THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF (THE IDEA OF) INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

CASE STUDY OF SMALL TO MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN THE UK

HOANG ANH THU NGUYEN
Doctor of Philosophy
ASTON UNIVERSITY

September 2021

Aston University
Birmingham

THESIS ABSTRACT

The social construction of (the idea of) intellectual capital: Case study of small to medium-sized enterprises in the UK

Hoang Anh Thu Nguyen, Doctor of Philosophy, September 2021

Intellectual capital (IC) has been a popular fashion phenomenon, when IC scholars were considered trendsetters who created numberless IC definitions and frameworks; meanwhile, the idea of IC seemed to be poorly understood by companies (the followers) (Schaper, 2016). This applied especially in relation to people with different backgrounds (Marr and Chatzkel, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2001). Consequently, it is time to get to know what the companies (particularly people in those companies) really think about IC, and why so. Especially, this issue is becoming even more crucial during the time when there have been so many changes and uncertainties in our society.

According to Hacking (1999), we can treat "something" as an object or an idea. Drawing on this argument, the literature review carried out reveals that most of the IC studies focus on the object IC. Meanwhile, just a small number of IC studies explored the idea of IC. However, IC scholars seem to have over-relied on preset IC frameworks and researchers' support, which has partly eclipsed actual participants' knowledge and the analysis did not yield a detailed interpretation of the participants' opinions about IC. Additionally, they have not provided any explanations for such diversity in the understanding of IC among different people. As a result, taking a different standpoint from most IC studies, the research aims to investigate IC *as an idea* - a perspective which has not yet been addressed explicitly so far in the literature. Wearing the social construction lens, particularly Berger and Luckmann's (1966), the researcher wished to unlock how IC is understood in practice, and why and how people have such understandings of it.

In this research, the case study method was chosen. Different interviews with people (both Vietnamese and British) holding various positions in three small organisations in the UK were conducted. Other materials such as the company website, Facebook, their brochure, leaflet, consultant report, magazine article and recruitment advertisements were analysed in addition to the interview transcripts. Both texts and visuals were taken into account. The visual methodology adopted mainly relied on Rose's guidelines (2016).

The findings from the study indicated that via internal and external interactions, the understandings of IC have been constructed under the impact of culture, education, role, experience, length of service and type of organisation. Moreover, the way such understandings have been communicated is also determined by the different people involved, the target audience, and the technical and technological boundaries.

By exploring the *idea* of IC, rather than the *object* IC, this study lies among a small number of studies in the voluminous IC literature. It has shed some more light on the two underexplored issues - how IC is understood in practice; and how (the communications of) such understandings have been constructed. Thus hopefully, the research can be of value to scholars, practitioners and it can open up new avenues for future research.

Keywords: *social construction, intellectual capital, Berger and Luckmann, visual methodology, qualitative method, epistemology, theory of knowledge, interactions.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"*A dream you dream alone is only a dream.*
A dream you dream together is reality."
John Lennon

To me, doing the PhD is indeed an adventure with all the memorable and valuable experience to get my dream come true. And I am eternally grateful for all the support I have fortunately received throughout the journey.

First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Melina Manochin and Prof. Ivo de Loo for their invaluable advice, continuous support, and patience during my PhD study. Their immense knowledge and plentiful experience have encouraged me in all the time of my academic research and daily life. They have opened up new horizons where I was trained to be a qualitative researcher. If it had not been for them, I would not have been able to delve into new oceans of knowledge and touch on different interesting angels of research and the current topic.

My great thanks also go to my husband and daughter who daringly decided to come to the UK with me to start a brand new chapter of their life; my parents in Vietnam who have been so brave and self-sacrificing to allow me to live far away from them - I owe them for the overwhelming support given to me from a distance; my brother in Canada who always care for me and cheer me up. They all stand by me, dream the dream with me. Together, we are making it come true.

My appreciation also goes out to my friends and relatives in Vietnam and UK for their encouragement and sharing all through my studies. My gratitude extends to Postgraduate Management team and other colleagues at Aston University who have given generous support and valuable advice which help me stay strong and confident during the research.

In addition, I would like to thank the interviewees who participated in this research. Without their invaluable assistance, this thesis would have been very different.

I believe no words can fully express my sincere gratitude. I will keep trying to be a better me in the future as a thank you to all the support I have received. And I know, my dear supporters will be the most delighted to see me grow and succeed.

Thu Nguyen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Six-year-old daughter: Mum, can we play a game? Whoever draws a dragon more beautifully will win.

Six-year-old daughter: Mum, that's not a dragon! Lookd at mine! This is a dragon, so I won.

Mum: How do you know what a dragon looks like?

Six-year-old daughter: My teacher made some dragon puppets for the dragon dance in Lunar New Year. And they all were long and thin like this.

Mum: But this is the sort of dragon I often see in the pictures of knights-in-armour. They are big, fierce and can stand, walk and blow fire. So I'm drawing a dragon, too.

We often recognise that different people do have different ideas about the same "thing". It can be something very common, physically present in daily life like a car or a chair, or it can be something coming from myths and fairy tales. Whether that "something" is real or not, exists or not, to keep the conversation going effectively, the matter of utmost importance is to make sure we understand, at least to some degree, what the others are talking about. Then, the focal point is not the "thing" itself, but what you (may) *mean* by the "thing". And significantly, we may notice that "an idea is being moulded in a matrix of very different types of elements" (Hacking, 1999, p.127). Therefore, more than ever, it is extremely necessary to have a thorough understanding of other's ideas – not only what they think but why they think so – before reaching any agreement on a particular issue.

Similar situations can happen in science, when doing research.

This research stemmed from the researcher's interest in the topic of intellectual capital (IC) and the ambition to explore it. Taking a different standpoint from most IC studies, the research follows Hacking (1999) in aiming to investigate IC *as an idea*. This is a perspective which has not yet been addressed explicitly in the literature but IC has become a popular phenomenon in academic research. In fact, scholars have created numberless IC definitions and frameworks and devoted a lot of time studying the practices of managing IC in companies based on these definitions and frameworks (Guthrie et al., 2001; Bontis, 2001; Marr and Chatzkel, 2004; Osinski et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the idea of IC seemed to be poorly understood by companies (Schaper, 2016), especially in commercial scenarios where people with different cultural backgrounds worked together (Marr and Chatzkel, 2004;

Guthrie et al., 2001). Instead of letting predetermined frameworks take centre stage, it would thus be timely to learn what the companies (particularly people in those companies) really mean by IC, and why so. Working then through a social construction lens – specifically that of Berger and Luckmann (1966) - this study focuses on exploring the construction of the idea of IC in practice and addressing how IC can be conceptualised from people's understandings and why they have such thoughts.

As Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, knowledge is obtained via communication. Thus, in this study, it is developed that the research participants' understandings are reflected in the communications between them and the researcher; and between them and other people, verbally and nonverbally. In communication with the researcher, the participants were given the opportunity to talk about what was of *value* in their company instead of being provided with IC predetermined frameworks and being asked about IC directly. Since the notion of value and value creation puts emphasis on different aspects of a business (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005), this was to ensure the participants would have more freedom to express their own thoughts fully in relation to IC. Stated differently, based on much of the findings of the extant literature, we deemed the notion of value to be a viable proxy of IC. With that said, the study explored how the construction of the idea of IC might take place.

In addition to the participants' construction of their own thoughts about what was of value, the researcher was also involved in the construction of the idea of IC. In fact, I, relying on my own knowledge and experience, decided among what was deemed to be of value, what could be considered as IC. Consequently, I played a more prominent role as the researcher in the study than what is common in most of the IC literature (more on this follows in Chapter 3). Such constructions occurred in particular when I conducted a labelling process with regard to the analysis of the data obtained. Hence, with the aim of exploring, accentuating and describing such constructions, I selected a highly personal writing style to facilitate the narration of my personal thoughts and actions as the researcher in this study.

The research as described above is expected to make significant contributions to the extant literature because it can help answer the calls for more investigations of how the concept of IC works and evolves in practice (Schaper, 2016). Such a pursuit will ultimately reduce the gap between scholars' perceptions of IC and how IC is perceived in practice (Nielsen et al., 2017; Dumay and Garanina's, 2013). In addition, by studying IC from the social construction perspective, the researcher also hopes to enrich our understanding of accounting as a social and institutional practice; indeed, this alternative perspective on accounting has already been suggested and affirmed by a great many accounting scholars (Walker and Llewellyn, 2000; Hopwood, 2009, 1994; Miller, 1995).

The next sections will provide more details about how this research has been motivated, designed, and conducted. The chapter will be structured as follows. My personal motivations are discussed next, followed by some elaborations on how the social construction lens was chosen and adopted. Some brief ideas about the previous studies in IC literature will be presented. After that, the reasoning behind the study is stressed. Next, the research design will explain how the study was conducted in order to meet the research aim. What contributions the study would bring will be highlighted in the following section. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks to prepare for more in-depth discussions throughout the thesis.

1.2. Personal motivation

Ten years ago, I completed my Master's degree at Sheffield University. When it came to the thesis project, I went to Google and Google Scholar to search for some interesting topics. After some searches here and there, I came across the term "intellectual capital" which I had never heard before, and I studied the IC disclosing practice of Vietnamese listed companies. The result of my research showed that Vietnamese listed companies did talk about IC. This conclusion was evidenced by different pieces of information published in their annual reports. Vietnamese listed companies also shared some common disclosing patterns with other developing countries, such as human capital elements and internal capital elements.

However, when taking a closer look at the IC disclosure by both Vietnamese and Chinese companies, I noted various differences, although the two countries shared many cultural, historical, and economic conditions and characteristics. I made numerous attempts to seek the answers to such discrepancies; nevertheless, with my knowledge and skills at that time, I was not able to find any clear explanation within either IC literature or the wider literature, even though the extant IC literature provided some hints that social and cultural aspects could possibly affect the way IC was disclosed (Chaminade and Roberts, 2003; Andriessen and Van den Boom, 2007). Therefore, in the discussion section, I posed this as a suggestion for further research. And since then, the unanswered question has remained a big concern to me. The desire to discover the cause of varying IC disclosing practices among Vietnamese companies, and between Vietnam and China had never subsided. For that reason, with no hesitation, when I had the chance to pursue a PhD, I decided to continue with the topic of IC. However, it may be worth adding that to prepare the PhD proposal for the application, I did look at the literature again to see whether the issue of such interest to me had been resolved or not. It seemed to me that, after six years, I could not find a satisfactory answer from the extant IC literature. And after that, a Yes from my potential supervisors can be said also to have reinforced my own judgment. Only when they saw the potential of the proposed research would they agree to work with me over a long PhD journey.

Although IC's growing importance for successful value creation had been recognised and emphasised throughout the 1990s (Lev, 2001), the topic has never lost the attention and interest of scholars and practitioners. This can be witnessed by a plethora of IC research spanning four different developmental stages (Schaper, 2016; Dumay, 2013), and there has been no sign of shrinkage in the amount of scholarly interest in it. This is totally understandable when we are living in this information age and the virtual economy (Guthrie, 2001). Hence, it was with such curiosity and confidence that IC became the topic for my doctoral research.

1.3. The adoption of the social construction lens

I started my proposal for the PhD application by claiming that I wished to explore why IC disclosing practices varied across companies, industries and nations. Gergen (2015, p.3) shared that “Once you get into constructionist ideas, all the furniture begins flying out the window”; in my case, when I got to know and comprehend the concept of social construction, I felt I had just been given a map leading to the bright edge from deep inside the wood where I had been ‘trapped’, for too long. I realised that “Yes, who I am now, and what I know now, is all socially constructed”. To put it crudely, nothing exists by chance; rather, there is a process of shaping, developing and updating the knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann also claimed that how individuals behave would be decided by how they understand the world(s) and others in the world(s).

And given that, more than ever, I believed that this lens would serve as a perfect tool fitting my curiosity, and my ambition to investigate the topic of IC. The arguments I used, proposed by Berger and Luckmann in their book ‘The Social Construction of Reality’ (1966), introduced the general idea of social construction. Despite being first published 55 years ago and having been eclipsed by other versions and ideas of social construction for some time, on its 25th anniversary, the book was addressed as “one of the greatest feats of theoretical synthesis in American Sociology”, a “milestone of sociology’’ (Abels, 1998, p.87), and “one of the monumental statements of social theory in the post-war years" (Seidman, 2004, p.81). It struck me especially, when looking at the literature on accounting and IC, that the use of the social construction lens, and particularly of Berger and Luckmann's work, seemed to be very limited. This even flared up some hopes in me that adopting that perspective would help produce fresh insights about issues around IC.

After I started wearing the social construction lens, I understood that behaviours are constructed according to the stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). With that said, different companies talked about IC in different ways because they understood IC differently. How they thought about IC would decide how they communicated about it. For example, according to Guthrie and Petty (2000), "distribution channel" can be counted as IC, but in fact, some companies did not deem that to generate value in their firm, so they did not mention it. Hence the focal point is their thinking about IC – that is, what they considered to be IC in their context. Consequently, instead of investigating why different companies disclosed IC differently, as I initially planned, I revised the research idea to become why different companies understood IC in different ways. In other words, it is the understanding of IC which can be seen as the root of all the different behaviours.

Would this problem then be an important one to delve into? Would it be worth researching? My answer is yes insofar as I believe that all the conversations around IC would be more effective if the participants understood what the others are talking about, especially when IC has become a global topic (Schaper, 2016). Sometimes, people mention the same IC elements, but actually, they have in mind different layers of meaning. Getting this sorted out will definitely help to clear up the way for more IC insightful discussions.

There have been numerous frameworks and guidelines for companies to identify, measure and report their IC (Dumay and Garanina, 2013). The common thing which can be seen from these works is that despite using different expressions, most of the definitions refer to the "ability" to create the value of IC and the most commonly discussed IC elements are "human capital", "structural capital" and "relational capital". However, did all the companies that adopted those guidelines and frameworks really understand what "IC" or these IC elements meant, I wondered? Did they have similar thoughts about IC? One typical example is the Danish project for guidelines for IC statements. More than a hundred companies got involved in IC statement constructing and testing over 1997-2002 (Schaper, 2016). Although recent articles still proved the usefulness of the Danish IC statement from both a strategic and communication perspective, it was discovered that most companies stopped using it soon after the project terminated (Schaper, 2016). Why is this so? When studying the reasons for this, Chiucchi (2013) underlined the great complexity of IC measurement practices, and management's consequent need for time to become familiar with them. And as Schaper (2016) asserted, since IC is a concept grounded in practice (Bukh et al., 2001; Bontis, 1999; Swart, 2006), how it works and evolves in practice must be reconsidered. Confirming Dumay and Garanina's (2013) hunches, Nielsen et al. (2017) identified a large gap between the perceptions in the literature and practice itself. And as Marr and Chatzkel (2004) upheld in their introductory editorial to the special issue "IC at the crossroads: theory and research", one of the matters that need addressing is what we mean when we talk about IC. Again, this reinforced my ambition, and my curiosity to investigate how IC could be understood by companies in practice and, more importantly, why this should be. Considering the understandings of IC as the surface of the problem, the construction of such understandings must be its roots. And only when the roots are uncovered, can the issue be completely resolved. Knowing why and how people have arrived at particular ways of understanding IC would be very valuable not only to the IC literature but also to practitioners and policy makers.

If it is that important, has it ever been asked what companies think about IC or any IC related issues and why different companies have different thoughts about IC? To see whether there are any gaps in the extant literature and how my potential research could help to fill such gaps, I had to conduct a literature review – naturally, of course, while wearing my social construction lens.

1.4. The idea of IC – What do we know?

While as a topic, IC was barely discussed before the 1990s, it is now becoming part of universal accounting, management and reporting vocabulary (Dumay and Guthrie, 2019). In fact, the accounting literature has witnessed a remarkable increase in discussions concerning IC. In the spirit of "standing on the shoulders of giants" (Massaro et al., 2016, p. 768), a literature review has thus been conducted to identify the gaps and provide evidence to justify using specific research methods (Massaro et al., 2016).

However, before moving on, it has become necessary to clarify that, as the wish to study how the idea of IC is understood was my starting point, the term "intellectual capital/IC" used in this thesis mainly refers to the idea of IC in itself, not IC as some kind of asset or knowledge possessed by companies. In instances where they occur in this study, any references to IC as an object will be clearly indicated in accordance with the context of the discussion. This is a vital distinction to make for, as Hacking (1999, p. 28) has pointed out, "If many writers use one word, X, to refer to both objects of a certain sort and the sort itself, the idea under which the objects are thought about, [..] idea and object are often confused." In line with this principle, the findings of the literature review were that the majority of the empirical IC studies did treat IC as an object when exploring the implementations of IC concepts and frameworks (Dumay and Garanina, 2013), figuring how these frameworks can fit with their IC. Meanwhile, just a small number of IC studies explored the idea of IC – what people think about IC.

As discussed above, this study adopts a different standpoint from most IC research in the literature, in that it studies the *idea* of IC – meaning how the idea of IC can be constructed in practice - which we approach through a discussion of what is of value to a company. Indeed, there have been some attempts made to investigate what kinds of people in companies think about IC, such as managers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), analysts (Abhayawansa et al., 2018) and auditors (Ahmed and Hussainey, 2010), and in different contexts, such as hospitals (Habersam and Piber, 2003), or in the non-profit sector (Veltri and Bronzetti, 2015). However, despite those few efforts, the question of how IC has been understood has not yet been extensively addressed. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's original arguments, my review of the literature then revealed that IC scholars seem to have been over-reliant on predefined IC frameworks, and provided too much support when interacting with participants (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011), which has partly eclipsed the actual understandings of these participants. The participants' thoughts about IC were hugely impacted by the given IC definitions, frameworks and guidance by the researchers without which their thoughts would probably have been constructed differently. In other words, it can be said that those studies have not shown how IC is conceptualised in practice as verification of already existing frameworks developed by researchers was sought.

Besides, many studies have used prepared questionnaires to assess the participants' understandings (Ahmed and Hussainey, 2010). However, this approach seemed not to allow the participants maximum freedom to share what they thought about IC. Furthermore, in their analyses, they have mainly used content analysis, word frequencies, word mapping and even NVivo software just to pick up the IC themes and codes from the answers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), not a detailed interpretation of the participants' opinions about IC, leaving the question as to how the term IC is understood in practice not been thoroughly answered.

Moreover, as argued above, there remain crucial questions in addition to how IC is understood, with regard to why people have had such understandings of IC and how they came to them. Whereas the extant literature illustrates that people have different understanding of IC, scholars have not explained the existence of such diversity. In other words, the concern over why and how these different understandings had been constructed has received insufficient attention. Even though researchers have provided some hints that society, cultures and beliefs may have a substantial impact on the apprehension of IC, they have not dug deeper into this issue (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011; Veltri and Bronzetti, 2015). Consequently, it can be said that the question as to how these various conceptions of IC have been constructed remain unanswered. In the wider accounting literature, the alternative viewpoint which considers accounting as a social and institutional practice has been receiving a lot of attention and interest and there have been calls for greater investigations of accounting in everyday life and culture, how changing social developments and values impacted on accounting thought and practice (Walker, 2016; Walker and Llewellyn, 2000; Miller, 1995; Hopwood, 1994). In a similar vein, by looking into the social construction of the idea of IC, this study anticipates contributing not only to the area of IC but also to the wider accounting literature.

Working on from the literature review and the corresponding recognition of the gaps in our knowledge about how IC is understood in practice and, more importantly, how such understandings have been constructed, I have drawn up two research questions as a basis for studying the social construction of the idea of IC in this study:

Research question 1: How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value?

Research question 2: How have these conceptions been constructed?

The first question aims to conduct an exploration of how the term IC is understood in practice, determining whether there is any similarities or differences among people, and compared with what has been defined in the literature. The second question will then help to uncover the social construction of such ideas, and so determine why people have such thoughts and what can affect their ways of thinking. Moreover, relying on Berger and Luckmann's arguments which will be presented in detail in Chapter 3, as the researcher I was also involved in the construction of these conceptions. Hence, what I thought and why I made particular choices of action and intervention during the research is also very important and requires highlighting, so forming some of the answer to this second question. As De Loo and Lowe (2017) observed, the researcher and the research cannot be meaningfully separated when social construction is chosen as the research's epistemology. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, alongside the exploration of the idea of IC I also wanted to bring the role of the researcher more to the front by providing personal reflections and motivations.

1.5. Research design

Adopting the social construction lens, in this study, it is believed that knowledge is socially constructed. To put it bluntly, how people understand IC is bounded by different elements. Therefore, as discussed above, in exploring the social construction of the idea of IC, my target is not simply an investigation of how people think about the concept because I also wish to unveil the background stories of why people understand IC in specific ways. Furthermore, methodology is usually decided on the basis of the researcher's ontology and epistemology. Taking the social construction viewpoint as my epistemology, as a researcher I have hence decided to use case studies to provide an interpretive understanding of the IC issue in the belief, firstly, that it allows researchers to "study accounting as part of a unified social system" (Scapens, 1990, p. 268), and secondly because this approach allows the researcher to experience the research participants' worlds (Ahrens and Chapman, 2006; Parker, 2003) and so "locate practice in its historical, as well as its economic, social and organizational contexts" (Scapens, 1990, p.268). A case study-based research approach should enable the researcher to compare different people's thoughts in the same organisation and so enable a close investigation of such variances. Given their personal understanding and experience, by exploring what people think about IC and the reasoning behind such ideas, this case study approach can be considered both descriptive and exploratory according to the categorisations made by Scapens (op. cit.).

I decided to approach SMEs for this study, which I deemed to be well suited to the research aims because the current IC literature focusing on SMEs' settings is too limited and fragmented (Demartini and Beretta, 2020). Similar to the wider IC literature, most of the previous studies focused on the measurement of IC and the relationship between IC and SMEs' performance (Jordão and Novas, 2017; Khalique et al., 2015). Consequently, studying the idea of IC in different SMEs would be helpful in filling the research gaps with more knowledge about this particular type of companies which are major players in today's economy (Daou et al., 2014). The only exception was Henry's (2013) research which explored the perception of IC by entrepreneurs of SMEs to indicate that the respondents were aware of the concept of IC, however, there was some confusion between IC and intellectual property. The other problem is a clear disconnect between the theoretical abundance of IC literature and the practical implementation of this phenomenon, which is aligned with other findings provided by Dumay (2009b), Andrikopoulos (2010), and Kong and Ramia (2010). Hence, by exploring the construction of the idea of IC, this study is expected to provide some clues regarding how their understanding can be constructed and why there is such a gap. In methodologically terms, Henry's study also has the limitation of not providing interviewees with the freedom to elaborate their understanding of what may be termed IC in greater detail. It is thus hoped that the current study can generate different insights into IC in SMEs by adopting the interview techniques discussed further below.

A total of fifteen interviews were conducted with both Vietnamese and British people holding various positions in the three different organisations: a law firm, a restaurant and a charity. Without any pre-established IC frameworks, they were asked about what they deemed to be of value in the companies. With such broadly covering questions in semi-structured interviews, the hope was that the respondents would be granted the opportunity to share their opinions freely and that their answers were not eclipsed by academic knowledge entailing that, as a result, IC could be conceptualised in as much detail as possible from their own understanding.

Despite the adverse impact of the pandemic, I managed to hold interviews with the same participants at different times, before and after the national lockdown. The interviews were conducted in either English or Vietnamese where appropriate. The interviews were then transcribed and translated where necessary. Moreover, as argued earlier, it is developed that the research participants' understandings are reflected in the communications between them and the researcher; and between them and other people, verbally and nonverbally. With the aim of exploring how IC can be conceptualised from people's understandings, the study employed the materials from public communication channels in addition to the interviews. The choice of the particular materials was mainly directed by the interviewees during the interviews and in line with what has been claimed in the literature, these sources have been used widely to facilitate triangulations (Scapens, 1990; Verleye, 2019). For this reason, websites, Facebook page, brochure, leaflet, magazine articles, consultant's report and recruitment advertisements were analysed. A lot of IC research in the extant literature relied on public data from companies without questioning the construction of them. Therefore, studying these sources from the social construction viewpoint would bring a lot of meaningful and helpful insights to the field.

