



Corporate identity orientation and disorientation: A complexity theory perspective

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ABSTRACT

The importance of corporate identity to organizations is increasing, which has led to the conceptualisation of corporate identity orientation. This paper challenges existing thinking by suggesting that if corporate identity orientation exists, so could corporate identity disorientation. Using a complexity theory perspective this conceptual paper explores how orientation/disorientation could emerge, and how the two could be related. The paper concludes that a combination of orientation and disorientation could be beneficial for corporate identity development, and that disorientation need not be wholly negative. This is relevant because the environment organizations find themselves in increasingly causes identity disorientation, so exploring this further helps address this crucial issue. As such, this paper opens new directions for researchers to look at corporate identity development, and also for practitioners to embrace elements of disorientation and how it may help unlock new opportunities.

1. Introduction

The importance of identities within organizations has risen in prominence (Brown, 2014; Powell, 2011; Suvatjis, Chernatony, & Halikias, 2012). Corporate identity elements (e.g. values, purpose) are playing a bigger role within organizations and technological developments have allowed organizations to express themselves in many new ways (Devereux, Melewar, & Foroudi, 2017). They also have potential to drive the distinctiveness of organizations (Balmer, 2012), which can in turn be a strong brand builder (Romanuik, Sharp, & Ehrenberg, 2007; Sharp, 2010). The environment that organizations exist in is also rapidly changing and the management of such change has become increasingly important (Waddock, Meszoely, Waddell, & Dentoni, 2015). The aforementioned technological developments and an increasingly complex world (Nyuur, 2015; Olins, 2014) raise the potential for confusion regarding the organization's identity (Olins, 2014). Identity within the context of an organization therefore holds significant strategic potential (Balmer, 2017). This is due to corporate identity being able to create "favourable corporate reputation, customer loyalty, employee commitment etc" (He, 2012, p.610). Melewar, Karaosmanoglu, and Paterson (2005) found that it boosts employee motivation aiding recruitment and staff retention, provides a strong base for organizational culture, increases transparency, brings competitive advantage,

develops better relationships and aids investment in the company. Corporate identity has also been shown to aid differentiation (Balmer, 1998) and distinctiveness (Balmer, 2012). Distinctiveness has been shown to strongly impact on brand building (Romanuik et al., 2007; Sharp, 2010). Further, corporate identity has important relationships with areas such as corporate brand, image and reputation. Due to these numerous and interdependent benefits and their foundational importance, corporate identity should be an important part of any business agenda. Whilst corporate identity has numerous associated constructs such as corporate personality, brand, image, and reputation, discussing these in depth is beyond the scope of this paper. We do, however, provide a background of how corporate identity is related to these constructs.

Analysis of existing research on corporate identity and strategic orientation reveals two gaps. Firstly, there has been little development of the corporate identity orientation construct. It was introduced by Balmer (2013) but has since received little attention. Second, inspired by the notion of dualism, it could be suggested that if a state of strategic orientation exists, so could a state of strategic disorientation. Expanding on this, we introduce the notion of corporate identity disorientation, and explore its relationship with orientation. These gaps need to be explored as they further highlight the strategic potential of corporate identity, as well as indicating an approach by which we may gain a

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Table 1
Management, marketing, and corporate marketing perspectives on identity.

Area	Key Papers	Perspective on Identity
Management	Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000	Internal in focus. This takes an internal perspective and is mostly conceptualised under the term organisational identity (Simões et al., 2005)
Marketing/Visual identity	Olins, 1978; 1989; Abratt, 1989; Markwick & Fill, 1997; Melewar & Saunders, 1998	External in focus, and emphasises the presentational aspect of identity. It has a customer orientation (Balmer, 2011; Podnar, Golob, & Jancic, 2011; Burghausen & Balmer, 2014). This area also largely concerns corporate identity's visual beginnings
Corporate Marketing	Balmer, 1998; 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2006; He and Balmer 2007; 2008; Illia & Balmer, 2012; Podnar et al., 2011; Burghausen & Balmer, 2014	Adopts both an internal and external focus. This approach was introduced by Balmer (1998) to bring together the internal and external schools of thought.

stronger understanding of strategic disorientation and the role it plays within organizations.

It follows that we open up a new area of research for academics, but also highlight the potential practical benefits of being in a state of corporate identity disorientation. This contribution is indeed needed, as organizations and brands need to display dynamic capabilities in navigating an increasingly complex world (Brodie, Benson-Rea, & Medline, 2016). What is more, how organizations simultaneously maintain continuity and flexibility has been highlighted as an area in need of further research (Wohlgemuth & Wenzel, 2016). Recent research also identifies that a lack of identity congruence could be beneficial, and that this also needs further exploration (Flint, Signori, & Golicic, 2018).

The theoretical insights generated by this paper contribute to our understanding of strategic disorientation, provide an exploration of the relationship between orientation and disorientation, and disentangle corporate identity disorientation and its potential outcomes. This culminates in a conceptual framework, along with theoretical and managerial contributions. These are arguably powerful contributions as they help organizations navigate and capitalise on potential identity disorientation, a state that can increasingly be heightened by the complex environments they inhabit.

1.1. Objective

This paper's objective is to explore corporate identity orientation and disorientation, with a focus on their relationship. In order to better understand the relationship between them, we draw upon complexity theory. We ultimately view orientation/disorientation as states existing on the same continuum. This builds upon Cilliers (2010) work on complexity and identity, by exploring further the applicability of complexity to identity. In exploring these areas, the paper also bridges the work on corporate identity orientation (Balmer, 2013) and corporate identity congruence/incongruence (Flint et al., 2018), contributing in part to Flint et al. (2018) call for a better understanding of how corporate identity incongruence could be beneficial.

Complexity theory is the study of complex systems. It has provided a useful perspective to study organizations and their environment (Anderson, 1999; Chiva, Grandío, & Alegre, 2010; Houchin & MacLean, 2005; Mason, 2007; Schneider & Somers, 2006), particularly the complex world of marketing (Gummeson, 2006; Rand & Rust, 2011; Woodside, 2014; Woodside, Nagy, & Megehee, 2018). Rand and Rust (2011) suggest that, "Marketing phenomena are often complex because they are the emergent result of many individual agents (e.g., consumers, sellers, distributors) whose motivations and actions combine so that even simple behavioural rules can result in surprising patterns" (p.181). Complexity theory counteracts mechanistic views of organizations and considers the organization as a whole (Chiva et al., 2010). The world is complex and major crises highlight the lack of usefulness of prescriptive models (Stacey, 2011), showing a need to break free from this approach to strategic management and marketing. As such, it

has important repercussions on approaches to both, identity (Cilliers, 2010; Schneider & Somers, 2006) and strategy (Cunha & Cunha, 2006; Mason, 2007; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we give overviews of corporate identity and complexity theory, followed by a discussion of their conceptual similarities. We expand upon this by discussing the notion of disorientation to refine our conceptualization of strategic disorientation. This is then further explored by looking at corporate identity orientation and disorientation, respectively. The paper concludes with a summary of the main arguments as well as implications and further research areas.

