Identity Work Through Prosocial Certifications in Hybrid Organizations

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I explore the role of prosocial certifications in the identity work of leaders within hybrid organizations. Existing literature has primarily emphasized the impact of these certifications on external legitimacy but has given less attention to their influence on internal dynamics. This study addresses this gap by investigating how these certifications guide internal identity alignment. Through qualitative methodologies using Certified B Corporations as an empirical setting, my research reveals that leaders initially engage in relational identity work for themselves, using prosocial certifications to deepen their understanding of their roles within the hybrid organizational context. This personal identity work is then leveraged into relational, discursive, and material identity work aimed at aligning and motivating employees. By demonstrating how these aspects of identity work are interlinked to one another and guided by certifications, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of identity work by providing a detailed analysis of how certifications facilitate the integration of blended missions within hybrid organizations. This dissertation enriches the organizational identity literature by showcasing the multifaceted utility of prosocial certifications in enhancing internal cohesion and advancing social responsibility.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organizational identity, the shared beliefs and ideas about "who are we as an organization?" (Albert & Whetten, 1985), is foundational to organizational life and a pivotal concept in organizational studies (Pratt et al., 2016; Gioia et al., 2013). It equips individuals within an organization with interpretative frameworks to make sense of organizational actions (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), influencing aspects such as business orientation, strategy, structure, culture, and innovation (Nag et al., 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Ravasi, 2016; Anthony & Tripsas, 2016). A particularly prominent implication of organizational identity involves how it influences an organization's relationships with its internal stakeholders, ultimately "capturing—or alienating—the hearts and minds" (Pratt et al., 2016: 2). For any organization, capturing the hearts of members relates directly to its survival and performance because when employees are emotionally and psychologically invested, they are more motivated to actively engage the organization's mission (Greil & Rudy, 1984; Van Dick, 2004). This investment leads to higher commitment, better performance, and reduced turnover, making the influence of organizational identity on members crucial for organizational success (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

However, organizational identity can pose challenges, particularly in hybrid organizations. Hybrid organizations are firms that balance commercial success and social mission (e.g., social and environmental goals), blending for-profit and non-profit elements. This dual focus represents the most significant and often conflicting aspects of their operations, leading to unique identity dynamics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Shepherd, Williams, & Zhao, 2019). Existing in a realm distinct from traditional for-profit or non-profit models, hybrid organizations face unique hurdles in aligning their blended missions with members' expectations, often

clashing with established norms and beliefs about work and social value creation (Wry & York, 2017; 2019). This misalignment can cause confusion, lower morale, and disengagement, highlighting the importance of a coherent organizational identity (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Glynn, 2000). This puzzle taps into the broader discourse on how leaders of these organizations can maintain a coherent identity in the face of such dualities, a question that has intrigued scholars across the domains of organizational studies (Pratt et al., 2016; Gioia et al., 2013).

Considering the pivotal role of organizational identity in hybrid organizations, literature on identity work emerges as a promising lens through which to examine the nuanced ways these entities navigate their complex identity landscapes. Identity work, broadly defined as the range of activities individuals and collectives engage in to create, and maintain identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Kreiner & Murphy, 2016), offers a rich framework for understanding the internal and external identity challenges faced by hybrid organizations. This theory is particularly relevant because it encompasses a variety of practices that individuals use to shape perceptions of their organizational identity. While the vast majority of research has been conducted on individual identity (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016), identity work can be extended to the organizational level, referring to individual actions to give meaning to giving meaning to the organization and its members (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). Research on identity work highlights how hybrid organizations engage in complex practices to align their blended missions with their stakeholders' expectations and values.

These practices go beyond merely communicating identity content through narratives (e.g., Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) or physical artifacts (e.g., Watkiss & Glynn, 2016). They also emphasize relational efforts on how identities are formed through interactive processes within and across organizational boundaries (e.g., Ybema et al., 2012). Within hybrid organizations,

leaders are the primary actors tasked with articulating a coherent organizational identity that resonates with both commercial and social goals. Leaders draw on social referent identities to create and maintain their organization's identity with external groups, fostering dialogue among stakeholders, mediating conflicts that arise from the organization's blended missions and strengthening a shared understanding toward the mission (Ybema et al., 2012; DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Research on identity work helps shed light on how organizations construct their identities within and across their boundaries. Focusing on how leaders shape internal perceptions of organizational identity versus how those perceptions are projected externally may help address the underexplored area in the literature. After all, a good deal of the existing work overlooks the deeper, more interactive processes that underpin identity construction in hybrid organizations championed by leaders (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). For instance, leaders of social enterprises often navigate the balance between generating revenue and serving their prosocial and environmental goals by highlighting beneficiary narratives and impact metrics in their communications (Dey & Teasdale, 2016). Similarly, fair-trade organizations frequently use storytelling and labeling initiatives to bridge the gap between ethical sourcing and consumer values (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012). These examples demonstrate how the relational aspect of identity work in hybrid settings allows leaders to address the inherent tensions within their organizations and project a coherent identity to stakeholders.

Despite the rich insights from existing literature on organizational identity work, certain aspects remain underexplored, particularly regarding the unique identity challenges faced by leaders of hybrid organizations that straddle commercial and social missions. Current research acknowledges that hybrid organizations face significant identity tensions due to their blended

missions, as leaders must balance commercial success with social objectives, manage conflicting stakeholder expectations, and maintain legitimacy across diverse audiences (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith & Besharov, 2019; Pache & Santos, 2013). Leaders must also ensure that employees' values and behaviors align with the organization's blended missions (Jay, 2013).

These tensions are rooted in the complexity of integrating social and commercial objectives within a single organizational identity, making it crucial to understand how these tensions are navigated by leaders (Gehman & Grimes, 2017). While we know that hybrid organizations struggle with maintaining legitimacy and balancing blended missions, there is a gap in understanding the specific identity work strategies that leaders employ to address these tensions, particularly in the context of prosocial certifications. These challenges are not fully addressed in current research, which has traditionally focused on more conventional organizational forms (Pache & Santos, 2013). Hybrid organizations present a complex landscape where the integration of social and commercial objectives necessitates a nuanced understanding of identity work at the organizational level. The need to articulate a coherent identity that aligns with both their social mission and commercial activities poses distinctive challenges for these organizations, underscoring the importance of this study's focus on the leaders' role in navigating these complex identity dynamics and using prosocial certifications as a strategic tool (Tracey et al., 2011).

One promising area of investigation concerns the role of prosocial certifications. These certifications have been shown to shape perceptions of an organizational identity to external stakeholders (e.g., Carlos & Lewis, 2018; Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York, Hargrave, & Pacheco, 2016). Hybrid organizations are increasingly adopting prosocial certifications to align their blended missions with societal and environmental standards, serving as a tangible expression of

their organizational identity (Jay, 2013; Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). These certifications legitimize the hybrid nature of these organizations within the socio-economic landscape, validating their ability to pursue blended missions effectively and gain societal acceptance (DeJordy et al., 2014; Waddock, 2008). Key insights from prior work suggest leaders in hybrid organizations may find the symbolism and language embedded in prosocial certifications useful when constructing and communicating their organization's hybrid identity internally.

Despite the recognition that prosocial certifications help in constructing a hybrid identity, our understanding of the specific identity work strategies that leaders employ remains limited. Notably, we know little about how leaders use these certifications to shape members' ideas and beliefs about their organizational identities, let alone their own. This gap points to the need for further research on how prosocial certifications are employed by leaders to construct and influence their organizations' identity. Such understanding is vital, given the role of identity work in enabling these organizations to navigate their complex operational landscapes, aligning divergent goals and securing stakeholder engagement (Jay, 2013; Tracey et al., 2011). Hence, this study poses the question: *How do leaders of hybrid organizations leverage prosocial certifications to navigate and reconcile the tensions between their social and commercial missions, in relation to their own understanding and that of organizational members?*

To investigate this question, I explore Certified B Corporations, a prominent, voluntary certification program for hybrid organizations. I engage in qualitative approaches to answer my research question, which involve multiple in-depth and inductive case studies (Eisenhardt, 2021; Gehman et al., 2018). Through in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of company materials, I explore how leaders utilize the B Corp certification as a tool within their discursive, relational, and material identity work. Iterations between data and the evolving theoretical

framework generate insights into how these leaders attempt to reconcile the tensions inherent in their hybrid missions. Deploying the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), I systematically analyze the data to develop emergent codes, themes, and overarching categories, ultimately building a grounded theory model (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to emerge from the leaders' experiences within the unique context of B Corp certification.

The findings from my study are organized into four distinct categories of identity work as leveraged by leaders within hybrid organizations: 1) relational identity work involving leaders themselves, 2) relational identity work directed toward employees, 3) discursive identity work aimed at employees, and 4) material identity work focused on employees. Central to these categories is the role of prosocial certifications in enhancing leaders' abilities to navigate their own identities and those of their organizations. Key insights reveal that leaders utilize these certifications to foster self-reflection, align their values with organizational missions, and enact identity claims that resonate with external social standards. This facilitates a deeper connection and commitment to the organization's identity, emphasizing accountability and alignment with broader social goals. Specifically, the study highlights how certifications like B Corp serve as a reflective tool for leaders, helping them reconcile their personal social values with their professional roles. This process involves integrating identity claims from social referents, which enhances leaders' accountability and aligns their actions with the organization's identity. The second-order themes illustrate various ways leaders integrate these standards into their personal and organizational identity practices, including affiliating with social referent identities to create accountability and better align with organizational identity. This approach not only enriches the leader's personal engagement with the organization but also ensures a cohesive approach to managing the blended missions of socio-environmental impact and commercial success.

This study makes several contributions to the theoretical landscape of organizational identity, particularly at the intersection of identity work and hybrid organizational contexts. First, it advances our understanding of how hybrid organizations and their leaders navigate the complexities of identity construction by demonstrating that prosocial certifications can act as pivotal tools for leaders in reconciling the inherent tensions between commercial and social objectives (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith & Besharov, 2019). This finding enriches the relational dimension of identity work by illustrating how symbolic representations, embodied in certifications, facilitate the communication of a unified organizational identity that aligns with both social and commercial missions. Second, the research delves into the relational and material aspects of identity work, highlighting how leaders use prosocial certifications both as external signals and internal mechanisms to engage and align stakeholders with the organization's blended missions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Ybema et al., 2012). This contribution underscores the importance of relational dynamics in the process of identity construction within hybrid organizations, offering insights into how these entities can effectively manage stakeholder expectations and values. Last, the study contributes to our understanding of hybrid organizations and the role of prosocial certification within these unique entities. It shows how these certifications serve not only as markers of legitimacy but as strategic tools for leaders to internalize and project the organization's identity, thereby enhancing both internal cohesion and external perception (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York et al., 2016). This extends the material dimension of identity work by revealing how tangible elements like certifications are integrated into the broader strategy of identity construction, enhancing organizational effectiveness in managing multiple goals.

This dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on organizational identity, identity work, hybrid organizations, and prosocial certifications. This review establishes the theoretical foundations of the study and outlines the key scholarly debates underpinning the research question. Chapter 3 details the methodology, including the empirical setting, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings, organized around the emergent themes and theoretical constructs. Chapter 5 offers a thorough discussion of the findings, situating them within the existing literature, highlighting theoretical contributions, and outlining implications for future research. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the key insights of the dissertation, acknowledges boundary conditions, and suggests avenues for continued scholarly exploration.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Organizational Identity

Organizational identity, a core concept shaping our understanding of how organizations function, has its roots in the foundational works of psychology, social psychology, and sociology (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934). Since Albert and Whetten's (1985) seminal definition, the concept has exploded in organizational studies. A simple Google Scholar search for "organizational identity" yields over 52,000 results, demonstrating its far-reaching influence both within and beyond management research. This proliferation of research has led to diverse conceptualizations of organizational identity. Scholars debate how it forms, changes, and influences factors such as an organization's strategic direction, leadership practices, and employee engagement (Pratt et al., 2016). Organizational identity has also become a buzzword in other theoretical traditions such as institutional theory, as well as by practitioners such as corporate branding, corporate identity and values-based management, and onboarding.

What makes organizational identity so popular? It is likely due to the fact that organizational identity tackles a fundamental question of social existence: Who are we as a collective? Major branches of social sciences, including anthropology (e.g., Sökefeld, 1999), political science (e.g., Abdelal et al., 2006), and economics (e.g., Kranton, 2016), as well as other areas of the humanities (e.g., Norton, 1997), address the issue of identity. And most, if not all, also addressthe identity of a collective, whether a nation (or state or city), demographic group, or constituent group. At its essence, organizational identity concerns how a collective defines itself. However, the act of 'defining' holds multiple meanings, and thus has led to many interpretations and contestations on defining organizational identity.

Two foundational perspectives dominate academic inquiry: the social constructivist and the social actor conceptualizations of organizational identity (Haslam & Cornelissen, 2017). The social constructionist view emphasizes the idea that organizational identity is not a static entity but a dynamic and ongoing process of construction among members of the organization and between the organization and its external stakeholders. This view is well-articulated in the seminal works of Albert and Whetten (1985), who introduce the concept of organizational identity as constituted by those elements of an organization that are central, distinctive, and enduring. However, from a social constructionist standpoint, these elements are seen as subject to continuous interpretation and re-interpretation through social interactions. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) further develop this perspective by examining how organizational identity changes over time through a process they describe as "adaptive instability." They argue that organizational identities are perpetually in flux, responding to internal dynamics and external environmental changes. The social constructionist view posits that the meaning of organizational identity emerges from the discursive practices within organizations, highlighting the role of language, symbols, and narratives in constructing and reconstructing identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

On the other hand, the social actor perspective considers organizational identity to be a collection of relatively stable attributes that allow an organization to be recognized as a distinct social entity. This perspective attributes agency to the organization itself, suggesting that it acts as an autonomous entity, capable of making strategic decisions and engaging with its environment independently of its individual members. Suchman (1995) and King, Felin, and Whetten (2010) have contributed to this view by describing organizations as legal entities with rights, responsibilities, and the capacity to maintain a coherent identity over time. This

perspective highlights the strategic management of organizational identity, suggesting that organizations engage in identity work to project a desired image to their stakeholders. Through such identity work, organizations strategically manage their presence and influence in their respective fields, aiming to enhance their legitimacy and operational effectiveness in external environments (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). The social actor perspective underlines the need for consistency and coherence in organizational identity to enable effective action and maintain legitimacy externally (Whetten, 2006).

Although these perspectives have different foundational beliefs, recent research (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2011; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) suggests they not only complement each other but may also influence each other in shaping organizational identity. Firstly, organizational identity can be perceived either as a dynamic and continuously evolving entity, reconstructed through daily interactions (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), or as a relatively stable set of characteristics that define the organization over longer periods (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This dual nature highlights the flexibility and resilience of organizational identity under various conditions. Secondly, the development of organizational identity can either be a bottom-up process, where it emerges from the interactions of individual members (Currie & Brown, 2003), or a top-down process, guided by existing structures and strategic decisions made at higher levels of the organization (Rao et al., 2003). These dual processes can either reinforce long-standing beliefs and practices or lead to significant shifts in identity, as seen in cases like corporate mergers. The degree to which organizational identity influences members varies across contexts; in stable corporations with long-standing traditions, identity might predominantly act as a structural background, whereas in dynamic, entrepreneurial settings, it may be actively and continuously shaped by member interactions.

By delineating these conditions, this literature review aims to guide the formulation of a coherent analytical framework for understanding how organizational identities are constructed and maintained. Examples from practitioners and popular press show that individuals within organizations assume the responsibility of creating and conveying identity content representing the organization (e.g., Cheney & Christensen, 2001; PlayPlay, 2023). In this dissertation, I adopt a synthesized perspective that recognizes organizations as both intentional, self-reflective social actors and as constructs shaped by member interactions. Following Ashforth and Mael (1996) and Ravasi and Schultz (2006), I view organizational identity as a dynamic interplay between stable institutionalized identity claims and the active constructions and enactments by individual members. This balanced approach provides a comprehensive framework to understand the intricacies of organizational identity within both strategic and interactive processes.

Implications of Organizational Identity for Hybrid Organizations

Research in organizational identity suggests that what is seen as central, lasting, and unique to an organization has a wide array of implications. Organizational identity can shape business orientation and firm strategy (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007), corporate structure (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Clark et al., 2010), culture (Ravasi, 2016), and innovation (Anthony & Tripsas, 2016). A particularly prominent implication of organizational identity involves how it influences an organization's relationships with its internal stakeholders. Organizational identity sets the tone for how internal members behave, interact, and make decisions within the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; He & Brown, 2013). When members align themselves with the organization's identity, they are more likely to be engaged with the organizational goals, which may in turn lead to increased job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Walumbwa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2008).

In other words, organizational identity may be used by leadership to capture "the hearts and minds" of employees (Pratt et al., 2016; van Knippenberg, 2016).

Organizational identity of hybrid organizations, firms that simultaneously pursue prosocial missions (e.g., social and environmental goals) and commercial activities, blending elements of both for-profit and non-profit models (Battilana & Lee, 2014), presents multifaceted implications due to their inherent mission multiplicity. Organizational identity serves as a foundational element for strategic clarity in hybrid organizations. The articulation of a coherent organizational identity helps align diverse missions, facilitating strategic decisions that support the overarching goals of the organization. However, balancing these diverse facets of identity is challenging and requires vigilant management to prevent mission drift—a phenomenon where one mission inadvertently becomes predominant, overshadowing others (Battilana, Besharov, & Mitzinneck, 2017). This balancing act necessitates a dynamic construction of the organization's core values among its members to maintain strategic alignment and coherence. For hybrid organizations, organizational identity is also crucial in managing stakeholder perceptions and ensuring legitimacy. The level of hybridity in hybrid organizations is not constant and can vary over time due to internal and external pressures. Shepherd, Williams, and Zhao (2019) highlight that hybridity can evolve based on factors such as market conditions, stakeholder expectations, and organizational growth. Understanding this dynamic nature is crucial for comprehending how hybrid organizations adapt and maintain their dual missions over time.

