what can be constructed and enacted.

### ***The Enduring versus Changeability Debate***

Questions over whether or not OI is enduring were surfaced in my literature review and have been central to my thesis. So much so, that my initial research question posed was about this issue. In conducting my research which has surfaced that OI is dual, so too can OI be understood as both enduring and changeable at the same time. While this may initially sound paradoxical, this was not the case because I was able to analytically stratify OI as an object of study by using critical realist ontology and temporality. Through this, OI can be understood to appear changeable at an empirical-level whilst at an ontological level is contingently enduring as an emergent property of structural relations among a combination of social entities, or essentially enduring as a property of an archival cultural-system. These terms also

highlight that OI is stratified temporally existing in the past as an enduring entity but in the present is contingently and reflexively enacted and (re)produced by agents which makes OI appear changeable. Thus, by showing that OI can be both enduring and yet also changeable a second contribution was to reinvigorating the endurance vs. changeability debate.

That this could be said to rejuvenate rather than be an answer to the debate was because Gioia et al. (2013) have claimed that a wide body of literature points to the conclusion that OI is changeable. Given that what has been achieved here is only a single case study of OI, then to argue that the debate has been settled would be premature and an over-extended claim. However, what my conceptualisation of OI has achieved is to challenge the hegemonic strength of claims that OI is changeable by showing that given a different set of theoretical assumptions, then OI can be considered to be both changeable and enduring rather than couched in terms of either/or changeable vs. enduring. Moreover, my findings also have not refuted the idea that OI *is* changeable since the claims of Gioia et al. were made from a social constructionist standpoint. Consequently, from the vantage point of this ontological paradigm (and also in current time), then OI is necessarily constructed by agents and thus discursive and changeable. In recognising this, I also recognise that my account is not of itself an alternative monopoly on understanding OI and thus what I have offered in my thesis makes a contribution toward, rather than is a conclusive solution to the debate. Indeed, where my contribution lies is that I have offered a

realist account of OI, which apart from a social actor conception, has been absent from the debate.

### ***Expanding the Horizons of Organizational Identity Scholarship***

A third contribution that my research and findings made was toward developing a more critical discourse within OI scholarship. Not foreseen by my literature review was the impact that institutional-level values and beliefs were found to have on OI dynamics suggesting this issue is non-salient and is therefore unlikely to have been well addressed. However, my findings showed that the socio-political environment was related to OI meaning that this is an area that could be developed further. In particular, during T3 and T4 there were changes in the socio-political environment that had a notable relationship with Boot's OI. For example, during T3 the climate had moved toward welfare economics which threatened Boot's emergent identity and in T4, further observations were arguably related to the proliferation of neoliberal ideas and values from the 1980s onward. Thus, I revisited my findings to make comment upon institutional-level issues which could spark interest in developing more critical discourses within the field.

During the first two time units of T1 and T2 (1892-1950), the dominant socio-political ideology in Great Britain was New Liberalism in which State involvement in public life and welfare were present but relatively limited (Alcock, Daly, & Griggs, 2014). However, at the end of T2 and into T3 (1951-1977) welfare economics came to the fore as a dominant mode of socio-political thinking. As evidenced in Chapter

six, this change had repercussions for Boot's OI which I conceived of as a threat to their emergent identity. In particular, the development of the *NHS* and the increasing involvement of State in matters of healthcare threatened Boot's identity as a public and healthcare service. Indeed, having argued that prior to T3, Boot's OI had been dependent on and emergent from a combination of social entities in the wider institutional environment, when this changed, Boot's OI was necessarily threatened. The effects of this were to an extent mitigated by Boots finding alternative anchor points in their past, for example, by re-focusing public service along socio-economic as opposed to healthcare lines. Thus, the rise of the British Welfare State had an impact on Boot's OI in which it became increasingly economically oriented comparative to being socially focused.

In Chapter seven which dealt with the fourth time frame and began shortly before the 1980s, the British Welfare State shared a platform with neoliberal socio-economic ideas (Alcock et al., 2014). At this time Boot's OI almost completely disappeared from the company records. Given my earlier arguments that Boot's OI had been dependent on and emergent from the wider institutional-level environment, it was suggested that the observed absence of identity had been related to this change. In particular, it was proposed that by accepting neoliberal values and ideas all relations between the organization and wider social entities had been severed, replaced by a singular focus on shareholders as the most significant stakeholder group for the company. When coupled with neoliberal principles, Boot's relationship with shareholders was primarily economic meaning

that Boots had arguably become an economic entity with a functional purpose to generate shareholder wealth. This was evidenced by Boot's market expansion programme in the 1980s, and foregrounding shareholders in company documents in the 1990s through espousing a "Value Based Management" (VBM) philosophy as a cornerstone policy. Although it was noted there had been a resurrection of identity in the 1990s and Millennium, what was generated was largely related to shareholders needs and focused through a lens of CSR, rather than emergent from a wider range of stakeholders and social values as in previous time frames.

Given these parallel changes in the socio-political landscape and dynamics in Boot's OI, then it was likely that the socio-political landscape was a significant factor for OI. In particular it could be suggested that welfare economics have a deleterious effect on OI for business organizations that are primarily established to serve the public and wider social needs. Indeed, when the State provides public services, then the role of businesses in promoting social benefits may be reduced comparatively to the size and scope of public welfare initiatives. Such potential effects of welfare economics on OI have not to my knowledge been well-explored by the literature, which traditionally takes a more organizational or psychological-level approach. Thus, my research findings highlighted that institutional-level studies of OI may be a novel area for development within OI scholarship.

That the institutional-level could be a profitable area for further work was also suggested by the dynamics of Boot's OI during T4. Although this period was not

about competing identities between the State and business, it did show that neoliberal values and ideas may be impoverishing for OI. It was also argued that economic entities lack social meaning for wider stakeholders and thus, OI helps to make an organization socially meaningful. Consequently, under neoliberal conditions when the possibility of a rich and socially valued emergent OI is limited, organizations may look for ways to connect with wider stakeholders to improve their social legitimacy of which adopting and disclosing CSR helps (Vanhamme & Grobbs, 2009; Omran & Ramdhony, 2015). Consequently, the uptake of CSR and its increasing importance for business organizations may be related to the poverty of OI within a neoliberal context. Some research has critically explored the relationship between CSR and neoliberal privileging of shareholders (Utting & Marques, 2010), and considered socio-political change on strategies of organizational legitimacy (Bucheli & Uk Kim, 2014). However, my findings suggest that there may be space to include OI as part of this critical discourse.