I conducted two rounds of thematic analysis to seek answers to the two research questions. In the first round, I looked for the themes which could be deemed as IC from the interviewees' responses and the materials and would then be used for further comparisons with the extant literature. The next round of analysing will be conducted to find out the reasonings behind such variances which can indicate the construction of the idea of IC. Particularly, during the second round, I looked for some elements which might have impacts on people's understanding. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's work (1966), those can be social and contextual aspects in home world and subworlds which might lead to different ideas at different times and among different people.

On top of this, both texts and visuals (logos, the colours of website sections) presented on other communication channels were taken into account. According to Davison (2017), the visual is an entire domain of communication that offers an abundant array of signs relating to accounting and accountability. The importance of visuals in accounting research can be evidenced by the "visual or pictorial turn" which follows the narrative turn (Beattie, 2014). In the area of IC in particular, visuals have often been used to communicate IC issues (Wee and Chua, 2016; Cuganesan and Dumay, 2009). Therefore, this study also analysed visuals to provide a profound understanding of the matter. As Graves et al. (1996) asserted, visual design is not merely decorative but has social and rhetorical significance. The visual methodology adopted here mainly relied on Rose's guidelines (2016) which enabled an analysis of visuals from the social construction perspective. The aim of such an analysis was facilitate identification of both the contents of the visuals and the constructions of them i.e., how were they created, by whom and why they were created as such. They constituted another source of input which enabled the researcher to view how conceptions of IC are developed and communicated.

1.6. Key contributions and implications

Taking a different standpoint from most other IC research, it is hoped that by exploring the idea of IC from the social construction viewpoint, this study will make various significant contributions to the scholarship. Significantly, this, the first adoption of Berger and Luckmann's concept of social construction in IC studies is believed to have facilitated fresh insights into the topic.

In the first place, this study lies among the few studies in the voluminous IC literature which examine the idea of IC, rather than the "object" IC. As argued above, in the extant IC literature, most of the work devoted to building IC definitions, frameworks, measurements and studying the practices of managing IC in companies. This study focuses on exploring the idea of IC in practice – how IC can be conceptualised from people's understandings.

The findings first of all give clear answers to as how practitioners understand IC. The over-reliance on IC frameworks, the support given by the researchers, the data collection approach and the data analysis have obscured the participants' own knowledge. Since there were no pre-determined IC frameworks given to the participants, the study does not look for what people thought about "literature-type" IC elements. Instead, they were granted the opportunity to freely share what they deemed to be of value, which indicated their own understandings around IC and how they might conceptualise it. This investigation can thus help to advance our knowledge about the gap between the idea of IC in the literature and IC as it is perceived in practice. This is an issue which still seems to be behind the curtain. This contribution to the discourse also provides scholars with a good opportunity to assess whether IC literature has covered all the ideas of IC or not. If not, the study would propose a number of further directions which could enable us to be more knowledgeable about IC – an important issue in life today.

More importantly, this study can be seen to pioneer the investigation of why and how people have such understandings of IC. As suggested earlier, the lack of answers leaves a big hole in our knowledge about IC. In this study, the social construction lens has enabled an in-depth exploration of that issue. By using the responses from different people from different backgrounds, cultures, and positions alongside analysis of the relevant company websites, Facebook page, brochures, leaflets, magazine articles, consultant's report and recruitment advertisements, the study of three cases provided a thorough exploration of the construction of the idea of IC. The analysis of both texts and visuals from a social construction perspective is so anticipated to produce even more profound insights about how such thoughts were constructed.

Moreover, the study can contribute a significant piece to the jigsaw picture of IC issues in small and medium–sized enterprises (SMEs) which are, today, major players in today's economy (Daou et al., 2014). As Demartini and Beretta (2020) claimed, IC literature focusing on SMEs' settings is limited and fragmented, most studies have focused on IC measurement and management, and the relationship between IC and firm performance (Jordão and Novas, 2017; Khalique et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a disconnect between the theory on IC and the perception and implementation of IC in practice (Henry, 2013). Using a small law firm in the UK as the single case study is expected to produce profound insights and help to enrich our knowledge about IC issues in such a rarely touched-upon context.

Methodologically, the study indicates more potential uses of the social construction viewpoint by seeking both to uncover the social construction of the participants' thoughts and to highlight the constructions staged by the researcher. I try to give a lot of details about how I conducted the research. It has been argued that "*methodology, the orientation of the research, and (especially) the researcher are always intimately bound up with method, whatever is examined, and the research process as a whole*" (De Loo and Lowe, 2017, p. 1797) and these issues are still often overlooked. Therefore, with an ultimate aim of striving for the cumulative knowledge production, this study also emphasis a variety of methodological issues.

By providing findings about the understandings around IC and the social construction of these conceptions as they appear in practice, the hope is that this research may have far-reaching implications. Firstly, the findings can serve as a good reference source if anyone wants to set up a new project studying IC. For example, drawing on the answers as to how people construct their understandings of IC, we would seek to determine how IC scholars make the appropriate selection of research participants and data collection methods, because individuals can be seen to communicate their thoughts in different ways. Secondly, management teams may be able to see the findings in this study as helpful in setting up the way they discuss IC issues with their staff. They may be more conscious and careful about how to construct the idea of IC in their company, given the possible impacts of some of the contextual elements. Third, these findings may serve as an insightful information source for the policy-makers that can assist them in producing effective and relevant policies. They will have learned how IC is understood in practice and will also be aware of the question "why so". They can therefore produce proper, detailed policies for each industry, sector or for even individual companies, which will hopefully be very helpful to them.

1.7. Thesis structure

In the hope of providing an exhaustive presentation of the research project and highlighting the role of the researcher in this thesis, I will discuss what has been understood, what methods have been chosen, and what has been put into practice, and devoted some effort to explaining why I have made such decisions. Therefore, the thesis is written in a story-like writing style. At every step discussed in each chapter, I will provide my reflections as a researcher on what I have learnt or observed, and the reasoning behind my choice of methods and my interpretation. The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Under the social construction perspective, researchers would have their own ways of constructing their understandings of social construction ideas. Therefore, in order to pave bring more of the researcher's role to the fore and make way for further discussions of how social construction ideas are adopted throughout this thesis, Chapter 2 starts to give a detailed presentation of the project by providing information on my personal background, and some examples of reflective moments in my life. Together, these will indicate how I have arrived at my view of the research topic, questions and objectives. The chapter also includes examples of two major changes in my life since I started my PhD and how I have reflected on these. It ends with some reflections on my role as a researcher which has been influential on my epistemology. After these reflections, the message I hope to convey is, first, that knowledge is socially constructed, and in addition, that how people behave is impacted by their knowledge about their surroundings.

Chapter 3: Given the indications of the social construction ideas provided in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 will extend the discussion of this viewpoint. This chapter begins with some historical information about social construction and the adoption of the social construction concept in accounting. Since Berger and Luckmann's work of 1966 has been used as the core spine supporting my understanding of social construction, next, it moves to more detailed elaborations on this epistemological viewpoint. The chapter also debates the choice and adoption of their work in this project. The chapter continues with the reflections as a researcher on Berger and Luckman's work which elaborates how this epistemological stance would decide the methodology.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents a thorough literature review to identify the gaps in the extant IC literature and demonstrate how the potential research idea can fit well into the scholarly field. I then determine how best to conduct research to fulfil my ambition of investigating the concept. After introducing the concept of IC and its development, the chapter puts forward the arguments to position this research. In line with Hacking's idea (1999), the literature review indicated that there are two groups of IC studies – those focused on IC as an object, and those focused on IC as an idea. Opting for the investigation of the idea of IC, I have conducted a closer look at the latter group. The review reveals that the actual participants' knowledge of IC has been obscured due to researchers' over-reliance on preset IC frameworks, the support received from the researchers, the data collection and the data analysis. Besides, although one assumes the researchers' agreement on the differences among individuals' understandings, they have not explained the fact that such diversity exists.

Chapter 5: The construction of the research methodology is presented according to three different stages: before, during and after the fieldwork. I first describe how some first methodological decisions were made, including the cases studied, the interviewees approached, the planned structure of the interviews and some other rules to maintain the project's quality and ethics. I next explain the construction of my methodology for doing the interviews in the field. Lastly, the chapter contains some discussion on the choice of the additional materials and the process of analysing the data using thematic analysis and visual methodology.

Since understandings can be reflected via the communications, the communications were used as the main sources of data. Accordingly, the analysis will be divided into two parts: (i) the findings from the communications between the participants and the researcher, (ii) the findings from the communications between participants with others, individually and collectively as a company. All the verbal and non-verbal communications were taken into account. Chapter 6 and 7 are devoted to those two segments of the analysis and are detailed as follows.

Chapter 6: After being collected, the data was analysed, the findings will be presented case by case in this chapter. Each section is divided in two parts which provide the answers to the two research questions: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people’s understandings; and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed? The first part gives an overview of what the interviewees deemed to be of value. With the knowledge gained from the literature, I will highlight some similarities and differences between what scholars have discussed so far and what findings have been unveiled in the case study. With this in mind, the second part of the chapter will elaborate on how those understandings have been constructed. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann’s arguments and taking into account the impact of both the different worlds and the time dimension, it is argued that the differences in interviewees’ cultures, education, their roles in the organisation, their experiences, their length of service and types of organisations could all lead to different conceptions. Finally, one of the chapter’s key sub-sections will analyse how these social construction processes occur both internally and externally in practice.

Chapter 7: Having been pointed towards additional material by the interviewees, Chapter 7 presents my further analysis of those materials with the aim of exploring how the understanding of IC is demonstrated via the public communication channels. The chapter includes some discussion of the reasoning behind my choice of these additional sources of data for each of the cases and my decision to analyse both the texts and visuals from the materials. Next, the chapter presents the findings drawn from the analysis in a case-by-case order. In the first place, some descriptive results are provided, where the similarities and differences of the materials themselves are highlighted and compared with the interviewees’ responses in order to strengthen the answer to the question of how IC can be conceptualised. In this regard, the conclusions have been drawn to posit that (i) different people could be involved in the construction of the idea; (ii) the target audience could decide what is communicated; and (iii) technical and technological boundaries could also determine what is communicated. This analysis not only supplements the study of how the various understandings of IC have been constructed, but it also sheds further light on how the communication of such understandings is constructed.

Chapter 8: This chapter provides the discussion and concluding remarks, firstly by presenting the findings in order to answer the two main research questions and providing the discussions beyond what has been revealed. After this opening presentation, the contributions and implications will be discussed more in detail. In addition, the chapter also presents some thoughts about the study's limitations, while in the final section the author suggests some possible directions for further research in order to contribute more to the field of IC scholarship.

1.8. Conclusion

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the whole research project. It highlights the reasoning behind my choice of the topic of IC, the adoption of social construction perspective and the standpoint of exploring IC as an idea. In this introductory chapter, some brief ideas about the extant IC literature have also been discussed to identify the gaps in our knowledge and position the study itself. Drawing on these arguments, the chapter explains how the research has been conducted to fulfil an ambition, and what contributions it can potentially make both to the literature and to practice.

It would appear obvious that IC has become an increasingly important topic over the decade, with a large number of relevant research works and guidelines. Obtaining more knowledge about IC should be an indispensable task for scholars and practitioners. This study is conducted with such an ultimate aim in mind. Despite taking a different standpoint from most IC studies, it does not separate itself from the question of the construction of our profound understandings of IC. Instead, it is expected to enrich and advance our knowledge by viewing IC from a different angle, touching uncovered issues and contexts, and integrating the researcher's knowledge into the interpretations.

The subsequent chapters will provide more in-depth discussions of each of the steps taken in this project.

CHAPTER 2 - NEW WORLDS & "UPDATED ME"

2.1. Introduction

Throughout life, we do not stay the same. This may be easily recognised in physical terms. Babies get bigger, and toddlers turn into taller teenagers. Similarly, each person keeps shaping her/his attitudes and behaviours according to what she/he knows and who she/he is, via different stages of socialisation in her/his world(s) (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). One may think about the same issue in different ways, given different settings and contexts. People may sometimes ask, "Why did he/she perceive/behave in such a way?" or "Why did I not understand what he/she said?" or "Why did I not behave alike?" and so on. Hence, what a researcher knows and believes will have an immense impact on how she carries out the research – for example, how she obtains the data, how she/he approaches research participants, how she/he interprets the data, and, besides all that, it affects the knowledge which is going to be shared in the study. In this study particularly, it is asserted (in Chapter 3 – Social construction) that the researcher was heavily involved in the construction of the idea of IC. Consequently, the stories behind her thoughts, behaviours and actions will be brought more to the front to facilitate more understanding of the construction.

With that said, this chapter devotes to the presentations of my background and how the reflections on my daily life have helped to construct my view on the research issue. And especially, the knowledge I have obtained in different "worlds" and contexts served as crucial parts of my co-construction of the idea of IC; therefore, this chapter also adds up to the reasoning why I came up with particular data analysis and interpretations later on in Chapter 6 and 7. Numerous moments would be suitable to illustrate the impact of these reflections; however, two straightforward examples of changes in my daily life since I started my PhD were chosen because the chapter primarily aims at providing my background information and explaining how I came to view IC the way I do now. This is believed to be crucial to the further discussions in the following chapters because those understandings and reflections led to my current philosophical stance which primarily decided how I conducted the research.

The examples presented below should demonstrate how I have been changed and updated with new understandings, given my new roles and positions in different settings: in a 'UK world' as a Vietnamese; and in a small sector as a researcher. Also, there will be some reflections on the examples given. In the reflections following, I will try to unpack how things would have been different if I had been in another world, carried another role, met other people and behaved differently. More importantly, with that belief in mind, understanding how things have happened to me could be enlightening about how things may happen to others. When conducting research that requires engagement from research participants, I will try to draw some lessons from those reflections, which may help investigate the research issue effectively.

2.2. Starting points

I am Vietnamese. I was born and grew up in Vietnam. I was brought up in Vietnamese culture. I was educated in Vietnamese traditions. Vietnamese-like-me people surrounded me. Of course, I have met people from different countries. With what I learned from books and other media, I have expanded my knowledge about various things in another ‘world’ apart from Vietnam. However, a few quick conversations and some casual relationships are not enough to overwhelm the Vietnamese part in me. I am still Vietnamese; I was born Vietnamese; and I am by nature a Vietnamese person.

After earning a bachelor's degree, I became a lecturer in a university in central Vietnam, and I devoted my time to teaching different accounting subjects. I was trained in teaching skills. At that time, I would have been destined to become an expert in accounting and teaching issues. I prioritised developing my knowledge around accounting and teaching.

One year later, I luckily received a scholarship for studying for my Master’s, and I decided to come to the UK to pursue this degree. This was also the first time I was able to experience another culture. I was in the UK for one and a half years, studying and learning and doing some voluntary teaching work. At the end of the course, I wrote my dissertation on “Intellectual capital disclosure”. At that time, I only had five months to conduct the research and submit my paper. The most striking finding I arrived at in the final draft of my dissertation was that the intellectual capital disclosing practice of Vietnam-listed companies was very different from that of companies in China. However, the two countries shared a lot of similarities in culture, history and economic development. The conclusion was presented, but I could not address it in depth or explain fully how it could be possible. When finishing the dissertation, I turned back to the literature again to have a closer look. I realised that the ‘intellectual capital disclosures’ were indeed different in different countries. The practices varied across nations, industries and even companies. I questioned myself, “why so?”. I searched all around the extant literature for some detailed explanations, but to no further clarity. Since then, I have nurtured the ambition of carrying out further research to uncover the answer the question, “Why does ICD practice differ so much between companies, industries and countries?”

Throughout some years of keeping busy teaching, the curiosity never faded in me. I was always longing for a chance to fulfil it. And the time came when I was offered a PhD place at Aston University. With no hesitation, my first proposal sketched out a piece of research in which I was looking for the answer to the question of different kinds of disclosure.

And I came to the UK, and my journey of knowledge started along the PhD route …

2.3. “Updated” me in new worlds

It can be said that since moving to the UK to pursue the PhD, the experience and the knowledge obtained have helped to construct my “new” view of the world. It is the beliefs about the reality and the knowledge, which consequently resulted in my view of the research issue. Numerous moments have contributed to this construction, but the following examples can help to illustrate what I thought and how I got changed.

Although I had been to Sheffield, for my Master’s for a year, it was already six years later when I came back to Birmingham in 2017. The UK I knew before was not the same anymore. The moment I came back, it was the new UK, again. My husband often said, “This UK is not the same as what you told me”. No, it was not. There were no small houses with gardens and beautiful flowers; it was not as quiet and easy to get around like in the smaller place, Sheffield. Things were doubtless new to my husband and daughter as they had not been to the UK before, but I was also updating what I knew about the UK during this stay. The “UK in reality” seemed to change, but in fact, the reality to me was socially constructed. It was different, depending on when and how I experienced it. Also, my knowledge about the UK experienced some constructions.

Coming to the UK as a PhD student, my primary role changed from teaching to researching. Of course, while I was teaching in Vietnam, I was doing some research as well. However, the amount of time for researching was minimal. Whereas, now, as a research student, I am devoting my whole time to developing myself as a skillful researcher. Before coming to the UK, I was a lecturer at a University in Vietnam. I did have a couple of chances to conduct some research; however, the teaching pressure did not allow me to have enough time to expand my knowledge and skills. Instead, I was busy updating the current accounting regulations, laws, software and other teaching methods, and revising our teaching curriculum. However, with very little time for research, I have to say that my knowledge about researching was indeed quite limited then. It can be seen from the examples above how different my focus is when moving from teaching to researching. It can be said that I have entered a new world – the world of doing research. And in this world, I have been updated with new knowledge, skills, attitudes and other understandings. I learned many new things, which I might not have touched if sticking to teaching only. The roles I am playing also decide what I know and what I do in everyday life.

However, it is also noteworthy that different people with different roles can develop different understandings. Despite both being Vietnamese, my husband and I would not share the same knowledge about research issues given our various roles in our lives. He has no idea about research stuff, and thus, when I talk to him about my work, I need to make it as simple as possible. It was very challenging to help him understand the topic. Still, it is sometimes worth my efforts to explain it because I can obtain some new viewpoints, especially from someone with a different role, different aspect. This can also help me understand why he has such opinions, given that I can acquire some clues on how to proceed with my study, for instance, how best to know why interviewees perceive in such a way.

With such experiences and reflections, I believe that knowledge is socially constructed, depending on where people stay and what they do in the society. Everyone has different understandings about the same thing; and what they believed to be "real" can also be different at another point of time, in another context. This has enormous impacts on my philosophical perspective which determined how I view the research and how I conducted the research. I am interested to explore the issue in contexts – tying the issue with contextual elements to better understand it, rather than testing the "reality".

Moreover, I not only trust the construction of reality and knowledge, but I also believe that the behaviours arise from our understandings. To illustrate this, a particular example that may be given is about teacher and student closeness. In Vietnam, teachers are placed in a high position in society, and there is always some distance between teachers and students. I had a chance to be a teacher in the UK, and one time, at the end of the term, after the class finished, a student came to me saying thank you and extended his hand towards me for a hand-shake. I was a bit surprised, stiffly staring at his hand, wondering what he wanted. It took me a few seconds to recognise that it was for a handshake, and I shook his hand in a bit of embarrassment because I did not understand his offer quickly enough. From then on, I knew that the distance between teachers and students in the UK is not as big as in Vietnam. I started to be more open to my students in the following classes, feeling comfortable when they used only my first name (in Vietnam, it is seen as disrespectful). My understanding of British culture again has been updated, and hence my behaviours towards my students have been adjusted accordingly.

2.4. Reflections as a researcher

It is evident that had I been in a different world, carried out a different role, met different people and behaved in another way, everything would have been different, and I would not have known what I know now, or I would have perceived it in another way. In other words, my understandings have been built up based on specific conditions. Recognising the changes in those moments I have reflected on above, as a researcher, I would not stop there. By being aware of why I have certain understandings which may be alike to or different from others around me, I believe a similar process would happen to other people.

So why is this important to me as a researcher? As a researcher, my task is creating and sharing knowledge. Each piece of research I carry out would have its mission of providing some insight into my field. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nature of knowledge. The decisive factor is to understand how we know what we know. In other words, it is critical to understand how that knowledge is built up. Only by answering that question can the insights produced in research become useful and applicable to different settings. Besides, being mindful about how an individual's understandings are constructed allows a researcher to decide an appropriate way of conducting a study to obtain more profound knowledge.

As shared in the reflections, I believe that knowledge has been constructed by means of different processes throughout my life. In other words, what I know relies on where I live, what I do and who I meet. As a Vietnamese coming to the UK, it can be seen that I had experienced a lot of differences compared with what I was used to in Vietnam. I feel that I know the UK better from these moments, and I understand why I did behave differently in certain situations. In other cases as well, my behaviours were greatly decided by what I understood about the contexts, the situations and the people I were interacting with. In the similar vein, I recognised that this might similarly happen in companies regarding their IC practices. They might have had different understandings about IC hence applied IC practices in different way. With that in mind, I thought exploring people's thoughts about IC would be more helpful to the field and insightful for further research. Consequently, I decided to study the ideas, the thoughts about IC rather than IC practices. That was why I now view IC as an idea in this thesis. More importantly, my understanding of social construction has fueled and fostered a strong belief that this would be the perfect means to investigate the topic of IC as I wished to.

In the next chapter, what I know and understand about social construction will be presented.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to present some background information of mine with the hope that it can partly help to explain the co-construction of the idea of IC done by me as the researcher – why and how I came up with particular analysis and interpretations in the project.

Also, the examples and reflections provided are expected to illustrate how I came to view the world and the research issue as I do now. Believing that knowledge is socially constructed, and behaviours are greatly influenced by people's understanding, I understood that companies disclosed IC differently because they understood IC in different ways. For that reason, I decided to study IC as an idea to explore what people think about IC and how they have such thoughts. In other words, the research was conducted to study the social construction of the idea of IC.

More details will come in the next chapter, presenting what I know about the social construction viewpoint, particularly Berger and Luckmann's framework, which is the main influence on my understandings and arguments.

CHAPTER 3 - SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

3.1. Introduction

There is a process of building, shaping, developing and updating our understanding, and how we behave is dependent on what we know and understand about the world around us (Berger and Luckman, 1966). These thoughts represent a distillation of my understanding about social construction ideas, and my own reflections. Particularly, the chapter will explain at length the arguments proposed by Berger and Luckmann which primarily influence my understanding of the concept. In this study, the knowledge of social construction has not only served as my epistemology which helped me to decide an appropriate methodology, but also provided a suitable means for examining the topic of IC from a different angle from previous literature on the subject – IC as an idea (Hacking, 1999).

The chapter will be structured as follows. In the next part, an overview of the social construction perspective will provide fundamental ideas about what it is and where it comes from. The discussion in this section will reveal that social construction viewpoint can be considered as a theory of knowledge. The next section will provide a closer look at the accounting field, particularly to see how it has been utilised there, and how my research can contribute to that area. Here, again, the potential of using the social construction perspective in my study can be seen more clearly, as the literature indicates that most of the previous empirical work focused on the organisational level, meanwhile, this study explored the construction of individuals' thoughts. Next, among several viewpoints regarding social construction, Berger and Luckmann's dominantly influences my viewpoint and has become fundamental to the thinking in this study. Consequently, the following section is devoted solely to a discussion around Berger and Luckmann's work – what the main arguments are and why I have chosen it. Besides, as a researcher, the social construction perspective also determines how I carry out my research. Hence, some reflections as a researcher on Berger and Luckmann's work will also follow.