2. Corporate identity

All organizations, of any size, have a corporate identity (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Olins, 1989) and organizations can be any form of institution established to pursue a purpose (Boulton, Allen, & Bowman, 2015). This makes the concept of corporate identity one that can be widely applied. Corporate identity lacks any universally accepted definition (Kitchen, Tourky, Dean, & Shalaan, 2013; Leitch & Motion, 1999; Melewar, 2003). However, it has been variously described as 'all corporate expressions' (Cornelissen & Harris, 2001, p.63), the strategic choices and corporate expression (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012) or what a 'company's "essence" is' (Olins, 1978, p.65).

There have been multiple approaches taken to corporate identity, from the disciplines of management, marketing and corporate marketing. The table below highlights a selection of key literature of these viewpoints as well as their stance on corporate identity. This is inspired by the work of (Simões et al., 2005), which explored the differing perspectives. We strengthen this further by adding recent literature into the discussion (see Table 1).

Adopting Balmer's definition of corporate identity orientation as a starting point (and subsequently placing the paper within the corporate marketing approach) frames corporate identity as 'the innate characteristics that define and differentiate an organization' (Balmer, 2013, p.725).

However, the use of 'innate' is problematic in that it implies that something is inborn, when in fact corporate identity can develop and evolve over time. This evolution over time is something that Balmer's work (2012; 2017) suggests. It has also been discussed by other authors (e.g. Burmann, Hegner, & Riley, 2009). Balmer (2017) also sees constant "adaptation (and change)" (p1475) as an ongoing institutional characteristic. Therefore, the innate characteristics alone do not define and differentiate an organization. We therefore feel that 'characteristics that define and differentiate an organization' would be a more appropriate approach. Balmer's work into multiple identities (Balmer, 2012) also shows a very complex view of identity, with multiple identities working in a network together. This lays the groundwork for identity being seen as complex.

2.1. Associated constructs

Corporate identity has numerous peripheral constructs, which often cause confusion. To this end, we shall explore these to help set the boundaries of the corporate identity discussion.

A key part of the discussion of corporate identity is corporate personality. It is thus considered as one of the earliest theories of identity (Cornelissen & Harris, 2001). Identity is seen as the expression of the personality, i.e. the “set of essential features that gives individuality and differentiates the organisation” (Perez & del Bosque, 2014, p7). It follows that this expression approach is part and parcel of the identity view. Olins reminds us that “it is the identity that projects and reflects the reality of the corporate personality” (Olins, 1978, p.212). This view has also been suggested by other authors in the field, with corporate identity being based on corporate personality (Balmer, 1998) or generated from the corporate personality (Melewar, 2003). However, some literature suggests that personality is incorporated into elements of identity. “Corporate personality is a reflection of strategy and culture through mission and core values of an organisation. Therefore, personality dimension is implicitly incorporated in mission, vision and values” (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). This approach is the one adopted in this paper, where personality is an integral part of identity.

Organizational identity is an important part of the literature, especially if we take the internal aspects as supplied by the corporate marketing perspective into account. As the corporate identity literature moved away from its external focus towards incorporating an internal focus, it naturally made a connection with organizational identity (Cornelissen & Harris, 2001). This was also suggested by Balmer (2001) and has been incorporated into recent models of corporate identity (Kitchen et al., 2013). We take the view, as shown by Kitchen et al. (2013), that organisational identity is part of corporate identity.

The relationship with these constructs is particularly important, and again highlights how corporate identity can provide a good foundation to build upon in other areas. The relationship here is that corporate identity overlaps with and informs the corporate brand (Balmer, 1995; 2001; 2012; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Kitchen et al., 2013). There is then a similar relationship between corporate brand, image and reputation (Kitchen et al., 2013), highlighting that corporate identity is something that starts within the organization.

Closely linked to this construct is the possibility of corporate identity disorientation. If Balmer’s metaphor were extended, corporate identity disorientation would be the centrifugal force to his centripetal force of corporate identity orientation. It would therefore be a state of confusion around the corporate identity. Corporate identity disorientation is therefore an area for consideration and one that we shall develop in the subsequent sections. We believe that a complexity theory perspective could be useful to approach the development of corporate identity orientation and disorientation, and their relationship. Corporate identity disorientation also links with the area of corporate identity incongruence put forward by Flint et al. (2018). We view corporate identity disorientation as a state that leads to corporate identity incongruence. The resulting incongruence could in turn create further identity disorientation, until the issue is alleviated.

3. Complexity theory

In this section we introduce complexity theory and highlight the similarities it has with corporate identity. This will help lay the foundations for integrating complexity into the orientation/disorientation discourse.

Whilst a universal definition of complexity theory is lacking (Houchin & MacLean, 2005), at its heart it studies complex systems (Zhao, 2014) and the study of order within these disorderly, non-linear systems (McElroy, 2006). A complex system has been recently defined as a system comprising of “co-evolving multilayer networks” (Thurner, Hanel, & Klimek, 2018). Complexity theories are also “concerned with

the emergence of order in dynamic non-linear systems operating at the edge of chaos” (Burnes, 2005, p. 77). The non-linear behaviour in these dynamic systems is dependent on competition between positive and negative feedback loops, which reinforce and subdue the system’s stability (Blomme & Lintelo, 2012). It has changed how researchers approach the notion of stability and predictability (Boisot & Child, 1999). Some researchers suggest that complexity theory comprises a group of complexity theories that include chaos theory, dissipative structures theory and complex adaptive systems theory (Burnes, 2005 citing Stacey, Griffin, & Shaw, 2002). This focus on systems also highlights its initial grounding in systems theory (Smith & Graetz, 2006).

Complexity theory also argues that no single organism exists in isolation (Boulton et al., 2015) and that the world is interconnected, with systems constantly in a process of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Boulton et al., 2015). The complex adaptive systems under study are acknowledged to consist of many interconnected and adaptive parts (Anderson, 1999; Waddock et al., 2015). More poignantly, it is the relationships between these parts, or agents, that can create much of the complexity and emergence (Cilliers, 1998; Urry, 2005; Ng, 2013). Technological developments such as social networks and the Internet of Things highlight opportunities to develop complexity theory, as the world becomes increasingly connected. This is especially so within the marketing environment, which consists of complex networks of actors including suppliers, distributors, retailers and other stakeholders.