A final point for comment is on the possibility that the socio-political context may have also had an impact on understanding and approaches to OI scholarship. Prompting this was that neoliberal values and ideas, which have been argued to economise OI, became widespread post 1980s which coincided with when much research into OI has been undertaken (Ravasi & Canato, 2013). Consequently, most OI research has taken place within a neoliberal-rich environment in which businesses construct OI to give meaning to what otherwise would be an economic entity. Thus, researchers are likely to have encountered organizational identities

that have been highly constructed by managers rather than emergent from an underlying combination of wider social entities in the institutional-level environment. As result, understandings of OI that have been centred on sense-making approaches in which managers construct OI (for example Ran & Golden, 2011; Haslam et al., 2003), or OI as narrative (Brown, 2006; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Kahane & Reitter, 2002; Chreim, 2005) may in part be a reflection of the neoliberal context in which many business organizations operate and are studied within. Indeed, such a situation may also further explain why social constructionist accounts of OI have been dominant within the literature.

The extent to which the institutional-level socio-political environment is interrelated with OI has yet to be established. However, my findings have highlighted that there may be connections that are worthwhile for further exploration and that could move toward development of a critical stream within OI scholarship. Importantly, socio-political beliefs (or ideologies of the State) are not static over time (Bucheli & Uk kim, 2014), suggesting that in addition to the institutional-level, temporal and/or historical approaches for organization studies are also useful (Rowlinson et al., 2010; Schultz & Hernes, 2013) and may help to surface critical issues. Moreover, given that OI research may of itself have been constrained by a socio-political environment, reflexivity on this may lead to new findings and discourses that critically challenge the hegemony of neoliberal ideology on both social reality and epistemology (Plehwe, Walpen, & Neunhoffer, 2006).

### ***How Do We Know Who We Are?***

In my literature review in Chapter one, I discussed the importance of a realist conception of OI for the legitimacy and authenticity of organizational claims about “who we are as an organization”. Scholarship has shown that OI is an important component of organizational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), which is enhanced when OI or CSR claims can be historically grounded and thus called ‘enduring’ (Vanhamme & Grobbs, 2009; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1993; Gioia et al., 2000). However, if organizational history and identity are malleable and revisionist (Gioia et al., 2000; Suddaby et al., 2010), then how can claims to OI as “enduring to who we are” be authenticated? Indeed, the authenticity of OI claims are important since if current OI claims professed as enduring are uncovered to be false, organizational legitimacy can be undermined (Booth, et al., 2007). Thus, in my literature review I suggested what was at stake for organizations by addressing realist notions of OI were what could reliably be claimed as enduring identity.

From an argument of common-sense, to be reliably claimed as enduring an OI marker must have actually endured across time. However, in the context of identity claims, empirical appearance of endurance in OI is not necessarily a pre-requisite for “who we enduringly are” because endurance in OI can be made to appear (e.g. Chreim, 1995; Anteby & Molnar, 2012) and is at the level of epistemology rather than ontology. For example, looking at empirical dynamics in which Boot’s OI has endured is at the empirical level and thus as discussed previously could also have been interpreted as changeable. Instead to be defensibly credible, claims of “who

we enduringly are” need to be framed through ontology. To frame an OI claim in this way, past OI claims must be shown to be a necessary explanation for current OI, in that past OI can be demonstrated to have enabled and constrained what was constructed in terms of OI in the here-and-now. If this can be shown to be the case, then it can be said what is constructed in current time was reproduction of past OI. Moreover, since what exists in the past is ontologically independent of agents, then what is reproduced can be claimed to be “who we enduringly are”. To emphasise, analytically separating OI into its dual nature helps to distinguish between elements of an OI that are socially constructed and those that are ontologically independent of agents. In effect, for current OI claims to be defended as who “we enduringly are”, they must necessarily have historical provenance and depend on what pre-existed in terms of past OI rather than simply appear to be enduring.

It is also likely that not all of what exists in past OI will be visibly manifested in terms of current OI. For example, Boot’s OI as ‘nationalistic’ endured through T1 and T2 but in the absence of war this identity theme was not generated in T3 and T4. Thus, it would appear that this theme was not enduring despite being a part of Boot’s historically situated OI. Consequently, historical OI markers, although enduring, could only be claimed as “who we enduringly are” if they are manifested both in the past and the present. For example, at T4, it could not be claimed that Boots were enduringly nationalist although nationalism was (and still is) part of Boot’s enduring identity as a property of the archival cultural-system. A second example was that of Boots as a ‘public service’. This theme was constructed at T1

and endured into T2 and to a greater extent was also manifest at T3 on grounds of its emergence and dependence on wider social entities. Thus, up until 1977 the company could have reliably claimed to have enduringly been a public service. However, by T4, notions of public service were suppressed by adoption of neoliberal values in which shareholders needs replaced those of wider social entities, meaning the company could no longer authentically claim to be a public service. Indeed, attempts to claim a public service identity in T4 would have had no basis in wider social relations and been inconsistent with Boots's emergent economic identity. Thus, on grounds of emergent OI, professing to have been a public service at T4 would be a constructed and rhetorical OI marker rather than an enduring identity claim.