3.2. An overview of the concept of social construction

3.2.1. What is it?

In Chapter 2, the reflections on some moments in my life have illustrated my belief that our understanding does not exist by chance, but that instead, there are processes of building, shaping and updating it. Furthermore, I suggested that, given their own particular knowledge, individuals would behave in certain ways. Chapter 2 also suggested that an epistemology adopted from psychology – the idea of social construction – could help explore these processes thoroughly and assist my quest for clarification about the topic of differing styles of IC disclosure.

So what is "social construction?"

According to Knoblauch and Wilke (2016), the term "social construction" entered the academic discourse with the publication of the book "The Social Construction of Reality" by Berger and Luckman in 1966. The authors were paid tribute for introducing this idea that has not only been adopted by its supporters in the decades following, but also modified in various ways by various academic movements, and taken up as a formula by public discourse. "Social construction" has become a phrase not only used in the social sciences but far beyond (Knoblauch and Wilke, 2016). Knoblauch particularly praised the widespread and crucial role of the social construction idea, "social construction has also been adapted in a formulaic way which crossed the borders of academic discourses and institutions and affected public discourse until today" (Knoblauch, 2019, p. 325).

The core idea of social construction, in its broadest sense, is that things do not emerge by chance, but are all produced from social actions, i.e., actions that we carry out by interacting with other people. In that case there are many and various things (if not all) that are socially constructed; for instance, emotions, knowledge, artwork and even perceptions which may have been taken for granted. As Hacking (1999) has indicated, "social construction" is related to a variety of topics: authorship, brotherhood, children as television audience, danger, emotions, facts, female refugees, gender, homelessness, homosexuality, knowledge, illness, literacy, oral history, postmodernity, population statistics, quarks, reality, serial murderers, technical systems ... None of these things could have existed without social bonds, and each of them could have been constructed differently had we so chosen.

Moreover, as Ian Hacking observes in his book, "The Social Construction of What?" (1999), social construction is often applied not only to worldly items – things, kinds and facts – but to our beliefs about them. Different people have different understandings of the world, given their various interactions with others. For example, when asked about trees, a toddler who has never had any interaction with this word, or things attached to this word, may not be able to provide an answer. Still, another child who has been shown some pictures about "trees" by her close adults will undoubtedly build up her understanding based on the images given. However, if real trees are shown instead of pictures, different interpretations of trees will likely be constructed. These differences can be attributed to diverse backgrounds, social conditions, social relationships, and interactions. Briefly, social construction idea assumes that our understanding of the world is constructed throughout our interaction with each other; and the construction takes place on a joint basis, in coordination with others, rather than individually. Therefore, taking a social construction stance, I could explore how people understand IC and how they come up with such understandings – in other words, I have studied IC as an idea and hence the thesis's focus is the social construction of the idea of IC.

3.2.2. Where does it come from?

Although the idea of social construction is not uncommon in management and organisational research, it is more obviously articulated in the area of psychology (Cammock et al., 1995). As Pfadenhauer (2019) stated, to understand the roots of social construction idea, it may be necessary to extend back to the time when sociology, especially, was to become so influential, at the same time as the sociology of knowledge was beginning to take shape. There are said to be two prominent and competing intellectual traditions at that time, and these traditions can broadly be distinguished in terms of basic epistemological orientations or models of knowledge (Gergen, 1985).

In his study, Gergen told that on the one hand, eighteenth century thinkers such as Locke, Hume, and various logical empiricists in the present century have traced the source of knowledge to events in the real world. "Knowledge copies (or should ideally copy) the contours of the world" (Gergen, 1985, p.269). This "exogenic perspective" (Gergen, op. cit.) thus views knowledge as a pawn to nature. In contrast, other philosophers such as Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, and several phenomenologists have adopted an endogenic perspective regarding the origins of knowledge. In this case, knowledge depends on processes (sometimes viewed as innate) endemic to the organism. The terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts and historically situated interchanges among people.

In this study, by understanding the emergence of the idea of social construction as a theory of knowledge, I have decided to take it on as my epistemological lens which decided how I looked at IC and how I conducted the research.

Since the notion of social construction was introduced into business and management literature, researchers have explored different issues from different aspects (Gergen, 1985; 2015). For example, Knorr Cetina (1999) and Pickering (1986) adopted the social construction ideas in physics. In 1999, Ian Hacking wrote "The Social Construction of

What?", in which he further discussed the question of social construction in both natural science and social science. As an accounting researcher, I would like to see how social construction ideas have been used in the accounting area and how this study might be able to make the contributions to the field.

3.3. The use of social construction ideas in accounting

The late 1960's witnessed the emergence of a new trend in accounting research. Those who advocated this new trend looked to the natural sciences to apply the scientific method to account research problems (Ritson, 2002). In his work, the author also traced the emergence of social constructionist concepts in the accounting discipline to 1977, just nine years after the publication of Ball and Brown's (1968) An Empirical Evaluation of Accounting Income Numbers and one year before the publication of Watts and Zimmerman's (1978) Towards a Positive Theory of the Determination of Accounting Standards. During the 1980s and early 1990s, accounting researchers in a range of sub-fields within the discipline questioned, debated, and proposed alternative world views, methodologies, and ideas for exploring and understanding accounting information and those who prepare it (see Tomkins & Groves 1983). Hopwood (1983), for example, called for studies to examine accounting in the contexts in which it operates, promoting case and field studies in organisations (also see Chapman, Cooper & Miller 2009). Chua (1986) put forward ideas about more radical and critical means and theoretical frames by which to study accounting, and discussion of "new" accounting histories based on sociological and interpretive approaches also began to emerge (see Miller, Hopper & Laughlin 1991). However, it is interesting that although the term social construction was not used, its idea was employed in the book "Accounting and Order" by Mahmoud Ezzamel (2012). Working on the ancient Egyptian accounting and non-accounting inscriptions, the author placed history at the centre of attempts to understand contemporary debates about the power and role of accounting in society. He argued that we were surrounded by all kinds of manifestations of order, and even in its most ancient forms, accounting had performative powers that ordered institutions, society, and the world.

When viewed as an epistemology, social construction has been implemented in different ways in the accounting literature. As discussed above, in taking the view that knowledge is socially constructed, the social construction idea invites us to consider the social origins of taken-for-granted assumptions. This has also happened in accounting where, for example, Lukka (1990) questioned the ontological reality of basic accounting concepts such as profit, assets and equity to suggest that the accounting profession's power and wealth is dependent upon a myth. Like Lukka (1990), Hines (1991) claimed the accounting profession depended upon maintaining wide acceptance of a belief in the notion of an objective economic reality. But what if this reality does not exist? Mouck (2004) demonstrated that many financial accounting representations might be appropriately characterised as epistemologically objective facts, even though they have an ontologically subjective mode of existence.

Almost all the studies adopting a social construction viewpoint explored accounting issues that focused on the organisational level and national level rather than the individual level. For example, Nahapiet (1988) shares a similar finding to Colignon and Covaleski (1988). That is, she stated that accounting could indeed shape an organisational actor’s perceptions of reality, writing (1988, p. 355) that the interaction between accounting and organizational reality “….is essentially a reflexive one, in which the meaning of accounting both shapes and is in turn shaped by the social world”. In turn, Preston (1986) observed that managers tended to rely far more heavily on information gathered during informal interactions with each other than on formal accounting reports when making decisions. He suggested that managers focused their attention on negotiating a shared interpretation of organisational reality during these informal interactions. For him, this finding implies that information system designers need to understand how managers inform themselves in the organisational setting. However, here the author has only explored the interactions among managers themselves and within the company context, overlooking other influences which might come from other people and other social or cultural situations.

Similarly, Busco et al. (2006) discussed how management accounting systems were implicated in processes of individual (un)learning and organisational culture change, and how they could be used to identify trustworthy solutions in the face of organisational crises. In exploring the role of trust in understanding processes of accounting change, they argued that (un)learning and change are rooted in processes of active appropriation by the individual, which are built through participation in and reflection upon the practices themselves. However, the research here has only explored the company context, relying upon the communications and interactions between departments, and the learning taking place within the company. In fact, no exploration of the individuals’ construction of knowledge was conducted in this research.

One exception to these omissions is to be found in Vamosi’s work (2005), who analysed the accountability concept at both the individual and organizational level. Relying on Berger and Luckmann’s work, here the accountability concept is presented in the context of a case study of a privatised company in transition from a command to market economy. By talking to the employees and managers, the author examined whether other rationales, apart from the market economy rationale, influenced and consequently reflected other perceptions of the company, its strategies and missions. The findings showed that changing views on accountability supported these institutionalisation processes. The perception of these employees regarding what can and what ought to be demanded in terms of accountability differs from that of many young employees, middle managers and management. However, the study provides no further explanations of to how these differences emerged. In other words, the construction of individual perceptions has not been addressed.

In this study, aiming at exploring individuals' thoughts about IC, I have decided to rely on Berger and Luckmann's arguments in their book "The Social Construction of Reality" (1966). Despite being eclipsed by other versions and theories of social construction for some time, on its 25th anniversary, the book was addressed as "one of the greatest feats of theoretical synthesis in American Sociology", a "milestone of sociology'' (Abels, 1998, p.87), and "one of the monumental statements of social theory in the postwar years" (Seidman, 2004, p.81). All of these testimonies were quoted by Knoblauch and Wilke (2016). Internationally, the book was ranked among the five most seminal texts in sociology by International Sociological Association. Today, without a doubt, the book is still said to be one of the most popular bestsellers in sociology on an international level. The next sections provide a more in-depth discussion of the Berger and Luckmann's book and the main arguments I took from it. Furthermore, the rationale behind my choice of Berger and Luckmann's work will be presented afterwards.

3.4. Berger and Luckmann's social construction viewpoint

As discussed in the previous parts, although there are many names for, and forms of, social construction in the social sciences, there are few doubts that Berger and Luckmann's book had a hand in its beginnings. The book has been widely read, and it also seems to have invented the general idea of social construction.

Although different issues were raised throughout the book, all discussions primarily elaborated on the two key terms, "knowledge" and "reality". And as argued by the authors, these two terms would matter to both a man in the street and a philosopher (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 13). Therefore, the book does not concern some expertise that is particular to sociologists, academics or only those who would study specific topics. It would be of great help to anybody seeking a lens to view their everyday life through and build up their understanding about why things go in such a way that they notice.

3.4.1. Main arguments to be used in this research

Although the authors argued that society is both an objective and a subjective reality, the analysis of everyday life's objectivity is not conducted in detail because it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, the discussions around externalisation and objectivation are not mentioned at length here. The two key points were utilised in this research are the socialisations in different worlds and the interactions which facilitate those socialisations.

This section will talk through the different types of the world that an individual may encounter and live in, in order to highlight the social construction perspective. These worlds are where, from the social construction viewpoint, the "different" individual is produced. These are where he starts his internalisation process, in order to become a member of society. For myself as a researcher, the different worlds analysed in the book are very useful in providing clues about the differences among the cultures, religions, sectors, and individuals that studies may need to consider. Subsequently, the core element of internalisation is also discussed; this is known as interaction. These ideas can guide a researcher towards the most appropriate method for participating in the worlds of others (such as research participants), and integrating them into one's own worldview, and thus to obtain new insights into the topic researched. These are also the key arguments I borrowed to study the social construction of IC.

3.4.1.1. Different worlds

"Man is a social product." (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.79)

As discussed in earlier parts of this chapter, the core idea of social construction in its broadest sense is that things do not emerge by chance; all are produced from social actions. Berger and Luckmann laid a solid foundation for this idea and elaborated it rigorously. The authors brought in the two terms "primary socialisation" and "secondary socialisation" to imply the process of learning by interpreting others who inhabit different zones, in order to become an integrated member of society. A person's everyday life contains various zones that vary in closeness and remoteness (Ibid, p.36). The closest zone to that person is the world within his reach, the world in which he works. There are also some zones in which he has no pragmatic interest. His attention to the world is mainly determined by what he is doing, has done, or plans to do in it. And in that world, he is supposed not only to "understand" the other's momentary subjective processes but also to "understand" the world in which the other lives; and that world then becomes his own (p.150).

There are two types of the world mainly mentioned in the book: “homeworld” and “sub-world”. These worlds are named according to the two “stages” of socialisation: primary socialisation and secondary socialisation. The following paragraphs will elaborate on these worlds and how an individual is constructed in these worlds.

- ***“Home world” – Primary Socialisation***

In primary socialisation, the “individual's first world is constructed” (p. 155). This is where a person first starts the process of becoming a member of society. He is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others in charge of his socialisation. As discussed above, this institutional world is posited to him as objective reality, and the significant others who “mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it” (p.150). He, then, will “take over” that world, interpret the actions within the world and acquire the knowledge needed to be a member of the society.

The book points out that this process mainly takes place in childhood, when the child starts being conscious about everything around him. Therefore, some concerns may be raised about the “likelihood” period, because it can be argued that this process can take place at any stage, as long as the person perceives new “significant others” in his world. To put it crudely, when an adult meets another significant other who brings him brand new experience, should this be considered as primary socialisation at such a non-childhood age? As I shared in one of my stories in Chapter 2, since I grew up in Vietnam, I had kept the belief about a specific distance between teachers and students. It was only when I came to England and did some teaching here, that I realised that this kind of relationship could be so different in another world. Here I had to redefine my perception of the teacher/student relationship and modify my attitudes and behaviours accordingly. This may be easily misunderstood as primary socialisation. However, as Berger and Luckmann argued, this is an example of “crisis maintenance” of reality. When a person recognises some difference in his everyday life compared to the world his original significant others have erected, he will experience some “re-socialisation, transforming, altering the subjective reality due to crisis” (p.175). The book therefore suggests characteristics which help distinguish primary socialisation from other forms of socialisation.

First, primary socialisation is the first socialisation an individual undergoes in childhood. But since the definitions of youth vary, this characteristic does not seem strong enough to characterise the notion completely. Therefore, the next one would be more helpful.

Second, in primary socialisation, there is no choice of significant others. It means that no matter whether the child enjoys or feels uncomfortable in the world, he has to accept the rules set by his significant others; he cannot change or re-create them. “The child does not internalise the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalises it as *the* world, the only existent and the only conceivable world” (p.154). The “home world” is inevitable, and his internalisation of their particular reality is quasi-automatic.

Moreover, the more relevant and essential point here is that those characteristics also hint that the “homeworld” can exemplify itself as a family setting, a home country where the individual is born, and a culture where “natural” tradition is transmitted to him/her. These are the “homeworld(s)” that are inevitable for individuals. Therefore, no matter how far one may travel from the “homeworld”, one’s behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, and actions attached to the original world will stay instilled. Understanding what and where the homeworld could be of great help when analysing social construction, because any individual's social construction would start from here. An expatriate can spend most of their life in another country, but the home culture, and love of home will stay with them throughout their life as “sedimentation”.

In a similar vein, how individuals think about IC would be dependent on where they originate. For example, a Vietnamese would perceive IC differently from a British. And in fact, there have been various research studies which indicate the impact of cultural aspects on IC perceptions (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011). Particularly, Andriessen and Van den Boom (2007), in their work “East is East, and West is West, and (n)ever its intellectual capital shall meet”, demonstrated the differences between Western and Eastern cultures in the way they conceptualize knowledge, and claimed that such differences could lead to the differences in managing IC. The authors combined a systematic metaphor analysis of the concept of knowledge and IC in Western IC literature and a review of philosophical knowledge conceptualizations in the main streams of Asian philosophy. Relying on the findings, it was recommended that more insight about Western and Eastern cultures was critical to obtain successful IC management globally. However, although the data collected by other scholars provided some clues about the influence of culture, those authors did not give any comprehensive explanations about this potential influence. For this reason, this study will specifically seek the potential impact of culture on the understandings of IC.

Nevertheless, this is only the first stage of socialisation. Perhaps, as is common sense, it is evident that not all Vietnamese will act in the same way, not all Buddhists will act in the same way. This is attributed to another stage of socialisation – secondary socialisation, which takes place in “sub-worlds”.

❖ *“Sub-worlds” – Secondary Socialisation*

In Berger and Luckmann’s definition:

“Secondary socialisation is the internalisation of institutional or institution-based ‘sub-worlds’. Therefore, its extent and character are determined by the complexity of the division of labour and the concomitant social distribution of knowledge.” (Op.cit., 1966, p.158)

As they argued, secondary socialisation exists due to the labour division. Yes, it might be absent in a society where there is no labour division, but this scenario seems impossible. Therefore, in this discussion, secondary socialisation is considered to be an integral part of society's role(s). In this way, each role opens an entrance into a specific segment of the society's total stock of knowledge. This implies a social distribution of knowledge. A society's stock of knowledge is structured in terms of what is either generally relevant or relevant only to specific roles.

For example, as discussed in the previous section, nourished in the same culture and tradition, Vietnamese people may behave in the same way. Traditionally, every person will cross her hands and take a bow to greet someone senior in terms of age and society's expertise. However, when asked to help fix a complicated computer problem, not all Vietnamese people would know the answer. Accordingly, the best solutions would come from an IT technician rather than a farmer or a doctor. This is because the IT technician has conducted his secondary socialisation to earn such knowledge to fit the case. Additionally, it would be worth adding that primary and secondary socialisation can occur in the same settings, for example, in a country, a community, or a family. In this case, secondary socialisation can be identified as taking place when individuals start carrying more roles than they did when children.

With that said, each person needs to obtain the knowledge and skills to perform a particular task in the society. Every child is supposed to start schooling at an appropriate age, and individuals are supposed to further obtain the knowledge they need for their roles in the society. Different people can choose different subjects, courses and topics to study, and consequently, what they are knowledgeable about would decide how they construct their understanding about a particular topic. For example, a mechanic may not be knowledgable about double-entry bookkeeping; and vice versa, an accountant may not know how to fix the car's electrical system which includes a range of circuits. In other words, what they have learned can help shape their perceptions about issues in their life and similarly, the idea of IC could have been constructed on the basis of what people have learned and known. Therefore, it can be said that education is the primary means which has a substantial impact on a human being's knowledge during their secondary socialisation.

Furthermore, according to Berger and Luckmann's arguments here, it turns more obvious that people from different companies (different sub-worlds) or holding different positions in the same organisations would apprehend IC in different ways. In fact, this assumption does not stand alone when compared to what is found in the extant IC literature. Previously, a lot of studies have tried to capture what people from different sectors and industries and what particular people in a company think about IC, such as banking (Curado, 2008), farms (Cavicchi and Vagnoni, 2018), non-profit organisations (Fletcher et al., 2003), managers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), or analysts (Abhayawansa et al., 2018). Although the authors did not indicate clearly why these people became the research subject, it can be interpreted that they also have assumed such a variance in people's understandings of IC. More particularly, in terms of managerial perceptions of intellectual capital, finance, non-finance, general, and marketing managers have all been found to have different opinions (Valentine st Leon, 2002). In the wider literature, it has been demonstrated that roles can have a significant impact on how individuals construct their knowledge. Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) discussed knowledge transfer as the construction of knowledge by learning indirectly from the experience of others. Knowledge transfer typically occurs across a boundary. The boundary could be between occupational groups (Bechky, 2003), or between organizational units (Darr et al. 1995). Being underpinned by Berger and Luckmann's work, this study will share the similar opinion with those research, further analysing the impact of the type of organisations and the role on the construction of the idea of IC in practice.

Berger and Luckmann also clarified that socialisation is never total and never finished. "To be in society already entails an ongoing process of modification of subjective reality" (1966, p.176). This is explained as maintenance of the socialisation under their perspective. That means what one knows or understands about something is subject to change at different points in time. In fact, we cannot escape from the movement of time, as time keeps moving every second, or even shorter than that. Consequently, even if individuals stay in the same world, they would be different at a different moment. Drawing on their argument, this study will also take into account the influence of the time dimension which could be exemplified through the amount of time spent within a (similar) role and the amount of time spent with the organization. For example, if an individual stays within the role she is performing, it can be said that she still remains in the same sub-world. And in such a sub-world, her understandings will be ongoingly re-inforced or modified. Taking this into the IC field, it implies that the individual's understanding about IC today could be different from what she would think tomorrow, due to the maintenance process. And because during the maintenance process, knowledge is updated compared with what the individual has known before, it would be possible to refer to the amount of time spent in the role as "experience". And indeed, Martensson (2000) suggested that some kinds of knowledge are experience-based. Also, Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) have indicated that a large, deep, and diverse experience base is evidenced to contribute to creativity because it increases the number of potential paths one can search, and the number of potential new combinations of knowledge. These authors also called for research to help explain how, when, and why prior experience affects knowledge creation in organizations. Therefore, to put it in another way, it is suggested that experience influences the social construction of IC. Whereas, in terms of the length of service, Coakes and Bradburn (2005) relied on human capital theory to treat the length of service in the organization as a proxy for job-relevant knowledge or ability, and included this in the questionnaire to explore how organisations value their intellectual capital in practice. Unfortunately, in the end, no analysis of the impact of this variable was found. This has motivated me to conduct this research to look for more empirical evidence to see how individuals have constructed their understanding over the time they work in the company.

Nevertheless, without socialisation by meeting, or talking with another person, there would be no learning process and therefore, no internalisation and he would not be able to become a functioning member of society. In other words, all the social constructions of an individual require social interactions. Consequently, social interaction is another crucial argument in Berger and Luckmann's work. The next section will discuss this core element at length.

3.4.1.2. Interactions

> *"Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others".* (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 37)

In Berger and Luckmann's book, it is stated that there are three dialectical moments in social reality: "externalization", "objectivation" and "internalisation". These are stages when social reality is constructed and shared among people. And according to Berger and Luckmann, all of these are facilitated by interactions. A person in isolation will have no possibility of developing as a person, nor can she or he produce a human environment. The human environment is only created when humans stay together. Also, everyday life's reality is on-goingly reaffirmed in the individual's interactions with others. For example, learning language would help to illustrate this clearly. How could a child obtain his first words if he did not hear another saying those? How could he understand what things can be called if no one talked to him and explained that? Obviously, without interaction, the social construction is impossible.

"The prototypical case of social interaction is face-to-face interaction, and all other cases are derivatives of it" (Op.cit., p.43). After more than half a century since its publication, this idea can still be appropriately applied in our own society. No matter how technology has enormously changed our way of communicating, this study argues that only face-to-face interaction brings us the most "real" understanding. In face-to-face situations, the other is presented to an individual in a vivid present shared by both parties. And given that, there is a continuous interchange of expressivity between them from which both the individual and the other interpret and construct their understanding about the shared situation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Texts can help carry the contents through which we can partly understand a person. Still, the social construction of knowledge needs more than that, since we need to know of, preferably to see, the reactions, the attitudes, the eyebrows, the smiles, the body gestures and so on to apprehend that person and his world thoroughly. And, of course, there is nothing but social interaction that can facilitate this.

Given that, as Berger and Luckmann concluded, we "not only understand each other's definitions of shared situations, we define them reciprocally" (Op. cit., p.150). And this is crucially necessary for researchers to know how best to obtain the knowledge that would guide them to the most proper methodological choice. This will be further elaborated on in the next section.

Moreover, as Berger and Luckmann note, relations with others in face-to-face situations are highly flexible. In other words, there is hardly any rigid pattern for face-to-face interaction. Different conversations can be compared in terms of the density of the reality they produce or maintain. On the whole, the frequency of exchange enhances its reality-generating potency. Still, lack of frequency can sometimes be compensated for by the intensity of the conversation when it does take place. Therefore, again, this is another significant point that can be deemed entirely relevant to research issues. For instance, this gives more detailed hints about the form, the way, and the interaction level in data collection. Adopting this to study IC issues, it is anticipated that the communications of IC would take place in different forms, at different time. For that reason, data from various communication channels will be collected and analysed.