Challenges in Managing Hybrid Identities

The complexity of conveying a hybrid identity to a varied stakeholder base, including investors, customers, and the community, can be daunting. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov (2013) highlight the importance of a well-defined organizational identity in providing a clear narrative

that articulates the mission and values, thereby facilitating stakeholder engagement. Employees' identification with the organizational mission and values is linked to enhanced motivation and a sense of belonging (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Given the multiple missions of hybrid organizations, fostering a culture that supports this identity complexity is paramount. A unifying organizational identity can help employees navigate the intricacies of hybrid organizational goals, thus bolstering commitment and engagement (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). However, any misalignment between proclaimed identity and organizational actions can erode legitimacy, especially if stakeholders perceive a lack of authenticity in the organization's pursuit of its hybrid mission (Jay, 2013)

Organizational identity influences the innovation capacity and adaptability of hybrid organizations. A robust and adaptive identity supports and drives innovative practices that align with the organization's diverse missions. Such an identity fosters an experimental culture where novel ideas are valued and adapted in accordance with the organization's core identity, facilitating a responsive and dynamic approach to changing environments and stakeholder demands (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011). Conversely, a rigid organizational identity may stifle innovation and limit the organization's ability to adapt to external pressures. Lastly, the ability of hybrid organizations to collaborate and form partnerships is intricately linked to their organizational identity. A clear and compelling identity can attract like-minded partners, facilitating collaborations that advance the organization's mission. Managing partnerships in a hybrid context, however, demands the alignment of diverse identities, necessitating a deep understanding of the organization's complex identity (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

The organizational identity of hybrid organizations plays a pivotal role in shaping their strategic direction, stakeholder relationships, internal culture, innovation capabilities, and

collaborative endeavors. On the one hand, hybrid organizations that pursue prosocial missions while also engaging in commercial activities (Battilana & Lee, 2014) may be perceived to be more attractive by members due to their socially desirable values. Employees are more likely to strongly identify with innovative approaches to addressing the grand challenges (He & Brown, 2013; Martínez, Pérez, & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2014). On the other hand, hybrid organizations are neither conventional for-profit companies nor nonprofit organizations and thus do not fit a single established form (Wry & York, 2017; 2019). This may result in additional difficulty for members within hybrid organizations to deem organizational activities appropriate or rational because they align with the socially constructed norms and beliefs about how work should be organized and how social value should be created (Suchman, 1995). The blend of financial and social values does not fit within existing cognitive categories, therefore making less sense to members. The lack of internal legitimacy can be particularly problematic if a for-profit company desires to transform into a hybrid company. Employees may be reluctant to support leaders' efforts to influence their conceptions of the organization and resist partaking in cognitive and behavioral changes in line with the hybrid mission (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Harquail & King, 2010).

Building on the complexities discussed, recent research offers deeper insights into how hybrid organizations often grapple with their blended identities. Battilana and Dorado (2010) provide an example in their examination of commercial microfinance organizations, highlighting how the hybrid identities of such organizations may fracture when employees align more strongly with one of the constituent identities rather than the hybrid identity. This observation underscores the internal challenges hybrid organizations face in sustaining a balanced identity amid diverse employee perspectives. Further exploring the strategic management of these

identities, Wry and York (2017) propose an identity-based approach to social enterprise. They argue that successful social enterprises can mitigate identity conflicts by developing a strong, cohesive identity that aligns closely with both their social missions and commercial imperatives. Their framework is particularly relevant as it connects to the earlier mention of hybrid organizations not fitting a single established form and facing legitimacy issues. Cornelissen et al. (2021) expand on this by documenting how social enterprises build a 'character' that embodies both social and commercial logics. Their findings highlight the dynamic interplay between an enterprise's foundational values and the practical demands of operating in competitive markets, which is crucial for maintaining identity stability and organizational success.

Adding a relational dimension, Besharov (2014) explores how organizational identification develops when individuals possess differing values, emphasizing the role of managerial strategies in fostering a shared identity, which is essential for overcoming the internal legitimacy challenges mentioned earlier. Tracey and Phillips (2016) delve into how social enterprises manage external perceptions and internal identity when operating in controversial or marginalized sectors, thereby maintaining legitimacy and operational capacity. This study links back to the difficulty hybrid organizations face as they navigate external and internal pressures. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov (2013) and Conger et al. (2018) further contribute to this discussion by reviewing how social enterprises balance competing demands through strategic identity work and by reevaluating their opportunities for social impact based on their category membership and identity control. These studies illustrate the complex nature of hybrid organizational identities and the critical role of strategic management in sustaining these identities.

The review of hybrid organizational identities underscores the critical importance of strategic identity construction for the sustainability and operational effectiveness of hybrid

organizations. Managing an organization's identity involves more than ensuring coherence; it necessitates navigating the complex interplay between internal self-conceptions and external stakeholder perceptions. This is especially crucial for hybrid organizations, which must reconcile conflicting demands from diverse stakeholder groups. My analysis emphasizes that identity work in these organizations is not just about alignment but is central to enhancing legitimacy and operational success. Such work involves continuous and evolving processes where individuals construct and adjust their identities, playing a pivotal role in the organization's ability to thrive.

Identity Work in Hybrid Organizations

As organizational leaders navigate the inherent identity tensions within hybrid organizations, they engage in identity work as a crucial practice for resolving these tensions and aligning stakeholder perceptions with the organization's blended missions (Smith & Lewis, 2012). Identity work in hybrid organizations is vital for survival and performance because it causes the organization’s stakeholders to be positively inclined toward supporting both the social and commercial goals of the organization (Barnett et al., 2006). A burgeoning stream of research is centered on the practices and strategies by which people construct professional, work, and organization-based identities (Brown, 2022; Ibarra, 1999; Watson, 2009). Identity work generally refers to the continuous and evolving processes by which individuals actively create, manage, adjust, and reinterpret their sense of self (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The concept is central to understanding how people see themselves and wish to be seen by others, involving a continuous negotiation of self in relation to the social world. Identity work is not a simple reflection of an internal self, but rather an active construction deeply influenced by social interactions, experiences, and the diverse roles we play in society.

Creating and sustaining identities that are congruent with the desirable and admirable concept have profound individual and organizational implications (Brown, 2022). At the individual level, the types of identities that people cultivate impact their everyday decision-making in organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and their career trajectories (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010. The positive implications of identity work are also evident at the organizational level, as employees whose identities are aligned with the organization's identity are more likely to be committed to the organization and its goals.

With the rise to its prominence, research on identity work has also become somewhat disjointed in examining different units of analysis, with the vast majority of research on identity work being conducted at the individual level (Kreiner & Murphy, 2016). In today's organizations, all participants, from CEOs to shop floor workers, are acknowledged as self-aware, practical creators of social realities and identities (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Several key themes emerge when examining identity work at the individual level. Identity construction involves the active process of individuals using personal experiences, social roles, cultural narratives, and feedback from others to create their understanding of self. They make choices and carefully curate their self-presentation to portray a desired image to themselves and others (Jensen, Schau, & Gilly, 2003). Impression management and strategic self-presentation are also components of identity work (Elabach & Sutton, 1992; Goffman, 1959). Individuals strategically emphasize some aspects of their identity and minimize others to manage how others perceive them in various social situations. This is done to align themselves with social expectations or achieve certain goals.

Since identities are formed from various social roles and group memberships, there is potential for tension and conflict within a company. Identity work, the process of managing and

harmonizing different, sometimes competing, aspects of our identity, is central to navigating these challenges (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Balancing commercial success with philanthropic responsibilities is a prime example for a social entrepreneur, for instance. Notwithstanding the dynamic nature of identity, individuals seek to maintain a sense of coherence and stability in their sense of self. This identity maintenance can involve finding meaning in experiences, reframing challenges to protect a positive self-view, and aligning behaviors with the social roles they wish to embody (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Finally, identity transitions often accompany major life changes like career shifts, relocation, or evolving relationships. This requires conscious identity work as individuals shed aspects of their previous identity and adapt to new roles and expectations (Ibarra, 1999).

Relatedly, Watson (2008) further elaborates on identity work, describing it as a set of interdependent processes in which individuals try to create a relatively coherent personal identity while also coming to terms with their multiple social identities. A social identity of particular interest to organizational scholars is that of professional identity, and an emerging stream of research has shown how identity work is undertaken in that context (e.g., Pratt et al., 2006; Kreiner et al., 2006a; Vough, Cardador, Bednar, Dane, & Pratt, 2013). The way people attribute meaning to themselves and to others has most frequently pointed to interconnected verbal, symbolic, socio-cognitive, and psychological processes (Brown, 2017; Caza et al., 2018). These forms of identity work may occur individually.

Understanding identity work at the individual level reveals several core concepts. We've learned that identity is fluid, actively constructed, and shaped by social interactions (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Individuals strategically manage how they present themselves (Goffman, 1959), negotiate internal tensions between various aspects of their identity (Alvesson, Ashcraft,

& Thomas, 2008), and strive to maintain a cohesive sense of self through life's changes. These dynamics are equally relevant when examining organizations. Organizations, like individuals, have identities that are constructed through narratives, interactions with stakeholders, and the need to adapt to changing environments. Understanding how individual identity processes function could shed light on organizational identities and how they impact employees' sense of belonging.

Discursive, Material, and Relational Approaches to Identity Work

However, researchers on organizational identity have rarely invoked the term "identity work" and investigated the phenomenon under a host of terms such as identity construction or identity management. Building on Kreiner et al. (2016) and Basque and Langley (2018), I refer to organizational identity work as "effort engaged in by organization members individually or collectively to form, repair, maintain, strengthen or in other ways influence understandings of the central, distinctive and enduring characteristics of a specific organization." The exploration of identity work at the organizational level unfolds through discursive, material, and relational approaches, revealing the intricate processes organizations engage in to create, maintain, and evolve their identities. These perspectives deepen our understanding of organizational identity as a dynamic construct shaped through language, materiality, and social interactions. The following discussion examines how leaders within hybrid organizations actively practice different types of identity work—discursive, material, and relational—to navigate and reconcile the inherent tensions between social and commercial missions, specifically analyzing how they leverage prosocial certifications to navigate these dynamics effectively.

First, discursive identity work investigates the central role of language and communication in constructing, maintaining, repairing, or revising identities within an

organizational setting. Building on the understanding that identities are dynamic—constantly constructed through social interaction— this approach focuses on how individuals and groups use verbal and non-verbal language to shape their own identities and influence how others see them. Discursive identity work involves articulating desired identities, navigating organizational power dynamics, managing relationships, and influencing perceptions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Watson, 2009). This approach highlights several key characteristics. Language serves as the primary tool, shaping identities in a continuous, evolving process (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Furthermore, discursive identity work reflects power relations within the organization and allows for the potential to gain or maintain influence (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Individuals and groups retain some agency in shaping their identities, though they work within the constraints of organizational norms and social contexts (Gioia et al., 1994). Examples include a manager using storytelling to solidify their leadership image, employees using humor to subtly critique policies, or a company portraying itself as socially responsible through its website and social media presence.

Second, material identity work examines the ways individuals and organizations actively use tangible objects, bodily practices, and the design of physical spaces to construct, maintain, and express their identities within organizations (Watkiss & Glynn, 2016). Expanding beyond the traditional emphasis on discourse, this approach recognizes the power of the material world in shaping how we see ourselves and how others perceive us (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Examples include a company's office layout signaling innovation, an employee personalizing their workspace, or a focus on sustainability demonstrating corporate responsibility. Material identity work acknowledges both agency and power dynamics. Individuals actively shape their environment, but access to resources might be unequal (Glynn,

2000). Furthermore, this process highlights performance; objects and spaces become tools to enact identities (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005). Since the meaning attached to these material elements can be contested, material identity work reflects an ongoing negotiation among diverse stakeholders within the organization (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Third, relational identity work examines the dynamic process through which identities are constructed, maintained, changed, or dissolved through interactions with social referent identities or groups external to the organization. It acknowledges that our sense of self isn't formed in isolation but is deeply intertwined with how we relate to others. This approach builds upon theories like Social Identity Theory (SIT), emphasizing the interdependent nature of identities within organizational relationships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam et al., 2017). Key characteristics of relational identity work include a focus on interdependence, where identities emerge from individual traits as well as through our interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and teams (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Relational identity work is a dynamic and continuous process influenced by evolving relationships and contexts (Corley & Gioia, 2004). This process occurs at the individual, group, and organizational levels. A team's shared goals shape its collective identity, which in turn impacts the identities of its members (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Power dynamics are also acknowledged, as those with power within a hierarchy can influence the identities of others. Conversely, individuals may resist dominant narratives through disidentification (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Pratt, 2000).

In summary, the discursive, material, and relational approaches collectively offer a comprehensive understanding of identity work at the organizational level. They reveal how organizations navigate the complexities of identity work. While the majority of prior research has concentrated on individual and discursive aspects, relatively less is understood about the

relational or material aspects at the organizational level. This gap is significant because understanding these dimensions can illuminate how organizational identities are not only constructed but also sustained and transformed in complex environments. As such, I explore how relational identity work influences subsequent relational, discursive, and material identity work toward employees, providing a nuanced view of how organizational identities are constructed, sustained, and transformed in complex environments. This specific emphasis on relational dynamics sets the stage for a deeper understanding of how leaders in hybrid organizations leverage insights gained from relational identity work to shape both discursive and material actions.

Role of Leaders in Organizational Identity Work

Research on institutional work raises intriguing questions on whether organizational identity work can be considered a conscious or intentional process. Institutional agents may not be fully conscious of the motivation behind their actions (Suddaby et al., 2010). A typical approach to this duality is to study identity work in the context of a scenario that induces people to consciously reflect on questions of identity. Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 626) suggest, for instance, that "specific events, encounters, transitions experiences, surprises, as well as more constant strains" can serve as triggers that "heighten awareness of the constructed quality of self-identity and compel more concentrated identity work."

The concept of organizational identity work presents unique benefits in emphasizing the agency of organizational leaders in identity construction. Firstly, it addresses debates regarding the necessity of 'enduringness' or 'continuity' as characteristics of organizational identity (Gioia et al., 2013) by emphasizing how members actively create either continuity or discontinuity through their discourse and behaviors. Secondly, the concept of organizational identity work

sidesteps the assumptions of sharedness and clarity that are prevalent in much of the literature (Gioia et al., 2013). According to Watson (2008), emphasizing organizational identity work shifts attention to the actions individuals take to construct identity. This perspective is valuable for analyzing how leaders' behaviors contribute to shaping organizational identity, without having to jump into the scholarly debate (Basque & Langley, 2018).

Organizational scholars like Anteby and Molnár (2012), Basque and Langley (2018), and Suddaby, Foster, and Trank (2016) have employed the concept of organizational identity work to show the processes through which an organization's top managers utilize language and rhetoric to foster identity concepts that strongly connect with their audiences. Anteby and Molnár (2012) demonstrate how managers at an aeronautics company shaped a nationalist identity in internal communications. They did this by downplaying past contradictions, such as the significant contributions of foreign partners. Their study highlights how the strategic use of collective memory and selective history can effectively construct organizational identity.

Suddaby et al. (2016) coined the term 're-membering' to describe how the rhetorical use of history taps into and shapes collective memories, thereby establishing organizational identity and encouraging stakeholder identification and membership. Basque and Langley (2018) detail how executives invoked the memory of the founder of a financial cooperative to engage in organizational identity work. The authors identify five methods executives used to channel the founder's voice to articulate, stretch, preserve, or refresh expressions of organizational identity. These invocations serve a dual purpose: they justify and legitimize current actions while enhancing the founder's mythology, thereby elevating his symbolic power within the organization. The symbolic significance of founders in constructing organizational identity is well-recognized.

Building on the examination of traditional organizational identity work, recent studies have shifted focus toward hybrid companies, where the blend of social and commercial missions presents unique challenges and opportunities for identity construction. In their study of a social enterprise that delivers digital content and data, Smith and Besharov (2019) note that social entrepreneurs who successfully navigate the tensions between commercial and social objectives tend to grow their ventures and ensure that employees, investors, and customers appreciate both aspects of a dual organizational identity. Founders and leaders of social enterprises continually recalibrated and reinterpreted their identity to address strategic and operational tensions arising during the venture's development. They also documented how early investments in partnerships and organizational structures aligned with the blended missions established safeguards to prevent mission drift as the organization experimented with new practices. Cornelissen et al. (2021) elaborate on the role of a key leadership process in identity, showing that founders and leaders of a hybrid organization constantly experimented with different organizational characters that define who they are and what they do, ultimately leading to combining diverse objectives and values as essential elements of a coherent, unified hybrid identity. Drawing on identity control theory, Conger et al. (2018) describe a reflexive and ongoing process of identity control in which social entrepreneurs ask and respond to questions regarding the hybrid identity of their organizations as they pursue membership in a prosocial, hybrid category membership.

Studies on organizational identity have identified multiple motivations behind why leadership in an organization might seek to shape how employees perceive the organization's identity. For example, changes in the business landscape, such as new competition, could prompt strategic adjustments that carry consequences for organizational identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Major structural changes such as a spin-off merger may create a new organization with a

relatively undefined identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Clark et al., 2010). Organizational identity may have drifted from what leadership believes it should be (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). Similarly, the identity of hybrid organizations as collectively shared by members may be unclear or in conflict with members' ideas of what the organization is. For these reasons, organizational leaders may engage in identity work to influence perceptions of organizational identity shared by members. Perhaps the most obvious element in such leadership is the communication of the desired understanding of organizational identity: the consistent communication of the desired identity may cause this identity to be shared among the organization's members.

Communicating Organizational Identity as a Form of Identity Work

The literature on organizational identity outlines numerous methods by which identity content is conveyed, ranging from specific guidelines like dress codes (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) to broader categories such as media and symbols (Pratt, 2003), as well as textual, material, and oral forms (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). But who are the individuals championing the construction of collective selves, and why? Scholars have proposed various terms for individuals acting on behalf of the organization, such as "stewards" (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997), "member-agents" (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010; Whetten & Mackey, 2002), and "identity custodians" (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013). Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2013: 119) define identity custodians as actors "who focus attention, invest time, and exert energy in an effort to sustain a collective identity." Identity custodians are viewed as representatives who speak and act on behalf of the organization (King et al., 2010), with organizational identity imbuing their actions with meaning (Brickson, 2013).