The additional factor of Boots storing their OI into a parallel cultural system through creation of a company archive made the picture a little more complicated. This is because a past OI is available to agents in the cultural domain independently of its emergent dependence on social entities in a more structural domain. Thus, for an organization with historical capital, a past OI can be drawn upon by organizational agents to construct a current OI (Schultz & Hernes, 2013; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011, Ericson, 2006). For example, Boots construction of being 'socially responsible' and its sub-themes of community and environmentally oriented at T4 were constructed by aligning with their past OI of being 'pro-social', and a 'public service'. In this case, Boots as being socially responsible appeared to be enduring when in fact it was unlikely. This was because the reproduction of Boots's past OI as a public service and

being socially responsible were inconsistent with Boot's current emergent OI as principally an economic shareholder valuing entity. Thus, although drawing on past OI to offer weight and credibility to current claims to be socially responsible (Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009), the contradictions between the past and present only gave space for the company to operationalise its past 'pro-social' identity as supportive of current OI rather than full claims to being pro-social. In effect, agents' reproduction of Boot's past OI was only partial, its full reproduction constrained by fundamental differences between the past and the present. Consequently, Boots as "enduringly being socially responsible" would be an unreliable claim.

On the reverse side, what then could be said of Boot's identity that could be reliably claimed as enduring? For arguments sake we could adopt the OI themes of the T4 middle period (1990s) as representing the company's current identity. During this time frame it was possible to identify themes of being 'shareholder focused' and 'a business'; themes consistent with Boot's identity as emergent from neoliberal values and ideas, and shareholders as the dominant stakeholder group. Thus, despite being not having historical provenance, these themes were reflective of emergent OI at the level of structural relations and thus could be defended as ontological identity claims (although not enduring). Other themes that could be reliably claimed by the company as having their basis in Boot's past OI were Boot's claims to being 'knowledgeable', 'health and pharmacy' and 'customer-led'. For example, knowledgeable could only be claimed on the basis of having past experience on which to build knowledge, Health and Pharmacy, had always been

related to Boots despite the silence of the 1980 period immediately prior. Moreover, Boot's past OI as a chemist was a guiding influence in corporate downsizing and brand creation. Finally, Boots could reliably claim to be customer-led since this had begun to develop in T2 under notions of being 'service oriented' which gained momentum in T3 because of the effects of the *NHS* on Boots more public service offering. Being 'supportive of staff' would be more difficult to claim however, given that notions of staff welfare had been previously predicated on staff as stakeholders, which by T4 had been supplanted by Capital shareholders.

That caring for staff is problematic to claim as enduring despite having been extensively the case in the past, is because linking with as opposed to reproducing past OI makes current OI claims only a partial reproduction and thus questionable in their authenticity. As stated before, partial reproduction occurs because full reproduction of past OI is constrained by complementarities and contradictions between past OI and the current organizational status quo. Thus, some complimentary identity markers can be reproduced and reliably claimed as enduring, while others which are contradictory can be suppressed. However, some can be strategically made to appear as though they have been reproduced. The latter of these strategies presented something of two-edged sword since on the one hand, linking with the past can support organizational legitimacy (for example: Vanhamme & Grobden, 2009; Czarniawska, 1997), while on the other hand could reduce legitimacy if shown to actually be inconsistent with the past (Booth et al., 2007).

This indicated a need for sensitivity and reflexivity in the management and use of past OI since if “who we claim to be” is overstated in terms of “who we were in the past”, and this contradicts a current OI as emergent from structural relations (or the current organizational status quo), then an opportunity for critique arises. During the course of conducting this research I witnessed first-hand one such event as I have described, with an article appearing in the *Guardian Newspaper* (Chakraborty, April 13<sup>th</sup> 2016). In particular, the reporter drew attention to “who Boots had been” in terms of their past OI as emergent from wider social relations (i.e. a national & public institution) and contrasted this with the neoliberal values and practices that are central to the organization today. This expectedly revealed contradictions between Boot’s past and its present in terms of OI that were of serious concern to the credibility and legitimacy of the company.

Although, the situation outlined above was engineered by an external press journalist, it may have just as easily occurred by Boot’s leaning too heavily and un-reflexively on past OI for marketing and advertising purposes and thereby offering the opportunity for critique to be surfaced among the wider public. This has happened at the organization already. For example, in my thesis it was found that Boot’s OI as socially responsible was markedly different to notions of being pro-social and a public service in their past. However, during T4, that the past was used by the company to strengthen claims to having an enduring heritage in being socially responsible meant that a contradiction between the two could be surfaced

threatening the legitimacy of Boots' current CSR claims. Indeed, for me as researcher investigating Boot's OI, this particular contradiction was apparent. Thus, careful and reflexive management of past OI, and organizational history is an important suggestion that my research highlights when attempting to gain strategic leverage from past OI (Suddaby et al., 2010). Such a recommendation does not stand on the basis of this research alone, for this same issue and recommendation was a finding and conclusion shared with the most recent scholarship on the management of organizational history and identity (Zundel et al., 2016).

## Conclusion

### *Theoretical Summary and Contributions*

Looking backwards through taking an historical approach to developing understanding of OI has been demonstrated to have been a worthwhile undertaking. In particular, I conducted a longitudinal and historical case study of OI at Walgreens Boots Alliance over a century, enacting a critical realist perspective to explain empirical OI dynamics which were generated using thematic analysis. This led to development of a stratified conception of OI demarcated through ontology and temporality indicating that OI is dual as opposed to dualistic. Specifically, I have argued that OI is both something to be explained and an explanation (*cf.* Archer, 1996), that it reflects both structure and agency (*cf.* Reed, 1997), and temporally represents both past and present rather than being suspended at their nexus in an ongoing here-and now (*cf.* Schultz & Hernes, 2013). From the perspective of critical realist ontology (Bhaskar, 1979), I have argued that OI is enduring inasmuch as it emerges from a structural-level combination of social entities or a cultural-system at the level of real, yet in the actual and empirical domains it appears to be socially constructed and thus changeable and discursive. This is supplemented by temporality, in which the former exists in the past, and in doing so becomes ontologically independent of agents. Meanwhile the latter exists in present time, in which agents construct and reconstruct their past as it contingently enables and constrains what they (re)produce in terms of OI in the here-and now.