Complexity theory opposes reductionist, mechanistic approaches to science (Anderson, Crabtree, Steele, & McDaniel, 2005; Houchin & MacLean, 2005) and the idea that stability is the natural state for organizations, making them predictable (Ng, 2013; Thietart & Forgues, 1995; VanderVen, 1997). “A complex system is not constituted merely by the sum of its components, but also by the intricate relationships between these components. In ‘cutting up’ a system, the analytical method destroys what it seeks to understand” (Cilliers, 1998, p. 2). It has been suggested that this mechanistic view is ‘trying to control a machine that does not exist’ (Boulton et al., 2015, p.6). Any system that can be fragmented and measured, as per this mechanistic view, is considered as one of complication rather than complexity (Tarride, 2013). It is in this respect that complex systems are different from ‘complicated’ systems (Cilliers, 1998; Sammut-Bonnici & Wensley, 2002; Tarride, 2013). The spontaneous instability that can occur within complex systems highlights this unpredictable nature (Blomme & Lintelo, 2012). This anti-reductionist approach has caused many debates around the role of management and leadership, with managers tending to be seen more as enablers than designers (Marion & Uhl Bien, 2010).

This marriage of order and disorder (Prigogine & Stengers, 1985) is often associated with the concept of the ‘edge of chaos’. Such a view posits that the most creative part of a system is somewhere between order and chaos (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; McElroy, 2006; Prigogine & Stengers, 1985). Kauffman (1995) describes these systems as poised systems and uses the analogy of water states (ice, liquid, gaseous) to describe the potential effects on organizations, with liquid being the state allowing for the most adaptation, and the other states being too rigid or too chaotic. Too much consistency can be a source of rigidity (Cunha & Cunha, 2006) and it is in this state that the desirability of stability is questioned, and the useful nature of instability is highlighted (Stacey, 2011). Similarly, a system that is too chaotic will also suffer (Waddock et al., 2015).

Not all systems can evolve, especially those that are highly chaotic, as they cannot maintain behaviours and have too few stable components (Schneider & Somers, 2006). The desire to avoid anxiety produces patterns of stability (Houchin & MacLean, 2005). This stability can be created by applying simple rules (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997; Boulton et al., 2015), or indeed the emergence of what is known in chaos theory as strange attractors (Mason, 2007; Waddock et al., 2015). Strange attractors are points at which initial conditions are drawn to (Mitchell, 2009), and can help describe the order that emerges from chaotic

Table 2
The similarities between the complexity theory and corporate identity literatures.

Theme	Complexity Theory	Corporate Identity
Always changing and never complete	Stacey, 2011; Waddock et al., 2015; Boulton et al., 2015; Morel & Ramanujam, 1999; Sammut-Bonnici & Wensley, 2002; Smith & Graetz, 2006; Gummesson, 2006; Mason, 2007; Ng, 2013; Allen, Strathern, & Varga, 2010	Balmer, 2008; 2012; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Topalian, 2003; Herstein, Mitki, & Jaffe, 2007; Otubanjo, 2012; Schmeltz, 2014; Suvatjits et al., 2012; Balmer, 2017
Self-similarity (the degree of sameness over time)	Schneider and Somers, 2006; Blomme & Lintelo, 2012; Boulton et al., 2015; Kauffman, 1995; Mason, 2007	Balmer, 2012. (The very notion of identity is often linked with an entity being similar over time.)
External environment plays an important role	Thietart & Forgues, 1995; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Stacey, 2011; Blackman, 2013; Boulton et al., 2015; Cilliers, 2005	Cunha & Cunha, 2006; Melewar, 2003; Cornelissen & Harris, 2001; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Cornelissen, Christensen, & Kinuthia, 2012; Öberg, Grundström, & Jönsson, 2011; Simões and Mason, 2012
Opposing a one-size-fits-all approach	Anderson et al., 2005; Cilliers, 2010	Alessandri & Alessandri, 2004; Suvatjits et al., 2012; Downey, 1987; Alessandri & Alessandri, 2004; Simões et al., 2005; Melewar et al., 2005
Co-creation	Mason, 2007; Boulton et al., 2015; Waddock et al., 2015; Desai, 2010	Bruce & Solomon, 2013; Devereux et al., 2017
Multiple, interacting parts	Gummesson, 2006; Waddock et al., 2015; Boulton et al., 2015; Poutenan et al., 2016	Suvatjits et al., 2012; Melewar, 2003; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Suvatjits et al., 2012; Kitchen et al., 2013; Balmer, 2017

systems (Mason, 2007; Byrne, 1998; Waddock et al., 2015).

However, complexity theory's application to the real world has been questioned (Chiva et al., 2010; Murray, 2003; Smith & Graetz, 2006). Its lack of a universally agreed definition or approach can prove problematic (Houchin & MacLean, 2005). It can be incorrectly interpreted (Stacey, 2011). The natural science comparisons also cause debate because systems from the natural world do not include human elements (Boulton et al., 2015; Houchin & MacLean, 2005). It has also been accused of failing to escape the boundaries of metaphor (Burnes, 2005; Houchin & MacLean, 2005; Stacey, 2011). However, this metaphorical perspective can prove useful for understanding organizations (Chiva et al., 2010; Houchin & MacLean, 2005; Murray, 2003). The edge of chaos concept has also received scrutiny, as it may not have grounds in reality, and aiming for it may not be useful (Boulton et al., 2015 citing Maclean & Macintosh, 2010). However, Boulton et al. (2015) do acknowledge that a mixture of control and loosening the grip of a modernist worldview, is beneficial.

Complexity theory has been used to view organizational identity (Schneider & Somers, 2006; Allen, Strathern, & Varga, 2010) but rarely explicitly corporate identity (Woermann, 2010), and we argue that it is a useful approach to further explore this field. Complexity theory has received much attention in the organizational change literature (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Burnes, 2005; O'Shea, Alfonso, & Morton, 2013; Styhre, 2002). Gioa et al. (2000) and Koskinen (2015) discussed the notion of adaptive instability and unpredictable change, respectively, specifically by reference to organizational identity, albeit without mentioning the term 'complexity'.

Complexity theory has long been used to aid an understanding of organizations (Stacey, 2011; Mason, 2007), causing the reassessment of approaches to leadership (Schneider & Somers, 2006), strategy (Boulton et al., 2015; Cunha & Cunha, 2006; Mason, 2007) and marketing (Gummesson, 2006). Complexity theory also suggests a change of mindset to business research and practice, particularly by reference to the efficacy of prediction and control (Boulton et al., 2015). In fact, the presence of chaos or complexity in a system implies that perfect prediction is impossible (Mitchell, 2009).