Although any individuals within the organization can be identity custodians, leaders tend to have better access to various communication channels through financial, human, and physical

resources that are not easily accessible to other members (Fiol, 2002; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013). Thus, while an organization as a standalone entity does not inherently possess agency to communicate (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2015), it is conceptualized as capable of engaging in identity work through the actions and communications of its members—specifically its leaders. This perspective aligns with social actor and social constructivist views, which treat the organization not as a passive entity but as one whose identity is actively constructed and communicated by its members. Therefore, organizational leaders are crucial conduits for the propagation of organizational identity, embodying and advancing the collective identity through their access to broader communication channels.

Schinoff, Rogers, and Corley (2016) build on this work and present an organizing framework for thinking about how organizational leaders communicate identity content in three ways that align actions: saying, showing, and staging. First, saying involves sending verbal or written messages that contain identity content to members. This can occur through various means, such as conversations, emails, or newsletters (Pratt, 2003). For example, during the spinoff of a Fortune 100 company, the executive team addressed identity ambiguity by communicating a new vision through letters and commitment statements (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Second, showing refers to modeled behaviors or displayed artifacts that conveyed identity content to organizational members. Showing involves agents visibly thinking, acting, or feeling in human ways on behalf of the organization.

Perhaps most importantly, identity custodians establish a setting where organizational members can actively embody and experience organizational identity. Staging "who we are" provides a sense of experience to members that showing or saying cannot provide. Through consistent interactions, members actually experience a sense of social connection with the

organization (Ashforth et al., 2020). For example, Pratt (2000) demonstrates how Amway distributors communicated identity content to new employees through a practice called "dream building", where employees were introduced to dreams via written, visual, and audio methods. When conducted in groups, this staging enables members to experience identity content similarly, fostering a high level of agreement on the organization's identity. Thus, staging allows custodians to create shared experiences, facilitating coordinated interactions with the organizational identity among members.

So, staging may be more effective for leaders than saying or showing in communicating hybrid identity content, and leaders should perhaps strive to make members enact organizational identity. However, leaders are not always capable of engaging in identity communication via staging. Leaders' perceptions of organizational identity may also be ambiguous such as when going through a major organizational change (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004) or when pursuing prosocial missions while also engaging in commercial activities (Battilana & Lee, 2014) and thus placing the organization's core values in limbo the blended missions. Even if leaders possess both clear intentions and ideas about hybrid identity, they may not afford the time and resources required to provide a context in which members can experience the identity content firsthand.

Prosocial Certifications Guiding Identity Work

Though understudied, an interesting possibility is that leaders could utilize prosocial certifications in the process of identity work, particularly in complex contexts such as hybrid companies. Prosocial certifications from reputable actors broadcast authenticity by providing credentials signifying that an organization has vigorously engaged in socially and environmentally friendly activities (Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Wry & Haugh, 2018). In accordance with the very nature of certifications—signaling legitimacy to external

stakeholders—the literature has primarily concentrated on the significant role that prosocial certifications play in shaping external perceptions by signaling an organization's commitment to societal values. Richards, Zellweger, and Gond (2017) investigate how firms maintain moral legitimacy through sustainability certifications, arguing that these certifications enable organizations to communicate their commitment to sustainable practices transparently and effectively. Husted, Montiel, and Christmann (2016) further examine how multinational subsidiaries and domestic firms use CSR standards to align with local stakeholder expectations and enhance their legitimacy. The strategic selection of certifications is crucial as it influences how organizations are perceived across different geographic and cultural contexts.

Additional studies examine the impact of certifications on reputation and market positioning. Schepers (2010) addresses challenges to legitimacy faced by certification bodies like the Forest Stewardship Council, reflecting on how these challenges affect the reputation of the organizations they certify. Fanasch (2019) demonstrates that eco-certification enhances a firm's performance in addition to its reputation, showing the tangible benefits of maintaining high standards in certifications. Bouvard and Levy (2018) explore the dynamics of reputation in certification markets, illustrating how certifiers and the certified interact to sustain the relevance and efficacy of certifications. Lee, Hiatt, and Lounsbury (2017) delve into the strategic trade-offs that firms face in emerging markets as they seek legitimacy through various certifications. This study shows how firms navigate between different standards to optimally position themselves, reflecting the nuanced strategic decisions involved in selecting certifications that best resonate with external audiences. This selection process is pivotal as it directly influences stakeholder perceptions and helps define the market identity of organizations. These insights together show

the strategic importance of prosocial certifications in managing and enhancing the perceptions held by external stakeholders.

However, while the existing literature provides rich insights into the role of prosocial certifications in shaping external perceptions and legitimacy, there is a significant gap in understanding how these certifications impact leaders' perceptions and their ongoing engagement in identity work. The few studies that do, such as work Conger et al. (2018), delve into category membership and identity control, illustrating how certifications can serve as tools for leaders to actively navigate identity tensions and align organizational goals with societal expectations. This highlights the role of certifications in reinforcing an organization's commitment to its social objectives, thus enhancing its identity to internal and external stakeholders alike. Muñoz, Cacciotti, and Cohen (2018) further explore this by discussing the dual effects of purpose-driven behavior in sustainable venturing, where certifications can simultaneously bolster an entrepreneur's mission-driven identity and impose constraints that complicate identity management. This 'double-edged sword' underscores the challenges leaders face in balancing adherence to certification standards with the evolving demands of their business model and market environment. While insightful, these studies touch on entrepreneurs' internal views alone, overlooking how these certifications influence the broader organizational identity.

There still remains a substantial gap in understanding the influence of prosocial certifications on internal stakeholders, particularly in hybrid organizations where leaders must balance commercial and social objectives. Studies like those by Villela et al. (2021) demonstrate that certifications for hybrid organizations can evolve an organization's identity and operational practices over time, embedding a deeper commitment to ethical standards internally and externally. Similarly, Paelman et al. (2023) reveal how certifications help align missions with

employees and financiers, suggesting a pivotal role in internal cohesion and strategic alignment. There is sparse research on how these certifications affect leaders' strategic decisions and identity work within their organizations. Gehman and Grimes (2017) highlight how certified hybrid organizations use their certification as a 'hidden badge of honor' to promote distinctiveness in saturated markets, yet how leaders internalize these benefits to navigate identity tensions remains underexplored. Furthermore, research by Lewis and Carlos (2018) suggests that firms may react strategically to certifications to avoid appearing overly virtuous in contexts emphasizing shareholder primacy, hinting at complex trade-offs faced by leaders in certified firms.

This oversight is crucial for understanding how certifications influence the broader organizational identity, particularly in terms of cognitive legitimacy among internal stakeholders (Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Certifications for social enterprises not only serve as external signals but are vital tools internally, providing leaders with frameworks to shape organizational identity and strategy (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Fiol, 2002). This internal aspect is pivotal as it enhances strategic coherence and reduces ambiguity in decision-making, fostering a sense of shared purpose among members and reinforcing alignment with the hybrid organization's blended missions (Harquail & King, 2010). Moreover, studies such as those by Parker et al. (2019) and Moroz et al. (2018) suggest that certifications can significantly influence firm growth and entrepreneurial ventures, indicating that these certifications can be instrumental in strategic direction and operational adjustments. This potential for certifications to serve as robust justifications for significant changes in strategic directions enables leaders to legitimize new initiatives and drive transformative change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

Drawing on this line of work, it becomes evident that while certifications function as a seal of approval for external audiences, they may also facilitate understanding and strategic navigation for internal audiences. Certifications and their embedded values provide leaders with mental maps that simplify organizational members' cognition and action, promoting efficiency and facilitating interaction within and outside the organization (DiMaggio, 1997; Barley & Tolbert, 1997). In summary, the existing literature provides rich insights into the role of certifications in external legitimacy and identity shaping. However, there still remains a notable gap in understanding how leaders of hybrid organizations leverage these certifications in their identity work to navigate the tensions between commercial and social objectives. This oversight underscores the necessity of my study, which seeks to illuminate the strategies employed by leaders to maintain coherence amidst competing demands and enhance stakeholder engagement through the lens of certifications for social enterprises. Hence, my research question arises: *How do leaders of hybrid organizations leverage prosocial certifications to navigate and reconcile the tensions between their social and commercial missions, in relation to their own understanding and that of organizational members?*

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Context

My empirical setting focuses on Certified B Corporations, businesses that use profits and growth as a means to have a positive impact on society (B Lab Global, 2023). As society's most pressing problems cannot be addressed by government and nonprofits alone, B Corps are hybrid organizations that leverage profits and growth to positively impact their employees, communities, and the environment. Founded in 2006, B Lab is the non-profit certifying agency that verifies businesses seeking this designation. The B Corp movement has grown rapidly; there are now over 8,000 Certified B Corporations globally across 150 industries (B Lab Global, 2024). The United States boasts a particularly strong B Corp presence, with over 2,000 businesses operating within diverse communities across the nation, as well as dozens of community networks (B Lab US & Canada, 2024a). Furthermore, B Corp certification serves as an ideal research setting, offering a distinct perspective on how leaders navigate and articulate their blended mission, shedding light on the complexities of identity work in organizations balancing positive social impact with profitability.

What distinguishes B Corp certification from similar prosocial certifications is that businesses must meet rigorous standards for social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to achieve certification (B Lab US & Canada, 2023; Gehman, Grimes, & Cao, 2019). To fulfill the performance requirement, a company must first complete the B Impact Assessment—a self-reported questionnaire quantifying the impact of the company's business model and operations on workers, community, customers, and environment. The B Impact Assessment is broken down into several key categories, each with a maximum

point value contributing to a total of 200 points. Table 1 presents the categories evaluated, along with a description and the maximum points available for each category.

TABLE 1: Five Areas of Impact for B Impact Assessment

Category	Description	Points
Governance	Evaluates mission, structure, ethics, transparency, social and environmental engagement	10-15
Workers	Assesses employee wellbeing, health, financial security, career development, satisfaction	40-50
Community	Measures a business's impact in the communities it operates in, sources from, and hires from	40-50
Environment	Reviews environmental management, impact on climate, biodiversity, water, air, land.	20-45
Customers	Focuses on customer care, product/service quality, marketing techniques, and privacy.	5

The scoring system is intricate and tailored to the company's specific track such as size, sector, and location, resulting in varying maximum potential scores. There is also an opportunity to unlock further points for having an impact business model (B Lab Australia & New Zealand, 2022). Companies must score at least 80 out of these 200 possible points to be eligible for certification. Upon completing the B Impact Assessment, companies must go through a multi-

step verification process to confirm that they meet the criteria for certification. This involves a detailed review by B Lab's standards team, which may include document submission for evidence, interviews, and sometimes on-site reviews to ensure the accuracy of responses and to evaluate the company's practices against the B Corp standards. After certification, B Corps are required to update their B Impact Assessment and undergo verification every three years to retain their status, ensuring continuous adherence to the evolving standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. The company should also meet legal requirements based on its location and structure. Specifically, a company must alter its corporate governance structure to ensure accountability to all stakeholders, not just shareholders. In states where available, adopting benefit corporation status is often the preferred legal pathway. This is a specific legal form that explicitly emphasizes a company's commitment to social and environmental stewardship. If a benefit corporation isn't an option, specific language is incorporated into the company's governing documents (articles of incorporation, bylaws, etc.) that outline the expanded fiduciary duty to stakeholders beyond profit.

B Corp certification is receiving growing attention both in practice and in the scholarly literature on hybrid companies and certification, offering a unique balance of timeliness, relevance, and growing theoretical interest (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; Kim et al., 2016; Moroz et al., 2018). In addition to the increasing popularity and growth shown in Table 2, B Corps offer an excellent setting for exploring how organizational leaders convey hybrid organizational identity to members. First, B Corp certification is granted to companies that adhere to stringent standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. This multiple focus inherently positions B Corps as hybrid organizations that balance commercial goals with social missions. (Gehman et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2016). The identity work of leaders

within these organizations involves navigating and reconciling these potentially competing priorities, making B Corps an ideal setting for studying such dynamics. Unlike other prosocial certifications, B Corp certification stands out for its rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of companies' social and environmental performance, legal accountability, and public transparency, making it a uniquely fertile ground for examining the nuanced identity work of leaders navigating the intersection of commercial success and social impact.

TABLE 2: Year-over-Year Growth in New B Corps, Worldwide

Year	Number of B Corps at year-end	YOY Growth
2007	110	-
2008	192	75%
2009	253	32%
2010	403	59%
2011	533	32%
2012	707	33%
2013	949	34%
2014	1,244	31%
2015	1,617	30%
2016	2,056	27%
2017	2,440	19%
2018	2,778	14%
2019	3,237	17%
2020	3,758	16%
2021	4,427	18%
2022	6,123	38%

Second, B Corps are committed to considering the impact of their decisions on all their stakeholders, not just for customers and shareholders but also including employees. This broad accountability introduces complexities in organizational identity, as leaders must continuously engage in identity work to align and re-align their actions with the diverse expectations and values of these stakeholders (Smith, Gonin, & Besharov, 2013). Third, B Corp certification

encompasses a wide range of industries and company sizes, from small local businesses to large multinational corporations. This diversity allows for a comprehensive exploration of identity work across different contexts and scales and may offer insights into how industry-specific challenges and size influence leaders' identity work within hybrid organizations.

Fourth, B Corps claim to form a community of purpose-driven businesses that is oriented toward continuous improvement and learning (B Lab US & Canada, 2024b). Whether or not this self-reported purpose translates into measurable outcomes, leaders within this community often share knowledge, best practices, and challenges related to managing hybrid identities. This collective learning environment, if substantiated by evidence, enriches the research setting, providing opportunities to study how leaders' identity work is influenced by peer interactions and shared experiences. Lastly, as B Corps are publicly committed to high standards of social and environmental performance, they are subject to greater scrutiny from stakeholders (Grimes, Gehman, & Cao, 2018). This visibility places additional pressure on leaders to engage in identity work that consistently aligns with the blending of organizational missions. The public nature of this commitment makes B Corps a compelling setting for studying how external perceptions and expectations influence internal identity work.

Methodological Approach

Data Collection

I followed the principles of theoretical sampling, where data collection is purposefully driven by the emerging theoretical insights uncovered during the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). Rather than pre-selecting all participants or data sources, I iteratively analyzed data, using those insights to guide subsequent sampling choices. The primary objective of theoretical sampling is to refine, enrich, and add depth to the developing theory

(Charmaz, 2006). As such, the researcher seeks new data with the potential to challenge, broaden, or add complexity to the emerging patterns and themes. This approach involves a dynamic and flexible process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As data is collected and analyzed, the researcher's growing theoretical understanding shapes subsequent sampling decisions. This continuous interplay between analysis and sampling facilitates theoretical development. With theoretical sampling, data collection decisions are not predetermined but actively respond to the patterns and concepts revealed within the data itself. The researcher places primary emphasis on choosing cases, participants, or data points that display the highest potential to contribute meaningfully to the formulation and refinement of the theory (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling is exceptionally well-suited for qualitative studies where the focus lies on strong theory building (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It prioritizes depth of understanding over a focus on broader representativeness. Furthermore, it aligns well with the adaptable nature of qualitative research, where flexibility and a willingness to shift direction based on evolving insights are frequently beneficial.

Accordingly, I began this research with a broader focus on organizational identity and change in hybrid organizations and interviewed a small sample of people working in hybrid organizations. Analysis of this initial data revealed the theoretical concepts of interest. Leaders' perceptions of organizational identity and how they interacted with prosocial certifications emerged as key themes. The subsequent sampling purposefully targeted interviewees who could provide varying viewpoints or deeper insights into this specific aspect (Eisenhardt, 2021; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, key informants primarily consisted of those in leadership positions at Certified B Corporations who were involved with the certification process. This iterative cycle continued throughout the research process, and more themes emerged. The findings particularly

highlight how leaders leverage prosocial certification in identity work, using it as a structured framework that helps define and communicate values, as well as guide practices.

In addressing the complex interplay between social and commercial objectives within hybrid organizations, semi-structured interviews emerged as the optimal data collection strategy for this research. This methodological choice was driven by the nuanced nature of the research question, which seeks to understand how leaders of hybrid organizations navigate identity work with the aid of prosocial certifications, such as B Corp certification. Semi-structured interviews uniquely facilitate a balance between structured inquiry and the flexibility necessary to explore in-depth the dynamic experiences and perceptions of organizational leaders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Locke, 2001). This approach enables detailed exploration into how certifications impact organizational identity and assist leaders in reconciling tensions between differing objectives, thereby providing rich, contextual insights essential for addressing the research question (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, during an interview with a leader of a newly certified IT consultancy, the unstructured portion of our conversation revealed that their initial enthusiasm about the certification did not translate to the rest of the organizational members, realizing the need for efforts to engage with employees. The interview protocol is detailed in APPENDIX.

The focus on leaders within Certified B Corporations was informed by initial analyses that highlighted their crucial role in shaping organizational identities amidst the complexities of hybrid models. Targeting interviewees directly involved with the certification process allowed for the capture of a diverse array of experiences and viewpoints, enriching the understanding of the certification's role in organizational identity work. During interviews, I employed follow-up questions to explore initial responses in greater depth. For instance, when participants mentioned changes due to certification, I probed for specific examples. This approach ensured that insights

were well-grounded in detailed, context-rich accounts rather than surface-level or socially desirable responses. This methodology, supported by the flexible and inquisitive nature of semi-structured interviews, was instrumental in uncovering the role of prosocial certifications in identity work. By engaging leaders in discussions about their decision-making processes, experiences with certifications, and reflections on their organizational roles, I gleaned significant insights into the multifaceted identity work within hybrid organizations (Eisenhardt, 2021; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

Regarding the diversity of data sources, I chose to interview informants across numerous organizations to capture diverse perspectives and to generate insights that were not particular to any certain organization. This approach allowed for comparisons that determined whether an emergent finding was unique to a single case or consistently replicated across multiple contexts (Eisenhardt, 2021; Gehman et al., 2018). Interviewing multiple participants also helped to develop a more robust theory because the propositions were more deeply grounded in varied empirical evidence. To establish initial connections and build rapport, I began my sampling with a small pool of interview participants from hybrid organizations located in Eugene, Oregon. Leveraging my position as a University of Oregon student strengthened these initial engagements. However, to gain a broader understanding, I expanded my interviewee pool to include B Corps across the United States, identifying these participants from the directory of Certified B Corporations, publicly available at https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/find-a-b-corp. In striving for theoretical saturation, I continued interviewing until no novel insights were gathered from additional interviews. The final, primary data source comprised 39 semi-structured interviews with founders, CEOs, and managers of B Corps in the U.S.