These theoretical propositions of OI which constituted my original contribution to knowledge, also made a theoretical contribution to OI scholarship in three different ways. First, they were an inclusive way to conceptualise OI, uniting divergent understandings of OI that have been divided along an ontological fault line between realism and social constructivism which has led to conceptual plurality and confusion (Whetten, 2006; van Rekom et al, 2008; He & Brown, 2013). To recap, I have offered a realist account of the independence of OI from agents' constructions of it without reifying an organization (*cf.* Cornelissen, 2002; Whetten & Mackey, 2002; King et al, 2010). Yet in doing so, because I conceptualised OI as stratified and dual, my account also accommodated social constructionist understandings of OI (for example: Gioia et al., 2000; 2013). Finally, my account of OI mitigated issues of power and agency that are embedded within psychological conceptualisations of OI (*cf.* Haslam et al., 2003) and highlighted that because of temporality, the ontological reality of OI is more than an epiphenomenon of individual-level cognitive capabilities.

Second, my thesis addressed questions of whether or not OI is enduring and changeable as a research question, meaning that I was also able to make a contribution to this debate (*cf.* Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013). My conceptualisation of OI suggests that OI appears both enduring and changeable at the level of the empirical which was confirmed by my empirical data. However, at the level of ontology, OI is contingently and/or essentially enduring as either an emergent property of structural relations or a property of an intransitive archival

cultural-system. Thus, although not conclusively reconciling the debate, I offered an alternative way to conceptualise OI that challenges the hegemonic claims of social constructionist scholarship that organizational identity *is* fundamentally a changeable phenomenon.

The final contribution that my research made was not so much of what my theoretical conception of OI brings to the table, but what was surfaced in my empirical data when developing my thesis. In particular, because of the temporal and historical approach I used, I generated and observed OI across several socio-political periods (*cf.* Alcock et al., 2013). In particular it was found that both welfare economic policies and neoliberal values had an influence on OI which have not notably been addressed in the OI literature. Consequently, a space for a further work that explores the relationship between OI and socio-political context has been opened up thereby inviting a critical stream within OI scholarship to emerge. In doing so however, it was also noted that such a critical stance could invite further scrutiny of how the current socio-political structure of neoliberalism may of itself have constraining and enabling effects upon current epistemology of organizational identity (*cf.* Plehwe et al., 2006).

### ***Limitations***

In recognising that a neoliberal context reduces emergent OI to primarily an economic entity, then it is possible that much of what is encountered of OI as a contemporary phenomenon is socially constructed and/or narrative rather than

“real”. Moreover, psychological conceptualisations of OI argue that this doesn’t matter since what agents, managers or founders construct in terms of OI is encountered by audiences as though it was actually real and thus has causal effects (Haslam, et al., 2003). Consequently, this raises questions of the utility of a realist conceptualisation of OI for empirical scholarship since it is not necessary for OI to be independent of agents’ constructions of it to be a causal antecedent. While I agree that this is likely to be the case and was a practical limitation, my account of OI had value in other ways. For example, in addition to its theoretical value for understanding OI in a more holistic way and contributing to dualistic debates, it also had a practical value for organizational-level management of OI. Thus despite having limited utility for operationalising realist notions of OI for research purposes, there were still a number of ways in which my account of OI had utility.

A second limitation was that I have may imposed endurance of OI on my empirical findings because of using thematic analysis. For example, Chreim (2005) has demonstrated that using abstract identity labels for OI can create the appearance of endurance in OI. Thus, because I used reductive labels to generate OI from the archival data, I too may have imposed patterns of endurance which may then have affected the explanations I gave. In counterargument, it must be understood that Chreim’s research addressed manipulation of OI by managers who used such labels as a rhetorical strategy. In my research, I had no prior knowledge of Boot’s OI or history and generating OI themes was inductively driven by the data as it was analysed at each time unit rather than imposed at the end to create continuity. A

key example of this was generating in T1 Boot's OI as socially idealistic, in T2 and T3 as pro-social and then in T4 as socially responsible. Moreover, in this case study, I could only explain the data that was available highlighting that further research would be required to strengthen my claims. By extension, this reflected a third limitation of generalisability.

Generalising from case study research can be problematic given that generalisability often relies on repeated observations (Myers, 2000). However, such a criterion for making generalisations is related to positivist methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2004) and thus was mitigated by the critical realist foundation of my research in which explanation rather than prediction is the norm (Easton, 2010; Sayer, 1992). Indeed, I did not attempt to make predictive generalisations about what will or will not occur given a set of conditions, but rather explained what had been empirically observed, generalising to theory rather than to probabilistic inference. This enabled me to construct an explanatory account which of itself can then be tested in different organizational and/or contextual settings that may help to refine, extend or refute what I have developed. For example, different research may give rise to observing different OI dynamics. In this way explanatory theory must give way to a confirmation phase in which its explanatory power can be tested under different contexts and/or by comparing with other possible explanations (Danermark et al., 2002). Consequently, this gives rise to possibilities for further research.

### ***Further research***

Since my research offered an initial explanatory based account of OI, it is then possible that further work may be undertaken to support what I have developed here. For example, my research has been focused on a healthcare organization that by virtue of its social importance to public health, was perhaps more likely to have had an identity emergent from wider-level structural relations at the level of the real. Conversely, the OI of an alternative organization, for example a bank, may have a primarily economic identity. However, being related to money would not necessarily indicate that an OI would be neoliberal and shareholder focused. For example, the Cooperative Bank which is well-known for its historically situated ethical activities and distributed ownership, may also have an OI that reflects emergent OI along the lines of what was seen at Boots. Consequently, while my research represents one case, the findings could be strengthened or refined by further development into a multiple comparative case study thereby extending the single embedded design I used (Yin, 2004).

In keeping with the possibility that alternative theories that may also explain my findings (Danermark et al., 2002) I reflected on my data in which there appeared to be two groupings of themes that I did not address in my account of OI. In particular, themes in the top half of the Table 3., expressed what seemed to be competencies, while in the lower-half, appeared relationally focused. Research has shown that OI can be reported on in different ways by different groups within an organization (He, 2012; Ashforth & Mael, 1996) meaning this distinction may have occurred because

data sources reflected specific within-organizational groups. However, I had considered this in my research design and used multiple sources across multiple facets of OI to avoid relying on only one source (Rojas, 2010). Thus, the division in themes was unlikely to have been data driven. An alternative explanation may have been that my findings tapped into an alternative construct known as organizational orientation (Brickson, 2000; 2007).

