

Identity and Meaning in Organizational Networks: Evidence from Fashion Houses and Combat Units

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ABSTRACT

We examine organizations as formally constituted networks of identities that act upon other identities in their operating environments through shared sets of meanings. Although all identities are triggered by positions in networks of ties enmeshed with domains of meanings, organizations represent formal efforts to coordinate certain kinds of activity around specific meanings. Our discussion emerges from concepts central to the Identity and Control framework articulated by sociologist Harrison C. White. Using qualitative evidence, we apply this framework to fashion houses and combat units. While fashion designers assert the *distinctiveness* of their individual craft through unique designs, combatants seek *cohesion* in maneuvers through similar execution of tactics. In their environments, fashion houses *enable* the expression of consumer identities' taste through the production of sartorial appearance, whereas combat units *disable* the expression of enemy identities' hostile intent through the application of violence.