To guide my research and supplement the primary data, I utilized secondary data sources, including detailed memos and bullet points from three interviews with leaders who did not consent to audio recording. These leaders, who are involved in hybrid organizations and also serve in roles as B Corp consultants or B Local board members, provided insights into the certification process. Additionally, I engaged in fieldwork by participating in multiple B Corp-related events, such as several virtual information sessions and B Corp Leadership Development (BLD) conferences. This participation was crucial for understanding the broader B Corp community dynamics and recruiting interview participants.

Secondary archival data was collected from websites, newsletters, and impact reports of the hybrid organizations. This data served to triangulate and contextualize the insights gained from the interviews, enriching the background information and addressing the biases inherent in self-reported data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews have the potential to be influenced by recall bias, where participants may not accurately remember past events, and retrospective bias, where current perspectives distort their recollections of past experiences (Eisenhardt, 2021). To mitigate these biases, triangulation was employed; by integrating findings from interviews with fieldwork observations and archival data, I sought to cross-verify information and enhance the credibility of the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006). For example, when a leader described changes made post-certification, I tried to verify these claims against documented changes in newsletters and impact reports. This process helped verifying whether or not that the data reflected actual practices rather than solely participants' recollections. The secondary data also helped me form a robust understanding of the empirical context by providing concrete examples and factual benchmarks against which interview responses could be evaluated. The summary of data sources and list of interviewees are detailed in Table 3 and Table 4.

TABLE 3: Summary of Data Sources

Data Type	Quantity	Original Source	Uses
Interview transcripts	39 App. 27hrs	Informants (39) ✓ B consultancy (3) ✓ B Local board members (5) ✓ Nonmanagerial employees (3)	Primary analysis for study
Notes from non-transcribed interviews	3 App. 2hrs	Informants (3)	Enrich understanding of the context Triangulate analyzed data
Public observations	13 App. 36hrs	B Corp Leadership Development conferences (4; 26hrs) B Information sessions (6; 5hrs) B Local events (3; 5hrs)	Enrich understanding of the context Motivate research question Recruit interview participants
Archival data	150+ pages	B Corp websites News articles Impact reports	Enrich understanding of the context Motivate research question Triangulate analyzed data

TABLE 4: List of Informants Participated in Semi-Structured Interviews

Person	Company	Role	Industry Sector	Type	Duration	Location
ID-01	ORG-01	President & Beekeeper	Food products	Initial	45 mins	OR
ID-02	ORG-02	Vice President of Sales & Marketing	Wholesale personal products	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-03	ORG-03	Managing Director	Growing perennial crops	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-04	ORG-04	Founder and Director	Advertising & market research	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-05	ORG-05	Mission & Information Manager	Investment advising	Initial	45 mins	OR
ID-06	ORG-06	Vice President, Food Waste Prevention	Software publishing and SaaS platforms	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-07	ORG-07	Communications Director	Agricultural processing	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-08	ORG-08	CEO	Agricultural processing	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-09	ORG-09	Founder/Chairman	Advertising & market research	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-10	ORG-10	Director of Finance and Operations	Other education	Initial	45 mins	OR
ID-11	ORG-11	Founder	Management consultant - for-profits	Initial	55 mins	OR
ID-12	ORG-12	Director of Culture & Strategic Impact	Computer programming services / B Local	Initial	55 mins	GA
ID-13	ORG-13	Bookkeeper	Real estate - leased property	Initial	35 mins	WA
ID-14	ORG-14	General Manager	Beverages	Initial	45 mins	SC
ID-15	ORG-15	VP of Operations & Co-Founder	Other personal services	Initial	35 mins	CO
ID-16	ORG-15	Co-Founder	Other personal services	Initial	35 mins	CO
ID-17	ORG-16	Director of People & Finance	Management consultant - for-profits	Initial	35 mins	NE
ID-18	ORG-17	Events & Communications Chair	B Local Community	Initial	35 mins	NC
ID-19	ORG-18	Founder	Apparel	Initial	35 mins	WA
ID-20	ORG-16	Consultant	Management consultant - for-profits	Initial	35 mins	NE
ID-21	ORG-19	VP. Sustainability	Food products	Initial	35 mins	DE
ID-22	ORG-20	Director of Accounting	Real estate development	Initial	45 mins	OR

TABLE 4, continued

Person	Company	Role	Industry Sector	Type	Duration	Location
ID-23	ORG-20	President/Principal	Real estate development	Initial	40 mins	OR
ID-24	ORG-21	Founder, CEO	Beverages	Initial	40 mins	FL
ID-25	ORG-22	Principal & CEO	Spec design (non-building)	Initial	35 mins	FL
ID-26	ORG-23	Manager, Operations & Investor Comm	Management consultant - for-profits	Initial	45 mins	CO
ID-27	ORG-24	Impact Manager	Technology-based support services	Initial	40 mins	TX
ID-28	ORG-16	Director of People & Finance	Management consultant - for-profits	Followup	30 mins	NE
ID-29	ORG-25	Co-Owner, Executive Producer	Advertising & market research	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-30	ORG-26	PNW Wholesale Territory Manager	Food products	Initial	35 mins	CA
ID-31	ORG-27	Governance Co-Lead	B Local	Initial	35 mins	ID
ID-32	ORG-28	Executive Chair	B Local	Initial	40 mins	IL
ID-33	ORG-29	Assistant Director of Workplaces	B Local	Initial	35 mins	TN
ID-34	ORG-06	VP, Food Waste Prevention	Software publishing and SaaS platforms	Followup	45 mins	OR
ID-35	ORG-04	Founder and Director	Advertising & market research	Followup	35 mins	OR
ID-36	ORG-07	Communications Director	Agricultural processing	Followup	35 mins	OR
ID-37	ORG-14	General Manager	Beverages	Followup	30 mins	SC
ID-38	ORG-07	Director Of Hospitality	Agricultural processing	Initial	45 mins	OR
ID-39	ORG-30	Founder & CEO	Contracting & building	Initial	45 mins	CA
ID-40	ORG-07	Head of Corporate Gardens	Agricultural processing	Initial	35 mins	OR
ID-41	ORG-06	Founder & President & CEO	Software publishing and SaaS platforms	Initial	40 mins	OR

Data Analysis

My research largely adhered to the principles of grounded theory, a methodology designed for constructing theories from data collected in the field (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory advocates for the development of theory that is deeply rooted in the data, rather than beginning with a theoretical framework into which data are placed. The essence of this approach is its inductive nature, starting without predetermined hypotheses and allowing the research findings to emerge from the data. This process involves an iterative cycle of data collection and analysis, where both activities inform each other and guide the direction of the study. The methodology emphasizes theoretical sampling, meaning that data collection decisions are made based on the evolving needs of the developing theory, rather than aiming to statistically represent a population (Eisenhardt, 2021). This is coupled with a constant comparative method of analysis, where data is continually compared to identify patterns and construct a theoretical framework that is grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Over time, Glaser and Strauss's collaborative path diverged, leading to the establishment of two distinct approaches within grounded theory: Glaserian and Straussian. The Glaserian approach emphasizes the emergence of theory from the data with minimal influence from existing literature, reflecting a more purist stance on the inductive nature of grounded theory. This approach is marked by a flexible and less structured coding process (Glaser, 1978). Conversely, the Straussian approach introduces a more structured framework for analysis. This approach is more prescriptive in its coding procedures and integrates existing literature as a tool for enhancing theoretical sensitivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Unlike the Glaserian method, the Straussian approach views literature as a means to deepen the researcher's understanding of the data, rather than as a framework within which to fit new data.

Recognizing the impracticality of the original Glaserian dictate to approach the field with no preconceived notions due to my existing knowledge in the subject area, my analysis leaned more toward the Straussian iteration of grounded theory. This approach is pragmatic for contemporary

research, where scholars often enter the field with some degree of theoretical understanding. Strauss and Corbin articulate this balance by suggesting that while researchers do not start with a preconceived theory, they do begin with a broad area of study, letting the theory emerge organically from the data. This methodological pivot allowed me to maintain an open mind, permitting the data to guide theory development while being cognizant of existing literature, thereby enriching the research process without being prematurely constrained by it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gehman et al., 2018). I recognize that a primary limitation of this approach lies in the potential for bias within self-reported interview data, which I sought to mitigate through a focus on probing for specific examples and experiences (e.g., *"Can you provide a brief example of how the certification is incorporated into internal communication?"*)

Upon settling on this analytical approach, I adopted a dynamic stance between the collected data and the literature, reminiscent of Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell's (2007) iterative model of theory building. This iterative cycle facilitated a deep, reciprocal engagement between emerging data insights and theoretical constructs, enriching both my understanding and the developing theoretical framework. Through successive waves of analysis and literature review, foundational insights crystallized, particularly via the examination of semi-structured interviews. These interviews were instrumental in capturing real-time narratives on how leaders of hybrid organizations engage in identity work toward themselves and their employees, especially in the context of B Corp certification. This identity work is crucial for understanding how leaders attempt to shape and reinforce the organization's hybrid identity among employees, highlighting the significance of certification in mediating the engagement between leaders and employees within these complex organizational settings.

In analyzing these narratives, I employed the Gioia methodology, a systematic and structured approach to analyzing qualitative data and building grounded theory (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). It was developed to bridge the gap between empirical data and theory development, offering a structured yet flexible framework for transforming raw qualitative data into robust, theory-laden

insights while ensuring rigor and transparency (Gehman et al., 2018). It involves an iterative process of moving back and forth between data collection, analysis, and literature to refine concepts. The Gioia method provides a clear, step-by-step process for data coding and analysis.

The process begins by creating first-order concepts, which involves coding the data using terms and language directly reflecting the participants' experiences. The focus is on staying close to the raw data and preserving the meaning within the interviewees' own words. Next, in the second-order themes stage, these first-order concepts are analyzed to identify broader patterns, relationships, and conceptual categories. Here, the analysis transitions from being purely descriptive to more conceptual. The third step involves synthesizing the second-order themes into overarching theoretical dimensions that represent the core theoretical constructs of the developing theory. These dimensions offer a holistic explanation of the phenomenon being studied. Throughout this analysis, the researcher constructs a data structure to organize first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions, demonstrating both the progression of analysis and the relationships between concepts. Finally, all of this culminates in a grounded theory model, developed from the aggregate dimensions. This model visually represents the core constructs and their relationships, offering a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon.

Before transitioning into the structured analysis of identity work using the Gioia methodology, it's important to address the complex identity tensions within the hybrid organizations I explored. The leaders recounted the intrinsic tensions they navigate as they reconcile the aspiration to uphold prosocial values with the practical realities of business. *"You know, a year's worth of pay for maternity and paternity care would be great in an organization that doesn't have to worry about profitability,"* one leader mused, illustrating the tension between idealism and fiscal responsibility. *"But what small business can afford that? Do I think parents should have this time? Absolutely. But can we, as a for-profit company, support it? That's cute."* This paints a picture of the trade-offs faced by businesses striving for social good within the constraints of the market. Another leader emphasized the importance

of authenticity in internal and external communications, cautioning against discrepancies that could lead to negative perceptions: *"We call it the brand sandwich—your public proclamations must match the actual experiences of your employees. The first ones to call out inconsistencies are the employees themselves, especially if you're out there claiming, 'We're the best company ever,' while they feel neglected."* These insights illustrate the challenges leaders of hybrid organizations face in maintaining a prosocial mission alongside the demands of a viable business.

Adhering to the Gioia method, my analysis began by organizing primary data—verbatim interview quotes—into a structured database using NVivo software. The initial coding process was meticulous, leading to the generation of 65 first-order codes captured in Table 5, each rooted in specific statements from interviewees about their experiences with the B Corp certification process. An illustrative example includes a leader's reflection on the process of educating staff about B Corp, which was coded as "Providing fact sheet about B Corp during staff meetings." This leader highlighted how they prepared staff to effectively communicate the significance of the certification to customers, revealing the strategic use of B Corp as a tool for aligning and articulating organizational values.

Prompted by these insights, I delved into the literature specifically focusing on the relational, discursive, and material aspects of identity work as they pertain to certifications. This literature review aimed to dissect how B Corp certification influences the interpersonal relations within the company, as well as its effect the narratives and storytelling shared within the organization and the tangible, visual artifacts displayed in the organization. For example, discussing B Corp during regular company meetings, as cited in another quote, was coded as "Using B Corp status as a reference point for discussion." This example illustrates the relational aspect of identity work where the certification fosters ongoing dialogues, reinforcing interpersonal connections and organizational cohesion at all levels.

The integration of these specific dimensions of identity work into the analysis provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of how certifications like B Corp shape organizational practices and self-

conception. This engagement not only provided a contrast to the first-order concepts but also enriched the analysis with a deeper theoretical understanding. It highlighted the multifaceted ways in which B Corp certification is intertwined with the very fabric of organizational identity, influencing not just what organizations do, but how they think about what they do and communicate these thoughts both internally and externally. Ultimately, the literature related directly to my findings by offering a framework through which the tangible and intangible transformations brought about by B Corp certification could be systematically understood and articulated.

The interplay between the first-order codes and the literature review facilitated the consolidation of these codes into second-order themes, moving the analysis from a purely descriptive to a more conceptual level. Themes such as "Explaining why B Corp is aligned" and "Making it part of regular conversation inside company" began to emerge, highlighting the certification's multifaceted role in shaping and communicating organizational identity. Table 5 depicts these 20 second-order themes and their relationship to the first-order codes, illustrating how detailed accounts from organizational leaders were abstracted into broader thematic constructs. These second-order themes were further synthesized to form overarching aggregate theoretical constructs, capturing the essence of identity work influenced by prosocial certifications within hybrid organizations. This synthesis culminated in seven overarching categories that articulated the nuanced interplay among leaders, organizational identity, and prosocial certifications. Each category represents a distinct aspect of how certifications contribute to the ongoing process of identity construction and communication within organizations striving to balance social and commercial objectives.

Lastly, an additional round of analysis was conducted to assign each aggregate theoretical dimension under relational, material, or discursive identity work. This interpretative step, though beyond the prototypical Gioia method, was necessary to capture the complexity of identity work in hybrid organizations and to align with the overarching theoretical framework of the study. For instance, “Communicating by linking with identity claims from social referents” was assigned under relational

identity work because it involves constructing identity through interactions with social referents. On the other hand, “Guiding employees' work to align with organizational identity claims” was assigned under discursive identity work as it involves using language or narratives to identities within the organization. In Table 5, each aggregate theoretical dimension has been labeled with its corresponding type of identity work in parentheses. These constructs form the core of my grounded empirical model, each supported by examples from the data, as demonstrated and discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

TABLE 5: Data Structure

First-order Codes	Second-order Themes	Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions
Having to document and quantify values Having to hold up to a standard Having to track source of cash flow Providing structure and accountability	Affiliating with social referents enhances accountability with org ID	Connecting with ID claims of social referent to enhance understanding of org ID *(Relational ID work for leaders)*
Representing movement larger than company itself Getting involved with B Corp activities Sense of belonging in a B Corp community Strong local presence of B Corps	Aligning org ID with a community of like-minded businesses	
Facilitate dialogues on DEI via a messaging app Providing support for B Corp community	Supporting ID claims from social referents	
Sharing B Corp status with Patagonia validates core values Strength in numbers of B Corp Taking a collective stand with other business	Validating org ID through peer aspiration	
Synthesizing need for improvement Formal declaration of assumed values and goals	Revising values and org ID through certification	Integrating ID claims from social referents into practices *(Relational ID work for leaders)*
Learning curve on B Corp standards Not having expertise on ESG Help from other B Corp in the community	Seeking knowledge about certification to better align actions with org ID	
Selected projects based on company mission Trying to utilize local suppliers Increased awareness on impact from client work	Protecting org ID by selecting B Corp-aligned partners	
Using B Corp status to differentiate Providing language to stand on to talk to people	Referencing B Corp to articulate values and org ID	
Writing policies with B Corp in mind Prioritizing pro bono work Needs to do a enhance DEI as a B Corp Internal framework for long term sustainability journeys	Referencing B Corp to implement practices to better align with org ID	
Reflecting company values as an early adopter Verifying what we are saying to be true Strive to honor the spirit of B Corp certification even without it Validating existing core values and mission	Validating org ID through certification	