Much focus in complexity theory is placed on the study of complex adaptive systems (Anderson, 1999; Boulton et al., 2015; Cunha & Cunha, 2006; Mason, 2007; Morel & Ramanujam, 1999; Schneider & Somers, 2006). Complex adaptive systems can be seen as "social systems that are, diverse, non-linear, consisting of multiple interactive, interdependent and interconnected sub elements" (Waddock et al., 2015, p.996). They are characterized by non-linear, co-evolving and emergent dynamics that are inherently unpredictable (Waddock et al., 2015, p. 998). One approach to complex systems has been to see them as "comprised of both concrete elements that interact and more diffuse

characteristics-such as mood or belief-which are less easy to measure and define" (Boulton et al., 2015, p.35). This definition has much in common with corporate identity approaches that consist of many concrete elements and diffuse characteristics (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Kitchen et al., 2013; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Melewar, 2003; Suvatjits et al., 2012). Such an approach therefore views an organization as a system, i.e., a whole comprised of many parts (Gummesson, 2006), and also one that is different from the sum of these parts (Waddock et al., 2015). It makes corporate identity essentially the emergent identity of the complex adaptive system under investigation.

This paper will now explore how applying this perspective to corporate identity and strategic orientation can help us understand the relationship between orientation and disorientation.

3.1. Complexity theory and corporate identity

In this section we highlight how corporate identity and complexity are related. If the focus of the strategic orientation (i.e. corporate identity) is complex, then it is conceivable to expect that the subsequent orientation should also be complex.

Identity has been explored from a complexity perspective (Cilliers, 2010), as has corporate identity (Woermann, 2010), although Woermann's work places a large focus on individuals and aspects of organizational identity. Cilliers argued that identity "should be stable, i.e., it should resist some external influences, but at the same time it should transform (deconstruct) in order to remain vital" (Cilliers, 2010, p 15). This approach is similar to how orientation and disorientation may be related. We build upon Woermann's (2010) and Cilliers (2010) work by consulting more in-depth the corporate identity literature. Table 2 displays the overlapping themes in this literature, which suggests that the relationship between the two is worthy of further development.

The relationship between corporate identity and complexity theory provides a foundation for further looking at orientation/disorientation. What is more, it suggests that complexity theory may be a useful perspective for viewing the relationship between Flint et al's corporate identity congruence/incongruence. In what follows, we look to the literature and address the identified research gaps.

4. Corporate identity orientation

At the outset, we shall briefly discuss corporate identity orientation, framing it as a foundation from which to discuss disorientation. It is the relationship between the two that is of predominant interest in this paper.

Corporate identity orientation is "the corporate identity as an organization's centripetal force based on an organization's innate

Table 3
Types of strategic disorientation. A description of potential other strategic orientations, based on notable strategic orientations (e.g. market orientation).

Type of strategic disorientation	Area concerned
Market disorientation	Disorientated about whom the market is, or what their needs are
Competitor disorientation	Disorientated around who the competition are
Corporate identity disorientation	Disorientated about the organisation’s defining and differentiating characteristics
Corporate brand disorientation	Disorientated about the what corporate brand promise is
Product/technological disorientation	Disorientated about what they should be developing
Organizational identity disorientation	Disorientated around who they are

characteristics that define and differentiate an entity” (Balmer, 2013, p. 725). At present, this is the only definition of the corporate identity orientation construct. Empirical research regarding identity orientation in general is also seen to be lacking (Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2012), although organizational identity orientation has received attention (Brickson, 2007).

Corporate identity orientation, with its focus on identity, could encourage stability in the organization. The coherence and congruence would separate it from being a purely chaotic system and would satiate the desire to avoid anxiety by producing patterns of stability (Houchin & MacLean, 2005), possibly through the process of negative feedback loops. Coherence is also at the very core of an organization (Olins, 1989) and such an orientation could encourage a form of ‘self-similarity’ (Schneider & Somers, 2006). Self-similarity in complexity theory is where parts of an entity “exhibit a quality of the entity’s whole” (Schneider & Somers, 2006, p.357). This could lead to the development of patterns and thus a coherent corporate identity. These patterns could be built around the mission, values, purpose or other related identity elements, or even the “symbols of loyalty” that Olins (1989, p.25) suggests. If the ‘strange attractors’ concept was adopted from chaos/complexity theory (Kauffman, 1995; Mason, 2007), it could encourage the development of recognisable characteristics that generate stability. This could also help contribute to creating Flint et al. (2018) corporate identity congruence. This in turn may then help with the organization/brand more easily identified by stakeholders.

5. Strategic disorientation

Our approach to disorientation is inspired by a Heraclitian perspective of ‘unity of opposites’ (Garrison, 1985) and dualism (Fay, 1996; Smith & Graetz, 2006). These approaches imply that if a state of strategic orientation exists, then so must a state of strategic disorientation. Disorientation itself can be defined as ‘the condition of having lost your bearings’ or a state of ‘confusion’ (Collins English Dictionary), ‘a usually transient state of confusion especially as to time, place, or identity often as a result of disease or drugs’ (Merriam-Webster) or ‘not knowing which direction we have come from/or are going’ (He & Baruch, 2009).

Disorientation has its roots in the psychology literature where it is said to be similar, if not identical, to confusion (Eskey, Friedman, & Friedman, 1957). It is usually attributed to spatial disorientation (Eskey et al., 1957; Waller & Hodgson, 2006), time (Eskey et al., 1957; Wang & Spelke, 2000; Littlefield et al., 2001) or identity/person (Eskey et al., 1957; He & Baruch, 2009). States of disorientation can lead to individuals making poor decisions as a result of the ‘disorientation effect’

(Waller & Hodgson, 2006). This disorientation effect could potentially transpose to organizations, and the decisions made whilst in a state of strategic disorientation. This state of disorientation could be similar to the chaotic states mentioned earlier with regard to complexity and chaos theories. However, as we shall argue later, the effects of disorientation may not be wholly negative.

We approach defining strategic disorientation by looking at the definitions of strategic orientation. Using the definitions of strategic orientation as “the guiding principles that influence a firm’s marketing and strategy-making activities” (Noble, Sinha, & Kumar, 2002) or from the perspective of “orientation focuses resources to achieve a desired outcome” (Grawe, Chen, & Daugherty, 2009), implies a lack of focus of said resources and principles or, as Balmer (2013) describes, an organization’s ‘cornerstone’. Therefore, when an organization lacks focus around its strategic elements, it could be seen to be in a state of ‘strategic disorientation’. This fits with the evolution of a strategic orientation itself (Ruokonen & Saarenketo, 2009), as it could err into/ fluctuate between a state of disorientation. This could also be approached from a complexity perspective. Then, it would be doing this naturally, or indeed represent when one strategic orientation takes precedence over another. Gedajlovic, Cao, and Zhang (2012) discusses a state where an organization lacks a strategic orientation. However, from a conceptual perspective, it could be argued that lacking an orientation and being confused about one are rather separate things.

Strategic disorientation could therefore occur if a lack of focus existed around the driving force of the organization. Table 3 summarises some potential strategic disorientations:

With corporate identity being the area of interest, the notion of corporate identity disorientation will now be explored further, and how it could be related to corporate identity orientation.