3.4.2. Why Berger and Luckmann (1966)?

Through the social construction lens, any choice of a specific perspective to underpin the research is itself socially constructed. There should be some motivating reasons which guide the researcher to decide her viewing lens during the research journey. And therefore, there is no better or worse choice, and the most important thing is that the option mainly fits with her knowledge, culture, social position, curiosity, or preferences. As Jack and Kholief (2007) claimed, these choices would not have caused a study to be better or worse; instead, it may have led to other research assuming such a different philosophical stance. Bearing that in mind, in this section, I lay out some justifications underpinning the choice of Berger and Luckmann's 1966 work in my study, in the hope of mainly showing how it best serves my curiosity and my intention of seeking the understanding of IC issues.

The adoption of Berger and Luckmann's framework in this study relies on the reasons that follow here.

First of all, it can be said that Berger and Luckmann's (1966) work provided a way out to the question I have been pursuing for a long time since my Master study. By relying on their work, I have understood that behaviour is constructed according to the stock of knowledge. With that said, different companies talked about IC in different ways because they understood differently what IC was and what is contained in the concept. How they thought about IC would decide how they communicated about it. In this sense, I have decided to explore IC as an idea and explore the construction of such perceptions, which may then provide a lot of clues for studying IC practices later on. More importantly, as one of Berger and Luckmann's key messages is the construction of knowledge, this might be deemed very well suited to investigating IC as an idea, and so to explore people's knowledge about what might be termed as IC.

Second, Berger and Luckmann focused their work on individuals – the construction of their knowledge and position as a society member. Again, for that reason, I am of the belief that Berger and Luckmann's ideas were what I had been looking for. As discussed earlier, the accounting literature review conducted here indicated that most of the work adopting social construction viewpoints analysed the construction at the organisational and national level. Therefore, with the aim of investigating the personal thoughts, I decided to follow Berger and Luckmann's work to facilitate a closer look at individuals in order to understand their own constructions and that of any company's ideas which has been collectively communicated. With that said, this study would be able to not only contribute more insights to the field of IC but also to accounting area in terms of the adoption of social construction viewpoint.

Third, in this study, I not only aim at exploring how people think about what might be labelled as IC, but also investigate the stories behind such perceptions. Therefore, my use of Berger and Luckmann's social construction viewpoint is completely aligned with other accounting research as constructivist researchers have not only sought the "truth", but the foundations behind it as well (Ritson, 2002). Researchers started to use the social construction viewpoint to promote an interpretive understanding of accounting phenomena. According to Haslam et al. (2017), although researchers who adopt social construction viewpoints within organisational scholarship, are often concerned with the cognitive products of social construction, there is also a focus on the construction process. However, the problem is that this aspect seemed to not to be thoroughly addressed in the accounting area, at least at the level of individuals (as I have noted earlier on in this chapter). The question to why individuals had particular thoughts has not yet been answered. Meanwhile, Berger and Luckmann have provided a detailed discussion on the process of socialisation which includes the primary socialisation in home-world and second socialisation in sub-worlds. This has provided me with a lot of understanding about how knowledge can be constructed in a process, therefore, can better assist me in investigating the process of constructing the idea of IC – in other words, what might affect the way people think about what can be seen as IC.

Based on the reasons mentioned above, the adoption of Berger and Luckmann's work in this study is expected to generate distinctive explorations of the topic examined. As debated above, this choice would decide how to view the research issues and to guide how the research is carried out. The following section thus presents my reflections on what I have understood about Berger and Luckmann's work and how it instructs the research design.

3.5. Reflections as a researcher on the work of Berger and Luckmann

In a framework proposed in 2000, Quattrone conceived accounting as the "knowledge of knowledge". This framework integrates different levels of knowledge, among which the "knowledge of knowledge" as a "how" activity concerns how accounting knowledge is produced. This involves not only the theoretical level of accounting as an academic discipline (the first knowledge), but also the level of practices where such knowledge is produced, for example, within organizations (the second knowledge), and the "knowledge of knowledge" as a whole, which concerns the epistemological level.

As has been discussed several times in previous chapters, as a researcher, how I view the world and the way I obtain knowledge significantly impact how I conduct my research to fulfil the research aim. Particularly, how I understand a specific viewpoint – in this case, the idea of social construction – also exerts a similar influence on the research design and analysis. Therefore, as mainly affected by Berger and Luckmann's ideas, in this section, I will provide some reflections on their arguments to explain how this framework would decide the way I conduct the study.

The ultimate aim of any kind of research is to explore and introduce a quantity of knowledge. In Berger and Luckmann's view, this kind of knowledge is also socially constructed. Typically, there can be considered to be two main approaches to conducting research – with, or without, participants. The figure below illustrates how the research knowledge in these two types can be constructed.

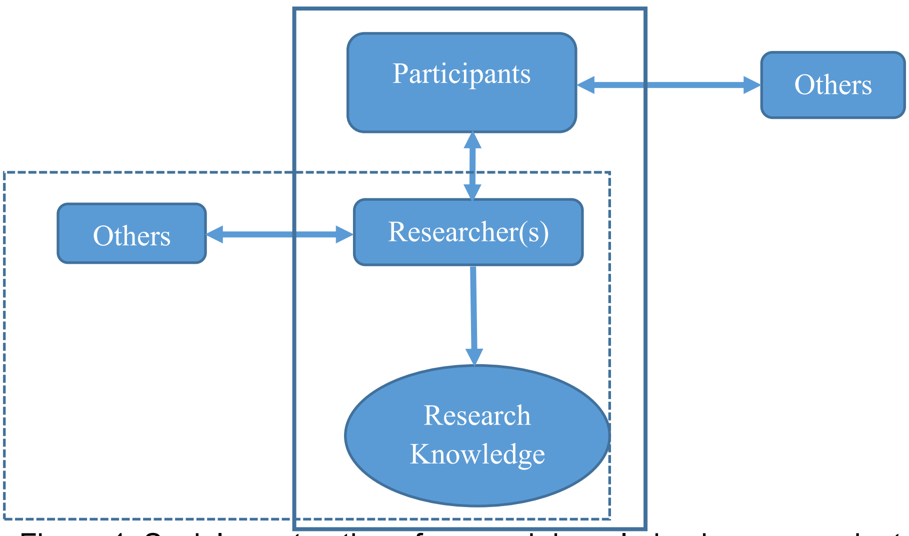

Figure 1: Social construction of research knowledge in a research study

In research that does not engage with participants, researchers play a key role in constructing the research knowledge. According to Berger and Luckmann, this construction would occur in the researchers' home-worlds and sub-worlds via interactions with other individuals. Whereas, in the case of researchers inviting participants to participate in the research, the knowledge would be co-constructed by both the researchers and the participants. In the first place, this co-construction also takes place during interactions between the researchers and their participants. However, besides this co-construction, the researchers and participants themselves have also undergone their own construction of knowledge within in their worlds, before sharing their understanding of the interactions.

Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's argument regarding interactions, I believe that without interactions with participants, I – as the researcher – would not be able to produce any knowledge. Therefore, my study should engage with participants via face-to-face talks and discussions. (This will be extensively elaborated in Chapter 5 – Methodology). These represent the essential platform for the social construction of research knowledge to take place.

The next section will further elaborate on the social construction of researchers' and participants' knowledge.

3.5.1. The social construction of researchers' knowledge

Researchers – as human beings – are also socially constructed. They also experience the three dialectical moments in social reality as mentioned earlier: "externalization", "objectivation" and "internalisation"; and their home-world, sub-worlds, and interactions all have immense impacts on their social construction. The cultures, traditions, beliefs and education from her home-world, and the different skills and experiences from various sub-worlds can help her fulfil the role as a researcher in a more "controlled" way. In this sense, their knowledge, beliefs and viewpoints would partly construct their decision over the methodology adopted for their research. As illustrated in my case, if I had not met my supervisors who introduced the social construction perspective to me, I would have not dived into the world of social construction thoughts and never would have obtained specific knowledge about this approach. All the same, I might have opted for another methodology that fitted quite a different ontological and epistemological stance.

Regarding methodological issues particularly, in a field-based study, researchers may want to consider approaching participants who share a similar home-world to the researcher's in their research project. This would help them easily understand certain behaviours and confidently analyse them. If encountering some who do not share that home-world, researchers can expect many differences, and should equip themselves with profound knowledge about that world so that they would not face any shocking, unexpected situations. In addition to the values inherited from the home world, researchers may need to seek other shared understandings among their own sub-worlds and the participants' sub-worlds. If there is anything in common, that would be an advantage during the research process. It would also help the researchers provide a more in-depth analysis, and more importantly, this would greatly support their interaction with the participants. In terms of data analysis, this also aligns with what was raised by Lukka and Modell (2010) that interpretive accounting research has the potential to produce not only subjectivist, emic understandings of actors' meanings, but also explanations, characterised by a certain degree of "thickness". Such an approach has challenged the notion of validity as little more than a technical issue of reducing bias in data collection and analysis and directed attention to the relationship between authors/researchers and their audience (Lukka and Modell, 2010).

To cut it short, a researcher's knowledge which has been socially constructed throughout her life in her home-world and in various sub-worlds, would influence how she would conduct the research, such as choosing the target participants, collecting the data, and interpreting the data. Moreover, as a researcher, she is doing a task that generates specific knowledge, and the knowledge the researchers ultimately aim at producing when doing their research is also a social product. Therefore, to conduct successful research, researchers may need to consider their roles and the appropriate approaches to interact with significant others, in order to reach a thorough understanding of the issue. The influence of researchers on their own research is becoming more and more recognised. This has been evidenced by different calls for reflexive research in which researchers emphasise their voice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

3.5.2. The social construction of participants' knowledge

When the researcher selects research participants to obtain their understanding of the topic studied, it would be not complete, thorough, and meaningful if the cultural or religious dimensions are not accounted for. These can account for certain of the behaviours, understandings, and actions of research participants, affecting and deciding the research results. Besides recognising the differences among various cultures and communities, researchers may plan for suitable approaches to access, or interact with, target participants.

Since individuals are constructed differently within their own chosen sub-worlds, it would be risky to attribute identical perceptions, understanding or knowledge to people merely because they share the same cultural influences. In studies that compare countries with countries and regions with regions, exploring the topic by itself will not be enough if no further analysis of the particular roles of research participants is taken into account. For example, if a case study is carried out, the wider the choice of participants selected, the greater the degree of insight will be gained. In a similar vein, it may also be worth paying attention to the different roles one may take. For instance, when choosing an accountant, a married one with the additional role of a mother role would offer different perspectives on the research issue from those of a single, childless accountant.

Therefore, to sum up, because sub-worlds contribute to socially constructing individuals who are born in the same home-world in many different ways, to obtain thorough knowledge about a topic, researchers not only need to consider their culture, tradition and religion, but their particular roles and experiences in their sub-worlds as well.

Additionally, it follows from what has been analysed above that it is also crucial to study the process, not just the result. For example, instead of analysing the company's figures, it would be more insightful to understand how they came to life and how they were constructed. And given the poor understanding of this process in management and organizational studies, this is even more pressing (Downing, 2005). This was also one of the reasons for my adoption of Berger and Luckmann's viewpoint. Indeed, their work emphasizes the importance of process by repeating the term "process" several times in every part; their key arguments also give more clues on the temporal order of the mechanisms involved in social construction. As socially constructed, "process" can be understood in different ways, but this study takes the Cambridge English Dictionary definition, which perhaps is the most widely available to the public. In that dictionary, "process" is defined as "a series of things that are done to achieve a particular result" or "a series of things that happen". Then, Berger and Luckmann's concepts of "home-world" and "sub-world" would fit this definition perfectly. Primary and secondary socialisations take place in a temporal order as moments in the process of the social construction of an individual and their knowledge.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted entirely to the social construction viewpoint. The idea has been demonstrated to be widely adopted in various areas. From among the different variants of social construction idea, Berger and Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" (1966) has been chosen to underpin my analysis given its suitability in helping me explore IC in social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, with its focus on individuals and its emphasis on the process of constructing rather than the products, Berger and Luckmann's work is expected to not only provide more insights to IC area but also the accounting field generally as it helps to study the construction at an individual level – how people understand IC, and more importantly, why and how they have had such thoughts.

By introducing the core concepts in Berger and Luckmann's framework – home-world, sub-world and interaction – this chapter elaborates on the key message which will be carried forward to the next chapters. The ideas of primary socialisation in home world and secondary socialisation in sub-worlds provide the framework to analyse the process of socially constructing the idea of IC. In this regard, people's thoughts can be influenced by cultures, the education they received, their social roles and other contexts they have experienced.

In addition, as shown in my reflections as a researcher on their arguments, the chapter also points out how research knowledge is socially constructed. Research knowledge is argued to be constructed from the combination of the researcher's knowledge and the research participants' knowledge. The argument regarding interactions also leads my project to the subject of engagement with participants in the co-construction of the research knowledge. However, to develop this initial idea into feasible and fruitful research, I need to examine how the idea of IC has been explored in the extant literature. This literature review would help me foresee how my potential research can fit well into the field. The next chapter will present a thorough review of IC literature through the lens of social construction lens.

CHAPTER 4 - THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF (THE IDEA OF) INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

4.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, the understanding of the idea of social construction, and my reflections in particular on Berger and Luckmann's work has led to my ambition as a researcher to explore how people in companies might understand IC by relying on their knowledge and how they have reached such perceptions. This desire to embark upon such a research project was even more strongly motivated by the claims that academic IC terminology is rarely employed in practice (Serenko and Bontis, 2013; Eijkman, 2011), and the calls for further research on the question of how the concept of IC actually works and evolves in practice (Schaper, 2016). However, to develop this idea into a feasible and fruitful research project, it will be crucial to look at the extant literature to see how the idea of IC has been explored so far. Here a literature review will help to identify the gaps, and provide the evidence to justify the use of specific research methods (Massaro et al., 2016). Based on this approach, I will be able to determine whether or not the potential research idea would fit into the field and how best to conduct the study to fulfil my ambition.

Moreover, with the aim of exploring how the idea of IC can be constructed in practice, this research will allow the participants to discuss what is of value, rather than talk directly about IC. This approach will help ensure that people's thoughts about what might be termed as IC will not be missed or influenced by the academic elements. And as argued in the previous chapter, I will have a prominent role in this research as a co-constructor of the idea of IC. Therefore, this chapter is going to provide an in-depth review of the literature around the idea of IC to serve two main purposes: (i) present my understanding about the topic of IC in general and the idea of IC in particular, which can then facilitate the explanations to my co-construction of the idea of IC; and (ii) determine what gaps in the research literature can be filled by studying the construction of the idea of IC and what contributions it can potentially make to the field of IC.

However, before moving on, it would be necessary to clarify that as I wished to study how IC might be conceptualised, the term "intellectual capital/IC" used in this thesis mainly refers to the *idea* of IC, not to IC as some kind of asset or a particular kind of knowledge existing in companies. In other cases, the *object* "IC" will be put into a clear context to aid the discussion around it. This distinction is a vital one because, as Hacking (1999, p.28) has said, "if many writers use one word, X, to refer to both objects of a certain sort and the sort itself, the idea under which the objects are thought about, [..] idea and object are often confused."

The literature review presented thus indicates that most of the empirical IC studies focus on exploring the implementations of IC concepts and frameworks (Dumay and Garanina, 2013), figuring how these frameworks can fit with their IC. In line with Hacking's argument (1999), these studies treat IC as an object – they look at the "IC" which were actually possessed by the companies. In comparison, just a small number of IC studies explored the idea of IC – what people think about IC. However, a closer review reveals that IC scholars seem to have over-reliant on pre-established IC frameworks and researchers' support, which has exerted too much academic impact on the participants and partly eclipsed their actual knowledge. Hence, they did not really study the idea of IC in practice. Besides, the analysis did not yield a detailed interpretation of the participants' opinions on what can be deemed as IC. Therefore, the question as to how IC is understood in practice has not been thoroughly answered.

Moreover, although assumingly agreeing on the difference among individuals' perceptions, scholars have not provided any explanations for such diversity. In other words, not much attention has been paid to concerns as to why and how these different conceptions of IC have been constructed. With that said, there is an obvious gap regarding how the idea of IC can be constructed in practice. By investigating this issue, the study is not only expected to fill such a literature gap but also seeks to reduce the gap between the IC perceptions in the literature, and how it might be conceptualised in practice (Nielsen et al., 2017) and why so. In this sense, IC scholars and practitioners might find the research outcomes insightful here when dealing with the implementation of IC in practical contexts.

Relying on the literature gaps and the research ambition, the research questions have been finalised as follows:

Research question 1: How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value?

Research question 2: How have these conceptions been constructed?

The chapter will be structured as follows. First, the origin of the concept of IC and how it has been framed in the literature are presented. The emphasis in this section is on the research approach whereby in order to study IC as an idea, the participants were asked about what was of value instead of being introduced to the term 'IC'. The discussions about studies treating IC as an object and as an idea will indicate the position of this research within the area. And finally, drawing upon this review of how the idea of IC in practice has been explored, some gaps in the literature will be pointed out, then the research questions will be finalised accordingly.

4.2. The concept of IC and how it has been developed in the literature

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the growing difference between the market and the book values of companies led to the birth of the concept of IC (Schaper, 2016). Since then, IC has been conceived as a major idea (Edvinsson, 2013). In the first years of flourishing IC research, numerous pioneering attempts were made in order to define what IC actually is (for example Edvinsson, 1997; Bontis, 1998). Also, scholars have made their efforts in summarising all the existing IC definitions in the literature. For example, Based on the work of Kaufmann and Schneider in 2004, Choong (2008) extended the prior scholars' literature review, including the major accounting and non-accounting journals before 1997 and after 2003, and produced a summary of IC definitions. More recently, Pedro et al. (2018) reviewed the published empirical studies of IC, and revealed the most frequently adopted IC concepts. More recently, IC has been identified as a key resource and driver of organisational value creation (Pedro et al., 2018; Marr et al., 2004). The common thing which can be seen from these works is that despite using different expressions, most of the definitions refer to the "ability" to create the value of IC. Some of the examples are as below. (See Choong (2008) and Pedro et al. (2018) for the full lists).

- *IC is defined as being the intangible value generated from human beings (e.g. knowledge, experiences, skills and motivation) and from resources (e.g. computers and information technology), aiming to add value to a company in the sense of creating a competitive advantage (Edvinsson and Malone (1997 quoted by Pedro et al. (2018)).*
- *"IC is intellectual material – knowledge, information, intellectual property, experience – that can be put to use to create wealth – collective brainpower" (Stewart, 1998, p. XI)*
- *"IC is indicative of the economic value of two categories (organization and human capital) of IA of a company" (Petty and Guthrie, 2000, p. 158)*
- *"IC are sources of value for an organization's future benefits, which do not have a physical or financial form" (Lev, 2001, p. 5)*
- *"IC mobilises 'things' such as employees, customers, IT, managerial work and knowledge. IC cannot stand by itself as it is merely provides a mechanism that*

allows the various assets to be bonded together in the productive process of the firm." (Mouritsen et al., 2004, p. 48)

This seems to be perfectly aligned with what has been claimed so far, that "IC played a major role in today's value creation processes" (Schaper, 2016; Dumay and Garanina, 2013; Alcaniz et al., 2011; Marr and Chatzkel, 2004; Riahi-Belkaoui, 2003). For this reason, when conducting interviews during the field-based work, one of the key questions to generate the idea of IC from the participants was "What do you think to be of value in the company?"

Following the pioneering work, various authors have defined taxonomies for IC. Hence, currently there have been numberless different IC definitions and frameworks but no consensus on this issue. As Marr and Moustaghfir (2005) asserted, different people talk about IC from different perspectives or disciplines, using the same language to describe different things. This is totally aligned with what the social construction viewpoint suggests. Consequently, uplifting the reasoning behind why people have particular thoughts about IC would be very helpful in reaching a crucial consensus in both literature and practice. Similar to IC definitions, IC frameworks have also been studied, analysed, and summarised in different work. For instance, influenced by the work of Kaufmann and Schneider in 2004, Choong (2008) extended the prior scholars' literature review, including the major accounting and non-accounting journals before 1997 and after 2003, and producing a summary of IC definitions. More recently, Pedro et al. (2018) reviewed the published empirical studies of IC, and revealed the most frequently adopted IC concepts. In turn, Ferenhof et al. (2015) established the current body of knowledge about IC by reviewing the extant literature to identify models intended to measure/classify IC.

With the aim of exploring IC as an idea, I have thus sought to focus on how people might conceptualise IC from their understanding. I had no intention of relying on a single IC definition or framework because such an approach might hamper the interpretations of what can be deemed as IC from people's responses. Consequently, when interviewing the participants, I raised the question "What do you think is of value?" rather than "What is IC?" Here, the rationale was that the decision to avoid using the term IC or any IC elements and invoke the answers by the notion "of value" would allow the research participants to talk freely and share their actual knowledge relevant to IC. In that sense, using value as the viable proxy of IC would facilitate the investigation of how the idea of IC can be constructed in practice.

With that said, my role as the co-constructor of the idea of IC has become clearer. I needed to draw on my knowledge of IC to interpret and analyse the participants' responses regarding what was of value. To facilitate this step, having searched far and wide in the literature, I have constructed a summary of IC elements which have been discussed in the literature (Appendix 1).

According to the extensive reviews conducted by those scholars, although different terms have been used to indicate IC components, the three main groups of IC elements which have been the most regularly used are "human capital", "structural capital" and "relational capital". Specifically, in the literature, the human capital of an organisation is composed of competencies, knowledge, capacities, talents and know-how, attitudes, motivation, the performance and the ethics of the people involved, values, attitudes, creative capacity and innovation, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as their intellectual agility, dexterity and the experiences of employees and directors (see for instance Osinski et al., 2017; Ferenhof et al., 2015). In turn, within the literature, structural capital is often taken to be what the organisation can absorb from its employees, even when they stop working there. It consists of intangible assets and knowledge arising from organisational processes, which are owned by the organisation and remain the same when employees leave it (see for instance Osinski et al., 2017; Ferenhof et al., 2015). Meanwhile, relational capital is often defined as the set of skills incorporated into the organisation and to the individuals that belong to it. Relational capital results from relationships with different agents in the market and with society in general (see for instance, Osinski et al., 2017; Ferenhof et al., 2015). Appendix 1 also provides more details on these categories.

The extensive research work on intellectual capital over the past decades has succeeded in creating and enhancing the awareness of IC (Lev, 2003), bringing IC issues to more audience. However, it has also been claimed that, since IC is a concept that is grounded in practice (Bukh et al., 2001; Bontis, 1999; Swart, 2006), every effort must be made to consider how it actually works and evolves in practice (for instance Schaper, 2016). This demand became even more crucial when most of more than a hundred companies involved in IC statement-constructing and testing over the period 1997-2002 in the famous Danish project, stopped using IC statements soon after the project terminated (Schaper, 2016). Although recent articles still prove the usefulness of the Danish IC statements from both a strategic and communication perspective, it would be worth exploring the reasoning behind the decision by those companies to cease their use of IC statements. When studying the causes of this, Chiucchi (2013) underlined the great complexity of IC measurement practices, and the subsequent need for management to have time to become familiar with them. Hence, it would be necessary to question whether all the companies which adopted those guidelines and frameworks understood what “IC” meant. Did they have similar thoughts about IC when implementing the guidelines from the project? Indeed, it has been thought advisable to develop research with the ambition to understand IC as a concept and not only as an application of a pre-set idea (Mouritsen, 2006).