TABLE 5, continued

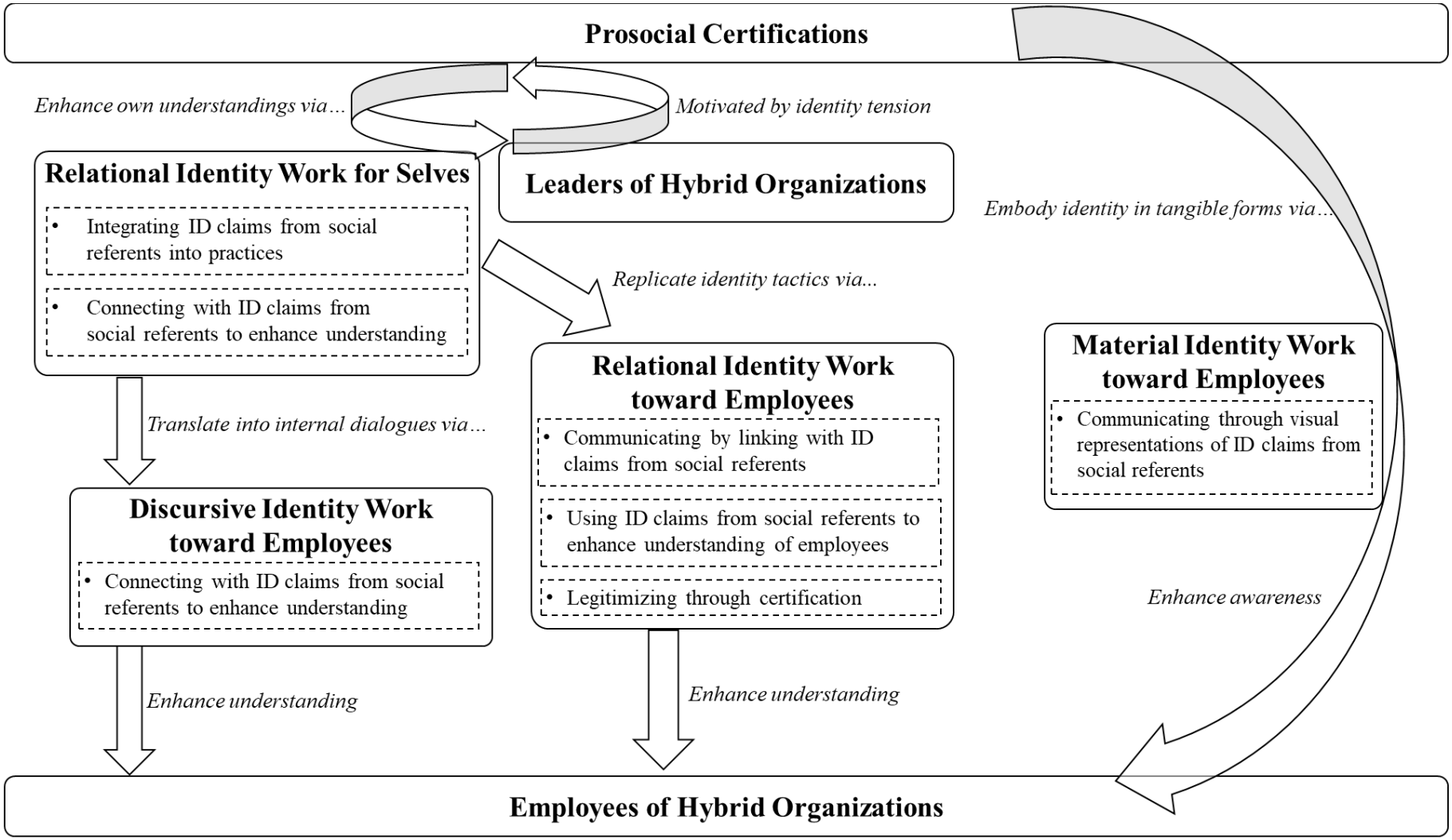
First-order Codes	Second-order Themes	Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions
Using YouTube shorts to explain certification Providing fact sheet about B Corp during staff meetings Showing examples of other B Corps to employees	Explaining why B Corp is aligned	Communicating org ID by linking with ID claims from social referents *(Relational ID work for employees)*
Using B Corp status as a reference point for discussion Reiterating core values during meetings walking employees through B Corp assessment	Making it part of regular conversation inside company	
Increased feedback from employees Members ask what B certification entails More questions from employees about producer responsibility since becoming a B Corp Trying to get members think like an owner	Empowering employees to shape org values	
Equipping newcomers with baseline knowledge Incorporation into training and onboarding Internal DEI training	Training employees on values	
Incorporating values in performance evaluations Increasing consciousness and accountability among employees Having direct relations with top managers	Affiliating with social referents enhances accountability and alignment with org ID	Drawing on ID claims of social referents to enhance understanding of org ID by employees *(Relational ID work for employees)*
Providing engagement opportunities at local B event Increased community involvement by employees Giving employees opportunities to be involved with B Corp community	Aligning org ID with a community of like-minded businesses – for employees	
Equating B Corp values into company initiatives Lends legitimacy to leadership's vision and values Less inspiring when communicating company values without B Corp status Proving the commitment	Legitimizing org ID through certification for employees	Legitimizing through certification *(Relational ID work for employees)*
Working hard to listen to members Having informal discussions Surveying for employee feedback	Asking for employees' feedback on alignment with org ID	Guiding employees' work to align with org ID claims *(Discursive ID work for employees)*
Taking employees to happy hours and volunteer hours Values reflected in workplace Ethical recycling and communication as reflection of core values Leading by example to employees	Embedding org ID through work practices	
Putting B Corp logos on everything Logo, scores, and platform making communication short and sweet Using tshirts with slogans Putting B Corp logos in training and recruiting documents	Displaying a logo	Communicating org ID claims by connecting with visuals of social referent ID *(Material ID work for employees)*

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In presenting the findings, I organize the aggregate theoretical dimensions into four specific categories based on the types and objects of identity work leaders engaged: 1) relational identity work involving leaders themselves, 2) relational identity work toward employees, 3) discursive identity work toward employees, and 4) material identity work toward employees. These categories emerged from the empirical data through a grounded theory approach, where I coded the data to identify patterns and themes. By analyzing these themes, I was able to group them into the four aforementioned categories, which collectively illustrate how leaders leverage prosocial certifications in engaging in identity work in an attempt to enhance the collective understanding of hybrid organizational identity. The empirically grounded model shown in Figure 1 encapsulates these categories.

The model begins with leaders' relational identity work for themselves, which involves integrating identity claims from social referents and aligning these with their own values and practices. This foundational work is crucial for leaders to harmonize their identities with the organizational mission. Moving outward, the model addresses relational identity work toward employees, where leaders replicate their alignment strategies through inclusive communication and participative decision-making, helping employees understand and align with the organizational identity. Additionally, the model describes discursive identity work toward employees, using narratives and formal communications to instill a collective sense of purpose and values, including the significance of B Corp certification. Finally, the model highlights material identity work toward employees, where leaders use tangible symbols like logos and branded materials to visually reinforce the organization’s identity, serving as constant reminders of its values and mission.

FIGURE 1: Empirically Grounded Model



Relational Identity Work by Leaders Toward Selves

The empirically grounded model as shown in Figure 1 starts with exploring how leaders in hybrid organizations leverage prosocial certifications to navigate the complexities of their own identities. At its core, the model focuses on "Relational Identity Work for Selves." This describes the active process leaders undertake to understand and harmonize their own social values with the identity of their organization. Leaders are driven to engage in this identity work by an underlying identity tension, arising from the potential conflict between a leader's personal values and the demands of managing a hybrid organization.

The model outlines two key processes through which prosocial certifications can support a leader's identity work. Firstly, certifications promote self-reflection and help leaders better understand their own social values and commitments. This heightened self-awareness is critical for aligning a leader's social identity with the overall mission of the organization. Secondly, by emphasizing values like social good and community building, prosocial certifications connect a leader's aspirations with those of the organization. This establishes a bridge that allows the leader to see how their values align with the company's goals. Leaders of hybrid organizations reflected a profound engagement in relational identity work. This type of identity work emphasized the interactions between the self and others within a social context, particularly how leaders enacted their identities in relation to B Corp certification.

Connecting with identity claims of social referent to enhance understanding

In this section, I examine how leaders harness B Corp certification to enhance their own understanding of and commitment to their organization’s identity. This process involves adopting identity claims from social referents, which fosters accountability while also enriching the leader’s alignment with the broader social standards that these certifications embody. Leaders

utilize these certifications as a mirror to reflect their own roles and the values they wish to instill throughout their organizations. The second-order themes discussed below illustrate the various ways leaders integrate these external standards into their personal and organizational practices.

Affiliating with social referents enhances accountability with organizational identity. The incorporation of Certified B Corporation standards markedly transformed leadership practices in hybrid organizations, notably advancing documentation, accountability, financial transparency, and decision-making processes. Such changes, anchored in identity work, enabled leaders to redefine and manifest their organizational roles. Meticulous documentation required by B Corporation certification became a pivotal exercise for leaders to crystallize and communicate their values. A leader captured the essence of this process in an interview:

> "I don't know if you've gone through the detailed process, but they make you document everything. It's tedious but ultimately, it shows you exactly where you stand on your values." (ID-06 ORG-06)

The certification process prompted a continuous reassessment, as leaders aligned their actions with professed values. This act of ongoing validation was crucial to affirming the organization's identity. Another leader conveyed the weight of this endeavor:

> "But then since you become a B Corp, you're held to that standard. It's not just about saying you're ethical, you have to prove it, constantly." (ID-04 ORG-04)

Financial practices became a focal point of scrutiny, aligning monetary flows with the organization's ethical framework. The same leader above noted the impact of this new requirement:

> "It didn't really shift much in how we do things on a day-to-day basis, except for how we track where every dollar comes from and goes. It's a big change." (ID-04 ORG-04)

Transparent decision-making processes also emerged as a core leadership practice, enhancing employee engagement with the company's strategic aims. An informant elaborated on this transformation:

> "We're trying to help them [employees] make intelligent decisions by being completely transparent organization in our billing practices and in our how we hire our subcontractors…" (ID-34 ORG-30)

The structural guidance from B Corp certification provided leaders with a blueprint for action, steering the organization from well-meaning intentions to accountable practices. A manager reflected on this transition:

> "So then when I joined [company], we always had good intentions. But with B Corp, there's a structure to follow, which really helps keep us accountable." (ID-17 ORG-16)

These insights from leaders underscore an engaged process of identity work, shaped by B Corp certification. The thorough documentation, ongoing accountability, and enhanced transparency all converge to reinforce the congruence between leaders' practices and their organizational identities. This alignment bolsters the organization's credibility and solidifies the collective commitment of leaders and staff to their foundational values and mission.

Aligning organizational identity with a community of like-minded businesses. Leaders expressed a strong sense of being part of a larger movement, which went beyond the individual goals of their companies to embrace a collective identity. This sense of being part of something bigger shaped how leaders perceived their role and the impact of their organization. It influenced their identity by connecting their personal and organizational actions to a wider social mission, reinforcing their commitment to these ideals:

> "But I think people forget that in our company, it was always about being part of something bigger. And B Corp just gave that a name." (ID-20 ORG-16)

Recognizing the presence and efforts of other B Corps in the community served as a significant relational anchor for leaders. It reassured them that their challenges and aspirations were shared, which normalized their experiences and embedded their identity within a network of peers:

> "You know, I saw that question and I see, and it's like, we're not alone. There are others out here trying to do good, trying to make things work right." (ID-03 ORG-03)

One interviewee spoke on the sense of support and connectivity felt by being part of the B Corp community. The affiliation with the community was described as instrumental in navigating preconceptions and fostering collaborative networks:

> "It just being part of the B Local community and seeing how other companies approach problems, that's been invaluable." (ID-15 ORG-15)

An account of a leader observing the rising presence of B Corps in their vicinity and choosing to join this expanding circle suggests an identity alignment process where the local movement's momentum influences individual organizational identity formation:

> "Once you're kind of in that realm you see it everywhere... we started our process of trying to become a B Corp" (ID-04 ORG-04)

Finally, the reflection of a manager who was motivated by larger corporations gaining B Corp status reveals an aspirational identity work where organizations look to peers for inspiration and validation of their identity within a larger reference group:

> "Some larger companies that we respect a lot... became a B Corp... it's great that there are companies of all sizes from Oregon who are part of the B Corp community" (ID-09 ORG-09)

In essence, the accounts illustrate how leaders actively mold their organizational personas to join a network of businesses committed to social responsibility. This shaping of identity aligns that of a wider community, one that organizations strive to embrace and manifest by connecting with the B Corp movement. These actions together exemplify a type of identity work where

leaders are not merely adopting B Corp values internally; they are also actively engaging with broader social contexts, thus affirming their organization's commitment to a collective business identity.

Supporting identity claims from social referents. Leaders of hybrid organizations shared accounts of their active participation in practices that bolster a sense of unity and support within a community of like-minded businesses. These leaders engaged in initiatives that facilitated important discussions and offered direct support to their community, showcasing a commitment to a collective social identity that extends beyond their individual organizational goals. They often took proactive steps to facilitate dialogues on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) using a messaging platform. This platform became a vital tool for enhancing open communication and collaboration across the B Corp community. By promoting an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives were not just welcomed but actively sought, these dialogues played a crucial role in shaping the collective identity. This effort helped ensure that the community's practices and values continually evolved to reflect a broad and inclusive understanding of social justice and equity:

> "So they started a Slack channel called B Corps for Justice, which has been a fantastic resource. I'm constantly on there, learning, getting resources, sharing information." (ID-12 ORG-12)

Additionally, leaders demonstrated their support for the B Corp community through contributions to community events and activities. By donating products and participating in events, they reinforced a culture of mutual support and collaboration that is essential for sustaining the collective identity of the community of impact-driven businesses. This type of support solidified the leaders' own identities as committed members of a group that values social responsibility:

> "I always donate product to their raffles and other events, and I make sure to participate whenever I can to help out." (ID-08 ORG-08)

These efforts by leaders to foster dialogue and provide tangible support are central to how their organizational identities align with the broader social identity of the community. Their identity work extends beyond the boundaries of their companies to embrace and uplift the collective identity of the B Corp community. This enhances the leaders' comprehension of what it means to be part of a hybrid organization that is both commercially viable and socially and ethically conscientious.

Validating organizational identity through peer aspiration. Leaders in hybrid organizations further reflected on being part of a broader community that shares similar social and environmental goals. The discussions centered around their affiliation with respected entities within the B Corp community, emphasizing how these associations contribute to their organizational identity and strengthen their commitment to shared values. One leader specifically reflected on the significant impact of sharing their B Corp status with well-respected companies like Patagonia. This affiliation not only validated their own efforts but also bolstered their reputation by association, enhancing how they were perceived both internally and externally. By aligning with such well-established companies, leaders reinforced their organization's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, which in turn supported their identity work within and beyond the community:

> "I think aside from the status of being in the same category as Patagonia, it helps us internally to feel validated about what we're doing. It's a big deal." (ID-33 ORG-07)

Leaders also spoke about the strength found in the numbers of B Corps, which provided a collective force that emphasized the power of unified efforts. This sense of strength in numbers

enhanced their identity as part of a larger movement, making individual challenges more manageable and fostering a shared spirit of perseverance and collaboration:

> "Yeah, it was definitely a little frustrating at times, but being part of a bigger group going through the same struggles helps us push through." (ID-04 ORG-04)

Additionally, managers emphasized the importance of taking a collective stand with other businesses within the B Corp community. This collaborative stance was seen as a powerful tool for effecting broader change, particularly in challenging environments or against formidable opponents. By joining forces, they strengthened their organizational identity as part of a proactive and resilient community:

> "A lot of what inspired the decision to move forward with certification was the chance to stand with others. It's about setting a precedent, about showing that we can and we will make a difference together." (ID-01 ORG-01)

These reflections illustrate how leaders actively engaged in validating their organizational identities as belonging to a broader, aspirational peer group. By aligning with respected entities, leveraging the strength in numbers, and taking collective stands, they contributed to a shared framework that promotes sustainability and social responsibility. These actions helped to validate their identities within the context of the B Corp community, affirming their place among aspirational peers and reinforcing their commitment to shared values and goals. This engagement supported their broader identity work, subtly intertwining their organizational missions with the collective aspirations of the community, fostering a resilient, mission-driven business culture.

Integrating identity claims from social referents into practices

In this section, I delve into how leaders harness B Corp certification to integrate the identity claims of their social referents into their own organizational identity. By revising values and organizational practices, seeking knowledge about certification requirements, protecting

organizational identity through selective partnerships, and using B Corp as a benchmark to articulate values to others, leaders enhance their organizational alignment with broader social standards. These efforts helped redefine the company's mission and operational strategies.

Revising values and organizational identity through certification. Leaders shared their insights on how their engagement with B Corp certification influenced their organizational identity, particularly how they revised their values and aligned them with broader social standards. Each response reflects a deep engagement in identity work, where individual informants considered the implications of certification on their organizational practices. One manager discussed the synthesis of recognizing the need for improvement within their organization. The certification process prompted a critical evaluation of existing practices, revealing gaps and initiating efforts to align more closely with the high standards required for certification. This introspection was crucial as it forced the organization to confront its actual practices versus its aspirations, thereby facilitating a more genuine alignment with its stated mission:

> "And the answer was no, like, we knew that it was not enough just to think we were doing okay. We had to step it up, make real changes that were tangible, not just on paper." (ID-07 ORG-07)

Another leader described how the formal declaration of previously assumed values and goals through the B Corp certification altered the organization's approach to its mission and practices. This formalization process not only made their commitments public but also more binding and accountable, thus embedding these values more deeply into the organizational fabric. It provided a framework that helped structure their initiatives and measure their impact more effectively:

> "I think that [B Certification] has changed the way we look at our mission. It's not just an idea now; it's something we live out every day,

> something we're accountable for to ourselves and our community." (ID-01 ORG-01)

These individual insights illustrate how the process of obtaining B Corp certification acted as a catalyst for revising and refining organizational values and identity. The informant's experiences of recognizing inadequacies and formalizing values represent a broader movement within their organizations toward aligning more closely with established social and environmental standards. This alignment process involved not just a superficial adoption of values but a deep, structural change in how these organizations perceived and enacted their roles within their communities and industries. Through this engagement, the certification helped solidify their identities as socially responsible businesses, aligning their internal practices with the aspirational standards set by the B Corp community. This engagement enhanced their legitimacy and integrity.

Seeking knowledge about certification to better align actions with organizational identity. The leaders in hybrid organizations encountered various challenges and learning experiences as they navigated the B Corp certification process. Each quote reflects an individual's pursuit to better align their actions with the values and standards of B Corp certification, a journey filled with self-education and community support. An informant discussed the initial challenge and ongoing process of understanding the B Corp scoring system, noting that not every criterion applied to their business and that achieving high scores in some areas could come at the cost of compromising their business model. This acknowledgment reveals a nuanced understanding that compliance is not a one-size-fits-all scenario and that alignment with B Corp standards requires a tailored approach:

> "The B Corp scoring method has been an interesting learning curve because you know, with something a score of 200 you know typically ourselves and probably most companies would think, you have to be this

> good, or you know some higher score so it's a little bit of a shock, even the first time around, of understanding that you know, like 80 is a decent score, 100 is a good score, if you get over 120 it's like a really great score somewhere in those ranges you know that's harder to wrap your head around..." (ID-01 ORG-01)

An owner of a company found it difficult to understand specific ESG terminology and expressed frustration over the lack of readily available information that could assist them as part of the certification process. This difficulty highlights the complexities involved in aligning business practices with standardized ESG measures:

> "Like, there's stuff in the certification questionnaires that they don't give enough information on. That maybe if you're a professional, ESG person, you know, the difference between what is it phase one, phase two, and Phase Three are level one, level two, and level three carbon emissions, but I don't..." (ID-34 ORG-30)

The same owner hence took on the responsibility of learning about and navigating the B Corp certification process independently, highlighting the self-directed aspect of aligning the company's practices with the certification requirements:

> "My time is free to me. I didn't learn about the beehive until well, after I was a B Corp. So I didn't have that resource..." (ID-34 ORG-30)

Seeking assistance from other B Corps in the community was a strategy employed by one leader. This informant leveraged resources such as reading relevant materials, consulting with a partner company already certified as a B Corp, and even hiring a consultant to navigate the process, demonstrating the communal and interdependent nature of learning and adapting within the B Corp ecosystem:

> "First is I bought the book, the B Corps, the updated version at that point. So I read that, and then my partner's company is a co-op, based in Boulder, Colorado, they're also a B Corp, and the woman who led them through their certification process, she became just a resource for me..." (ID-17 ORG-16)

Another leader reached out to a brewery that was already certified for guidance, which, along with multiple conversations with B Lab representatives, provided clarification and support throughout the certification process. This proactive outreach for knowledge and assistance showcases a commitment to fully understand and meet the B Corp criteria:

> "I reached out to at least one brewery that was already certified. So I reached out to her and we shared an email or two and we got on the phone and had a conversation and chatted about what process they went through..." (ID-14 ORG-14)

The informants' experiences illustrate a dedicated effort to seek knowledge and guidance to align their actions with the rigorous standards of B Corp certification. This individual journey of seeking expertise, engaging in self-directed learning, and actively seeking support from the community highlights the ongoing process of revising organizational values and identity. The ultimate goal for these leaders was not only to meet external standards but also to ensure that their organizational practices reflected a commitment to the principles and values that B Corp represents, thus validating and solidifying their organizational identity as part of a socially responsible business community.