Specifically, as we consider orientation/disorientation as duality (see Fig. 1.), we shall explore the nature of dualism. “Dualities reflect opposing forces that must be balanced-properties that seem contradictory or paradoxical, but which are in fact complementary” (Evans & Doz, 1992, p.85). There therefore must be a balance between these opposing forces, consisting of a minimal threshold of each (Smith & Graetz, 2006). Viewed through the lens of complexity theory, the two ends of the spectrum would push and pull against each other, creating a similar effect to that of the ‘edge of chaos’ (McElroy, 2006). Using dualities in this manner has been seen as a potential method of operationalizing complexity theory (Smith & Graetz, 2006). The relationship between strategic orientation/disorientation could thus create a context within which to discuss complexity theory.

However, studies have shown that disorientation/confusion in individuals could exist on separate scales, as identity synthesis and

A representation of disorientation and orientation existing on the same continuum

Fig. 1. Representation of disorientation and orientation.



identity confusion (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Wang, & Olthuis, 2009). Research on ideal values and counter ideal values (Van Quaquebeke, Graf, Kerschreiter, Schuh, & van Dick, 2014) also adopted a similar approach and resulted in the conceptualization of two distinct forces. Similar research exists in the ambidexterity literature (He and Wong, 2004; Gedajlovic et al., 2012) on whether organizations can be exploratory or exploitative in equal measure or not. Therefore, the dualistic viewpoint is open to further debate. This dualistic perspective also highlights how corporate identity congruence and incongruence could be related.

6. Corporate identity disorientation

Viewing corporate identity disorientation and orientation as a duality can aid in defining corporate identity disorientation. In his definition of corporate identity orientation, Balmer (2013) describes it as the centripetal force. To continue this metaphor, corporate identity disorientation could act as the centrifugal force, or reactive centrifugal force. Centrifugal force is often considered as a pseudo force (Sheremata, 2000) and is viewed by some to be the same force as centripetal, just with differing points of reference. This could again support a dualistic approach.

Of the previously mentioned, strategic disorientations, it is pertinent to investigate corporate identity disorientation first, as ‘identity’ features prominently in approaches to disorientation (Eskey et al., 1957; He & Baruch, 2009). It also assists as a response to Flint et al. (2018) recent call for more work into exploring the potential benefits of corporate identity incongruence. Identity disorientation has been explored in the realm of organizational identity by (He and Baruch, 2009) and was seen as a negative state in reaction to change. The other strategic orientations could be affected by corporate identity disorientation, as a result of the relationship between corporate identity orientation and other strategic orientations due to corporate identity’s close link with strategy (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Melewar, 2003; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Kitchen et al., 2013). The ebbing and flowing of a corporate identity focus will therefore have numerous effects within the organization, informed by a corporate identity’s all-pervasive nature, again highlighting its complexity and importance to managers.

Corporate identity disorientation would imply a lack of focus around the corporate identity, to the point where it becomes confused, or disorientated. This could be confusion regarding the mission, values, vision or whatever it is that defines and differentiates the organization. The negative effects of such a state have been described by Olins: “When companies lose sight of their individuality, their real purpose and strengths, they get deflected into making mistakes” (1989, p. 7). This could also contribute to corporate identity incongruence (Flint et al., 2018) and result in ambivalent identification of the organization (Balmer, 2017).

The notion of identity confusion or crisis comes predominantly from the psychiatric/psychology literature, first mentioned by Erikson (1963). This has led to the idea of identity diffusion which implies uncertainty about who one is and what one is to become (Huang, 2006), and depersonalisation (Stuart & Laraia, 2004). These notions echo concepts from the personal identity literature where corporate identity often draws inspiration. This can also be related to organizational drift, which can occur when strategic intent is not clear (Cunha & Cunha, 2006). Drifting organizations are described by Cunha and Cunha (2006) as “those that act opportunistically without a common goal to unite their actions” (p.846). Therefore, it could be seen that ‘drift’ could be a result of strategic disorientation. However organizational drift has also been described as having drifted towards a different goal, so it is not always losing the goal, and could potentially mean a shift in focus as opposed to becoming confused.

With regard to the causes of disorientation, a number of possibilities can be considered. Organizations currently exist in a world of crises (Heller & Darling, 2012; Olins, 2014) and a crisis is potentially always

on the horizon (Heller & Darling, 2012), which could cause a sense of disorientation. In a similar vein, in an era when organizations and industries face disruption, disorientation could also be a more frequent and latent threat.

However, disorientation may not always be negative, and viewing it from a complexity viewpoint would imply that it is part of an organization’s existence. This furthers the work of Flint et al. (2018) suggesting that intentional corporate identity incongruence (which disorientation would influence) could be a useful strategy. Elements of this positive side have been discussed within the practitioner literature, drawing upon ideas such as the benefits of failure (Harford, 2011), the exploitation of chaotic environments (Gutsche, 2009), or being more disruptive with the brand (Brown, 2018).

Organizations could experience fluctuating stages of orientation and disorientation, creating examples of order and disorder (Prigogine and Stengers, 1985). Making sure there is the right combination of rigidity and chaos (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), or indeed stability and instability (Cilliers, 2010), can be beneficial. This could be an example of how a system can stay ‘robust and adaptive at the same time’ (Thurner et al., 2018). To go through a state of disorientation could thus lead to a further understanding of the mission and values (or other defining characteristics), through emergence and reinforcing identity. Building on this assertion, it could act as an exploratory capability that allows the organization to get out of its comfort zone, aiding with the evolution and growth of the organization and its identity. Positive feedback loops of complexity could further help forge new ground and fuel growth through more distinctive and differentiating attributes being created, thereby contributing to brand positioning.

Being comfortable with disorientation may also allow the organization to adapt to its environment more effectively, and not be shaken by external or internal factors that cause confusion. It could be argued that the organization needs to fluctuate between orientation and disorientation to avoid becoming stagnant. Peters (1987) suggests that “stability and inertia are the enemies of organizational prosperity.” (cited in Smith, 2005). This could therefore aid with the notion of organizational improvisation (Hadida, Tarvainen, & Rose, 2014) and highlight that change and crises can be opportunistic (Kovoor-Misra, 2009).

In contrast, complete and consistent disorientation of the corporate identity could lead to a state of complete chaos. A key debate here, and potentially a controversial suggestion that arguably merits further discussion, would be to what extent management could willingly cause disorientation in order to harvest its benefits.

To highlight the uniqueness of the present study, Table 4 shows how our thinking fits within the existing literature. Rather than drawing from all literature sources, we have focussed on studies that have dealt in some way with confusion around identity. We have also included papers on strategy, which show the beginnings of these ideas. This table thus aids researchers who wish to explore this area further. It suggests that these ideas appear to be growing amongst marketing researchers, whilst most of the papers in the earlier period derived from an organizational identity perspective. The reason for this could potentially be a manifestation of industry trends of disruption and agile organizations.