In this construct, organizations have been conceptualised as having relational, collective or individualistic identity orientations and in particular that organizational orientation 'captures how one's relations with others are reflected in one's identity' (Brickson, 2005, p. 577). Thus, there was a clear overlap between orientation and OI that was likely to explain why some OI themes were relational and others were about competencies (or as described by Brickson – individualism, Brickson, 2005). Indeed, even among the OI themes I generated 'relational' was of itself an identity theme. Further, given that multiple OI themes coalesced around relational orientation and individualism, then notions of orientation seemed to be a meta-thematic framework for my data in that my themes could have been further reduced to represent an alternative but related construct to OI.

This was reassuring since being able to group OI data into orientations supported that I had actually captured OI relevant material thereby forming a type of theoretical triangulation or convergent validity for my findings (Denzin, 2006) However, the concept of organizational orientation is an empirical rather than

ontological theory that functioned as a way to reconceptualise OI. Indeed, within each time frame, themes could be regrouped into orientation categories suggesting that orientation was a way to theoretically re-describe OI at each moment in time, rather than explain it over time. Moreover, in hindsight I also considered the groupings were not aberrant to my work, since both my approach and organizational orientation made relational assumptions about OI meaning that both constructs were likely to have been simultaneously surfaced from the data. Discussing this further was beyond the scope of my thesis, but it optimistically pointed to my realist conceptualisation of OI as having potential for exploring other related organizational concepts and that my data could also be utilised beyond this study.

A final area in which my thesis may serve as a springboard for further research was that of CSR theorising. In particular, CSR theories are interrelated with conceptions of OI that were surfaced by my literature review. For example, social actor theory with its basis in anthropomorphic metaphor was connected with discourse of corporate citizenship (*cf.* Mele, 2008). Further, notions of organizations as moral actors with more or less virtuous identities were also connected with value-laden organizational outputs (*cf.* Moore, 2012) that could also be understood as being related to CSR. However, my account of OI advanced a different understanding of organizations as embedded within wider social reality (Ackroyd, 2000), and from which alternative understandings of CSR may also emerge.

On this basis, for some organizations which are deeply embedded within and dependent on a wider social context, CSR may be understandable as emergent and part of an organization's identity. This was suggested by my historical account of Boot's from T1 to T3 in which Boot's identity was generated as being socially valuable and even transformative. Conversely, when the possibilities for OI emergence are narrowed to shareholders and neoliberal values, then CSR may be better understood through a shareholder and business case for CSR (Kurucz et al., 2008). In terms of my data, this was related to Boot's OI post 1980 in which CSR was adopted as a reputational activity rather than as an outcome of being embedded in and depending on wider social relations. Exploring this further was beyond what could be achieved here but highlights that my thesis is likely to be useful for further theoretical development and critique of current CSR theory. On a final note, in discussing future research possibilities as a close to my thesis orients us back to the quotation by Kierkegaard with which my thesis began. That having gained understanding of OI from looking backward to the past, future possibilities to explore OI lie forward.

## Appendix A

### Example of extraction of data from a T2 document in colour coded fonts

T2\_Archive\_material\_Doc\_2

Circa 1923: A Record of Service – Archive Ref: A83/41 – Document is typically summarised as projected identity since it is clearly written to inform others about Boots.

Planned to serve the needs of the times according to the highest standards obtainable, the numerous branches of Boots the Chemist are perfectly equipped to meet every requirement of the medical and nursing professions and the general public.

In practically every important town in Great Britain, Boots the Chemist have a modern chemist's shop, where may be obtained at reasonable prices every hygienic requisite that science has perfected for the preservation of health and the demands of the toilet. Whatever your individual needs go to Boots the Chemist.

Planned to serve the needs of the times according to the highest standards obtainable, the numerous branches of Boots the Chemist are perfectly equipped to meet every requirement of the medical and nursing professions and the general public.

In practically every important town in Great Britain, Boots the Chemist have a modern chemist's shop, where may be obtained at reasonable prices every hygienic requisite that science has perfected for the preservation of health and the demands of the toilet. Whatever your individual needs go to Boots the Chemist.

The firm of Boots the Chemist is the crystallisation of activities and organisation (comparative to the notion of Empire).

The firm whose name has already become a household word.

For over 40 years it has been necessary to keep pace with the increasing numbers of customers, which a constantly improving Boots' 'Service' has achieved.

For over 40 years it has been necessary to keep pace with the increasing numbers of customers, which a constantly improving Boots' 'Service' has achieved. (Branding its SERVICE)

As far as it is possible for any organisation serving the public with so many and varied kinds of merchandise, Boots the Chemists are self-contained.

Many of the firm's products are issued answering to tests of higher value than those deemed sufficient merely for general public requirements.

A speciality is the manufacture of Eau de Cologne, of which Boots are the largest English producers. For this purpose a specially designed plant of unique construction is in operation, which has enabled the firm to excel in quality and smoothness the best German products.

In medicine stamp duty alone Boots contribute to the revenue £50,000 per year, and from alcohol used in the various processes of manufacture the revenue benefits to the extent of a quarter of a million pounds per year, in addition to the very heavy tax borne by Saccharin.

During the war Boots had a record of remarkable and conspicuous service.

Boots produced the first box respirators used, and supplied the whole of the chemical granules for filling the respirators used by the British and certain of the Allied Armies during the whole period of the war. They filled and supplied upwards of 8 million completed box respirators and, at the same time, to meet the famine in fine chemicals created by the isolation of Germany, grappled with this problem and successfully solved it. Today there are no fewer than 800 research chemicals on sale.... Boots became and still are the largest producers of saccharin in the United Kingdom.

Boots are one of the very few firms [others being: Burroughs Wellcome & Co; A.B Partnership; Evans Sons, Lescher & Webb Ltd; and Duncan Flockhart & Co – 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 1923 received permission letters] who received from the medical research council a Licence to manufacture the wonderful new drug, Insulin, which has revolutionised the treatment of diabetes.