Moreover, this issue has flared up again recently. Responding to Dumay and Garanina’s (2013) call, Nielsen et al. (2017) identified a large gap between the perceptions in the literature and the reality. And indeed, as Marr and Chatzkel (2004) asserted in their introductory editorial to the special issue “IC at the crossroads: Theory and Research”, one of the issues that needs addressing is what we mean when we talk about IC. This question again reinforced my ambition and my curiosity as a researcher to investigate how people and companies think about what can be deemed as IC in practice, and more importantly, why so. From a social construction perspective, different people would have different ways to understand IC. Hence, in order to build up our knowledge about the understanding of IC in practice, it would be extremely time- and effort-consuming to collect every single thought about IC. Instead, exploring the construction of people’s understanding to see how the way to understand IC can be affected would be more helpful.

The two principal point of this study are thus how IC can be conceptualised from people’s understandings and the construction of such conceptions. However, before conducting the research to fulfil such an ambition, an extensive literature review must be carried out to see how feasible the research idea would be, whether there have been any similar studies, and what the available answers are to the questions raised. In other words, a review of the literature would help to identify the gaps, and position the potential research. For that reason, the next section will present my findings when undertaking a literature review in the area of IC.

4.3. Positioning the research

In accounting, the literature has also witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of discussions around IC. No longer the topic that was barely discussed before the 1990s, IC is now becoming a key part of today’s accounting, management and reporting vocabulary (Dumay and Guthrie, 2019). Apart from the Journal of Intellectual Capital, which mainly focuses on IC research, other highly ranked journals have also published special issues on IC, for example, the Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal’s special issue "Managing, Measuring and Reporting Intellectual Capital for the New Millennium" (2001);

and the European Accounting Review's special issue, "Intangibles and Intellectual Capital" (2003).

Nonetheless, most IC studies are "top-down" research which studied the implementations of IC concept and frameworks (Dumay and Garanina, 2013). They investigated how companies adopted and adapted the frameworks to fit their IC. In this regard, scholars have studied IC as an object by looking into what companies really had as IC in their current context. A few "bottom-up" studies have explored how different companies developed different IC practices. However, just a few of them have looked into what people thought about IC, while others have been stuck in the trap of proposing IC frameworks to fit their current IC (Dumay and Garanina, 2013). For example, Secundo et al. (2010, p. 140) reviewed existing IC theories and practical experiences to build a conceptual IC model and dashboard, then applying it to investigate IC in an Italian higher education and research institution. In the findings of their study, they state that their research is "exploratory" and their "dashboard of metrics proposed is comprehensive". Secundo et al. (2010, p. 152) also outlined that the advantage of their model is that "IC is a metric of performance, and the intangible report may well represent for HE (higher education) and research organizations what the balance sheet and the income statement are for business companies". Similarly, Massingham et al. (2011) used "360-degree peer review as a method of validating self-reporting in HCVM (Human Capital Value Measurement) surveys" in the Australian Royal Navy. They argued that their proposed method for validating HCVM helps "to build confidence in the objectivity of the HC scores" (Massingham et al., 2011, p. 69). Here the logic justifying their approach is financial and abstract as they claim that "the measurement of intangible assets, such as HC, has become a very important research agenda for both academics and practitioners. These methods seek to quantify the economic value of people to the organization and to assist management and financial decisions" (Massingham et al., 2011, p. 69).

However, although these researchers have investigated the issue IC in practice and more contextually, very few of them have studied IC as an idea, meaning people's thoughts about IC rather than the IC that companies actually possess. And this categorisation is also aligned with Hacking's argument (1999) when he suggested that we can treat something either as an object or an idea. Hacking uses "ideas" to include ideas, conceptions, concepts, beliefs, attitudes and theories. Consequently, similarly, IC can be discussed as an object or an idea. When somebody says "intellectual capital", they may be referring to the human resources in the company, or the brand name, or the patent, some very common IC elements discussed over the decade. All these elements can indeed exist within certain companies, and they know they possess them. However, in other cases, when somebody uses the term "intellectual capital", they actually mean the perception of IC – what they think can be deemed as IC, no matter whether those things exist in reality in that particular context.

In this sense, it can be said that the idea of IC has not been given much attention by scholars, and that a study of this issue would potentially contribute valuable insights to the literature which also helps to narrow down the literature search for the review. As I desired to seek the answers to how people think about what can be seen as IC and how they can reach such an understanding, a detailed literature review focusing on the IC literature group studied IC as an idea will then allow me to determine where the gaps lie and how this study can help to fill them, given that I can draw up my research question(s) in response.

As earlier discussed in the previous chapter, in addition to the participants' construction of their own thoughts about what was of value, the researcher was also involved in the construction of the idea of IC. In this sense, relying on Berger and Luckmann's arguments of 1966, my research idea can be illustrated as below.

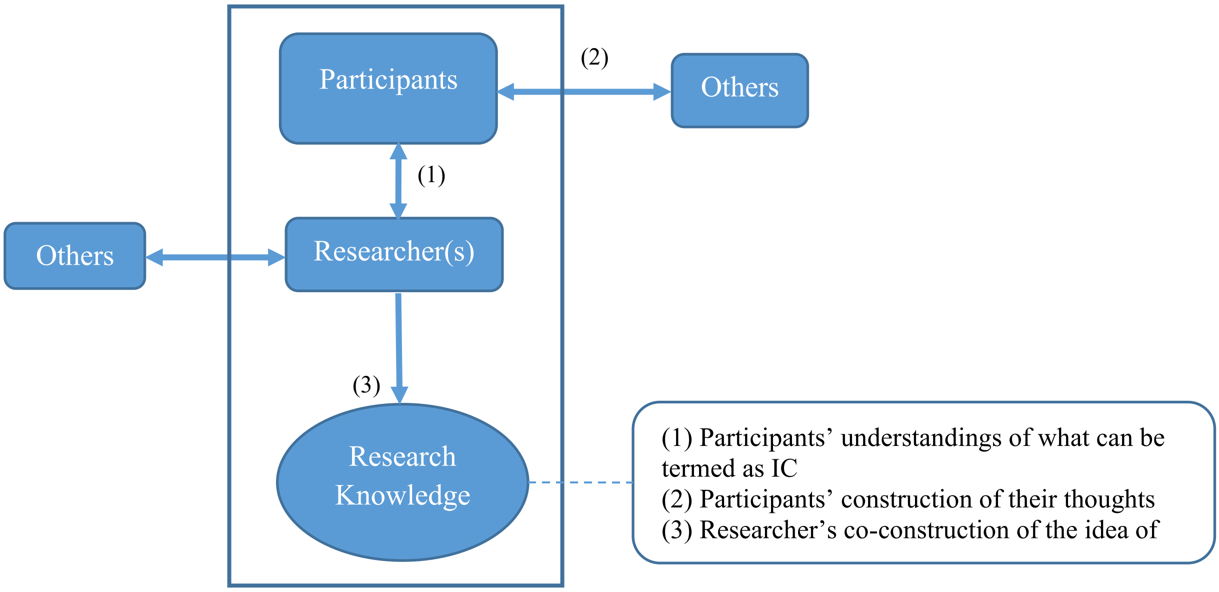

Figure 2: Illustration of the research idea

For the researcher's construction which has been overlooked in the literature (as De Loo and Lowe, 2017), it lies more with the methodological issues, therefore, this will be explained in depth in Chapter 5 – Methodology. Within the scope of this chapter, I will place the primary focus on the social construction of participants' knowledge – what they think about what is of value and why they have such thoughts. Consequently, the next section will look at the extent of IC literature in order to see how scholars have examined these two aspects, and whether the IC literature has been able to offer the answers to such questions, or if any elements of the topic require more research. Once I have completed that task, I will develop a research design that can hopefully yield fruitful insights into the field.

4.4. The idea of “intellectual capital” in practice

The research ambition is to study how IC can be conceptualised from people’s understandings in practice, and more importantly, how these conceptions have been constructed. Therefore, in this section, those two focal points in the previous research will be investigated. This would reveal how much these two issues have been addressed so far in the literature.

4.4.1. How is the term IC understood in practice?

The review revealed that recent literature has seen a growth of studies examining what people think about IC. Scholars have relied on the argument that different people will have different understandings of IC and have subsequently conducted various studies that involved another “type” of participants. To uncover how people thought about IC, researchers appeared to give participants the freedom to express their own thoughts. However, these opportunities were not as free as they seemed. This impediment can be attributed to the adoption of pre-established IC frameworks and the support given by the researchers. Hence, the participants’ understandings have been partly eclipsed. Instead of exploring those diverse understandings, they have relied on only what has been developed and shared in the literature, in the hope of gaining different viewpoints and further constructing our understanding of IC. This does sound a bit conflicting. Under the social construction perspective, such an approach would not be appropriate, because giving research participants a preset definition and framework would be thought to have a certain influence on their perceptions. The upshot is that the researchers would not be able to explore what the participants think and why, which would be even riskier if the participants had never heard about IC before or known about it. Furthermore, it can be said that the respondents’ construction of the idea of IC starts right at the time when they are introduced to the IC concept. While the intention of the study is supposed to explore how the research participants have constructed their understanding of IC somewhere in their home-world and subworlds, the research plan will unfortunately be diverted to exploring the construction within the interactive context involving the researcher. In this scenario, the researcher becomes an influential person in the participants' "new sub-world", and the answers obtained cannot be considered to match the relevant knowledge sought.

For example, in their case study exploring the construction and valuation of intellectual capital, Giuliani and Marasca (2011) started with the first step of achieving a consensus on the meaning of IC. This was motivated by a question raised by a CEO in one of the first meetings "What are we talking about exactly?" With the researchers' scientific support, the focus group in the study reached a definition of IC as a system of intangibles that have strategic relevance. This definition was proposed and then adopted, in line with the aim of the research project. What seems to be concerning here is what exactly the scientific support of the researchers given was? How much influence did the researchers exert on the understanding of the focus group? This issues raised scepticism, because the definition reached seemed to be precisely aligned with what was discussed in the Meritum project (2002). In other words, had the participants any opportunity to propose their own thoughts?

Also, from a constructivist point of view, Habersam and Piber (2003) anticipated differing individual conceptualisations of IC in hospitals. Hence, to understand the perception of IC in hospitals, the authors conducted some semi-structured interviews. However, during the interviews, "all questions refer directly or indirectly to the Meritum taxonomy, distinguishing between human, structural and relational capital" (Habersam and Piber, 2003, p.758). And as they described in their paper, these questions were given in a questionnaire that allowed the interviewees to define all three types of IC characteristics. Although the researchers claimed that not addressing the term IC explicitly until the end of the interview would prevent textbook answers, they accidentally led the interviewees onto the road they had chosen for them. In other words, by designing the questionnaire following Meritum's framework, the researchers may have limited the chances for the interviewees to reflect their thoughts regarding IC. Moreover, the questionnaire may only have allowed the participants to express what they thought. Briefly, the researchers would not have known why the participants possessed certain perceptions of IC.

To take one example, in exploring how senior Italian managers perceived their organisation's IC, Benevene et al. (2019) conducted interviews in order to listen to the participants' answers to the question "Can you tell us about your organisation's IC?" Although no predefined framework was used, the data was analysed mainly using content analysis, word frequencies and word mapping were presented. Similarly, Brosnan et al. (2019) drew upon Habermasian's and Wittgenstein's theory to study the subjective interpretations of worker/manager/professional groups towards IC, but what they extracted from the interviews were the codes developed by NVivo software. They only provided only themes to address the research question, rather than a detailed interpretation of what the participants thought about IC. To put it another way, the analysis method somehow hampered our understandings about how IC is understood in practice.

To sum up, IC scholars have made various attempts to explore how different people think about IC, but they have not comprehensively investigated the idea of IC due to their research approach; namely, in their approach to collecting responses from participants. In this sense, they did not let the idea of IC flourish freely, but limited the construction of such ideas within pre-set IC frameworks and so guiding the participants towards their answers. This has, to some extent eclipsed the participants' knowledge, which in turn has hampered our understanding of the social construction of the idea of IC. Furthermore, an analysis which only picked up themes did not really address what practitioners actually meant when they talked about IC. In other words, the issue of how the term IC is understood in practice has not yet been thoroughly addressed.

4.4.2. Why and how have people had such understandings about the term IC?

According to Berger and Luckmann, individuals construct their knowledge via interactions with others in their home world and sub-worlds. In this sense, participants have also constructed their understanding of IC in their home world and sub-worlds via many interactions. However, when exploring how people understand IC, scholars have not provided clues to as why and how they have obtained such understandings with regard to it.

In a case study carried out in the non-profit sector, Veltri and Bronzetti (2015) affirmed that IC measurement, management and reporting systems were influenced by relevant context-specific and firm-specific factors. By analysing the semi-structured interviews they conducted, and with the manager (GD) in particular, the authors concluded that his culture and beliefs were strongly related to how IC was introduced and managed within the organisation. For instance, they pointed out that the IC framework was introduced because the GD was able to see the potential of IC as a monitoring tool; the company then continued with it because he recognised the usefulness of ICR for its managerial aims. As the only person responsible for producing and disclosing IC information then, the GD alone exerted a remarkable impact on IC adoption in the company. However, apart from giving examples to elaborate on the GD's influence on IC's use and management, the authors did not explain why the GD had such beliefs. Therefore, this conclusion about the effect of individual culture and beliefs was not very rigorous and persuasive.

Furthermore, in claiming to study the impact of culture on how organisations are set up and managed, two Austrian authors – Habersam and Piber (2003) – studied IC's perception in hospitals in Austria and Italy, but only provided exploratory results. They admitted that there should be further research into the extent to which the findings reflect typical national or regional characteristics. Similarly, in their case study conclusion, Giuliani and Marasca (2011) stressed the relevance of the social or organisational dimension of the IC valuation process. They asserted that "a different 'society' could have potentially adopted a different definition, with a different perception of the resources needed to achieve the strategic goals. All of this would have implied a different IC and consequently, a different value" (Giuliani and Marasca, 2011, p. 386). However, again, they left this concern open for further research, which reinforced my ambition to shed some light on the social construction of the various conceptions of IC.

In addition, some of the above studies used secondary data, but failed to pay attention to the construction of the data. For example, Abhayawansa et al. (2018) analysed 64 initiation coverage reports written by analysts in order to understand how analysts perceive IC but did not discuss how these reports originally came into being. Furthermore, there was no explanation of why the analysts had such perceptions of IC. Nonetheless, there were some exceptions amongst these studies which did examine how people constructed their ideas of IC. Nevertheless, those studies only focused on the interactions in the company context, overlooking the interactions the participants had somewhere, with someone outside the company.

In another example, Giuliani and Marasca (2011) studied the construction and valuation of intellectual capital in a case company they called "Ankon". Compared to previous IC valuation studies, this case study focused on an *in vivo* IC valuation process rather than reviewing, commenting, or proposing theoretical models. As shown in the case history, the identification and definition of IC were the results of discussions in the organisation. Consequently, these debates were strictly connected to the people who took part in the meetings, and to the point in time when the meetings took place. Overall, the study suggested that "more than the IC value *per se*, what can be mainly relevant is the process" (Giuliani and Marasca, 2011, p. 387).

In turn, Bukh et al. (2001) aimed to explore the construction of intellectual capital statements made by nineteen Danish companies. In this project, the researchers participated as observers and commentators on the monthly meetings, while a related questionnaire was administrated annually. The questions raised in the research were: (1) Why does the firm want to measure intellectual capital? (2) Who is involved in the project? (3) How does the firm work with intellectual capital? (4) What is intellectual capital? (5) What potential elects is the reporting of intellectual capital expected to have?

Finally Stacchezzini et al. (2019) drew on social ontology theory[1] (Searle, 1995, 2006, 2008) as the basis for the interviews they have conducted in order to understand how company actors behave and interact to define IC. The study focused on the reporting aspect, where the process of integrated reporting preparation and how IC "exists" for integrated reporting purposes was analysed. In examining IC issues in the context of integrated reporting, Corbella et al. (2019) then conducted in-depth interviews with actors directly or indirectly involved in the integrated reporting preparation process of a European oil and gas company. The key elements presented in the findings reflected the process of integrated reporting preparation and how IC elements were mobilised within this process, not how individuals constructed their own understandings of IC.

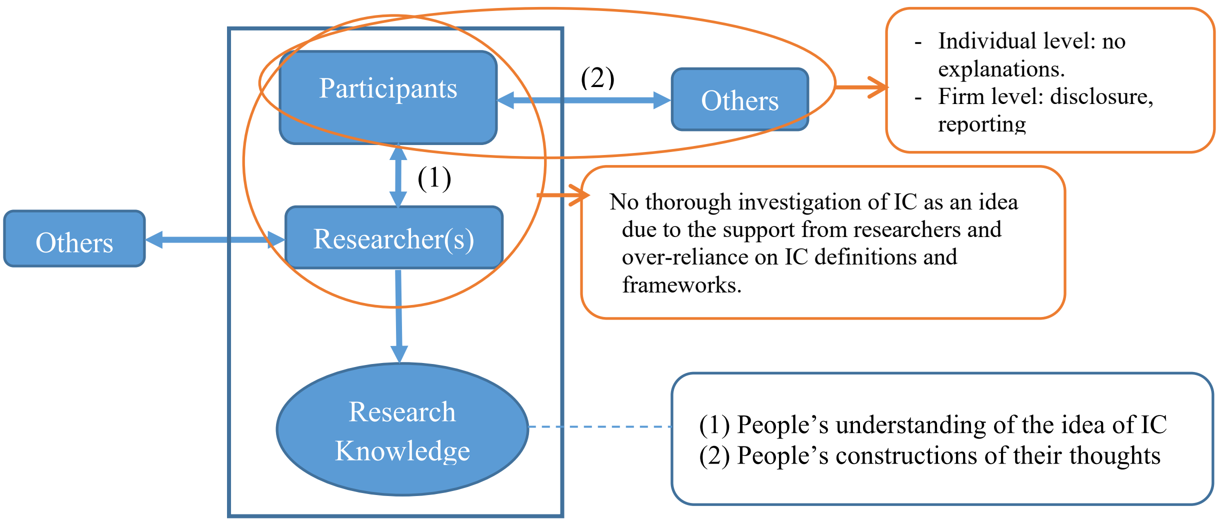

Figure 3: Literature Review of IC as an idea, using Berger and Luckmann's viewpoint

[1] *Searle (1995) addresses social ontology, or "how social facts exist" (p. 5), defining social facts as those "facts in the world [...] that exist only because we believe them to exist" (p. 1). That is, social facts arise through [Continued from previous footnote] intentional human activity that represents objects and imposes on them a function that would otherwise not be performed simply by virtue of the nature of the object itself.*

To sum up, my review of IC studies which explored IC as an idea has revealed that although pursuing the social construction viewpoint, IC scholars seemed not to have fully uncovered the participants' understanding of the idea of IC. This is attributed to their over-reliance on the preset IC frameworks used in the fieldwork study, the research's support during the interactions between the researchers and the participants, and the analysis methods. Secondly, IC studies have merely discussed the different understandings of IC among groups of individuals. They have not provided any further explanations of the concern over why this happened. Although some suggestions regarding the impact of culture, social elements and the organization roles were provided, scholars mostly left this question unanswered, which limited our understanding about the social construction of the idea of IC. These gaps indicated that what I desired to study has not been extensively addressed yet. Therefore, my research can be expected to well fit the current literature, and to yield valuable insights which can advance our understandings about IC.

Consequently, the research questions have been finalised as:

Research question 1: How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value?

Research question 2: How have these conceptions been constructed?

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an extensive review of IC literature. It has been observed that IC empirical studies in the extant literature can be divided into two groups: studies that considered IC as an object, and studies that considered IC as an idea, which is aligned with Ian Hacking's social construction viewpoint (1999). Given the research intention that explores how people understand IC, it was believed that this project would belong to the second subset in the literature.

The review of IC studies which explored the idea of IC has revealed that IC scholars seemed to have over-relied on predefined IC frameworks and provided too much support when interacting with participants, which partly eclipsed the actual understandings of participants, hence not yet thoroughly studied IC as an idea. Besides, the analysis in those studies did not yield a detailed interpretation of the participants' opinions about IC. Therefore, the question as to how the term IC can be conceptualised in practice has not been comprehensively answered. More importantly, although assuming that different people have different perceptions about IC, these studies did not provide any explanations for such diversity. The concern of why and how these different understandings had been constructed was not paid much attention. Given the conclusions drawn from the literature review, the gaps have been identified, and more pieces of evidence could be used to justify using specific research methods (Massaro et al., 2016). Two research questions have been finalised, and the shape of the research has come out more evident. Hence, the next chapter will discuss the research design which elaborates on how the study has been conducted to fulfil the research aim.

CHAPTER 5 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. Introduction

As analysed in the previous chapter, the emergence of social construction idea can be traced back to when the sociology of knowledge was beginning to take shape. Philosophers proposed two major ways of viewing the origins of knowledge – the “exogenic perspective” and the “endogenic perspective” (Gergen, 1985, p.269). Social construction thinkers believe that knowledge is socially constructed, and the process of building, shaping and updating what we know takes place via interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In other words, social construction viewpoint entails a theory of knowing and can hence be viewed as an epistemology. Notably, in adopting Berger and Luckmann’s ideas, I believe that there is not a single reality, but multiple realities that are socially constructed in different ways by different individuals. Taking the social construction viewpoint, drawing on such a belief in the nature of knowledge and reality, it can be considered that my epistemology is commensurable with my common interpretive ontology (Chua, 1986, 2019). And as Quattrone (2000) suggested, for a social science researcher, the choice of a particular methodology is not entirely free. It is dictated by her/his position within a particular discipline and ontological viewpoint. So the next question is which methodology is compatible, and in addition to that, how ought it to be effectuated.

As stated in the discussion in Chapter 3, there have been many calls for the case and field studies in organisations to examine accounting, in particular, in the contexts in which it operates (Hopwood, 1983; Tomkins and Groves, 1983). Accounting researchers are encouraged to “enter the field and engage in qualitative research grounded in symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology” (Ritson, 2002, p.9). And so far, “field-based qualitative research methods had to remain the exclusive province of the social constructionist.” (Ritson, 2002, p.10). And indeed, “case studies” is also mentioned by Chua (1986) as one of the methodologies she listed when she laid out the interpretive accounting research tradition. Therefore, in this research, I have chosen to adopt the case study with its intention of exploring what people deem to be of value, and the reasoning behind such ideas, this case study can be considered both descriptive and explanatory according to the categorisation made by Scapens (1990).

Nevertheless, from a social construction stance, it is understood that there is no single formula or recipe for all social construction research. In other words, conducting a case study would be decided not only by the researcher’s philosophical stance, as discussed above, but by other contextual aspects. Lee (2020) also pointed to a similar idea when asserting that both the methods that researchers employ and their assumptions about the usefulness of the information gathered by those methods are shaped by particular cultures. Consequently, in the hope of clearly illustrating how the methodological issues have been decided in my particular research context, this chapter will also include my own stories behind the choices and adoptions of particular methods.

Moreover, in this thesis, it has been stressed that social construction is an ongoing process. Therefore, how I conducted the study was not simply a decision I had to make before taking the actual steps in the field. The methodological issues were also being constructed alongside the fieldwork, and even selected after all the data were obtained. Consequently, in this chapter, the construction of research methodology will be presented according to the three different stages: before, during and after the fieldwork. The next part will talk about how some first methodological decisions were made. This will include the case study, the interviewees approached, the interviews' planned structure and some rules to maintain the project's quality and ethics. The following section focused on the construction of my methodology when I was in the field doing the interviews. This was when the language issue was brought in, and when I had to adjust my interview techniques to fit with different interviewees and into other contexts. Lastly, there will be some discussion on the choices of cases and choices of data to be presented in the findings, which can give some basic information to pave the way to the empirical analysis in the next chapter.