7. Conceptual framework

In the framework below, we highlight the notion of corporate identity orientation and disorientation along with potential outcomes these could have according to the current literature. This is all shown with a feedback loop into corporate identity.

The above framework synthesizes our analysis of the corporate identity literature and the strategic orientation/disorientation literature. In the following section, we discuss our conclusions and the theoretical and managerial implications of the study.

Table 4
Positioning the present study within the literature.

Publication	Conceptual focus	Other variables/concepts	Methodology	Sample size	How is the present study different?
Gregersen and Johansen (2018)	Visual identity- Consistency and inconsistency are shown on a spectrum and they also portray consistency as a dogma.	N/A	Qualitative, Face to face interviews with strategists	10 interviews	This study builds further on the spectrum approach, by looking further than visual identity. Their consistency-as-dogma approach is a precursor to our identification of the potentially negative outcomes of orientation.
Flint et al. (2018)	Corporate identity incongruence - Introduces identity incongruence and suggests it could be useful.	Corporate identity congruence	Qualitative, interviews, onsite observation, document analysis, over 7 years	153 interviews with managers from 124 organizations in seven countries, multiple onsite observations and hundreds of documents	This study builds upon Flint et al by suggesting that disorientation may be a precursor to incongruence. We also build upon their ideas on positive incongruence with positive disorientation.
Balmer (2017)	Identity ambivalence and disidentification/ identification- these are placed within a new corporate identity schema.	Corporate marketing, strategy, legal theory, social identity branch theory, stakeholder theory	Conceptual	N/A	This study suggests these areas are potentially an outcome of corporate identity disorientation/orientation
Abdallah and Langley (2014)	Strategic ambiguity- Strategic ambiguity as a double-edged sword and suggests that over time it can be detrimental.	Organizational action, creative consumption, divergent perspectives	Qualitative case study (2001–2005), document analysis, observation, interviews	32 semi- structured interviews, 8 observation sessions, extensive collection of documents	This study approaches this from a corporate marketing perspective, and with a focus on corporate identity. We also apply the strategic orientation perspective.
Balmer (2013)	Corporate Identity Orientation- Introduces the construct and other forms of corporate orientation.	Corporate brand, corporate marketing, various other orientations	Conceptual	N/A	This study uses Balmer's paper as a foundation to explore further corporate identity orientation. We also introduce corporate identity disorientation.
Leitch and Davenport (2011)	Corporate Identity as constraint- suggests that corporate identity, whilst being an enabler, can be a constraint.	Corporate marketing, temporality, logics of equivalence and difference	Qualitative single case study, interviews and document analysis	15 interviews, 158 emails, 136 media items	We build on this by looking at how disorientation could alleviate these constraints and also contributing to their discussion on corporate identity being a constraint.
Cilliers (2010)	Resistance and deconstruction of identity is needed to adapt. Also discusses the danger of identity being rigid and constraining.		Conceptual	N/A	We build upon this work by incorporating Cilliers' work into the corporate identity literature.
He and Baruch (2009)	Organisational Identity transformation – Within identity transformation they identified one stage as identity disorientation.	Organisational identity change, institutional theory	Qualitative case study, observation, interviews, document analysis	6 weeks observation, 24 interviews, extensive documents	We build upon this idea of identity disorientation but from the corporate identity perspective, and also suggest how it could be provide benefits.
Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008)	Organizational ambidexterity- Briefly discusses identity from the organisational perspective, including the tension of continuity and change.	Organizational learning, technological innovation, organizational adaptation, strategic management, organisational design	Literature Review	N/A	This study differs by developing these ideas in the corporate identity literature and applying a complexity viewpoint to the discussion.
Cunha and Cunha (2006)	Organisational Drift – Drifting organisations are considered those that act without a common goal to unite actions.	Complexity theory, Schumpeterian environments, improvisation, minimal structures, dynamic capabilities, organisational resilience	Conceptual	N/A	This paper explores similar ideas within the corporate marketing/strategic orientation perspective, specifically corporate identity. We also look at potential positives.
Corley and Gioia (2004)	Organisational Identity ambiguity – explores identity ambiguity within corporate spin offs.	Organisational identity change	Qualitative single case study, interviews, document analysis, observation	80 interviews, 38 informants, observation throughout case study	We focus on this area from a corporate marketing perspective and link it with the strategic orientation literature.
Foreman and Whetten (2002)	Organisational Identity congruence - between identity perceptions and expectations.	N/A	Quantitative, survey	2000 sent, 800 completed, 670 usable.	We differ from this paper in regards to taking a more corporate marketing perspective but also by exploring the positive side of incongruence.
Gioia et al. (2000)	Adaptive instability - To induce change by introducing instability (with guidance) into an organisation, resulting in a dynamic consistency. They conduct this paper from an organisational identity perspective.	Organisational image	Conceptual	N/A	We apply similar ideas to the corporate identity literature and also use complexity as a lens in which to view this. We also embed these ideas into the strategic orientation literature.