Protecting organizational identity by selecting B Corp-aligned partners. Leaders within the hybrid organizations have undertaken significant steps to ensure that their company's practices and partnerships align with the principles upheld by B Corp certification. Their narrative reflects a conscientious journey to protect and reinforce their organizational identity through deliberate choices influenced by their B Corp affiliation. A leader spoke about using company values in tandem with B Corp certification as a framework to evaluate and decline projects that do not align with the company's values. This decision-making process was used as an educational moment for the team, ensuring that their actions were consistent with their publicly stated commitments and boundaries:

> "How we'll most frequently talk about like mission is typically when we're talking about new requests for proposals or projects, people will reach out to us and they'll ask us to work on a project. And I will say no, and I will explain to the team, like we can't do this, because of these values..." (ID-04 ORG-04)

Another interviewee explained that the certification process led them to scrutinize their supplier relationships, aiming to foster more local business partnerships. This shift was an embodiment of the company's commitment to community sustainability and economic support:

> "So we did need to look at like some of our supplier relationships and see if we could do more localized spending..." (ID-14 ORG-14)

An informant described how B Corp philosophies have been integrated into their client work and operational decisions, thereby influencing the company's impact beyond direct environmental contributions. The reflection provided reveals a broader interpretation of impact, one that encompasses the quality and nature of client work aligned with B Corp's values:

> "But there are, you know, ways that it might come up within our client work. And so we're working with a company that is, you know, just rethinking how to do packaging..." (ID-17 ORG-16)

These individual accounts demonstrate a collective effort by the leaders to understand and adhere to the B Corp standards, and ultimately incorporating these standards into the fabric of their organizational identities. By choosing projects, partners, and practices that reflect their B Corp alignment, they protect and strengthen their organizational identity. This process entails a continuous revision of values and practices, ensuring that the organization's identity remains in line with the evolving standards and expectations of the B Corp community. Through this alignment, leaders show a commitment to operationalizing their values, ultimately fostering an organizational culture that is ethically congruent and socially responsible.

Referencing B Corp to articulate values and organizational identity. The accounts below showcase how leaders within their organizations used their B Corp certification as a strategic

tool to articulate and affirm their values during business interactions. Each leader's statement serves as a testament to the deliberate integration of B Corp ideals into their organizational identity and how they communicate this alignment to others. A manager recounted that they explicitly showcased their B Corp certification during pitches as a testament to their commitment to responsible business practices. This certification was not merely a badge but a statement of distinction—a clear marker that set them apart in the competitive landscape and underscored principles of sustainability and ethical conduct in their operations:

> "Now, I don't think it's, you know, nobody's found out that we're a B Corp, and it's like, all of a sudden knocking on our door wanting to do a bunch of work. But we think it's a little bit of a differentiator..." (ID-28 ORG-25)

Another informant described how the B Corp framework equipped the company with a set of terms and principles that bolstered their ability to communicate their commitment to sustainability and impact with confidence. This language became a vital tool for discussions, enabling the organization to stand firmly on its foundational values when engaging with employees, clients, and the broader community:

> "And they're very interested to hear what we're doing and what experiments we're trying out and how we're trying to keep impact in mind in all the things. Oh, so I see it as like, it's just kind of like given us some language and some foundation to stand on..." (ID-17 ORG-16)

Collectively, these quotes from the leaders reflected their engagement in a form of identity work that leveraged their B Corp certification as a means of articulating and validating their organizational values to external parties. By referencing their B Corp status in various business contexts, they effectively communicated the essence of their company's mission and practices. This approach helped differentiating their business hat aligned their organizational identity with a set of recognized, aspirational standards. Through such engagement, they forged a

stronger connection with their clients and peers, reinforcing a shared understanding and appreciation for the values and goals that their B Corp certification represented.

Referencing B Corp to implement practices to better align with organizational identity. Leaders within hybrid organizations have embraced the B Corp certification process as a significant contributor to shaping their organizational identity, particularly in terms of implementing practices that resonate with their values. To start, a manager recognized that the B Corp certification process opened their eyes to environmental conservation and social equity aspects they hadn't previously considered, enhancing their understanding of what was essential for their organization's impact and growth:

> "And it opened my eyes to additional aspects of what was important? And what ways that I could push the envelope of environmental conservation and social equity?" (ID-34 ORG-30)

The leader used the B Corp standards as a blueprint for drafting company policies, demonstrating how these standards became an integral part of the organizational DNA, guiding not just operational but strategic initiatives as well. Faced with the absence of previous templates or documentation, another leader encountered challenges in formulating new policies that would meet B Corp standards, highlighting the meticulous and innovative work that goes into such endeavors:

> "I basically like wrote our, our company policies with the B Corp standards in mind. Because like, at the time, when it's just the founder, and you don't really like a lot of stuff isn't documented, right?" (ID-19 ORG-18)

B Corp certification was primarily seen by the company as a tool to guide internal practices and decision-making, reflecting an internalization of these values rather than using them merely as a marketing instrument:

> "I'm not going to throw the logo on people's faces, if they buy our product. It is more of a tool that when you know we've grown the size and scale that we that we envision a company to be a lot of naysayers come and say, Well, why are you doing this?" (ID-24 ORG-21)

The process of B Corp certification led a leader to realize areas where the company could elevate its community involvement through pro bono work, indicating a commitment to social impact and a reflection of its corporate identity:

> "And so a lot of the like charitable giving, we do there and we're trying to figure out how to increase our pro bono work within that area..." (ID-17 ORG-16)

The certification also served as a reminder and motivator for the team to consider new strategies beneficial to the organization, revealing a proactive approach to development. Company assessments informed future strategic efforts, with a leader acknowledging the role of B Corp certification in guiding organizational focus on continual improvement:

> "And so it's just kind of a good catalyst like, Okay, let's do this. Like, let's work on this..." (ID-27 ORG-24)

> "So we will, we're already working on that, like how to improve our score, what areas we want to focus on..." (ID-17 ORG-16)

These narratives from individual leaders within their respective organizations indicate a deliberate process of using B Corp certification to revisit and refine organizational values and identity. The process served as an impetus for change, providing a structured framework to evaluate and improve upon existing practices, set strategic goals, and deepen their commitment to sustainability, social equity, and community impact. It acted as a catalyst for aligning the company's operations with its foundational identity, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and conscious business conduct. Through this engagement, the certification became more than a badge of honor; it was a guiding force in the company's evolution, ensuring

that its identity and values were not only professed but actively realized in every facet of the business.

Validating organizational identity through certification. The reflections from leaders within the dataset describe an experience where B Corp certification helped leaders reflect on the organization's values and actions. Through the process of certification, each leader grappled with the alignment of their business practices to a set of standards that resonated with their core values. One leader felt that their role as an early adopter of B Corp certification was a true representation of their company's values, indicating a deep congruence between their organizational identity and the values upheld by B Corp. This sense of alignment, although initially not recognized by consumers, was something they believed was evolving:

> "I think the upside is we feel like the certification reflects our values and as an early adopter there were many years where I don't think consumers really understood the certification..." (ID-02 ORG-02)

Another leader shared a sense of personal satisfaction and alignment from ensuring that business decisions mirrored their individual values, suggesting that the B Corp certification was a natural extension of their personal ethos into the business realm:

> "When the reality is we wanted to become a B Corp, we didn't have to become a B Corp. Right wanted to become a B Corp. and, and we wanted to have our business be a reflection of who we are as, as people and individuals..." (ID-28 ORG-25)

The same leader considered the certification process an opportunity to put their commitment to social good into practice, enhancing the wellbeing of their employees and the local community. This enactment of values in tangible ways emphasized the harmony between their organizational identity and their actions:

> "I felt really good. Being able to give people raises, I felt really good writing checks that were going out to local nonprofits..." (ID-28 ORG-25)

The process also prompted introspection and reassurance, as leaders considered how their actions within the business aligned with their reasons for founding the company. This reflective practice validated that their organizational identity was not only claimed but also lived. A manager noted a shift in the purpose of B Corp certification, moving from a sales tool to a form of public accountability, ensuring their practices were verifiable and transparent:

> "Using the certification to kind of walk the walk, I say, like, as I mentioned before, we could talk to talk and say we're a company, just general practices and kind of the world whatever..." (ID-24 ORG-21)

Lastly, the certification served as a validation of existing practices for a leader, whose company's values were already in sync with B Corp standards, indicating that the process was less about transformation and more about affirmation of their ongoing efforts:

> "So really, we were already living by those core values and that mission, and we got this certification because it validated what we were already doing..." (ID-14 ORG-14)

Collectively, these leaders' reflections depict how B Corp certification has played a crucial role in 'Validating work (org ID & actions) through certification.' The certification acted as a mirror, reflecting its intrinsic values and serving as a benchmark for their business practices. This validation process has not only affirmed the authenticity of their organizational identity but has also encouraged leaders to delve deeper into their operational practices, ensuring they continue to align with the values and mission of their organization. It's a continuous journey of aligning their organizational identity with the esteemed B Corp standards, ultimately enhancing the integrity and public perception of their business.

In summary, prosocial certifications emerge as a pivotal tool for leaders engaging in relational identity work. By facilitating a rigorous reassessment of their company's practices against prosocial standards, leaders use the certification as a touchstone to verify and validate the congruence of their organizational actions with core values and social missions. It affords leaders

the opportunity to introspect and demonstrate their commitment to stakeholders, reinforcing their company's identity as socially responsible entities. This external acknowledgment serves to strengthen the credibility of their organizational values, establishing a transparent, accountable presence within a community that prizes ethical business conduct. Through continuous engagement with B Corp standards, leaders ensure their values are more than just internal guidelines; they are lived experiences that resonate with and contribute to a collective identity. Hence, B Corp certification is more than a marker of compliance; it is an integral part of the identity work that leaders undertake to solidify their standing in a community of businesses dedicated to advancing social and environmental well-being.

Relational Identity Work by Leaders Toward Employees

Building on the relational identity work done by leaders toward themselves, the model progresses to relational identity work toward employees, encapsulating how the introspective practices are extended to employees within hybrid organizations. This extension signifies an effort to infuse the workforce with the identity claims derived from prosocial certifications. Leaders who have embraced their own identity work replicate these tactics through inclusive communication, participative decision-making, and co-creation of the organizational narrative. This cultivates a work environment where employees' understanding of the organization's identity is enhanced. The model captures a process where the alignment of personal and organizational values, fostered by leaders, is mirrored and perpetuated toward employees, thereby nurturing a unified identity within the hybrid organization. Leaders of hybrid organizations who employed relational identity worked not only on self-reflection and external validation, but also pivotally on their engagement with employees. Through the lens of B Corp

certification, leaders cultivate an organizational identity that echoes their commitment to social and environmental values.

Communicating by linking with identity claims from social referents

In this section, I explore how leaders communicate organizational identity claims by leveraging the associations with B Corp standards. By actively disseminating knowledge, integrating B Corp values into regular conversations, empowering employees, and conducting targeted training, leaders ensure a thorough understanding of the company's ethical stance and social responsibilities within their organizations. These efforts clarified the significance of fostering a shared commitment to these values among employees. The second-order themes discussed next illustrate these practices of fostering a cohesive organizational identity that aligns with the broader B Corp community.

Explaining why B Corp is aligned. The dissemination of knowledge within the organization surfaced as a pivotal element in the narrative of one informant. This leader took a proactive stance in dispelling ambiguity by sending a thorough email that juxtaposed the attributes of PVC and B Corps, crafting a comprehensive side-by-side analysis to enrich the team's understanding. The informant articulated:

> "And then I sent out information to the team afterward because people get confused with PVC and B Corps, one of the differences so I had a side by side comparison...so folks can have a better understanding of it." (ID-27 ORG-24)

Further emphasizing the essentiality of foundational comprehension, another informant discussed their commitment to ensuring that every member grasped the essence of B Corp certification and its significance to the firm's values. The leader expressed:

> "We like to make sure that all of our employees have at least some, some basic understanding of B Corp status and why it's important, what's involved in it..." (ID-33 ORG-07)

An interviewee depicted the instructional experience as not merely an obligation but a source of enjoyment, elucidating the joy derived from enlightening employees about the B Corp movement and instilling a sense of pride:

> "...it was really fun getting to educate people on what B Lab is...they should be really proud of it and we should share about it with everybody we know." (ID-27 ORG-24)

In a different vein, a leader described how the organization forged an educational resource—a fact sheet—shared during staff gatherings to clarify what it entails to be a B Corp and the intricacies of the certification process:

> "But then during staff meetings...I created a fact sheet for them on this is what a B Corp is...so that when we announced if customers would come in and go, What is this B Corps thing? they would be knowledgeable enough to be able to answer." (ID-14 ORG-14)

Lastly, one manager detailed how showcasing the trajectories of other successful B Corps served to enlighten and potentially motivate the employees about the B Corp movement's evolution and impact:

> "We spent some time showing the team examples about other deep works...a little bit of history of deep work early days, and how it's evolved over time..." (ID-21 ORG-19)

Through these various approaches, the informants engaged in an intricate form of identity work. By assiduously imparting knowledge about B Corp certification, they fostered a collective organizational identity that was capable of articulating the company's values and ethical stance, signifying a continuous engagement in shaping an organizational identity that resonates with the B Corp philosophy.

Making it part of regular conversation inside company. A manager illustrated the ongoing dialogue within the organization, mentioning how the B Corp status regularly surfaced in monthly all-hands meetings, becoming a touchstone for shared values and accomplishments:

> "But, you know, it's a constant reference point, right. So in these monthly, all-hands meetings... we're sort of celebrating, if you will, our B Corp status amongst our employees." (ID-06 ORG-06)

In meetings, the company practice of revisiting its core values was a consistent opening act, reinforcing the principles that align closely with B Corp certification and ensuring these values remain current and relevant:

> "And we do that all the time. All of our meetings, kind of start with our reiteration of our core values..." (ID-34 ORG-30)

A leader detailed how they provided an in-depth walkthrough of the B Lab assessment for employees, discussing scores and the rigorous process of certification. This transparency aimed to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the significance of B Corp certification and its alignment with the company's actions:

> "Yeah, no, I walked them through every step... the hope was that everyone had a really, really comprehensive understanding of not only what it means to be a B Corp but what went into becoming a B Corp as well." (ID-27 ORG-24)

Lastly, a manager highlighted the efficacy of the B Corp status in succinctly conveying the company's values to potential employees. This clarity in values was emphasized as a potent tool for attracting talent that resonates with the company's core values:

> "I think it really helps with employees and like building a team... it like really sums up your values in a clean and crisp way." (ID-19 ORG-18)

These reflections indicate a pattern of intentional incorporation of the B Corp certification into the routine conversations and materials of the company. By doing so, B Corp values not only guide business practices but also serve as a recurring topic of internal dialogue, shaping the relational dynamics within the organization and reinforcing a shared understanding and commitment to these values.

Empowering employees to shape organization's values. The candid discussions about B Corp values appeared to invigorate employees to provide open and forthright feedback, as a leader recalled a moment of accountability prompted by an employee. This instance underscored a cultural shift toward greater inclusivity, sparked by the employee's boldness in addressing a discrepancy between the company's diversity aspirations and the reality of their actions:

> "And we talked about what B Corps meant. And the more we talked about it, I think it empowered our people to also be very transparent with feedback... We had like one woman, from like Chicago, like slapped me like, yo, look at your calendar, what the fuck?" (ID-12 ORG-12)

The account above indicates a leadership approach that actively encourages employees to take part in shaping the organization's values, especially as they relate to B Corp principles. Curiosity about the specifics of B Corp certification was evident among team members, as described by a manager. Casual interactions became opportunities for employees to inquire about the certification, reflecting their burgeoning interest in the company's sustainable practices:

> "Occasionally they'll ask questions of like what kinds of things go into the B Corp certification when we're just like sitting around a campfire at training or something." (ID-10 ORG-10)

The leader also observed an uptick in employee inquiries regarding the company's responsibility for its products post-B Corp certification. This increased curiosity pointed toward a deeper engagement with the company's ethical responsibilities and a desire for more active involvement in the B Corp community:

> "The other thing that has come up is team members have challenged us just about being more involved with the B Lab, or with the B Corp community..." (ID-36 ORG-06)

In an effort to cultivate a sense of ownership, a manager emphasized their goal to instill in every employee an owner's mindset, encouraging them to integrate the company's clients, goals, and values into their decision-making:

> "But it's not going to change the way I try to get my people to behave like and to think like, right, like, my goal is to get every one of them to think like an owner..." (ID-34 ORG-30)

These actions suggest a concerted effort by leaders to actively involve employees in shaping the company's values guided by B Corp certification. This second-order theme of 'Empowering employees to shape org values' reflects a strategy where employees are not passive recipients of corporate identity but active participants in its development and manifestation. The inclusion of B Corp principles in decision-making processes signifies a company's identity that values employee input as a vital component.