5.2. The social construction of the research methodology - Before the fieldwork

Being aware of the interpretive paradigm taken, I started to consider an appropriate methodology. As mentioned above, in my empirical study of IC, the case study method was chosen. That meant that I would have to get access to companies and talk to the people there to understand how the idea of IC can be conceptualised from their understandings. However, who to approach and talk to in order to earn more knowledge is believed to depend a lot on the researchers. Relying on their network, their interest, their curiosity and their capability to seek potential interviews in particular contexts, different researchers might have different choices for their cases; and consequently, what their research can reveal might be different. In other words, this helps to indicate the prominent role of the researchers in a research, which is aligned with what Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested regarding the construction of knowledge.

In this section, I will present what I thought behind my choices/decisions before the fieldwork; how they could have been different, which might have led to different insights in this study; how semi-structured interviews were planned and prepared before the actual fieldwork; and some rules set for maintaining the research's quality and ethics.

5.2.1. The choice of the case study and targeted interviewees

As the aim of this research is to explore the idea of IC rather than the object IC, I did not set out to find companies with particular types of IC but instead aimed at approaching companies where people could provide (interesting) insights into what they deemed to be of value. Before the fieldwork, I set some “criteria” for myself in this search for potential cases to study. Since I was not only looking to explore the idea of IC in practice but also why people had their particular conception or understanding of IC, I sought to study companies where different people from different backgrounds were amply available. Taking my lead from Berger and Luckmann’s viewpoints about the home world and subworlds (which have been elaborated in Chapter 3), I sought cases where the people experienced the same and different cultures, a similar and different education, and varying social roles.

With these considerations in mind, the choice of case study was socially constructed because of particular contexts. For example, if I had decided to come back to Vietnam for the fieldwork, then my approach to seeking and accessing participants must have been different. I have friends, colleagues and family there who would have further networks that could be relied on. Moreover, I could travel to the south, to the north and to anywhere needed to approach potential interviewees, entailing that the selection of the cases to study would be differently constructed. In staying in the UK for the field work, it was inevitable that my network was more limited, while companies in the UK would be far different from those in Vietnam. Under these circumstances, I have decided to study small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which can be partly attributed to the context of doing the field work in the UK. I was not able to gain access to big companies but, more importantly, the decision emerged from the observation that the extant IC literature focusing on SMEs’ settings is limited and fragmented (Demartini and Beretta, 2020). Similar to the wider IC literature, most of the previous studies focused on the measurement of IC and the relationship between IC and SMEs’ performance (Jordão and Novas, 2017; Khalique et al., 2015). Consequently, studying the idea of IC in different SMEs would be helpful in filling the research gaps with more knowledge about this particular type of companies which are major players in today’s economy (Daou et al., 2014).

Three cases have been chosen for this study: one law firm, one restaurant and one charity. I tried to approach commercial firms and non-commercial firms to diversify the data in the hope of producing valuable insights to the field of IC. Moreover, the charity was chosen because there has been very little research into IC in social enterprises such as charities (Kong, 2010). It was expected that using a charity as a case study would enhance our understanding of the topic of IC. With the other two commercial firms, aiming at exploring different working environments, I have decided to use one case where there could be more blue-collar workers and one for more white-collar workers. The reason is that subworlds – working environments – can have a remarkable impact on people's understanding (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and research have shown that blue-collar and white-collar workers' perceptions are influenced by various material, psychological and social elements (Hennequin, 2007). Hence, a lot of differences emerge between these two sets of workers between them, such as work attitudes (Sarac et al., 2017), perception of risk of work-related injury (Harrell, 1990), perception of worksite health climate (Morris et al., 1999) and conceptualisation of the various facets of job satisfaction (Hu et al., 2010).

The relevant details about each of the three cases are given as follows:

In terms of the case study of the law firm, there are three shareholders, among whom one is Vietnamese. This is a small firm which only has seven full-time staff and some part-time ones. The office is relatively small and located within a mile of Birmingham city centre. It was established about fifteen years ago by one of the shareholders and has become one of the biggest law firms in Birmingham. Individual interviews were conducted with people holding different positions in the company, such as the Managing Director, the IT and Accounting Director, and two junior employees. The Managing Director has had his own law company in Vietnam for ten years. He moved to the UK and after some co-operation with this company, he decided to buy a substantial part of the shares from the other two shareholders and became a member of the board of directors. He is now the Managing Director, who is responsible for the strategies, commercial and communication issues. The IT director is in charge of all the accounting and the IT issues in the company. He is the person who signs for approval of any expenses incurred. In contrast, the two junior employees interviewed were quite new in the company and they had both worked in different companies in Vietnam before coming to the UK. One of them is the core member of the BD team – the business development team – which mainly takes care of all the communications via the company's public channels such as the website, Facebook and their brochures. The other is doing her PhD in Finance in the UK.

The restaurant case study involves the only vegetarian restaurant in London which serves all the vegan dishes. It was established in 2018 just before the Covid pandemic and has stayed strong through the challenging time. It is located in an area called the “Vietnamese Village” where various Vietnamese restaurants are located. I talked to different people in different positions – the Head Waiter, the Chefs, the Owner - all of whom were Vietnamese. The Head Waiter works part-time there while he studies for his PhD in Tourism. He used to work in industry before coming to the UK to pursue his studies. Meanwhile, the Chefs and the Owners have only worked in restaurants and had very little education before migrating to the UK for work.

Based in Birmingham, the charity was founded in 1870 and is currently being run by a Board comprising of nine Trustees. This organisation has provided monthly lecturer series, annual transactions, excursions and various other activities to its members. However, the society is facing various problems - memberships have been shrinking and there has been a shortage of people who can fit in the key roles. The organisation is considered to be converted to a CIO - Charitable Incorporated Organisation – which is a new type of legal format for a registered charity enabling the charity to enter into contracts in its own right. I talked to four Trustees among whom are the President, the Vice President, the Former Treasurer. I also talked to an external consultant who was currently working very closely with the society to help it overcome the difficulties and grow better. What I found interesting about the charity is that people from completely different backgrounds can join solely by demonstrating the same passion about the subject. Moreover, they join as volunteers which made me question whether they cared about what was of value in the society or not. The President, Vice President and the former Treasurer were all in their retirement. The President had worked as the Director of big museums, while the Vice President worked in local government. The former Treasurer was a former lawyer, while the other Trustee was a university lecturer. Of the Board members listed here, only two had an education in archaeology, while others joined the organisation because of their passion in the field. Some of the executives have different experiences in other charities, while some of them had worked exclusively in commercial companies. It might be necessary to add that I myself used to work for the charity as Treasurer, and my knowledge about the charity will doubtlessly shape the analysis and co-construct the idea of IC in this research.

Appendix 2 presents all the interviews conducted for this research and the details about the interviewees.

5.2.2. Preparations for semi-structured interviews

As stated earlier in this chapter, using the social construction lens I believe that only meeting and talking to participants can provide thorough answers to how and why they construct the idea of what can be labelled as IC in specific ways. In this regard, interviewing is the required tool. When asking people about their experience, the researcher opens the investigation to multiple voices and values and avoids the tendency to reduce people to numbers (Gergen, 2015). By interviewing, we will obtain a deeper understanding of the topic through responses from the participants. The knowledge is also socially constructed, by means of the interviewer and interviewee's interaction (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). And especially, with its emphasis on the context, the qualitative research interview proves its suitability for the social construction lens, because it is not “a neutral medium that enables conversationalists to freely encounter each other, unaffected by the context; rather, the interview is a mediator that makes certain possible ways of relating to one another” (Ibid, p.106).

However, there are various ways to raise questions and obtain answers from interviewees. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) depicted two metaphors for the interviewer – as a miner or as a traveller – that illustrate two different epistemological conceptions of interviewing – as a process of knowledge collection, or as a process of knowledge construction, respectively. In the miner metaphor, knowledge is understood as valuable buried metal, and the interviewer will unearth it. The knowledge is waiting to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner. At the same time, the interviewer-traveller wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people they encounter. In this study, wishing to apply the social construction lens, I decided to act as a traveller-interviewer who approaches “people” to listen to their stories about what they deemed to be of value. In this sense, the analysis also clearly indicates how the questions were raised, how the answers were obtained, and how the findings were co-constructed.

In my empirical study of IC, semi-structured interviews would be used. It meant I would need some key themes to discuss throughout the interviews, and follow-up questions would emerge later on, as the interviewer deemed appropriate (Bryman, 2016). The technique of semi-structured interviews was chosen thanks to its flexibility, which enables rich, detailed answers, and especially for its emphasis on interviewees’ own perspectives (Op. cit.). Since I desired to uncover why people had particular thoughts about what was of value, and how they have constructed such ideas, semi-structured interviews proved to best fit.

Moreover, as analysed in Chapter 4 regarding the social construction of IC, most authors brought pre-set IC frameworks to the fieldwork, which may have affected the participants' responses. These partly obscured their "actual" thoughts about IC and limit the exploration of IC as an idea. Furthermore, Marr and Chatzkel (2004) argued that even though organizations and scholars recognise the important contribution of many individual assets, such as brand, relationships, culture, and knowledge, they do not necessarily use the term "IC". The authors also suggested avoiding using "IC", to eliminate the difficulty of understanding the term. Consequently, in this empirical study, I decided to give the interviewees chances to freely talk about their experiences around what was of value – as a way to investigate the idea of IC. By using value as the proxy of IC and not giving any clues on the meaning of the term IC beforehand, it is believed that the research participants can have more chances to reflect their understanding without being impacted academically. Consequently, the idea of IC and its constructed can be explored thoroughly. And therefore, semi-structured interviews proved to be extremely suitable.

However, to prevent the interviews from becoming unstructured and getting off the point, I set out the three key questions that can direct the talks to the focused topic. This set of questions serves as signposts which can help both interviewer and interviewees stay on track. The main issues that need covering are as below:

1. What is of value to the company in your view?
2. How do you capture what is deemed to be of value?
3. How are things deemed to be of value to the company communicated?

In short, before the fieldwork begins, what the researcher can prepare is the structure and some key themes for potential interviews. This choice would also be constructed based on the researcher's knowledge and beliefs. However, how to conduct the interviews in the field varies. The conversation would depend on the contexts, the interviewees, and the interactions between the researchers and them. The researchers may need to adapt to every situation by constructing/reconstructing their methods and skills. Consequently, it can be said that even during fieldwork, methodological issues continue to be constructed.

5.2.3. Assessments and ethical considerations

Besides the issues of obtaining contacts for potential interviewees and preparing the structure of the interviews, maintaining the quality and ethics of the research is also a big concern before going out to the field for empirical work. To take the social construction stance is to hold that different studies cannot be compared to each other, given their different contexts and constructions. In other words, it becomes difficult to consider generalisability. Hagg and Hedlund (1979), sharing Herbst's opinion (1970) as an example, claimed that "the uniqueness of social processes is so great that one should not try to obliterate it by forcing individual cases that can be, and need to be, understood on their own terms into frameworks that are alien to them" (p. 140). Moreover, the social construction viewpoint would support the argument that there is no ultimate truth. Hence the question of validity would be another hindrance. Each study would contribute a piece to build up a fuller picture of the topic, and it would be impossible to claim which one is bringing out the truth or the most valid results.

However, such criticism of some quality criteria does not mean that social construction research can be done in any preferred way at all, or without any guidelines and control. The construction of quality and ethics could be different, but it does not mean that there is no requirement for quality and ethics. Those should constitute the basic knowledge in academia's sub-worlds, and therefore, any researcher must have learned and constructed their understanding before doing any research work. The following sections represent my understanding of the task of maintaining the quality and ethics of research using the social construction viewpoint.

5.2.3.1. Assessments checklist

Recently, scholars have proposed some "new" criteria to assess the quality of a case study. Scapens (2004) argued that the focus for assessing quality of research conducted in the qualitative tradition must be placed squarely upon good research design and suitably conducted data collection and analysis procedures, the degree to which findings reflect the context from which they are drawn, and the degree to which arguments are supported by evidence drawn from multiple sources. Thus, as Healy and Perry (2000) argued, the quality of research conducted in the qualitative tradition should be judged on its own ontological and epistemological terms. As such, different labels such as credibility, confirmability, trustworthiness, consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability are more appropriate (Parker, 2012).

In addition, Hansen (2011) added to the list of "newly proposed" evaluation criteria for case-based research with conceptual clarity, consistency and interest and realism. Consistency indicates the stable stance that the researcher has taken during the research. Conceptual clarity and interest infer the ability to produce clear, logical arguments so that the study is more connected with the audience. Realism is tested based on the questions of whether the things described in the study are likely to happen.

According to Parker (2012), the issue of credibility in qualitative research can be treated in terms of the central research questions being addressed, the types of data being collected, and the research methods employed. And to evaluate the interpretations and explanations given, they should be tested in the sense of being authentic, plausible, and convincingly drawn. This "authenticity" refers to the actual involvement and experience of the researcher in the field. "Plausibility" implies that the findings and arguments appear logical to the readers. And "convincing" denotes the usefulness of the knowledge to management accounting researchers and practitioners (Baxter and Chua, 2008). Lukka and Modell (2010) claimed that the validity of the case study research can be enhanced by addressing these issues.

Based on the discussions above, I have created a checklist for myself, which serves as a guiding template for the researcher to follow throughout the project to maintain the quality of the research.

Steps	Criteria	Checklist
Preparation	Credibility	• The reasons for, and especially the implications of the choice of the particular cases should be clearly and explicitly stated.
		• The study's questions of how and why must also be clearly stated.
		• The unit of analysis by means of which cases will be examined must be clear.
Interview	Authenticity	• The involvement and experience of the researcher in the field are highly important.
	Independence	• The interviewer must not produce leading questions which can inadvertently influence the answers
		• The interviewer should avoid giving her opinions on the matters. Rather, she should encourage the interviewees to tell their stories by asking open questions like "Can you say something more about *this/that*?" and "Can you tell me about that event/story/what just happened?"
Analysis	Trustworthiness	• Describe how the interpretations were produced.
		• Make visible what was done.
		• Specify how to accomplish successive transformations.
		• Make primary data available to other researchers.
	Persuasiveness/ Plausibility	• Theoretical claims should be supported with evidence from informants' accounts.
		• Alternative interpretations of the data should be considered.

(Taken from Hagg and Hedlund, 1979; Riessman, 1993; and Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015)

5.3.2.2. Ethical considerations

Each interviewee will be given a reference code at the very beginning and all data will be stored against this code rather than against the names of the participants. The recording files, the transcripts and all other materials will be stored in a separate folder in the researcher's personal laptop, to which the researcher has sole access with a password. Also, for a backup, data will be stored parallel on the external driver (password is also required for access).

The interviews will be digitally recorded with the interviewees' permission and will be transcribed by the researcher. A password-protected media file will be used to store the recordings and transcripts, as well as any other information regarding the study's participants. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured at all stages of the research. The transcripts and other documents will be stored in a separate folder in the researcher's personal laptop, to which the researcher has sole access with a password. Furthermore, for a backup, data will be stored parallel on the external driver (password is also required for access). All the recording and transcribing processes must be done by the researcher herself, and her alone.

5.3. Social construction of research methodology - During the fieldwork

Construction of the methodological process is continuous, taking place not only before the fieldwork starts, but also during the field-based research and the interaction with participants. This includes the language issue and how to deal with participants, manage and run the interviews with different people in different contexts, and these points are continuously reflected upon and brought into the research design, to inform the steps and decisions further ahead in the project. These are all obvious signs of social construction in terms of methodology.

Since I had interviews with some Vietnamese, I flexibly chose the language that the interviewees felt the most comfortable with. For example, in an interview with the Vietnamese owner at the law firm, when we settled down at a table, I took out the participant information sheet and the consent form after some more chatting. I explained that this was the procedure required for any interviews conducted. I gave him the consent form and asked for permission to start the recording. The first question I raised the recorder played was, "Which language would you like to use?" "Let's talk in Vietnamese, is that OK? It would be more comfortable for you and for me." He replied. I understood this. It would be easy to understand why he opted for Vietnamese. Using the mother tongue would always be more comfortable and more effective to express our ideas. Talking in Vietnamese also helps us understand each other better.

In some studies, the researchers may have decided to carry out the interviews in English to avoid discrepancies when translating the transcripts. It is argued that the translation may alter the meaning which was initially shared. In other cases, the researchers have opted for their mother tongue, arguing that it would help both interviewers and interviewees express their opinions more easily and naturally. Both arguments make sense; however, from a social construction viewpoint, this is not critically vital. Researchers cannot exactly predict what language can bring more comfort to different participants. Choosing one particular language for the whole project can cause unpleasant feelings to some interviewees, especially when the interviews are done in more than one language. In my project, I let the participants in my research chose the language they want to use. This means that different interviews would be in different languages; however, this is not a problem because what will be analysed is the construction of ideas and responses. With background stories like these, it would not present a problem when trying to understand the concepts.

5.4. The social construction of the research methodology - After the fieldwork

After the field work, the analysis of the data obtained would follow, and here, the social construction of methodology can be seen via the interpretation of the data, the selection of the core data to be presented, and how to present them. The researcher alone plays the key role in deciding, out of the whole amount of data obtained, which pieces will be presented, and which ones will be discarded. In this particular study, I co-constructed the idea of IC by labelling "IC" among what was deemed to be of value via different communications. However, the question is, how do they come up with particular presentations? In the first place, the choice is ultimately determined by the need to answer the proposed research questions. Any research has its aim; then in the end, the audience needs to see how it has fulfilled that ambition. The study has started with the questions, so it needs to be wrapped up with the relevant answers. Consequently, which bits to choose from the data pool would depend on what can precisely hit the target proposed.

However, the research does not end there. The findings do not only share what has been obtained from the case study; beyond that, the findings can also signal further research possibilities in the future. Fruitful research should be expected to put forward meaningful insights into the field. And to be able to do this, the researchers need to use their knowledge to determine which revelation will really strike the scholars. They must thoroughly understand what has been there in the literature, what is being called for in the field, what was seen from the case, but was not expected to be seen by the academics, and so on. In other words, the researchers construct the findings' presentation in their own way, given their knowledge, feelings and beliefs.

The findings/discussion section of a study is also where the research knowledge is shared. Therefore, in other words, when the researchers construct the layout of the section, they are constructing the final version of what has been learned from the research, both from what has been obtained from the participants, and also from their own knowledge. Consequently, this stage signifies the co-construction of the study's research knowledge. Chapter 6 and 7 will elaborate how I conducted the analysis as an insider.

5.4.1. The choice of the materials and the use of them in the study

This study aims to explore people's understandings to see how the idea of IC can be conceptualised, and relying on Berger and Luckmann's work, the rationale of the study is that understanding is thought to be reflected in commu nications. For this reason, in addition to the interviews, I have also decided to investigate other materials which were published on different communication channels by the companies.

With this said, a lot of additional materials were used. However, depending on the particular cases and the indications of the interviewees, different materials were chosen for each of the cases. Websites were the most common source utilised. And indeed, websites have been deemed to be a rich platform for researchers to gain more insights into the issues studied (Gerpott et al., 2008). In the area of IC studies in particular, there have been calls for greater adoption of websites as a data source (Cuozzo et al., 2017). Furthermore, Striukova et al. (2008) found websites to be the most common channel for the analysis of intangible disclosures. However, the restaurant does not have a rich website and instead I was given some magazines which had some articles about the restaurant. Meanwhile, the charity and the law firm have various channels to communicate with stakeholders; for instance, their brochure, leaflets, recruitment adverts and the consultant report. The materials were not only found out by the researcher but also introduced by the interviewees. For example, when talking to the Vietnamese director in the law firm, I raised the following question: "How are those things which are deemed to be of value communicated within the company and with outsiders?" What he shared about the communication within the company has been discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter. He also mentioned the brochure as being the main means of sharing company information with outsiders, especially the customers. Being curious, I wondered what might also be included in the brochure and I was told that another team was in charge of preparing the brochure. Still, I really wanted to find out whether the brochure writers and the users could have any impact on what was shared in the brochure. A lot of questions came into my mind and I decided to ask him for a copy of the brochure to have a close look. In the case of the restaurant, after the interview, the Head Waiter brought a magazine to me saying that a British journalist came and wrote about the restaurant. He said that they were interviewed about the story behind their business on vegetarian food and their thoughts about running a business in the UK. Seeing such an interesting and potentially valuable source, I have also used this magazine article as the data in this study.

In fact, the use of multiple sources of evidence has been emphasized noticeably in the literature, especially in case study research. According to Scapens (1990), typical sources of evidence in case studies include interviews, documentation, direct observation and participant observation; and the process of collecting multiple sources of evidence on a particular issue (known as triangulation) is a good way to assess the validity of each piece of evidence. Recently, Verleye (2019) – echoing Baxter and Jack (2008) – claimed that combining multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations and archival documents, has become a hallmark of case study research. Triangulating interviews with other types of data has been shown to contribute to a better understanding of the different ways in which cases are seen and interpreted (Stake, 1995); in other cases, it can help to increase the robustness of the findings (Verleye, 2019). In this research, studying additional materials is also a way to probably distinguish between the “actual understandings” and “understandings reflected via communications”. Lee and Saunders (2017) suggested some secondary data sources which can be appropriate such as organisational web pages, news reports and Facebook pages.

In IC studies, scholars have often used different sources of data. For example, Habib-Uz et al. (2010) aimed at exploring the perceptions of a range of stakeholders with respect to such disclosures and conducted their study by using the annual reports of 20 selected Bangladeshi banks, followed by a questionnaire survey. In 2018, Cavicchi and Vagnoni carried out a case study research on one of the largest Italian farm businesses, to gain an understanding of the drivers of intellectual capital (IC), and of their implications for strategic management. This case study was based on a two-step model, including both interviews and questionnaire survey. Meanwhile, to study the senior management of Italian social enterprises’ perception of IC while allowing triangulation of information, Benevene et al. (2019) recently collected annual reports, organisational websites and mission statements in addition to the responses obtained from the semi-structured interviews.

However, most of their study seemed to only analyse the “surface” of the data sources, rather than digging deep into them. They mainly adopted content analysis or thematic analysis to pick up some commonly mentioned ideas. In another example, Rossi et al. (2018) studied the disclosure of IC information on universities’ websites and built up a disclosure index from the result of the content analysis. Even when they used diversity of data sources, Striukova et al. (2008) only adopted content analysis to categorise and quantify IC information obtained from annual report in a .pdf file, together with documents such as analysts’ briefings, and social and environmental reports and interviews.

One exception must be the study done by Atkins et al. (2018). The paper analyses disclosures relating to rhinoceros conservation and protection by top South African-listed companies, in order to assess the current state of “extinction accounting”. The authors pursued a social construction approach, and hence made no effort to quantify the disclosures in integrated reports, sustainability reports and corporate websites in a positivist sense. Instead, each section was reviewed carefully to identify content on accounting for extinction, and how diction and tone were used to convey the corporates’ views on rhinoceros poaching and the need for action. However, the results were grouped according to broad theme headings to gain a sense of the scope of reporting dealing with the rhinoceros, and to identify links between the corporate narrative and the transformative potential of accounting systems. And the authors still described their method as interpretive content analysis.

Further, the analysis of those materials was not thoroughly discussed in some studies. For instance, Benevene et al. (2019) utilised documents such as annual reports, organisational websites and mission statements to allow triangulation of information but included no detail about why and how the website was used, and what was obtained from it. Again, in a study by Stacchezzini et al. (2019), the authors offered as another source of preliminary information that the company’s website was examined to identify its IC-related initiatives, but again there was no explanation regarding how the examination actually took place.

Therefore, in this research, in order to explore the social construction of the idea of IC, I decided to study beyond the communications. In other words, I was not only seeking what was communicated by being presented via communication channels, but beyond that, I aimed at uprooting how those ideas had been constructed, and how those pieces of information were brought to light in public channels. The next section will give more details about how this target could be met by data analysis.