Insulin is now prepared on large commercial scale, the product of the firm being distinguished by a high degree of purity, accurately standardised potency, and great stability. {was this why Boots was the only company not to make lower grade standard hospital packs that were cheaper?}

Boots' Athletic Club is acknowledged to be one of the most progressive athletic organisations in manufacturing circles.

With reference to National Health Insurance, Boots look after their cases by having a fully recognised Health Insurance Society, which is able to give bigger and better benefits than the ordinary Health Insurance Society is called upon by law to give.

Every effort is made to ensure the fullest and brightest conditions necessary to the well-being of the people who serve behind the counters.

Such is the confidence of the public in the pharmaceutical service of Boots the Chemist, that in Health Insurance alone some two million prescriptions are dispensed each year, in addition to the very large total of private prescriptions.

The great firm of Boots the Chemists. Its shops are acknowledged to be equipped with everything necessary to meet the pharmaceutical requirements of the public.

The shops are familiar, and no greater proof have we of the value as a household word of the name of Boots the Chemists than the opening of new premises everywhere.

Example of separating text into colour coded sub-documents for all one facet: Excerpt from projected identity facet at T2.

**The Bee staff magazine for retail department.**

This is largely projected identity and the way in which the organization represents itself to its internal staff members.

The Bee, July 1926 p. 307

T2\_Prj\_1: It is the purpose of the writer of this series of articles (Behind the chemist's counter) to show the romance that lurks always behind the chemist's counter – the romance of real life that is often far more intriguing than the romance of fiction The Bee, July 1926 p. 307

T2\_Prj\_2: He dropped his voice to a confidential manner, but almost instantly felt compelled to raise it again, for this was a corner of one of the most popular Boot's stores in a busy seaside town, and everybody knows what "Boots" anywhere is like on a shopping morning, when housewives of all description drop in to buy anything from talcum powder for the baby, to shaving soap for their husbands, or an elaborate wedding present for some dear friend. The Bee, July 1926 p. 307

T2\_Prj\_3: The customer asked for Acid Sulphate of Soda... The customer suggested that they had been supplied with a different line altogether. The article supplied was correct, but the customer received something which was labelled by a different name....naturally concluded that he had not been supplied with the article for which he had asked... our sympathies are with the customer...May we suggest to everyone that, unless a convincing explanation be given to any customer, the title under which he ordered a particular item shall be that which is found on the label. The Bee, July 1926 p. 307

T2\_Prj\_4: LEARN BEST HOW TO UNDERSTAND THOROUGHNESS. The Bee, July 1926 p. 307

The Bee, July 1926 p. 341

T2\_Prj\_5: Our photograph is eloquent of the happy spirit which characterised the annual outing of the staff of Branch 1021, Commercial Road, Portsmouth... games and sports were indulged in and the party spent a memorable day. The Bee, July 1926 p. 341

The Bee, July 1926 p. 341

T2\_Prj\_6: Branch 315 has made thirty-four consecutive monthly increases commencing with June, 1923. This is an interesting point and raises the question as to whether any other branches have equalled or beaten this record. The Bee, July 1926 p. 341

Example of descriptor generation from projected identity facet at T2, that were then manually cut and grouped into themes:

Period	Facet	Intrnl	
		No	Descriptor
T2	prj	1	Romantic
T2	prj	2	Busy
T2	prj	2	Everything
T2	prj	3	Customer oriented
T2	prj	4	Moral Character
T2	prj	5	Happy
T2	prj	6	Competitive
T2	prj	7	Everything
T2	prj	8	Moral Character
T2	prj	10	Impressive
T2	prj	11	Moral Character
T2	prj	12	Competitive
T2	prj	13	Moral agent
T2	prj	15	Magical
T2	prj	16	Quality
T2	prj	17	Competitive
T2	prj	18	Moral Character
T2	prj	19	Family
T2	prj	20	Happy
T2	prj	21	Customer service
T2	prj	22	Moral Character
T2	prj	23	Customer care
T2	prj	24	Moral teacher/agent
T2	prj	25	Meritocratic
T2	prj	26	Service
T2	prj	26	Relational
T2	prj	27	Service
T2	prj	27	Honesty
T2	prj	28	Honesty
T2	prj	29	A public service
T2	prj	30	Ethical
T2	prj	30	Relational
T2	prj	31	Confident
T2	prj	32	Service
T2	prj	32	Ethical
T2	prj	33	Happy
T2	prj	33	Honest
T2	prj	34	Fair
T2	prj	34	Integrity

Example of manually collated themes generated from sub-descriptors that were collapsed further

T2\_Theme list – PROJECTED IDENTITY

Large	Relational
British	Listener
Female	Equality
Giving service	Egalitarian
Medical	Hospitable
A Service	Customer oriented
Everything (range/variety)	Collaborative
Purity (products)	Public serving
Hygienic (products)	Characterful/Virtuous
Offering value	Caring
Offering quality	The Nation's Chemist
Expert	Health and public welfare
Research	Meritocratic
Pioneering	Worthy
Scientific	Pro-education
Modern	Enlightened employer
Competitive	Its people
Hard working and energetic	Internationally minded
Excellence	Ethical
Best	Honest
Trustworthy	Integrity & honourable
Safe	Caring
Family	Moral character
Happy	Fair
Collective	

Sample of spreadsheet data in Excel workbook ordered by theme: This Theme is “nationalistic at T2 and reflects from left to right: referencing, text, descriptor, themes, collated theme, and final theme.