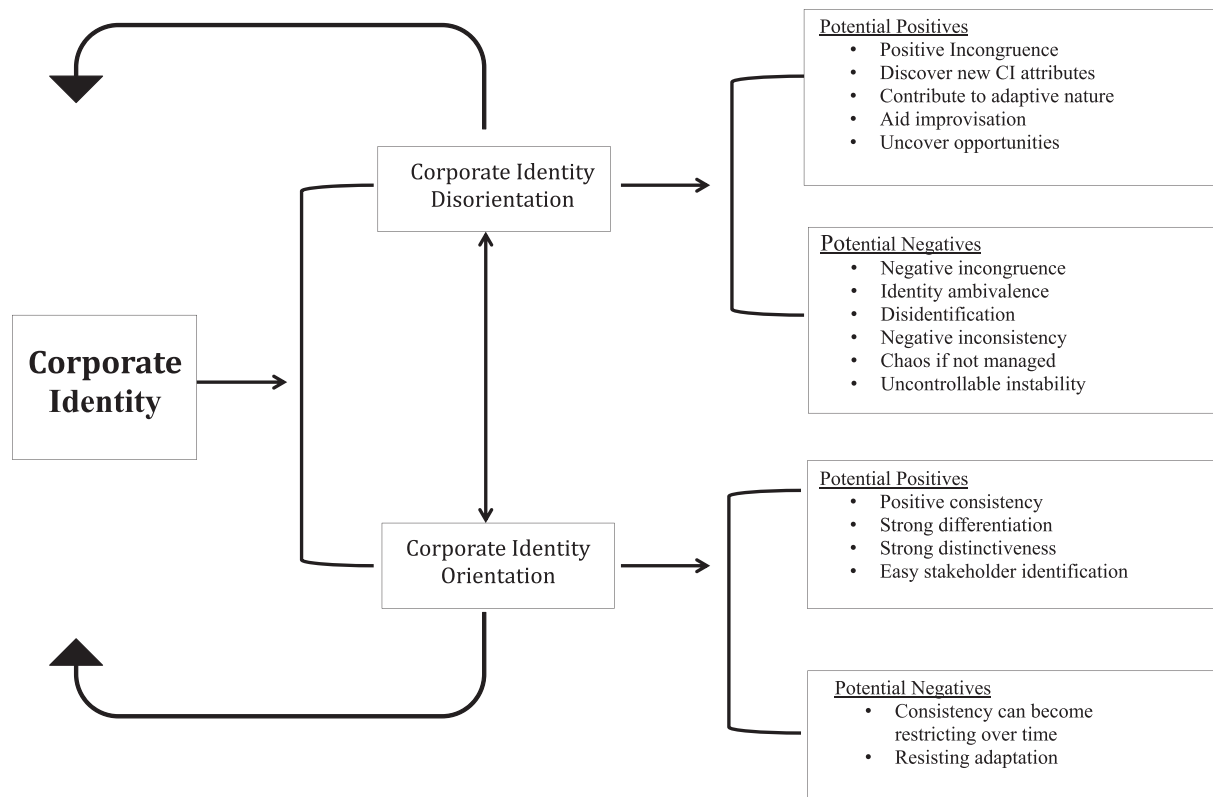


Fig. 2. Conceptual model of corporate identity orientation and disorientation.

8. Conclusions and implications

There is little research on corporate identity orientation, corporate identity disorientation and the relationship between the two. To help understand this relationship, and offer insight on the constructs themselves, this paper has drawn upon complexity theory. Complexity theory has yet to be explored in depth with regard to corporate identity, despite the literature streams sharing many similarities. We have also drawn upon the corporate identity and strategic orientation literature to build our arguments. Exploring beyond corporate identity i.e. corporate brand, corporate image and corporate reputation is beyond the scope of the present study.

8.1. Theoretical contribution

This paper offers three theoretical contributions, which shall now be discussed in turn. In highlighting the theoretical contributions of this paper, we have been inspired by the approaches of Whetten (1989) and Corley and Gioia (2011).

We introduce the first theoretical contribution by reference to the notion of strategic disorientation. We contend that this contribution has potential to impact both management and marketing scholarship. It may be of particular value for those interested in strategic orientation. Whilst strategic orientation is a larger presence in management research than in marketing research, there are numerous strategic orientations that have been pursued by marketing scholars, most notably market orientation. Strategic disorientation is different from current thinking. In the strategic orientation literature, the focus has been on the orientation component, for example, market orientation or product orientation. In contrast, this paper follows a line of thought inspired by dualism: if orientation exists, so could disorientation. In this spirit, we introduce various strategic disorientations that could be explored in future research, namely market disorientation, competitor disorientation, corporate identity disorientation, corporate brand disorientation,

product disorientation and organizational identity disorientation. To this end, we argue that this notion helps portray a more complete picture of strategic orientation within organizations, as well as opening up disorientation as an area for future research. We have also drawn upon the strategic orientation literature to form a foundation upon which to define strategic disorientation. This contribution is timely, as increased disruption in various industries could cause disorientation across multiple areas of the organization. It follows that contributing knowledge in this area will help organizations better prepare for these scenarios, and potentially capitalise on them.

The second contribution is the exploration of the relationship between orientation and disorientation. This again impacts both management and marketing fields. What is more, as we draw on a complexity theory perspective to develop the argument, this also impacts the area of complex systems. This is scientifically useful for scholars as it further develops the notion of strategic disorientation, building upon the introduction of the construct earlier in the paper. Of course, being aware of strategic disorientation in isolation is not enough; being aware of how it relates to orientation is key to understanding its nature. Exploring this relationship highlights how doses of strategic disorientation could be useful, and this is discussed further in the section on our third contribution. To explore the relationship between the two constructs, we drew on complexity theory and dualism. Utilizing complexity theory also highlights how disorientation could be seen as an emergent state. It would thus be of particular interest to those studying emergence. By applying the above perspectives, we conclude that orientation/disorientation exist on the same continuum and are emergent states that can spread through an organization. Organizations arguably fluctuate between the two states over time in the same manner as order and disorder, and stability and instability. We have built this relationship upon dualism and opted to consider it on a continuum. This was also informed by the complexity literature, which helped us build our conceptual framework of corporate identity disorientation and introduce a more nuanced picture than has hitherto been presented

in the literature.

Our third contribution brings the conceptualization of corporate identity disorientation and its potential benefits into a sharper focus. For example, disorientation could lead to discovering new aspects of the corporate identity, thus improving the organization's ability to adapt to its surroundings. It could prevent the organization from becoming too rigid in the context of its identity. This would conceivably be restricting in the long term, and limit growth. A conceptual framework is provided (see Fig. 2) that summarizes these potential outcomes of disorientation. This is also carried out for corporate identity orientation. Along with Table 4, the framework supports future scholarly endeavors, as it brings structure to an otherwise overly fluid scholarly arena. The conceptual framework/table provided also helps by offering a structure to a burgeoning literature in this area. By summarizing the literature, our structure aids researchers in developing new scholastic grounds. Specifically, this will be of use to corporate identity scholars, as well as those examining organizational identity, as the two share conceptual similarities. We also use a complex systems approach to explore the relationship with corporate identity orientation/disorientation. This could be of interest to those studying complex systems. As we viewed orientation/disorientation on a continuum, we build upon the orientation work by Balmer (2013), which was also an area in need of further development. This contributes to a stronger, overall understanding of corporate identity. In addition, we introduce disorientation as a precursor to incongruence, i.e., having an initial lack of focus about the corporate identity may result in incongruence. This incongruence could then lead to further disorientation. We frame disorientation as a precursor to Flint et al. (2018) incongruence amongst other potential outcomes. This forms part of the conceptual framework provided, although we note that the introduction of corporate identity disorientation is different from the current corporate identity literature, which tends to restrict endeavors to the importance of consistency. However, there has been some recent work beginning to question this notion (Flint et al., 2018; Gregersen & Johansen, 2018). We built on this observation by exploring further the positives that can be gleaned from this seemingly counterintuitive idea. With the risk of disruption, we recognize that there is indeed an increased risk of disorientation. However, the importance of being distinctive could be aided by discovering new aspects of identity. Therefore, whilst inducing disorientation may sound counterproductive, it could also be a way of creating more distinctive identifying attributes. In summation, we offer fresh perspectives on how disorientation could be positive for a corporate identity.

8.2. Managerial contributions

We also wish to bring several managerial contributions to the reader's attention. Firstly, this paper suggests that going through a state of corporate identity disorientation is potentially useful and can provide opportunities for the organization. Experiencing disorientation is a potential regular occurrence in the current business environment. For example, new external technology developments, or disruptive competitors could lead to a state of confusion around the identity. Therefore, managers should become comfortable with this state, and try and leverage benefits from it. Doing this could aid in the growth of the organization's identity, as it could lead to the discovery of new aspects that help define and differentiate the organization.