5.4.2. How was data analysis conducted in this study?

As mentioned earlier, the data in this research comprised of interview transcripts and other materials such as websites, brochures, leaflets, Facebook page, magazine articles, consultant's report and recruitment advertisements. As visual material was used as well as texts, two main methods were adopted to analyse the data: thematic analysis of the texts and Rose's visual analysis. Moreover, as this research adopted the social construction viewpoint, it was believed impossible to distinguish the "actual understandings" and the "understandings-via-communications". In other words, wearing such a philosophical lens, I did not aim at finding the truth, the "actual understandings", instead, the findings were based on the sharing from the communications during the interviews and via other channels.

The analysis conducted was mainly based on Berger and Luckmann's framework (1966). Being Vietnamese herself and interviewing some Vietnamese during the course of the field work, some analysis was rooted in the researcher's knowledge of Vietnamese culture and the charity where I used to work for.

5.4.2.1. Thematic Analysis

The two research questions of this research project, are: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value; (2) How have these conceptions been constructed? Consequently, the analysis was conducted following these two main points as the two rounds of analysing.

In the first round of analysis, I sought out the themes from the interviewees' responses and the materials which could be deemed to be related to IC. This analysis was supported by the summary of IC frameworks I had constructed before (See Appendix 1). Next, comparisons were made between responses to examine the similarities and differences. Given these indication, the next round of analysis sought to determine the reasonings behind such variances which might then indicate the various constructions of the idea of IC. During the second round in particular, I looked for some elements which might have an impact on people's understanding. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's work (1966), these elements can be social and contextual aspects in their home world and subworlds which might lead to them constructing different ideas at different times and among different people. The answers to these issues could come from the interviewees' responses; for example, when stating that partnerships were very important and necessary for a charity, one participant attributed her understanding to her experience when working in the local authorities and "other charities with more power" (Charity case, President). Moreover, the interpretations could come from my own knowledge. For instance, as a Vietnamese, I might be able to understand why Vietnamese interviewees shared the same opinion regarding the value of the long-run benefits, since this is a traditional belief rooted in Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, I used to work for the charity and hence used my understandings about their operations to back up the arguments. This is also one of the stages indicating my co-construction of the idea of IC and its construction.

5.4.2.2. Visual Methodologies

As I mentioned earlier, I not only analysed the texts of the materials in this study but I also considered their visual aspects. Nowadays, we cannot deny the increasing penetration of visual materials in every corner of our life. We can easily see them almost everywhere at any time, but they do not exist pointlessly; on the contrary, they carry their own meanings and serve certain purposes. As one scholar puts it, “Images reflect societies constructions of their self-representation and their shared perceptions, with photographic and electronic imagery increasingly regarded is important modes of information sharing and presentation” (Parker, 2009, p. 1112). In fact, studies of visuals and their roles can be traced back to the 1990s (Preston et al., 1996, Graves et al., 1996, Davison, 2002).

In accounting, visuals are deemed to be powerful tools for communicating messages with regard to many different aspects of organisations (Davison, 2014). In the IC area in particular, Hooks et al. (2010) demonstrated that visuals are important tools for communicating IC, while Guthrie et al. (2004) encouraged researchers to extend content analysis to capture IC communicated through visuals. Of the wide range of research studying visuals, Hooks et al. (2010) analysed images relating to IC in annual reports - namely figures - in order to explore the opinions and understandings of the annual report preparers who produced the figures and the users who interpreted them. Abhayawansa (2011) conducted analytic studies of IC in analysts’ reports, and coded all visual contents in the form of tables and figures in the body of an analyst report. He was interested in how intellectual capital (IC) information was communicated by sell-side analysts in their research reports, and what information they selected.

However, in those studies, the researchers mainly counted the images, graphs and pictures in the annual reports or on the websites. They conducted a content analysis of visuals in annual reports (Duff, 2018; Abhayawansa and Guthrie, 2016; Wee and Chua, 2016; Husin et al., 2012; Abeysekera, 2011); and content analysis of websites (Striukova et al., 2008). In adopting the social construction perspective for this study, the construction of the visuals has also taken into account. According to Rose (2016), four aspects of visuals can be explored – the visual itself, the production, the audience and the circulation. For each of the sites there are three modalities can be examined – technological, compositional and social. In this study, social modality was the core of the visual analysis because it can help to understand the construction of the visuals. In other words, the questions being addressed are: What the visuals meant (site of visual itself); Who created the visuals, when and why (site of production); How to interpret the visuals, by whom and why (site of audiencing). The visuals analysed include logos, and the colours of website sections. For each of the visuals analysed, I sought the answers to those three questions above mentioned. The answers were mainly found in the interview transcripts when the issues of visuals were discussed by the participants.

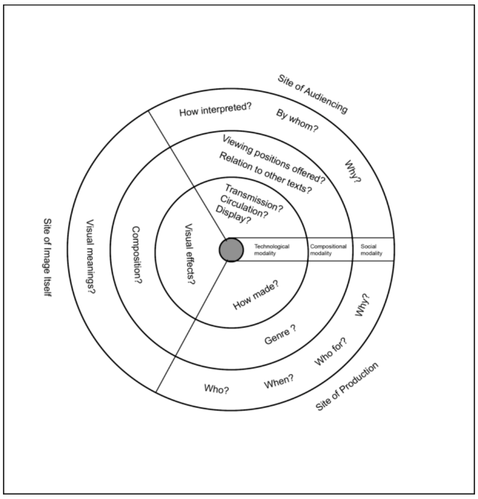

Figure 4: The sites and modalities for interpreting visual materials [from Rose (2016)]

5.5. Conclusion

As one may recall, in the previous chapters, given the knowledge about the social construction viewpoint and the review of IC extant literature, the research questions have been finalised as (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value; (2) How have these conceptions been constructed? This chapter has elaborated on how to conduct the research which targets those questions. Moreover, by sharing my own stories when engaged in an empirical study in the IC area, the chapter has illustrated how the research methodology has been socially constructed, and the process of construction has been presented in three different stages: before, during and after the fieldwork was done.

To explore the social construction of the idea of IC, I have not only targeted investigating what people think about what was of value, but also attempted to unveil the stories behind why people had such understandings in specific ways. In this regard, the case study method has also been chosen based both on the consideration of my paradigmatic stance, and on my wider reading.

Taking the social construction viewpoint as my epistemology, I decided to use case study to provide interpretive understanding of the IC issue. Case study research would enable the exploration of different people's thoughts in a same organisation and allow a close investigation of such variances, which facilitates the study of the construction of the idea of IC. And because aiming at investigating the idea of IC, I asked the research participants about what was of value. Since my approach was independent of any preset IC framework, the semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to have more chances to talk, and their answers were not eclipsed by academic knowledge. During the interviews, the methodology was also being constructed with attention paid to the choice of language and the way the researchers raised follow up questions.

The analysis stage after the fieldwork had been done also witnessed the social construction of methodological issues. This can be exemplified in the choices of the cases and the core pieces of data to be presented in the discussion of the findings. The choice aims to provide clear answers to the proposed questions, but mainly relies on the contexts, the researcher's knowledge of the topic and of the relevant literature. Since the research knowledge is constructed from a combination of the information obtained from the participants and the researcher's own knowledge, this stage strongly demonstrates its co-constructive nature.

In summary, there might be various ways to conduct research adopting the social construction lens. However, generally, research methodology is socially constructed based on what the researcher knows and believes. And this construction does not only occur before the fieldwork but continues to take place throughout the project. Being aware of this would help researchers be prepared and flexible in conducting their research.

The next chapters will present the findings from these co-constructions.

CHAPTER 6 - EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, a social construction lens has been used to review the IC literature. On the basis of this approach, the two research questions have been finalised. Moreover, the research methodology has been discussed and justified in respect to how it can help to seek answers to the questions raised. Now, in this empirical chapter, the findings will be presented. As stated in the Methodology chapter, two sources of data were employed: the interviews and the materials on the public communication channels. This chapter will be devoted to discussing findings only from the first sources: the interviews.

As mentioned, the three cases studies were of a law firm, a vegan restaurant and a charity. By adopting the social construction lens, I anticipated that the findings from each contexts will very much differ from each other. This chapter hence presents the results of analysis on a case-by-case basis to highlight the contextual influence on the participants' thoughts. In each case, the main contents fall into4 two halves which provide the answers to the two research questions: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings. What do they deem to be of value? and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed?

This chapter also presents the comparisons of the three cases studied, aiming to signify the similarities and differences among the ideas about what was of value and their constructions. Drawing on the knowledge gained from the literature, I have also made further comparisons of what has been discussed so far by scholars, and what has been unveiled in the case study. By constructing these evaluations, I discovered that the IC literature has not fully covered what people can deem to be of value in a company insofar as has not fully captured what people mean when they refer to certain terms. Some terms and meanings hence seem to have slipped through the "literature net".

Drawing on the theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966), this study takes the idea of IC to be constructed through the socialisation stages in both the home world and through the temporal movements within a sub-world. In considering the impact of both the different worlds and the time dimension and based on the evidence obtained from the three cases, it can be argued that culture, education, the role in the organisation, experience, length of service and type of organisation can all lead to different understandings. Moreover, the responses from the participants hint that they have communicated both internally and externally to shape the ideas of what was of value Importantly, these interactions have mainly taken place in their daily routines rather than in official meetings as suggested by the extant literature.

6.2. The law firm case

I conducted six interviews with four different people from the law firm, among whom were three Vietnamese and one British. They held various roles in the company: General Director, IT and Accounting Director, Junior Paralegal. Please refer to Appendix 2 for more details about the interviewees. The following sections present the findings obtained from the conversations with them.

6.2.1. How can IC be conceptualised from their understandings?

When the interviewees were asked about one of the main themes, "What is of value in the company?", they touched on different aspects. As can be seen in their responses, some of the understandings were shared by three of them, some were discussed by two, and some were even mentioned by only one interviewee. However, although they might be referring to the same idea – in fact, the very same IC item – they might give different explanations as to how the thing could be of value to the company and how to capture such value. In other words, they only shared an understanding of the common IC elements, yet to some extent, did not fully share even that. Therefore, in this section, the aspects deemed to be of value by the company will be presented in descending order of how much the value was agreed upon among the interviewees. It means that opinions shared by more people, or shared to a greater extent, will be discussed before the understandings of IC which were less shared within the company.

Firstly, the value of ***management style*** seemed to be agreed upon at the highest level. Interestingly, this has not been seen in the extant IC literature. The most similar item which could be found is "Administrative practices" (Pedro et al., 2018), "Culture routines and practices" (Marr et al., 2004), "Culture" and "Management philosophy" (Rudež and Mihalič, 2007), "Leadership/Leadership skills" (Abhayawansa, 2014). Both the Vietnamese owner/director and the Junior Paralegal asserted that management style is of great value, especially from the staff's viewpoint. The Vietnamese Director insisted that the firm's managers were very easy-going, and he believed that the team would see this as a value because they always felt comfortable and flexible.

“I think the managers here are more easy-going compared to me when in Vietnam. For example, in Vietnam, when my staff turned up at the company later than 9 am, they will be reminded immediately. But here, a lot of people arrive at work late and leave for home early. Generally, it is quite loose. The regulations seem to be quite gentle.” (Vietnamese Director)

When I talked to the Junior Paralegal , she also echoed this in her answer, as follows:

“For example, my previous company required fingerprints for signing in and signing out. The bosses here are quite easy-going. For example, the rule is if anyone needs a day off, he or she has to give one day’s notice, but if today there is someone absent without giving any advance notice as required, the bosses would not say anything at all.” (Junior Paralegal 1)

Although the British owner did not mention this aspect, the two responses from the Vietnamese owner and staff member imply almost similar ideas about the management style. Therefore, in the order of the extent of shared opinions I constructed, “management style” ranks first.

The same was true of ***team spirit/harmony/support***. Both the directors gave similar examples of how to keep the firm's harmony, and how it can bring value to the company.

“We're building a pretty good team. We've got very nice people who genuinely get on well with each other. And we're holding regular team meetings, so we discuss all the issues and flesh them out to ensure that everybody has a chance to explain their position, and then I make the judgments as the office manager. Sometimes I get everybody happy but not always. There's always one or two. They're not quite as happy, but I generally think yes. So that’s what we are doing right now to keep harmony in the company.” (IT & Accounting Director)

However, this characteristic was not deemed to be of value from the junior staff member’s viewpoint. When talking about the company environment, she revealed that she wished people could help each other more. This means that at that point in time, she did not consider team spirit as something valuable in the company.

“For instance, the issue of daily mail posting or helping IT & Accounting Director to go to the bank. I think anyone can do this, and this does not matter much. However, the traffic is usually not good at home time, and it is very difficult to get the cars parked. Hence nobody wants to do it. And they always try to escape the task by imposing it on others. And then the team spirit is ruined. It is not worth such damage. So I think if each person can contribute a bit more, everything would be better.” (Junior Paralegal 1)

Likewise, this element has not been discussed thoroughly by IC scholars. The most similar items found in literature are “Group cohesiveness” (Mura and Longo, 2013), “Team’s social interactions” (Hormiga et al., 2011).

While ***management style*** and ***team spirit*** were referred to as something of value in the company, and this position was shared by two of the three interviewees, ***people*** and ***motivation policy*** were mentioned by all the three participants; however, each of them took a different viewpoint on these elements. And quite similarly, the literature has seen a lot of discussions around these items (Ferenhof et al., 2015).

When asked about the company's values, all three interviewees mentioned ***people*** as the core value in the firm. Nevertheless, digging deeper into the stories they shared, I realised that although they all believed people are of great importance, such values and their idea of how people bring in value are not shared.

The Vietnamese Director offered a more general opinion regarding the role of people. He believed that all people, both staff and managers, could be the firm's core value. Considering the ability of the competency they have, each role would contribute remarkably to the whole firm's development. He explained clearly what could be lost if anyone left the company, no matter what role they were holding.

However, with a similar question, when talking about people, The IT & Accounting Director, emphasized a particular benefit when the firm recruited Vietnamese employees.

> *“What we've done in immigration is we've recruited people who speak the languages of the countries that we tend to work with a lot, so we've got a lot of Vietnamese and we've got a lot of relationship with the Vietnamese people. We've got about five Vietnamese people recruited. We've been quite successful, because we understand that the client may speak fairly good English but they don't always understand everything clearly and it's very nice for them to speak to a national from their country and it's their first language. And in that way, I think we offer a more tailored approach to the service and we get very satisfied customers doing that.” (IT & Accounting Director)*

Whereas the Junior Paralegal discussed the strength of human resources by stressing the Vietnamese Director and her direct supervisor's capability.

> *“When I joined the company, Ms. P impressed me a great deal, and I idolised her very much. When I explained something, I did not need to give a full explanation, no need to have a start, a body and an end. I just needed to say, “I don’t understand this point,”, and she could immediately get me and offered very helpful instruction. She is very smart and experienced. So she is my idol.”(Junior Paralegal 1)*

However, in the second interview with her, she asserted that she herself was also one of the sources of value to the company thanks to what she could contribute and how she performed her assigned tasks.

> *"The biggest value is still people. I am who I am now today because I have some value, I can do different tasks, and also thanks to my great supervisors who have guided me, and trained me to be better. But nobody knows us as well as we do ourselves. During all the time I worked at the company, I recognised what I could do and what I could contribute to the company. Hence, I know what I am good at, and I focus on developing that aspect. Consequently, I have produced better performance, and that has become my value, and also helped to create value for the company." (Junior Paralegal 1)*

In short, although all of them agreed that people are of great value in the firm, they perceived the value from people as coming from different sources, and focused on particular types of staff who can be of value in the company.

In addition to ***people***, relying on the interviews' responses, I also found out that ***motivation policy*** was also seen as a very important issue that contributed to the company's value generation. From the managers' viewpoint, "motivation policy" was one of the main ways to attract and retain their staff. Thus, indirectly, it was the key to generating values for the company by maintaining its people. From the staff's perspective, motivation policies were of great value in the firm, as this would decide how they felt about the company and their work. Once again, this is evidenced by the stories shared. Nevertheless, the approach to motivating employees was not identical among the participants' responses. In other words, although they did agree that motivation policy can bring a lot of value to the company, they revealed different ways to conduct this.

According to the Vietnamese Director, a plan for long-term development is what an employee expects when joining a firm.

> *"In the past, I managed a law firm. I had excPresidentt people working for me. I offered them the chance to get involved in big work so that they could develop themselves. However, I was not good at management. For example, I did not give them a long-term guarantee. I did not give them a plan for long-term development. Therefore, after a while, when the excitement with the new job had subsided, they started getting bored and they changed their job. Then, they could easily seek new jobs because they had had many chances to work on many big, complicated and valuable projects. They became experienced and very attractive to other firms. Consequently, keeping employees is a tough issue. I did try many ways, and I found out that we need a combination of different approaches. After losing a lot of excPresidentt staff, I gained a lot of experience. I know that I both need to give them the chance to work, gain experience and develop their competency, and offer them a long-term plan for*

development at the company as well. We need to show them what they can be after five or seven years so that they can foresee their future. That should be all about training, promotion and income. Given that, they would feel reassured, and focus on developing in the long run. The better they perform, the more they understand about the company, the more they can contribute to the company's development. They will create the core values of the company." (Vietnamese Director)

This viewpoint was also shared by the Junior Paralegal.

"I worked for a medium company which had more than 250 staff. And they were very fixed, I mean if they had promised me some improvement or promotion after six months, I would definitely have it right after six months. In contrast, with this company, because it is smaller, we don't have such fixed plans. The fixed benefits are not very clear." (Junior Paralegal 1)

However, the British IT & Accounting Director gave a very different perspective regarding the motivation method. It is not the long-term guarantee, he believed, that is most important, but the short-term benefits.

"We maintain a healthy workforce. A healthy workforce is one that gets paid reasonable pay for the work that they do. Being a small company, we reward people for very good work, which I think big businesses tend to not have the ability to do since small businesses can be more efficient. And we give bonuses; for instance, if an individual brings in some work through people they know, we will pay them a bonus for that because it's bringing in work that we wouldn't have got otherwise. They've gone out and done a bit of marketing for us outside of the business, as it were, and brought us additional business, so that's good for them, and it's good for us. They get rewarded for it and that's one mechanism that we can adopt." (IT & Accounting Director)

Besides some common ideas regarding what is of value in the company, the interviewees also provided unique responses which were not shared by any others.

Brand name is one of the aspects whose importance was not commonly agreed upon among the interviewees although it has been seen repeatedly in the literature (Lev, 2001; Rudež and Mihalič, 2007). Only the Vietnamese Director, gave a detailed discussion of the firm's brand name, while the British IT & Accounting Director and the Junior Paralegal seemed to be less knowledgeable about this item. The Junior Paralegal briefly guessed that the company may have its brand name within Birmingham and London area, whereas the IT & Accounting Director provided some information about the merging process, rather than the idea of how its brand name is of value to the company.

Furthermore, ***work ethic*** and ***customer feedback*** were mentioned only by the Junior Paralegal, and these also gain little attention in the literature (Lou et al., 2019). She particularly highlighted the role of work ethic and she admired how the work ethic had been maintained in the company while it was usually neglected by other law firms.

> *"Ms. P (her supervisor/researcher) only wants to support the real truth. It means, for example, if there are people who want to stay in the UK but they do not have plausible reasons, then Ms. P will not accept those cases. She only agrees to offer services to those who have plausible reasons, not all cases coming to us. Other companies will accept all cases no matter how unreasonable they are because of profit, but we don't. From the very beginning, Ms. P told me that the line between being ethical and unethical is very fragile, and she wants to keep those ethics." (Junior Paralegal 1)*

However, in the second interview a year later, the Junior Paralegal showed some differences in her perception of ethics. She said she would still deem ethics to be of great value in the company, but she would pursue it in a different way.

> *"I still think that ethics is of some value to the company but there is some difference. Ethics will create value to the company because it can help to build up a good image for the company as an ethical law firm. However, if there is too much sticking to the principles, the company may destroy other values, for example KPI would not be met and the sales would decrease. Now, in some cases, despite being quite reluctant, I still accept to deal with some cases, but I absolutely work ethically."(Junior Paralegal 1)*

In addition, she deemed that customer feedback also plays a vital role in shaping her working style and improving her skills and experience. Then, she made it clearer by claiming that when she could improve herself, she would be able to contribute more to the company by generating more value.

> *"When we work with customers, we can educate them on how to live and work legally in the UK. Besides, when working with them, we can be educated a great deal. For example, once a customer saw my documents, she said "Oh dear, I don't think you can work with me like this" or "I hope you can do it like this." So I think those feedbacks can help to shape my working style. In other words, those will help me to know how best to work with customers, and given that, I can gain more access to customers, and that can result in a win-win outcome when cooperating." (Junior Paralegal 1)*

6.2.2. How have they constructed their ideas?

As we have seen in the last part, when "management style" was discussed, it ranked first in terms of a shared perception in the company. Both the Vietnamese Director and the Junior Paralegal agreed that the management style was of great value to the company, while the British IT & Accounting Director did not mention it at all. The Vietnamese Director also backed up his idea by offering some explanations about how different Vietnamese staff and British staff can be to manage.

> *"There are many differences in terms of culture between UK and Vietnam. For example, in the UK, people work hard only to a certain extent. It means they would never let themselves work exhaustedly with too much overtime working. Yet in Vietnam, in some situations, to finish the work for a project, my team were very willing to work very, very hard, even overnight, for the whole week. But it does not happen here. No matter what happens, people here will leave for home at 5 pm, and we cannot require more. If we exploit them, they will complain immediately. That is the culture. Thus we need to adapt to it and adjust our management style to give them the right amount of pressure." (Vietnamese Director)*

From what he shared, it can be understood that both cultures significantly impact how the company is managed and the staff are "used". Both the Vietnamese Director and the Junior Paralegal have some experience working in Vietnam. Therefore, they have similar "assessments" of the management style. They both thought that the law firm managers were more easy-going than others because what they saw and experienced in Vietnam had been different.

Another example that can indicate the influence of culture on the understandings of IC is around the motivation issue. According to the Vietnamese director, a long-term plan for development is what an employee expects when joining a firm. Interestingly, this viewpoint was also shared by the Junior Paralegal. Meanwhile, the British IT & Accounting Director gave a different perspective regarding the motivation method. He believed that it was not the long-term guarantee, but the short-term benefits which were the most important.

As a Vietnamese, I can say that it was not a coincidence when both the Vietnamese Director and the Junior Paralegal gave similar ideas about motivation. Being fostered in Vietnamese culture, I can understand that Vietnamese people look for a long-term guarantee rather than short term benefits. For example, parents would always prefer their children to work in governmental or public organizations rather than the private sector, because they believe once their children can settle in the public sector, they would have minimal risk of being sacked. On the other hand, private sector jobs can provide much higher salaries, but no one would know how long you could work for them. Therefore, this kind of viewpoint shared by the Vietnamese Director and the Junior Paralegal is understandable. Because I do not understand British culture very well, I am not sure whether the IT & Accounting Director's perception comes from Britain's traditional homeworld. However, it can be a good signpost indicating the area that further IC studies can delve into. But for now, it can be seen that with the social construction lens and the researcher's knowledge, some of the knots regarding the influences of cultural aspects which have never been touched in the literature can be now partly untied.

Moreover, when the Vietnamese Director was asked what he thought to be of value in the company, he offered a very detailed answer. He confidently used the terms “tangible”, “intangible”, “fixed assets”, and “value”. The importance of intangible assets was greatly emphasized, and he believed those assets could bring much value to a small company, especially a service company. This became totally understandable when his background and experience were revealed. According to what he said, he has a lot of relevant qualifications. He holds an MBA, and he has been taught about business management, human resources management, marketing and strategy.