Intl_Ref	Arch	Text	Sb-theme	Theme	UP-theme	Final Theme
T2_Prfl_43	Y82/ 102	We are now in the happy position of being again a British Controlled Company. I think it is only fair to say that, during the time this business was controlled by American interests, the never attempted to interfere with the management in any way, and always welcomed any suggestion made by the Directors which was for the good of the business as a whole.’ Annual general meeting 8 <sup>th</sup> June 1933	British (when american owned)	British	British	<b>National</b>
T2_Prfl_210	Y83/ 60/ Doc. 111	In the present early stage of the process of welding the American and English Companies concerned into a working alliance, whilst retaining the distinctive national characteristics of each, both as regards the trading lines and the obligations towards shareholders, it is too soon to elaborate details. It need only be said that for the present that the English companies retain their English registration and that their preference shareholders will find that their dividend rights fully secured. Doc: No 111 30 <sup>th</sup> September 1920 Quarterly notes (to preference shareholders)	(British) character	British	British	<b>National</b>

T2_Pr_f_213	Y83/ 65/ p.71	Liggets decides to sell ORDINARY shares on the UK stock market: "Liggets international in the year of 1920 acquired all the then issues Ordinary shares of the Company from Sir Jesse Boot (bart); and are desirous, in the interests of the giving employees and the British public an opportunity of owning a portion of the present Ordinary Share capital, and have therefore decided to make the present offer for sale of 25% thereof, viz., 250,000 Ordinary Shares." : 31 <sup>st</sup> March 1922	(British) company	British	British	<b>National</b>
T2_Pr_f_271	C & D	The American business, he said, had had a period of deflation and falling markets, but had emerged stronger and better than before. The laws of supply and demand were gradually becoming adjusted. He had told them that he would not try to Amercianise their business or upset British methods and they had carried out that idea with successful results. C & D February 3 1923 p.143	Retaining (British)ness	British	British	<b>National</b>
T2_Pr_f_275	AuBox/ 35 c.10	"Our Company has always felt that however well these drug stores may be adapted to American conditions they are not suited to the taste of the British Public. We have not copied their physical characteristics in England, and do not intend to do so here. Nor does our Company follow their policy of week-end sales as illustrated by Mr. Dodds, or of cutting lines below and economic price, temporarily or permanently, to convey a fictitious atmosphere of cheapness. Mr. Henderson, a director of our New Zealand Company , will confirm and amplify that statement. No parallel can be drawn between the drug-stores of America and our shops at home. Mr. Saul for Boots Ltd.	British (retail style)	British	British	<b>National</b>

T2_Prj_63	Y82/ p.113	‘In the fine chemical department we have had to consider a considerable extension both of factory accommodation and plant. We have not only to meet a great and rapidly increasing demand for special medical products...we have also to provide for the manufacture of an extending range of fine chemicals, for we have continually in mind the importance of making this country independent of foreign supplies.’_June 12 1936: Annual Shareholders Meeting	British/National independence	Patriotic	British	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_109	Y82/ p.136	‘Our Agricultural and Horticultural sections have, right through the war, have given to the Ministers of Agriculture and Food all the help in their power.: Annual Report Chairman’s Statement, July 1945	Patriotic	Patriotic	British	<b>National</b>
T2_prj_110	Y82_ p.136	We have arranged with the cordial co-operation of the Ministry of Agriculture a highly successful series of meetings at which 20,000 farmers have had the opportunity of hearing addresses by leading agricultural scientists, who have given many talks to the Young Farmers’ Clubs. We were also able to play a useful part in the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign.’ Annual Report Chairman’s Statement, July 1945	Patriotic	Patriotic	British	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_158:	458/52	The American controllers, however, did not seek to interfere with the direction of the British Company, which was able to benefit from the pooling of its resources and advice without suffering from any break in the continuity of its development. It was largely due to Mr. George M. Gales, who joined the board as the representative of the United Drug Company, that the change in control took place so smoothly and expeditiously. The story of Famous Companies – Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd. “Chemists to the Nation” Reprinted from the Financial News, C1934 22 <sup>nd</sup> November	British (no influence of american ownership)	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

T2_Prj_209	MATGD22	Planned by British enterprise, built by all-British labour and all-British materials to meet increased demand for Boots pharmaceutical products MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad5677-s Adverts 1931-1932	British	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_210	MATGD22	All British construction, labour and materials – Boots contribution to the trade revival MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad5677-s Adverts 1931-1932	British	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_211	MATGD22	Ahead of its time, this new factory [D10 Beeston] sets a new standard: Every device of craftsmanship and ingenuity has been used to make these buildings the most up-to-date factories in Britain for the manufacture of pure medicinal products. In them, Boots employees will work under ideal conditions – and the best work is better done when the conditions are perfect. MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad5677-s Adverts 1931-1932	British (Factory)	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_212	MATGD22	Over 50,000 British Shareholder; over 17000 British Employees MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad5677-s Adverts 1931-1932	British (stakeholders)	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_316	*	CHEMIST TO THE NATION..... Numerous Branches in GREAT BRITAIN... OVER 17,000 BRITISH employees... OVER 50,000 BRITISH shareholders Scribbling Diary 1934	British (shops & shareholders)	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_163	Bee	The story Boots have to tell in their advertising campaign of 1931 is of interest to all classes of people, but especially the middle classes and working classes. Its object is to acquaint the great shopping public with the high standard of Boots service, and the quality of its merchandise.....and to present Boots Organization as the real vital national service it is rather than a mere chain of chemist's shops. The Bee April-May, 1931 p. 182 'We tell the world the facts	Vital national service	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

T2_Prj_173	MATGD22	Gradually, they [Boots] set up standards of purity and exactness. Gradually, in place of the little herbalist's shop where Boots began, they built up a great manufacturing and analytical laboratory, spreading the benefits of its scientific care through more than eight hundred shops up and down the country. MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad8623-s: Adverts 1931-1932	National	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_182	MATGD22	They [Boots' pharmacists] know what this vast service means to the health of the nation. MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad8152-s: Adverts 1931-1932	National	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_191	MATGD22	Because of their [Boots] extraordinary standards of drug purity, Boots have become and national institution – a sort of national institute of scientific research. MATGD22. – CAIS76 Ad1665-s: Adverts 1931-1932	National institution	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_198	MATGD22	...But Boots could not let it go at that. As the nation's chemist they must get it [anti-venom] no matter what the cost. MATGD22. – CAIS76 Ad1375-s (I must have anti-venom serum) : Adverts 1931-1932	National chemist	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_203	MATGD22	Always experimenting, often discovering, Boots consider no expense too great – no task to trivial that helps turn illness into health, to prevent as well as cure. To do so – and to go on doing so – is their job as the nation's chemists. MATGD22. – CAIS76 ad 3684-s Adverts 1931-1932	Nations chemist	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_277	M.B.140a-188	We dispense 4,000,000 prescriptions during the year. That of itself indicates the values of Boots the Chemist to the British Public and which justifies our slogan "Chemist to the Nation." Special Supplement (Pharmacy Week) Sept 26 <sup>th</sup> 1929 M.B.140a-188	Chemist to the nation	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