Training employees on values. In an ongoing endeavor to integrate new employees into the organization's identity, a manager detailed the intentional discussions that were a mainstay of their onboarding process. The manager conveyed the organization's dedication to ensuring each new team member was apprised of the company's sustainable practices and philosophies:

> "We talked about it throughout the process... So everybody comes into the company with at least a baseline knowledge of kind of where we are." (ID-14 ORG-14)

An informant recounted the systematic approach to ingraining company values across the organization. Through meticulous crafting and strategic placement of these values, the informant described how they were made a cornerstone of regular internal communications:

> "We have those values defined... front and center on the homepage on our intranet site... we reinforced them every month in a monthly all hands meeting." (ID-06 ORG-06)

In the domain of training and onboarding, another leader illuminated the organization's approach to infusing their guiding principles into every aspect of employee development. The leader emphasized the commitment to transcend rhetoric, embedding the values into lived experiences:

> "We have an entire employee training... We want it to be more than just words and lip service. We want it to be something that we're really living." (ID-07 ORG-07)

Further, a leader highlighted the emphasis placed on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as an integral component of the company's internal training regimen, ensuring these values were consistently reinforced:

> "We do a lot of internal trainings on diversity, equity and inclusion... about one a month for all employees." (ID-27 ORG-24)

A recent hire reflected on the transparency and clarity of the organizational culture they encountered upon joining the company. This clarity was facilitated by comprehensive documentation and resources, setting the stage for an informed introduction to the company:

> "...understanding what culture is like, and having something to look at when you first get onboarded, is really beneficial to understand what kind of company you're walking into." (ID-20 ORG-16)

Across these narratives, the leaders convey an intricate tapestry of efforts that are orchestrated to cultivate and reinforce organizational values. The processes these leaders describe do not operate in isolation but intertwine to form a robust scaffold for training employees on values, where each new hire is systematically equipped with the knowledge and understanding necessary to navigate the hybrid identities inherent in a B Corp.

Drawing on identity claims of social referents to enhance understanding

In this section, I explore how leaders of hybrid organizations draw on the identity claims of their social referents to clarify and strengthen their own organizational identity among employees. By embedding B Corp-driven values into performance evaluations, decision-making processes, and community engagement, these leaders ensure that employees not only understand the organization’s identity but are also actively involved in it. Such strategies are crucial in aligning employee actions with the organization’s broader social and environmental

commitments. This alignment solidifies a shared identity that resonates with the principles of B Corp certification. Through these initiatives, leaders empower employees to embody and advocate for these principles, thereby enhancing the organization's credibility and collective commitment to its foundational values and mission.

Affiliating with social referents enhances accountability and alignment with organizational identity. A leader spoke of the integration of the organization's core values with employee performance evaluations, highlighting how activities such as volunteerism and DEI initiatives were not only promoted but also measured and communicated within the company. This was done to align these activities with the organization's performance metrics, showcasing the company's commitment to its values and philosophies:

> "We give examples of them. You know, in the volunteer, we track our volunteerism, our volunteer hours. In fact, in tomorrow's meeting, we will report on our volunteer hours..." (ID-06 ORG-06)

The structured approach to B Corp certification was described by a manager who believed it brought about a greater sense of accountability among the employees. This shift was particularly noteworthy as it marked a departure from previous informal practices that lacked the same level of responsibility:

> "And so I think having some structure is helpful... it also is a way to make everyone accountable. I don't think that we had a lot of accountability before..." (ID-20 ORG-16)

B Corp certification was cited by an interviewee as a catalyst for increased employee engagement and awareness. With the certification as a backdrop, employees became more vocal and questioning, ensuring their actions were in alignment with the company's stated values and commitments:

> "They definitely are speaking up a lot more now... people are like, 'Well, wait a minute, B Corp. Like, should we do it that way? Or not?'" (ID-14 ORG-14)

The company's dedication to transparent decision-making was underscored by a leader who discussed how transparency in operations facilitated informed and collaborative decision-making processes for employees:

> "We're trying to help them make intelligent decisions by being completely transparent... it's a highly collaborative process." (ID-34 ORG-30)

Finally, a manager suggested that B Corp certification also played a role in boosting employee confidence. The external validation of the company's values was seen as a boon, affirming the trust that the company's internal messaging about its values was genuine:

> "And they are also saying, 'yes, y'all are doing a great job'... it just gives some extra confidence." (ID-04 ORG-04)

By integrating these measures, the organization ensured that the values it professed were deeply embedded in its operations and culture, reinforcing the notion that the company's identity was closely aligned with the principles of social and environmental responsibility. This systemic integration of values through accountability, transparency, and validation served as a testament to the company's genuine commitment to embodying the core values it upheld.

Aligning organizational identity with a community of like-minded businesses – for employees. A leader enthusiastically recounted their organization's sponsorship of the BLD Pacific Northwest event, seeing it as an inaugural step into the B Corp community following their certification. The virtual nature of the event presented an opportunity to distribute resources and recordings to the staff, aiming to deepen their connection with the B Corp certification through various forms of engagement:

> "So we are going to sponsor the BLD Pacific Northwest event this year... that will at least give me an opportunity to share with our staff... I think the better the fit you know the overall commitment will be with the B Corp certification." (ID-05 ORG-05)

Reflecting on the moments after achieving B Corp status, an interviewee detailed the initial uncertainty about how to leverage the certification. This led to a pursuit of community involvement, as suggested by a fellow B Corp contact, which significantly increased the team's engagement with community initiatives:

> "And I still remember we got it. And we were like, 'Okay, now what?'... we literally, and that was the only resource I knew of... And now I'm more involved with the community than I have time for." (ID-12 ORG-12)

Another leader also highlighted the significance of allowing employees to participate in B Corp events for networking and learning, seeing these opportunities as instrumental in connecting with the broader B Corp community. Despite the challenges of remote participation, the value of these interactions was clear:

> "What I think has been most helpful for us is the sort of opportunities that's given our staff in the Portland community... I think for networking and it helps you kind of find like-minded people." (ID-10 ORG-10)

In summary, through the active facilitation of opportunities for community involvement and learning, leaders within the organization meticulously crafted a path for employees to engage with the broader B Corp community. This approach was a deliberate exercise in identity work, as leaders sought foster a shared identity among employees.

Legitimizing through certification

I also delve into how leaders use prosocial certifications to legitimize their organizational identity among employees. This approach serves as a potent tool to authenticate these values within the company. By integrating these certifications, leaders enhance the credibility of their initiatives, particularly in areas like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), making these values resonate more deeply with employees.

Legitimizing organizational identity through certification for employees. A leader highlighted how B Corp certification has bolstered the legitimacy of the company's leadership, providing concrete evidence of the organization's commitment to social and environmental concerns. This certification has become a badge of authentic leadership, cementing the company's reputation in these critical areas:

> "To me, one of the really related, really valuable things with the certification is that it reinforces our leadership position... So, it's really a point of legitimacy right it adds credibility to all of our efforts..." (ID-06 ORG-06)

In a follow-up interview, the same leader recounted a shared understanding that the B Corp certification closely aligns with the organization's values, particularly those related to DEI initiatives. These projects, infused with B Corp values, resonate strongly among the employees and are a direct reflection of the company's dedication to these principles:

> "We have a number of projects that spurred pretty deep commitment to DEI initiatives, and we do a lot of work in that space. So it's led to a number of other developments within the company that I think our employees appreciate. And, yeah, I, I would say, you know, through all those things, it's really reenergized us, it's confirmed our commitment to it." (ID-06 ORG-06)

The absence of B Corp certification would render the company's communications less engaging, as articulated by the leader during the follow-up interview. Without the inspiration drawn from B Corp values, there would be a discernible loss of energy, potentially weakening the employees' connection to the mission and vision of the organization:

> "And as we just alluded to... I think the organization would, would miss that and would suffer, I think, I think we would have a less inspiring workplace..." (ID-06 ORG-06)

Finally, a leader described the B Corp certification as a testament to the company's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. This certification was perceived as an

affirmation of the company's dedication to important values such as equity, environmental stewardship, and employee well-being:

> "Yeah, well, I think it proves that commitment of taking it to the next level... I would say culturally, they're very similar, you know, the weight on equity and pay and making sure that your employees needs are met." (ID-35 ORG-07)

In conclusion, these reflections showcase the intricate process through which leaders within the organization have navigated the landscape of corporate identity by leveraging B Corp certification as a means to legitimize and deepen their commitment to social and environmental causes internally. By weaving these values into the fabric of the company, the leadership endeavors to present a cohesive and socially responsible organizational identity to its employees.

Discursive Identity Work by Leaders Toward Employees

The bottom left quadrant of the model illustrates another process where relational identity work for leaders is translated into internal organizational dialogues through discursive identity work toward employees. This aspect of identity practice involved shaping the narrative surrounding the company's values and mission through strategic communication. Leaders utilized stories, dialogue, and formal messaging to embed a collective sense of purpose among employees. By articulating the importance of B Corp certification, leaders created a shared narrative that invited employees to participate in the organization's journey toward social responsibility. This transition signifies a shift from personal reflection to communicative action, where the internal narratives and self-understandings of leaders are vocalized and disseminated among employees to cultivate a shared organizational identity. Leaders initiate dialogues, craft stories, and utilize formal and informal communications to instill these reflections within the organizational culture.

Guiding employees' work to align with organizational identity claims

I examine how leaders guide their employees' work to align with the organization's identity claims, emphasizing organic and reciprocal approaches. Leaders utilize various methods to incorporate employee feedback on alignment with the organization's core values. This process ensures that employees not only understand but also contribute to the organization's identity, creating a workplace where mutual respect, safety, and inclusivity are emphasized.

Asking for employees' feedback on alignment with organizational identity. A manager stressed the significance of attentive listening in leadership, emphasizing the necessity for emotional steadiness and fairness. This approach was described as essential for ensuring the well-being and safety of the team and fostering a culture of mutual respect and candor:

> "I think staying very emotionally steady, and maintaining a sense of fairness, working hard to listen, um, and to be proactive in working with teams for their own personal safety, as well as for company safety..." (ID-35 ORG-07)

The same leader conveyed the importance of informal, spontaneous interactions as a means to connect with employees. This less structured form of communication was regarded as an authentic way to demonstrate care for employees' professional and personal well-being:

> "Yeah, I mean, frankly, it's not very structured. It's just kind of having an attitude to show up every day. And make sure that people know that you care about them professionally and personally." (ID-04 ORG-04)

Further emphasizing a structured approach to employee engagement, a manager highlighted the regular use of quarterly surveys to gather comprehensive feedback from the workforce. These surveys were aimed at assessing employees' sentiments about safety, fairness, and inclusivity within the company:

> "And so we send out quarterly surveys to check in with our employees. How are you doing? Do you feel safe? Do you feel it's a fair and inclusive environment? What can we be doing and setting goals based off of that?" (ID-27 ORG-24)

In summary, the various approaches detailed by the leaders show a concerted effort to create a dialogue-rich environment that values employee feedback. This approach involves not only structured methods, such as quarterly surveys, but also less formal ways to cultivate an atmosphere where open interactions are the norm. These measures suggest a deliberate effort to maintain an environment where feedback is actively sought and valued, ensuring that employees feel integrated into the company's ethical framework and its evolution.

Embedding organizational identity through work practices. A manager detailed their initiative of merging team-building social activities with community service, reflecting the organization's value of giving back:

> "So when we first got certified... I take everybody to happy hour. And then so Friday night, happy hour, Saturday morning, volunteer." (ID-12 ORG-12)

Values within the company were articulated to be as natural and essential as breathing, present in the everyday life of the company—from onboarding processes to the nuances of the workplace environment:

> "It really is everywhere, it's hard to point to just one thing... It's so ingrained in our company..." (ID-07 ORG-07)

Ethical behavior, as described by a leader, was evident in everyday practices such as recycling and inclusive communication. These actions demonstrate a broader commitment to integrity and inclusivity, integral to the company's identity:

> "Ah, well, I think the biggest one is a sense of ethical behavior, even on the smallest scale... We work pretty hard to be a hard working and truly integrated and integrity first company." (ID-35 ORG-07)

Another leader stressed the importance of action over words, expressing a belief that the company's mission and values are most effectively communicated through demonstrable actions:

> "We don't do it in that classic way of here's our mission. And here's our value. We think that those things... are seen better by what we do by our actions rather than our words." (ID-07 ORG-07)

In sum, these narratives demonstrate how leaders actively embed the organization's identity into work practices. From integrating values into social and volunteer activities to ensuring that ethical standards permeate daily operations, the company is committed to demonstrating its identity in practice. Leadership's belief in materializing values through tangible actions fosters an authentic and value-driven work environment.

Material Identity Work by Leaders Toward Employees

The final segment of the empirically grounded model, located in the center right, delineates how prosocial certifications manifest through material identity work toward employees, subsequently augmenting the awareness of the organizational identity among employees of hybrid organizations. While material identity work may not directly enhance the understanding of organizational identity as relational or discursive identity work does, it plays a critical role in raising awareness and providing constant reminders of the values and mission of the hybrid organization. Leaders engage in material identity work by ensuring that the essence of the organization's identity is present in the physical domain of the workplace. In contrast to the relational and discursive identity work that leaders undertake for themselves—which often involves reflective and interactive processes—material identity work directly translates prosocial certifications into physical symbols within the organization. These tangible elements, such as logos on T-shirts and inclusion in training materials, may not in themselves deepen employees' understanding of the organizational identity, but they serve as powerful artifacts that reinforce the organization's identity claims.

Through the strategic use of physical branding and symbolic elements, leaders embed the ethos of prosocial certifications within the organizational culture. This material embodiment of

identity does not rely on the nuanced processes intrinsic to relational work for leaders themselves but rather employs a straightforward approach that augments visibility and awareness of the organization's values, ensuring that employees are constantly reminded of the identity that the hybrid organization strives to project and uphold.

Communicating through visual representations of identity claims from social referents

In this section, I explore how leaders use visual representations to communicate their organization's identity and align it with the values of social referents like B Corp. By embedding the B Corp logo on various artifacts within the company, leaders visually reinforce this commitment across the organization, serving as a continuous reminder.

Displaying a logo. A leader conveyed the company's approach to make their B Corp certification visible, embedding the logo on all material alongside other sustainability certifications. This widespread visibility is a proud marker of their unique status within their industry:

> "Yeah absolutely, we pretty much put those three logos on everything and because we're the only winery that I know of in the world that has all three of those statuses." (ID-03 ORG-03)

The company's communication strategy was succinctly captured by another leader who mentioned that from the moment of certification, the B Corp logo, score breakdowns, and a summarizing platform were used to communicate the company's performance and commitment succinctly:

> "Absolutely, since the moment we got certified we started putting that we're B Corp certified in all of our training and recruiting documents..." (ID-34 ORG-30)

A manager described the use of T-shirts with food-centric messages and the B Corp logo as a physical manifestation of their values in the workplace, serving as a daily reminder of the company's ethical stance:

> "And we go beyond that with, you know, what you'd call them in the organizational behavior, space relics, right? We send out, you know, we have [company] shirts, right in the back of the shirt says Food connects everything..." (ID-06 ORG-06)

Additionally, incorporating the B Corp logo into training and recruiting materials was highlighted as a significant post-certification change. It symbolizes the company's alignment with B Corp values and communicates the benefits that employees enjoy as part of a socially responsible organization:

> "Absolutely, since the moment we got certified we started putting that B Corp certified in all of our training and recruiting documents..." (ID-07 ORG-07)

In summary, these accounts emphasize a strategic use of symbolic elements, such as logos and slogans, as integral components of the company's identity work. The leaders' focused efforts to imbue physical items and company documents with B Corp branding serve as a continuous, visual affirmation of the company's identity and values. This strategy of 'displaying a logo' on a range of materials and artifacts reflects a broader commitment to embedding a socially responsible identity into the tangible aspects of the workplace, reinforcing the organization's ethical commitments in the minds of employees and stakeholders alike.

Model Summary

In hybrid organizations, leaders navigate the complexities of their organizations' hybrid identity through "Relational Identity Work for Selves," an introspective process facilitated by prosocial certifications. These certifications serve as tools to reconcile the identity tensions caused by managing an organization that blends commercial and social objectives. The process creates a coherent narrative that leaders then extend to their employees, establishing a unified organizational identity that resonates through shared values and mission. Building on this self-focused identity work, leaders employ "Relational Identity Work toward Employees," involving

inclusive communication and participative decision-making, to replicate their identity alignment strategies. This transition to "Discursive Identity Work toward Employees" involves vocalizing internal narratives and using communicative actions to permeate the organizational culture with these aligned identities. Finally, "Material Identity Work toward Employees" cements the identity integration through visible symbols like logos, ensuring that the ideas of prosocial certifications are continually present in physical representation. This multifaceted approach embeds the organizational identity, ensuring employees embody and perpetuate the company's values, thus reinforcing a collective organizational identity.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

In this dissertation, I explored the intricate dynamics of identity work within hybrid organizations, specifically focusing on how leaders navigate and reconcile the inherent tensions between commercial and social missions. Utilizing Certified B Corporations as my empirical setting, I employed qualitative methodologies to investigate the role of prosocial certifications in shaping organizational identity. My approach followed the principles of grounded theory building and employed the Gioia methodology, involving systematic data collection and analysis processes. My findings reveal that leaders leverage these certifications not only as tools for external legitimacy but also as crucial mechanisms for internal identity alignment and stakeholder engagement. This study contributes to the literature on organizational identity by highlighting the multifaceted nature of identity work in hybrid settings and underscoring my strategic use of certifications in managing identity complexities effectively.

Summary of Empirical Findings and Theoretical Development

The literature on prosocial certifications within hybrid organizations extensively discusses their role in enhancing external perceptions of legitimacy by aligning organizational

practices with socially and environmentally responsible standards (Carlos & Lewis, 2018; Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York, Hargrave, & Pacheco, 2016). These certifications are recognized as pivotal tools that signal commitment to societal values and help hybrids navigate the complex balance between blended missions (DeJordy et al., 2014; Waddock, 2008). Furthermore, research on identity work emphasizes the challenges hybrids face in managing blended goals, where they must simultaneously achieve commercial success and fulfill social missions (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith & Besharov, 2019). This balancing act requires a nuanced understanding of how organizational identity is constructed, maintained, and communicated (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). However, while these studies highlight the significance of prosocial certifications in external stakeholder relations, they often overlook how these certifications influence internal dynamics and identity processes.