Managers could achieve this either by inducing disorientation in their organizations or by embracing disorientation that may be forced upon them. Managers looking to induce disorientation could achieve this by experimenting with new technology, new internal communications, new ways of working, or even new industries. Building on this assertion, new 'defining and differentiating characteristics', an important part of identity, can potentially be discovered. However, they should be aware that too much disorientation may be detrimental. A corporate identity orientation should not be lost altogether. For

example, if disorientation were to lead to incongruent messages being communicated to external stakeholders, this could prove problematic. Similarly, if there was severe, continuous organization-wide disorientation this could cause compromising issues. In this sense, it would be useful for managers to monitor any dominance of this emergent state. Becoming familiar with this could aid in how the organization adapts to its environment and effectively deals with external challenges.

A further recommendation to managers is to make sure that a balance is being kept by still applying focus to a corporate identity orientation. Whilst this paper does advocate the benefits of disorientation, this is not to be at the complete expense of orientation. Building consistency within the identity is still important, and this can have multiple benefits, such as helping to build saliency amongst external stakeholders. Therefore, remembering to apply elements of corporate identity orientation will help keep a crucial balance. As organizations are complex systems, perfect prediction and control is limited. However, this is not to say that the solution is 'do nothing'. As mentioned previously, a complexity approach does not mean embracing a *laissez-faire* one. It is recommended that managers adopt the mindset of an enabler, rather than a designer as suggested by Marion and Uhl Bien (2010). One approach is to adopt a simple rules approach rather than applying many rigid rules. This is especially so if a heavily co-creative approach to the organization is adopted. Managers could look at their current corporate identity and assess whether it is constraining and forcing them to be too rigid. Whilst being consistent remains important, in a rapidly changing environment too much consistency could arguably cause unnecessary rigidity.

8.3. Implications for future research

In the following section we suggest areas that could prove useful for future research and theoretical development.

8.3.1. The components of corporate identity orientation/disorientation

Further exploration of the components of corporate orientation/disorientation could be beneficial. This could take the approach of antecedents and consequences adopted by (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). Whilst corporate identity orientation/disorientation development under a complexity theory perspective would be interesting, it could be approached from other epistemological/ontological approaches, in which case a linear approach to modeling the construct could be adopted. However, from the complexity viewpoint corporate identity orientation could be of particular benefit to enabling stability within the organization. It follows that research within the complexity field could be of interest. The creation of relatively stable patterns could also link with the literature on the replication of organizational routines (Friesl & Larty, 2013). Further to this, research on strategic orientations has suggested that they can be adopted when they are needed (Hakala, 2011), and the very nature of when is the best time to adopt a corporate identity orientation could therefore be explored. Similarly, the exploration of when and what is deemed to be beneficial, conjunctive orientations could be of interest, considering the importance of a market orientation in marketing. Examples of when orientations could be useful to adopt include a start-up phase, during mergers and acquisitions (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; Öberg et al., 2011), mismanagement (Heller & Darling, 2012), new resources acquisition (Bruce & Solomon, 2013), and in industries and times of rapid change. Example questions could be: How does corporate identity orientation create self-similarity within the organization? What are the antecedents and consequences of corporate identity orientation and disorientation? When/why should a corporate identity orientation be adopted?

8.3.2. The nature of strategic disorientations

In addition to corporate identity disorientation, other disorientations may emerge: market, organizational, product, corporate brand

and competitor disorientations could also be researched in their respective fields. Another area of future research is exploring the areas of an organization that may be more susceptible to positive forms of disorientation, relative to others. For example, with corporate identity disorientation, are the benefits only applicable to the internal aspects of corporate identity, i.e. should external messaging be confused? Example questions could be: How do other strategic disorientations manifest themselves? What elements of a corporate identity are more open to positive forms of disorientation? How is a healthy level of disorientation maintained?

8.3.3. Adoption of the corporate identity orientation

A further area for future research is the examination of who could adopt corporate identity orientation. Both internal and external stakeholders could potentially adopt this orientation. It is in this respect that stakeholder theory could provide a useful perspective, not to mention the boundaries of what exactly is included in the complex adaptive system under study. With co-creation/construction on the rise with external stakeholders (Bruce & Solomon, 2013; Devereux et al., 2017; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Ramaswamy, 2008; Roser, Defilippi, & Samson, 2013), this highlights the possibility that external audiences could adopt corporate identity orientation. Stakeholders could thus have a vested interest in the existence and presentation of an organization, and help it flourish and create new forms of self-organization and emergence. Again, when there is the possibility of co-destruction (Plé and Cáceres, 2010), it could be argued that for stakeholders to resist destruction could suggest some form of corporate identity orientation. This is perhaps also evident in the observations of ‘fans’ of an organization (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008) who can defend the identity when under attack, or contribute to any crowdfunding initiatives. Therefore, the idea of external stakeholder strategy could become prevalent. Another area could help disentangle how this idea would translate to national identities under the notion of national identity orientation, as there are already acknowledged similarities between national and corporate identities. Example questions could be: How do external stakeholders of an organization adopt a corporate identity orientation? What constitutes national identity orientation/disorientation?

8.4. Conclusion

This paper contributes to research on corporate identity, complexity theory and strategic orientation. We introduce the notion of corporate identity disorientation and discuss its relationship with corporate identity orientation, aiming to suggest further research avenues in this area. To help achieve this objective, the theoretical lens of complexity theory was employed. Through this perspective, we argue that disorientation need not be a negative state for an organization to experience, and, in fact, it would form part of the instability inherent in organizations. This paper suggests that the notion of orientation and disorientation should exist on the same continuum and both be included in the orientation process.

At the outset, we portray the role of complexity theory in organizations, and the mindset that is associated with this perspective, i.e., to question the likelihood of predictability and the degree of control that practitioners have over corporate identity. This paper also highlights the usefulness of corporate identity orientation and the stabilizing effect it can have in chaotic environments that organizations find themselves in. By placing such a dynamic construct at the heart of the organization, it could help organizations adapt in an ambidextrous manner, and improve improvisation. This paper also highlights that not all forms of disorientation are negative, and in fact a tight control over the identity may not allow the organization to evolve, adapt and develop as effectively as it could. However, being clear on the goals and purpose of the organization and its defining characteristics can help stabilize the organization and guide it out of a truly chaotic environment.

As shown in this paper, adopting a complexity theory perspective can introduce new ways in which to research the multifaceted arena of corporate identity. By using complexity theory in this manner, we hope that others will adopt this view further to expand corporate identity research. We also encourage the development of disorientation and further consideration of its potential benefits.

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