T2_Prj_290	M. B. 557-604a	<p>It was no doubt obvious to everybody that what we were concerned about was the danger of our becoming too 'high-brow' and freezing out those customers who helped to build our great business. We need to guard against becoming like the person who moves upwards in the social scale and receives her old friends with a frigid politeness which discourages further visits. Our business is to be 'Chemists to the Nation' and don't let us forget it. If we do other people quickly will, and we have no particular fancy for being chemists only to the upper ten, the atmosphere is too rare; likewise are the volume and profit... Now so we cannot be accused of going all proletarian, we will quote from Miss Offley, one of our No7 Beauty Consultants. This is what happened in Southend:- "one lady came in and bought £1/12/6 worth of preparations to take back with her to Baghdad—she said that she had used them out there for the last three years and that nearly all the wives of British doctors and R.A.F. Officers were quite No7 enthusiasts." M. B. 557-604a 1938</p>	National chemist	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Prj_316	*	<p>CHEMIST TO THE NATION..... Numerous Branches in GREAT BRITAIN... OVER 17,000 BRITISH employees... OVER 50,000 BRITISH shareholders Scribbling Diary 1934</p>	National chemist	National chemists	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_3	Bee	<p>We may turn to saccharin, the well known sweetening substance now used as a substitute for sugar. Messrs. Boots are the chief English makers of this conundrum among chemicals. In the year of largest sale, the firm contributed over half a million sterling as duty upon their output. The Bee June 1926 p. 293 (By Prof. H. E. Armstrong – the Romance of a Drug Factory)</p>	British	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

T2_Ci_64	A83/41	<p>A speciality is the manufacture of Eau de Cologne, of which Boots are the largest English producers. For this purpose a specially designed plant of unique construction is in operation, which has enabled the firm to excel in quality and smoothness the best German products A Record of Service Circa 1923</p> <p>Boots produced the first box respirators used, and supplied the whole of the chemical granules for filling the respirators used by the British and certain of the Allied Armies during the whole period of the war. They filled and supplied upwards of 8 million completed box respirators and, at the same time, to meet the famine in fine chemicals created by the isolation of Germany, grappled with this problem and successfully solved it. Today there are no fewer than 800 research chemicals on sale.... Boots became and still are the largest producers of saccharin in the United Kingdom. A Record of Service Circa 1923</p>	British	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_65	A83/41	<p>Take one instance; the blockade and the war generally left us short of sugar, and saccharin, its best substitute, was mainly a German product. Boots took it in hand, and they are now manufacturers of about 70% of the saccharin made in this country. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p> <p>In the war operations they (Boots) played a decisive part, in such of them as were concerned in dealing with that dreadful weapon of warfare – the poison gas. They supplied more than 8,000,000 complete box respirators to the British and Allied Armies in connection with the anti-Gas department of the Government – the first effective box respirators ever used, and they supplied also the whole of the chemicals required for these respirators. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p>	British	British	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_8	Bee	<p>Take one instance; the blockade and the war generally left us short of sugar, and saccharin, its best substitute, was mainly a German product. Boots took it in hand, and they are now manufacturers of about 70% of the saccharin made in this country. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p> <p>In the war operations they (Boots) played a decisive part, in such of them as were concerned in dealing with that dreadful weapon of warfare – the poison gas. They supplied more than 8,000,000 complete box respirators to the British and Allied Armies in connection with the anti-Gas department of the Government – the first effective box respirators ever used, and they supplied also the whole of the chemicals required for these respirators. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p>	Patriotic	Patriotic	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_9	Bee	<p>Take one instance; the blockade and the war generally left us short of sugar, and saccharin, its best substitute, was mainly a German product. Boots took it in hand, and they are now manufacturers of about 70% of the saccharin made in this country. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p> <p>In the war operations they (Boots) played a decisive part, in such of them as were concerned in dealing with that dreadful weapon of warfare – the poison gas. They supplied more than 8,000,000 complete box respirators to the British and Allied Armies in connection with the anti-Gas department of the Government – the first effective box respirators ever used, and they supplied also the whole of the chemicals required for these respirators. The Bee June 1926 Boots – In its developments (Rt. Hon. T. P. Connor, M.P.)</p>	Patriotic	Patriotic	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

T2_Ci_65	A83/41	Boots produced the first box respirators used, and supplied the whole of the chemical granules for filling the respirators used by the British and certain of the Allied Armies during the whole period of the war. They filled and supplied upwards of 8 million completed box respirators and, at the same time, to meet the famine in fine chemicals created by the isolation of Germany, grappled with this problem and successfully solved it. Today there are no fewer than 800 research chemicals on sale.... Boots became and still are the largest producers of saccharin in the United Kingdom.: A Record of Service Circa 1923	Patriotic	Patriotic	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_90	334/15	By the end of the war, such important chemicals as Aspirin, Acriflavine, Chloramine T, and Saccharin, all vital to the war effort and none of them previously manufactured in Great Britain were being produced by the Company. Boots – A World Famous Organisation Circa 1949	Patriotic	Patriotic	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>
T2_Ci_94	334/15	It was inevitable that a considerable proportion of this factory's [Beeston] production would be utilised by the Ministry of Supply on behalf of the government in the Second World War.... These are just a few examples of Boots contribution to the war [WWII] effort. Boots – A World Famous Organisation Circa 1949	Patriotic	Patriotic	Nationally oriented	<b>National</b>

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