My empirical findings reveal the pivotal role of prosocial certifications like the B Corp certification in shaping the internal identity of hybrid organizations. The data reveal that these certifications are strategic tools for leaders, facilitating the articulation of a coherent organizational identity that blends commercial and social objectives. This process aims to enhance operational effectiveness by promoting a unified approach to stakeholder engagement and aligning organizational practices with societal values, thereby reducing internal conflicts and increasing employee alignment (Jay, 2013; Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). Leaders utilize the structured framework provided by certifications to manage expectations and communicate key values across the organization, thus seeking to foster a sense of commitment among employees. This may contribute to a more cohesive organizational identity that supports both the social mission and business goals, illustrating the dual function of certifications in bridging the gap between identity perception and operational reality.

This dissertation enriches the literature on organizational identity by delving into the role of identity work within hybrid organizations and underscoring how prosocial certifications serve as instrumental tools in this context. By analyzing how leaders employ certifications for identity construction and maintenance, I highlight a sophisticated mechanism through which the tensions inherent in blended missions are managed. These findings extend previous research on identity work by demonstrating how certifications actively shape identity dynamics internally (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Certifications facilitate the integration of diverse organizational goals, enhancing coherence and allowing leaders to navigate the complex interplay of expectations and responsibilities. This study contributes to theoretical discussions by showing how material, discursive, and relational identity work can be effectively mediated using prosocial certifications, providing leaders with a robust framework to align actions with the articulated identity, thereby ensuring both internal consistency and external legitimacy (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York et al., 2016). I now discuss each of these contributions in greater depth.

Contributions to Theory & Practice

Theoretical contributions

Leaders' relational identity work to reconcile hybrid identity tensions through prosocial certifications: Hybrid organizations often grapple with the challenge of balancing commercial success and positive social and environmental impact. This dissertation sheds light on how leaders of such organizations use prosocial certifications to manage these inherent identity tensions. A novel insight from this study is the pivotal role of leaders' relational identity work facilitated by engagement with prosocial certifications. This work is crucial for leaders to shape their understanding and approach to reconciling the company's mission tensions. By internalizing the values and standards set by certifications such as B Corp, leaders enhance their

capability to engage effectively in identity work with other organizational members, both relationally and discursively. These types of identity work are not mutually exclusive but interrelated, each contributing to a cohesive organizational identity. Relational identity work often encompasses discursive and material aspects, as leaders tell stories and use symbols to reinforce their values. The extensive findings on relational identity work emphasizes its inaugural role, leading the process which is then complemented through discursive and material identity work. This finding is significant because it ties back to prior literature that has discussed the complexities of managing hybrid organizations but has less frequently examined the nuanced ways leaders leverage these identities to influence belief and ideas held by employees about "What are we, as hybrid organizations?" (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith & Besharov, 2019).

The mechanisms through which leaders utilize prosocial certifications are multifaceted. First, these certifications promote a heightened self-awareness among leaders, helping them to introspectively align their personal values with the broader mission of the organization. This reflection is crucial for developing a coherent leadership approach that embodies the organization's blended mission. Second, prosocial certifications emphasize values like social good and community building, enabling leaders to bridge their personal aspirations with organizational goals. This study found that leaders of hybrid organizations engage deeply in relational identity work, emphasizing interactions that negotiate and enact their identities in relation to their certification. This dynamic suggests that certifications do more than signal external legitimacy; they actively scaffold the internal identity coherence necessary for operational effectiveness in hybrid settings.

More broadly, while existing studies have acknowledged the external signaling value of prosocial certifications, less attention has been paid to their role in internal identity construction

and coherence. This research highlights how prosocial certifications, such as B Corp certification, serve not just as markers of legitimacy but as essential tools for leaders to align organizational identity internally. This study illustrates that these certifications help leaders articulate and reinforce a coherent organizational identity that integrates commercial and social objectives, thereby enhancing both internal management practices and external stakeholder engagement (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York et al., 2016). The significance of these contributions lies in enhancing our understanding of how identity work functions within hybrid organizations, as well as how certifications influence relational and discursive identity processes (Smith & Besharov, 2019). This advances the discourse on identity work by providing new insights into the mechanisms through which organizational identity is constructed in complex environments (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

Relatedly, there has been limited exploration of how organizational leaders strategically construct identity perceptions among internal and external stakeholders in hybrid contexts. This study contributes to the understanding of strategic identity communication by showing how identity is actively managed to align stakeholder perceptions with the organization's identity. Leaders use certifications to mediate between internal expectations and external perceptions, effectively utilizing the certification's framework to guide communication strategies and identity enactment within and beyond organizational boundaries (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Several avenues for future research arise from these findings. One question is how variations in leaders' backgrounds and personal values influence the effectiveness of prosocial certifications in identity work. Another area to explore is the long-term impact of such certifications on organizational identity stability and change, especially as hybrid organizations

scale and evolve. Additionally, future studies could investigate the differential impacts of various types of prosocial certifications across industries to discern whether certain sectors derive more identity alignment benefit than others. These questions would further elucidate the complex interplay of leadership, identity, and organizational effectiveness in hybrid settings.

Relational and material dimensions of leaders' organizational identity work: While existing research has extensively explored the discursive aspects of identity work, focusing predominantly on how identity is constructed through language and narrative, there has been less emphasis on the relational and material dimensions. This dissertation expands the understanding of identity work by integrating these often-overlooked aspects, exploring how identity is shaped not only through discursive narratives but also through dynamic interactions with stakeholders and the strategic use of material symbols, such as prosocial certifications (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). This approach provides a more holistic view of how organizational identities are constructed and maintained, particularly within hybrid organizations that face the challenges of maintaining commercial viability while also fulfilling socio-environmental missions.

Prior research has treated organizational identity in relatively homogenous contexts, often overlooking the unique challenges faced by entities with inherently conflicting goals, such as hybrid organizations. This dissertation addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of how such organizations navigate their complex identity landscapes. It showcases the ongoing identity work required to balance these often-competing priorities, illustrating how leaders of hybrid organizations must continuously engage in both relational and material identity work to align their internal and external identity claims with their blended mission (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith & Besharov, 2019).

In terms of relational identity work, the findings reveal that this process is multi-level, starting from how leaders engage with the prosocial certifications and then how these leaders mediate this identity work to the broader organizational members. This nuanced approach requires substantial processing by leaders who must internalize and then externalize the certification's values, integrating them into the organizational fabric through their daily interactions and decision-making processes. Material identity work, on the other hand, is more direct, with certifications immediately impacting the organizational members by visibly aligning the organization's practices with recognized standards of social and environmental responsibility, thus requiring less interpretative work by leaders.

These insights add depth to the existing literature on relational and material identity work at the organizational level, highlighting the complexities of managing identity in hybrid organizations where leaders must navigate between their roles as both business executives and social change agents. Navigating the complexities of hybrid identity requires leaders to engage in a sophisticated, multi-layered process of identity work that is responsive to the dynamic demands of various stakeholders. At the foundational level, this involves leaders internalizing the values and standards from prosocial certifications, which not only inform their personal leadership style but also serve as a benchmark for organizational practices (Gehman & Grimes, 2017). Leaders then apply these internalized values to strategic actions that resonate across the organization. This translation is not a one-way communication but rather involves a continuous negotiation between competing priorities of commercial success and social impact, ensuring the organization adheres to its blended mission in a way that is both authentic and economically sustainable (Smith & Besharov, 2019). This depth of engagement in identity work is critical because it

enables organizations to maintain a cohesive identity that supports strategic flexibility and resilience in the face of changing market and societal expectations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010)

Emerging from these findings are several questions for future research. One area of inquiry could explore how differences in organizational culture influence the effectiveness of relational and material identity work in hybrid organizations. Another potential research direction is to examine the long-term impacts of continuous identity work on organizational stability and employee satisfaction in hybrids. Additionally, investigating how external changes in societal expectations and economic conditions affect the identity work of hybrid organizations could provide insights into the adaptive capabilities required to sustain blended missions over time. These questions would deepen our understanding of identity work in complex organizational settings and enrich the strategies for managing identity in an ever-evolving socio-economic landscape.

Practical contributions

This dissertation offers actionable guidance for leaders of hybrid organizations on effectively using prosocial certifications to navigate and reconcile the inherent tensions between their blended mission. Leaders can leverage certifications both as tools for enhancing external credibility and as integral elements of their internal strategy. The study shows the importance of certifications in helping leaders develop a deep, personal understanding of their organizational identity that aligns with both social and commercial objectives (York et al., 2016). By engaging with these certifications, leaders can set a strong example, fostering an organizational culture that values authenticity and consistency. This can result in more committed and motivated employees, who see their leaders embodying the values that the organization espouses (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Therefore, leaders are encouraged to actively participate in and promote the

processes involved in obtaining and maintaining certifications, as this engagement significantly impacts organizational alignment and identity coherence (DeJordy et al., 2014)

Beyond individual leader engagement, this dissertation provides strategies that can be integrated into broader organizational strategic planning to enhance both internal management and external stakeholder engagement. The findings suggest that certifications can be used as frameworks for developing strategies that balance commercial performance with social impact (Gehman & Grimes, 2017). For hybrid organizations, this means embedding the values and standards from these certifications into all levels of strategic planning, from marketing to product development to HR policies. This integration helps ensure that the organization's blended goals are not in conflict but are instead driving synergistic effects that enhance overall performance (Kim et al., 2016; Smith & Besharov, 2019). For instance, aligning HR practices with the socially responsible values advocated by certifications can improve recruitment and retention rates, attracting talent that is committed to the organization's mission. Similarly, marketing strategies that highlight an organization's certified status can appeal to niche markets and consumer segments that prioritize ethical consumption (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). This strategic alignment not only bolsters internal coherence and employee engagement but also enhances the organization's reputation and attractiveness to external stakeholders, including investors, customers, and business partners (Barnett et al., 2006; Fanasch, 2019).

These practical implications provide leaders with a robust blueprint for embedding prosocial values into their organizational frameworks, promoting a cohesive identity that supports sustainable business practices while also driving social change. The dual focus on internal and external alignment facilitated by certifications like B Corp can serve as a model for other organizations seeking to successfully navigate the complexities of hybrid operations.

Boundary Conditions and Direction for Future Research

This dissertation is not without limitations, which present avenues for future research. One such limitation stems from its cross-sectional nature, which may not fully capture the longitudinal dynamics of identity work in hybrid organizations. Future research could adopt a longitudinal perspective to explore how leaders develop and sustain their engagement with prosocial certifications and the impact of this ongoing identity work. Such a study would help reveal the mechanisms that support or hinder the effectiveness of identity work over time, including how changes in the external business environment or internal organizational shifts influence leaders' strategies for maintaining alignment between commercial and social missions (Pettigrew, 1990; Yin, 2014).

Additionally, slicing the data according to when companies received their certification could provide valuable insights. The way leaders use certification when the company has just been certified might differ significantly from how they do it after ten years. This approach would also allow for a more nuanced understanding of the temporal aspects of identity work, potentially uncovering stages that leaders experience as they strive to embed these blended objectives deeply within their organizational culture. Drawing on process studies of change, this research could unveil the temporality, activity, and flow of organizational dynamics in managing blended goals (Langley et al., 2013; Cloutier & Langley, 2020). By focusing on processual aspects, such studies would illuminate how leaders navigate through continuous and often subtle transformations, providing a richer understanding of the sequence of events and the rhythm of strategic decision-making in hybrid organizations (Langley, 1999). Capturing employee data as discussed in the next paragraph would add depth to this longitudinal approach, as it would

provide insights into how identity work evolves across different organizational levels and over time.

Another limitation is the primary focus on the identity work conducted by leaders, potentially overlooking the significant contributions of other organizational members. Employees at various levels may also engage in the construction of the organizational identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Employees may establish relationships with colleagues, customers, and other stakeholders to reinforce the organization's values through daily interactions (Bartel & Dutton, 2001), participate in internal communications to discuss organizational identity (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004), or adopting and practices that embody the organization's identity, such as participating in recycling programs, energy-saving initiatives, and community outreach activities, demonstrating their commitment to the organization's social and environmental goals (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). Future research should delve deeper into the identity work carried out by employees to provide a more holistic understanding of how organizational identity is constructed not just by leaders but also by employees. This could involve developing a process model to track the dynamic interactions between leaders and employees over time, highlighting how these interactions shape and reshape organizational identity. Future research should delve deeper into the identity work carried out by employees to provide a more holistic understanding of how organizational identity is constructed and maintained in hybrid organizations. Investigating the interplay between leadership and employee identity work can offer valuable insights into how hybrid organizations can effectively balance their blended mission.

Furthermore, given the reliance on leader interviews, the responses in this study might be influenced by social desirability bias, a type of response bias that denotes the tendency of

respondents to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others (Krumpal, 2013). Although I implemented several measures, including asking for specific examples and using secondary data, the bias may have potentially skewed the empirical findings in a way that the informants overly highlighted the positive aspects of their organizations' hybrid identity and its relation to B Corp certification. At the same time, leaders of hybrid organizations may have downplayed their own undesirable actions as well as those of employees and the organizations as a whole. After all, the very nature of prosocial certifications is to promote positive external perceptions—including those of researchers (Carlos & Lewis, 2018; Gehman & Grimes, 2017; Richards et al., 2017). To address this limitation, future research could incorporate multiple perspectives, including those of employees, to enhance the validity of the study. By triangulating data from different organizational levels, I could examine whether the identity work as perceived by leaders aligns with the perceptions of other organizational members. This approach would help assess the efficacy of leaders' identity work in shaping organizational members' perceptions of the organization's identity in ways that genuinely reflect the blended mission, identifying potential discrepancies or alignments that could inform more effective strategies for identity management within hybrid organizations.

Finally, I examined leaders' identity work within the context of a specific prosocial certification—B Corp—which encourages the rigorous adoption of socially responsible practices. Future research could extend this examination to other types of prosocial certifications to determine whether the findings from this study hold across different certification frameworks with varying standards and requirements (Pache & Santos, 2010; Tracey et al., 2011). The exploration of other certifications such as ISO 14001 (e.g., Aravind & Christmann, 2011; Boiral, 2007) could reveal whether and how leaders can leverage these symbolically adopted standards

to engage in identity work toward employees. Additionally, since this study was conducted within the United States, future investigations could explore how these dynamics play out in different geographic locations. Studying this model in relation to leaders in other cultural and institutional contexts would offer insights into how global variations influence the ways leaders use prosocial certifications to construct hybrid identities. Research into the diverse applications and impacts of various certifications could enrich our understanding of their role in hybrid organizations, highlighting potential gaps between the ideals these certifications represent and the actual practices.

In particular, this dissertation's findings are embedded in the specific context of hybrid organizations with a focus on B Corp certification. The broader theoretical implications of this research suggest that the principles of identity work observed here may be applicable to a wider range of organizational settings where leaders must navigate complex identity dynamics. For instance, leaders involved with non-profits, social enterprises (Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014), or corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) might also benefit from understanding how relational, discursive, and material identity work can be leveraged to align organizational practices with their mission. This broader applicability shows the potential of prosocial certifications and identity work frameworks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how identity dynamics are managed in organizations striving for both commercial success and social impact (Gehman & Grimes, 2017; York et al., 2016). The transferability of these insights may depend on the similarity of the organizational contexts and the presence of comparable pressures to balance blended missions. Factors such as the regulatory environment (Kim & Schifeling, 2022) or the specific nature of the prosocial certification in question (Wry & York, 2017) can affect the applicability of these insights. Future

research should explore these broader implications, linking the findings of this study to greater theoretical questions about identity work and organizational behavior in diverse settings (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have explored the complex interplay between prosocial certifications and identity work within hybrid organizations, shedding light on how these elements interact to shape organizational dynamics and leadership strategies. By illuminating the critical role of certifications in fostering internal coherence, this study enhances our understanding of how leaders of hybrid organizations can navigate their blended missions effectively. The insights show the need for leaders to engage deeply with the values embodied by certifications, incorporating them into organizations to ensure authenticity and alignment. The findings demonstrate that relational, discursive, and material identity work are interconnected processes that collectively contribute to the construction and maintenance of a cohesive organizational identity. Relational identity work initiates the alignment of leaders' personal and organizational values, often encompassing discursive and material elements by communicating these values through narratives and reinforcing them through tangible symbols. This integrated approach is essential for leaders to manage the complex identity dynamics within hybrid organizations.

As hybrid organizations continue to proliferate in response to societal calls for sustainable and socially responsible business practices, the insights from this study offer valuable guidance for leaders aiming to balance commercial success with social impact. As civil society organizations continue to certify businesses around the globe, their importance when it comes to organizational opportunities, strategies, resources, and reputational assets is only likely to grow (Moroz et al., 2018). The pathways for future research promise to further enrich our

understanding of hybrid organizations, potentially leading to more robust frameworks that can support the thriving of these complex entities in a rapidly changing world.

APPENDIX
Interview Protocol

1. Tell us about your main responsibilities at the company.

Part A. Identity Custodian's Understanding of Organizational Identity

1. Hybrid organizations refer to firms that pursue both market-oriented and prosocial goals. Do you consider your company a hybrid organization?
2. Can you tell us about the core values that your company is built on.
    - Can you provide a brief example of how the core values are reflected in its daily practices?

Part B. Identity Custodian's Engagement with Prosocial Certification

1. Tell us about how obtaining the B Corp Certification shaped your beliefs about the company's mission and core values.
    - Did it confirm your past beliefs on the company's core values?
    - Did you have to re-evaluate your beliefs? Why?
2. Did you have an instance where you reevaluated your beliefs about the company's core values?
    - How was obtaining the B Certification influential in this reevaluation process?
3. Was there a time when the B Corp certification went against your own ideas about the company's mission and value? Could you give an example or two?

Part C. Identity Custodian's Communication of Organizational Identity

1. Tell us about how you discuss your company's mission and core values to employees. *[org identity communication]*
    - To whom do you primarily talk about your company's mission and core values? Managers or non-managerial employees?
    - Tell us about 2-3 different ways you communicate the company's mission of [modes of communication]
2. Does B Corp certification play a role in communicating your company's mission and core values to employees?
    - Can you provide a brief example of how the certification is incorporated into internal communication?
    - What would happen if your company were not a B Corp?
3. Tell us how the employees respond to your communication.

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