Drawing on the Vietnamese Director’s knowledge, and with my understanding that accounting experts would be more familiar with accounting terms, I looked forward to the interview with the IT & Accounting Director because I believed that as the accounting director he would offer me a lot of detailed and relevant ideas about IC in the firm. However, when I asked him what he thought to be of value in the company, he said he did not understand me. After trying to paraphrase the question without success, I realised that language might be an obstacle for me in that interview. Therefore, I decided to talk straightforwardly about the topic of IC by using more detailed terms, and I thought it would be easy for him to understand. I mentioned “intangible assets” and “brand name”; but unexpectedly, he did not give a direct answer to my questions. He talked about merging the firm with another one, and changing the company’s name, instead of about the value the brand name can bring to the firm. Putting aside the language barrier, which more straightforward questions may have sorted out, I realised that this could be attributed to his educational background. Although he is in charge of all accounting issues in the company, he emerged from a telecommunication background. And in fact, he spent nearly a third of the interview time telling me a series of stories about what he did when he was young. He was so confident and proud of those memories. He had gained a lot of knowledge and skills in a more techinical field – telecommunication; and he did not mention anything about how he learned about accounting. He joined the law firm with his friend, a solicitor, and took over the running of the company, and he invested his efforts into designing a system for generally managing the company. This may explain why he was not acquainted with the accounting terms. In other words, the education he had received did not prepare him to be knowledgeable about such accounting terminology. Therefore, he did not mention as many IC elements as the other participants.

In addition, when talking to the researcher, the Junior Paralegal also confirmed that during her university years, she was introduced to different terms, such as “vision”, “asset”, and “value”. She even mentioned the three different types of leadership, and indicated that “democratic leadership” would be the most suitable. This proves that she was considerably knowledgeable about companies and business issues. Therefore, it would be understandable when she was able to talk confidently about people as the core value to a firm.

> *“I studied psychology, then international human resource management and then took an MBA. At my University, we had free access to the Financial Times. Hence, my lecturer always encouraged us reading the Financial Times to learn more updated news, and including the news in our case study coursework so that we could earn higher marks. Since then, I have built up the habit of reading the Financial Times every day. I know a lot from there.” (Junior Paralegal)*

Relying on what can be extracted and interpreted from the interviews, it can be seen that what people have learned can really help to shape their perception about IC. Even if they did not have any courses or degrees in accounting, some knowledge about business, marketing, and strategies still can help them come up with some commonly used terms when talking about what is of value in the company.

The extracts from data shared above all show the common ideas given by the General Director and the Junior Paralegal – the Vietnamese people in the company. But actually, they do not always have the same thoughts. They both were born in Vietnam, and had lived there for a long time before moving to the UK. Thus they can share some traditional beliefs and cultural behaviours from Vietnam – their homeworld. They also have a background in business. Nevertheless, they do not have the same position and role in the company. Given that, their understandings can be constructed differently. Some of the accounts presented below can elaborate on this issue.

When asked about what is of value to the company, the Junior Paralegal mentioned some points that were not shared by either of the managers in the case study. They were about work ethics and customers’ feedback. Her junior level can explain this. Working in the law sector, it is crucial to take ethics into account. Especially with a junior, learning how to work ethically is the first, basic step to help her survive and develop in the career path. Likewise, as a junior member of staff, she deemed that customer feedback also plays a very important role in shaping her working style and improving her skills and experience.

Additionally, she also discussed the strength of human resources, by stressing the competency of the Vietnamese Director and her direct supervisor. While the two directors considered all people in the firm to be of great value, the junior staff particularly highlighted the role of the Vietnamese Director and her supervisor. Her opinion did not mainly come from either of the cultures, or the knowledge or skills from her education. Instead, it was simply because she idolised her management team and believed they were contributing remarkably to the company's value. And again, her position and role in the company can explain this. As a junior staffer in a particular department, she may not have had many chances to work with all other people in the company; instead, she would be mainly guided by her supervisor, and would have been approached by the director in the first place. Therefore, she could more easily recognise how these seniors could create value to the company. Nevertheless, despite also mentioning “people” as the core value in the company, she referred to specific individuals, not all the staff.

Another account which can help to exemplify the influence of role/position in the company on the perception of what was of value concerns the team spirit and harmony. Both the directors gave similar examples on how to keep the firm's harmony, and how it can bring value to the company. However, this characteristic was not deemed to be of value from the junior staffer’s viewpoint. When talking about the company environment, she revealed that she wished people could help each other more. This means that for the time being, she did not grant team spirit as something valuable in the company. The difference in their answers can be attributed to the role they were holding in the company. As a junior member of staff, the Junior Paralegal would have engaged more in team work with others, and hence she could understand how the team members were performing, and how well they were getting on with each other. In contrast, as managers, the Vietnamese Director and the IT & Accounting Director expected to build up a harmonious environment as part of the company’s vision, strategy and value. And this aligns with what Curado (2008) has suggested – “Interviewees (top managers) from the direction level were chosen because knowledge management is a subject of intense strategic interest.” (Curado, 2008, p.144)

> *“We are trying to build a good team. Our core value is “sharing is caring” and we have upheld that value, and maintained that value.*” (Vietnamese Director)

Another point to touch on is, when discussing the motivation issue, according to the Vietnamese Director, a long-term plan to develop is what an employee expects when joining a firm. He was able to reach this comment after having experience much staff loss in the past.

> *“I had a long time managing a law firm in Vietnam. I had very good staff and I gave them a lot of opportunities to work and develop themselves. However, there were some things I did not do well. For instance, I did not give them a long-term development plan. Therefore, after some time, they lost the excitement for new experience with work;*

consequently, they gradually got bored and they left. At that time, they could easily find a new job because when still working with the company, they were given a lot of chances to work and develop themselves, hence, they became attractive candidates to a lot of other companies. I did try different methods, separately or in combination. After losing a lot of staff, I realised that we both need to give them chances to learn, develop and build up their competency, and need to show them a long-term development plan as well. What they can be after five or seven years, in terms of training, promotion and income. They will feel secure, and more committed to staying at the company." (Vietnamese Director)

If he had not been managing companies for a long time, if he had not experienced different issues at different moments in his career life, he would not be able to confirm the value of a motivation policy in a company. It is obvious that when he first started running a company twenty-five years ago, he would not have the same understanding about motivation policy as he does now. At that time, he did not know that a long-term development plan is crucial in retaining staff. Now, after some time trying different methods to create a better workplace, and after experiencing some staff loss, he thinks totally differently about the way to motivate employees. Therefore, the updated knowledge and perception can be attributed to his experience, or the amount of time he has spent in his managing role.

Also, similar findings can be drawn from the Junior Paralegal's response. She herself claimed that her thinking about people has changed over time. When in Vietnam, she was not able to understand the value of people in the company thoroughly, however, after working for some time in the UK, the issue became clearer to her.

*"I had heard a lot about the value of people in a company, since University time, but I did not understand what it meant. Until I started working, the more practical experience I have, the better I understand this issue. When in Vietnam, I also worked for a big company, but, I don't think I really understood the value of people until I came to the UK and joined the law firm." (*Junior Paralegal 1)

To reaffirm the influence of time, the change in her opinion about ethics was also observed. When she newly joined the firm, she strictly stuck to ethics, and she deemed ethics as the core value to her and to the firm. However, after a while working in the company, she found out that some other things needed to be obtained to create more value to the company, hence, in some cases, ethics should be pursued in a different way.

"I still think that ethics is of some value to the company but there is some difference. Ethics will create value to the company because it can help to build up a good image for the company as an ethical law firm. However, if there is too much sticking to the principles, the company may destroy other values, for example KPI would not be met

*and the sales would decrease. Now, in some cases, despite being quite reluctant, I still accept to deal with some cases, but I absolutely work ethically.” (*Junior Paralegal 1)

Furthermore, the Vietnamese Director offered a more general opinion regarding the role of people. He believed that all people, both staff and managers, could be the firm's core value. However, with a similar question, when talking about people, the IT & Accounting Director emphasized a particular benefit when the firm recruited Vietnamese employees. This can be explained by using the comparison in the amount of time these directors had had with the company. The IT & Accounting Director, mainly dealing with financial figures, and having worked for the company for ten years, could see the difference when with and without Vietnamese staff. Meanwhile, when newly joining the firm, the Vietnamese Director would not be able to see this improvement. Consequently, when asked about the values, the IT & Accounting Director went for the Vietnamese staff who brought more customers to the firm. It seems that the more someone has worked in a company, the better he will understand about it, hence his judgment about what is of value in the company would be different.

Let’s talk particularly about the Vietnamese Director so that we can see how one individual’s understanding can be updated over his time working in the company. In the first interview, he did not mention at all about the system when being asked about what is of value to the company; however, in the second interview, some time later, he told me that he would like to add “system” to the previous answers provided. This change is attributed to the amount of time he spent in the company, since the more he worked within the company, the better he understood about it.

“When I was actually involved in the company, I discovered that the company had lots of drawbacks which needed improving. For example, the system of staff management needed changing. I suggested monthly training and weekly meetings so that every step in the procedures would be officially written down. This would help to create a more professional working environment for the employees, and hence they tend to better commit to working for the company for a longer time.” (Vietnamese Director)

A similar thing happened to the Junior Paralegal , as over time she had developed quite a different perception about people as the core value in the company. As discussed in the previous section, in the first interview, she stressed that her supervisor and the Vietnamese Director were the significant examples which helped her to believe how people can be of value in the company. However, a year later, in the second interview, she asserted she could also help to create value for the company. This is because at the time of the first interview, she had just joined the company and she was still learning to adapt and develop herself. After a year working hard, she got to know the company better, and she had obtained a good deal of knowledge and was more competent in doing what was assigned to her. Then she was recognised, and she knew that she had her own value and that her contribution could generate value for the company. At the time of the second interview, she became more convinced that people are the core value, since she herself had become an example of this fact.

> *"At first, I always desired for recognition. I was young and enthusiastic, so I did everything. I just thought that if I could show my enthusiasm and responsibleness, I would be appreciated, and I could earn a pay rise. I did not think about anything else. Until one day, after nearly a year working for the company, I felt that I seemed to be the ambassador for the company. I was in charge of almost everything. And one of the directors told me that he was very proud of me, I knew that I had my own value. And what I can contribute to the company can create the value for the company."* (Junior Paralegal 1)

Sub-conclusion: When asked what was of value, the interviewees from the law firm provided different ideas. The elements "management style", "team spirit", "people", "motivation policy", "brand name", "work ethic" and "customer feedback" were all deemed to be of value in the firm. However, none of those opinions was fully shared by every research participant. This means that in some cases, only two out of three interviewees referred to very similar ideas about one aspect. With other elements, they all provided different elaborations on the understandings. In particular, there were some viewpoints discussed by only one of the participants.

Also, looking at the similarities and diffences in their understandings, relying on Berger and Luckmann's framework (1966), it has been argued that the culture, the education received, the experience, the role and the length of service in the company can assert some influence on the construction of their ideas.

6.3. The restaurant case

For this case study, I selected a vegan restaurant serving 100% vegan food, located on a busy street in London. I conducted four interviews with the Head Waiter, the two owners and one other Chef (please refer to Appendix 2 for more details about the interviewees). I did a very long interview with the Head Waiter who demonstrated his extensive knowledge about the philosophy of veganism, and his relationships with customers. Working with the other three interviewees, being the Chefs and Owners, it proved more difficult to maintain a conversation with them as they all had the same style of providing quite short answers with few details. Despite my efforts to get these three participants to discuss new topics, they tended to repeat the same thing over and over instead of giving fresh opinions. This tendency is visible in the following analysis, which also recognises the influence that their background has on their knowledge.

6.3.1. How can IC be conceptualised from their understandings?

In the case of the restaurant, all the interviewees mentioned that ***people*** were one of their most valuable resources. However, they did not go deep into this subject because they believed their assertion was self-evident and there was nothing special to talk about. In fact, I needed to give hints to some of the interviewees in order to get them to talk about human resources at all. Even then, they responded that their assumption was just common sense that "people" were indispensable to the restaurant.

> *"I think we need people resources to build up any kind of organisations." (Chef 3, Owner)*

In contrast, the most commonly discussed topic was ***food-related elements***. Certainly, products are very common within IC frameworks (Demartini and Paoloni, 2011; Huang et al., 2007; Montequin, et al., 2006). All of them talked about the values that their food brings, not only in relation to the Vietnamese traditions they want to share with non-Vietnamese customers but also the spiritual values that vegan food can give people. They emphasised the power of vegan food across religious cultures, with the power to pass through all religions like nothing else can. Being proud of their status as the only restaurant serving 100% vegan food in London, they believed their Vietnamese dishes were of great value.

> *"Introduce Vietnamese food to UK and international customers. We are proud of it. This restaurant is proud to offer 100% vegetarian food. Some other restaurants only sell some kind of vegetarian foods" (Chef 1)*

> *"My restaurant is vegan hence it carries the spiritual culture, religional, also the food spirit. If we are in Vietnam, this is not important, but here in the UK, we want to bring the food culture to international people so that they can have knowledge about our country." (Chef 2, Owner)*

> *"When a person eats vegan food, they can feel peaceful, happy. That is the spiritual value. People also eats vegan food to keep them healthy. Any religions can eat vegan." (Chef 3, Owner)*

> *"That the value of veganism. It is not a normal physical restaurant because it has the gravity and attractiveness of veganism. Any religions can come here to eat. We can't just say that we are vegan restaurant, we need to show the vegan spirit. When*

customers come, if they don’t feel such spirit, they will not come again. There is nothing which can go through all the religions like vegan eating. Any religions can eat vegan food. This is a Vietnamese restaurant; hence all the dishes carry the traditional Vietnamese culture, values.” (Head waiter)

Another element all the interviewees mentioned here was the restaurant’s ***location***. They claimed that being located in London benefits the restaurant a lot as a “place for tourism” and a “place for exploration”. Interestingly, this point is also linked to the value of Vietnamese food discussed earlier. Had the restaurant been located in Vietnam, the value that their Vietnamese food would have not been recognised. Doubtlessly, there are always numberless places serving Vietnamese dishes in the country, hence being one of them does not seem to be as special as being one of the few in London. With this said, the product and the location are inter-related in terms of the value they could bring to the firm.

“London can be considered as a destination for people to come for explorations. This is the place for tourism. Hence, they want to know about our Vietnamese culture, they are curious about it.” (Chef 3, Owner)

Although the restaurant interviewees shared many common ideas, only the Head Waiter discussed ***customer***-related issues. He believed that their restaurant had a unique set of customers which brought them a lot of value. Their customers were special because they were not “normal eaters”. They shared the joy of eating vegan food and had helped the restaurant to grow. Moreover, they were willing to travel from very far away to visit the restaurant because they were sincere about eating vegan food, meaning that their behaviour as customers and assistance to the restaurant was of great value to the business.

“I think the value of people in a vegan restaurant is totally different from that of other restaurants. Because the customers coming here, they are very special. They are not normal eater. They did not come here to eat they just come to help. They said, “it took us two hours to come here, congratulations on your business.” It is their behaviors, their willingness and motivations which are totally different. They are not food gravers. They were not attracted by the food, they were idealists. They were spiritualists, religionists.” (Head Waiter)

In summary, the research participants in the restaurant case study shared almost all the same thoughts. They each mentioned people, the restaurant’s location and in particular the Vietnamese traditions and philosophy that the vegan foods brought to customers. However, only the Head Waiter directly shared his thoughts on their customers. The next section will explore why the interviewees shared a lot of similar ideas but why customer issues were only indicated by a single one among them.

6.3.2. How have they constructed their ideas?

As stated earlier, when asked what was of value in their restaurant, the four interviewees mentioned almost the same things: people, location and food-related elements. They provided a lot of detailed explanations to justify their emphasis on the value that Vietnamese vegan food can bring. In particular, they attributed this emphasis to the influence of culture on their understanding. Since they are Vietnamese, they are proud of Vietnamese food and see the value of their products. Had the interviews been conducted with a non-Vietnamese staff, they might not have shared such a thought about the food provided. Moreover, Vietnamese people understand how their traditional food is different from other dishes. Those who have been living in different countries might better assess why and how much non-Vietnamese people like Vietnamese food and for that reason, they could capture the value that their food can bring.

But it is not only about Vietnamese food, all the interviewees strongly emphasised that they were proud to provide 100% vegan food in their restaurant. This emphasis could be explained by the experience they had had because all of them used to work in other places where non-vegan food was served. The restaurant sector was the same, but the products provided were totally different. Hence, thanks to their experience of working in restaurants serving different types of food, they noticed the value that vegan food can have. If they had not had such experience, they might not have recognised and perceived the value of food spirit in that way. Again, this can be explained by the secondary socialisation in the sub-worlds that they have experienced. To put it crudely, if they had not changed their sub-world, they would not have obtained such an understanding about the value of vegan food.

> *"When I worked in a normal restaurant, I could feel that people do not have special food spirit as when they eat vegan. They just came to eat normally. But here, they came not only for the food, but for the peaceful feeling as well." (Chef 3 Owner)*

Another noticeable point was the brief responses from one of the interviewees. This interviewee only mentioned the value of introducing Vietnamese food to non-Vietnamese customers in London and that of being the only restaurant in London which serves 100% vegan food. However, when asked about the people and other aspects that this restaurant had, he provided no further comparison and gave the excuse of working in the restaurant for just a few weeks to explain having no deep understanding of the workplace. In contrast, the Head Waiter and the other two Chefs provided further details of the food, the service and other changes that the restaurant had experienced since being opened. With that being said, it can be argued that the amount of time working in the same sub-world can have an impact on the way people think about what can be of value.

"I used to work for other restaurants before this one. But I have not worked for this restaurant for long, so I have not been able to know it very well. I have worked here for just a couple of weeks." (Chef 1)

Furthermore, only the Head Waiter provided a long discussion in terms of customer as something of great value. He stated clearly that the restaurant benefited a lot from its "special" customers. He believed that he knew more about customers because it was his responsibility to take care of them, understand their needs and cater their requirements. Thanks to such a role, he had more opportunities to talk directly to them and listen to them sharing their thoughts. From the stories shared by the customers, he realised and appreciated the support the customers provided. None of the other interviews who worked in the kitchen and very rarely had any contact with customers gave a similar opinion. This variance hence can be attributed to the role they were holding in the restaurant. According to Berger and Luckmann, the labour division decides the role and corresponding sub-world and influential others in those sub-worlds. In this case, the Head Waiter interacted with the customers in his own sub-world, which made him aware of the value the customers brought to the restaurant.

"I talked to them while they were free, but I would not disturb them if they were busy enjoying the food. They loved talking to me, listening about the veganism and I am very willing to have some discussions. And I think that is a part of my job." (Head Waiter)

In short, the restaurant case might have indicated the influence of culture on the way people think about what is of value. As Vietnamese, they all produced similar thoughts regarding the value of creating and serving Vietnamese food to non-Vietnamese people in London. Besides, the experience they had in similar contexts, the length of service and the role in the organisation could also exert some influence on their thoughts, and this is aligned with what has been discussed in the law firm case.

6.4. The charity case

This charity was established in 1870, aiming to support and raise the profile of the region's archaeological heritage, and providing a monthly lecture series, annual transactions and many other benefits to members. Five interviews were conducted with the President, Vice President, External Consultant, Former Treasurer and a Trustee. Please refer to Appendix 2 for more details about the interviewees.

6.4.1. How can IC be conceptualised from their understandings?

One of the most elements commonly mentioned by all the interviewees when asked about what was of value in their charity organisation was ***people***. However, they all touched on different aspects of this element. For example, except for the former Treasurer, four of them mentioned the pro-active characteristics of those who joined the charity and the board of trustees.

> *"So BWAS doesn't need more people that turn up to quarterly meetings and have an opinion, because there are no stars. BWAS needs proactive people. And I think that they've got a very strong board knowledge wise expertise wise, passion, wise. But I also think there are people around that table who signed up to be a board member, not a do-er, and what they believed a board member's role to be is standing up, having an opinion and meetings and approving a budget. Actually what the board roles we need is to deliver the strategy on every path around that table, is doing some doing." (Consultant)*

> *"You need a lot of skills and a lot of not just interpersonal skills just people who are willing to sort of turn up and be nice to people and draw them into your community. People are very willing to take part in activities, yeah, but they want someone else to organise it for them. So that is why are we recruiting them the trustees did we pay attention to those skills because we accept people to sit in on the board as a committee and then we found out that okay they are not willing to do something" (Vice President)*

> *"I mean we could do lots more excursions but just need someone to organize them and get them started" (Trustee)*

> *"When we say when we talk about the value of people in the company generally we have different people have different understanding about people how they can bring the value or how valuable they are what do you think it depends on what role they're saying it's valuable to volunteers who do things and help to run the program and the revivals have a really good group of trustees who not necessarily say we should be such and such that actually get involved with roll up early and do something themselves is anything that you think those things will help us to survive and grow up apart from the knowledge the partnerships and the systems" (President)*

The skills of the board were also considered as something of value. It was explained that the charity needed different skill sets to develop and catch up with the various changes now. For example, they needed someone who can do the accounting stuff, marketing tasks or IT jobs. Without these skilful people, the charity might face a lot of problems trying to survive, maintain operations and grow. The consultant put it this way:

> *"There will be some gaps, but that's not to say the board isn't skilled. Well I think they would they say it as well you know that they are they've defined that they need a marketing officer needs. They need a different skill set on the board, so I mean they also find they need the treasure and when you sit down for the right" (Consultant)*

Meanwhile, the former Treasurer emphasised their need for people who could take the initiative. This would help the charity to be more flexible and so more competitive compared to other similar organisations.

> *"There is except possibly the present president, we've not had anyone who has really been seeking to take you in a new initiative with the society as I say it's been a matter of keeping the show on the road and that's really what I was doing as treasurer, we were just continuing what we've been doing for many years" (Former Treasurer)*

Moreover, three of the interviewees (President, Vice President and the Consultant) mentioned the turnover of the board. They insisted that having more regular turnover was very important because it helped to keep the board and the charity fresh and more open-minded to changes and improvements.

> *"Ideally you need to have a regular turnover which keeps the organisation fresh oh why is so important because you get a lot of organisations that have the same chairman for years and years and years and their views and their approach to things become entrenched and that can make the organisation stale. If you've got a trustee board that's got lots of old people who've been there forever, they think they know what the organisation is there for, and they have their very strong views as to how they should be doing things but they're not necessarily right that's why it's important to keep the board churning and to change that leadership often, so you get a fresh interpretation of how you deliver the goals of the organisation" (Vice President)*

> *"The same people joined the committee and stayed on the committee for far too long so as you know the charity commission prefers there to be a regular turnover of trustees" (President)*

It should also be underlined that the second most commonly mentioned element was ***Expertise***. All of the interviewees discussed this when asked what was of value.

> *"So if I think about a charity that shares information, then the expertise, the intellectual property, then that potentially is something that a charity has a value and I say intellectual property. And I suppose I don't just mean things that might be like trademark or, you know, registered in some way, it may just be the CEO is a real expert in this field or a board member is a real expert in this field and have information to share on that on that issue. If you look at the expertise they have, well there's much more there in terms*

of that board has an extraordinary amount of expertise across local history and archaeology." (Consultant)

Next, ***system-related*** issues were also among the elements most mentioned in the interviews. The interviewees said that a good system was very essential in a charity because when people volunteered to do something, it was important that they knew what they were supposed to do. This would help keep the charity well-organised and well-run, rather than causing a mess.

"I think one of the biggest things has been just putting in place structure and policies and policies are often thought to be very boring but then the grounding premises that you know that grounding principles that that organisations can come back to you to make, you know operational decisions. And so I think some of those foundation blocks were missing. I think structure and resourcing were the kind of for me or two pillars of growth. Well I think with volunteer-run organisations, and you have such high turnover of the people doing the doing, that if you do not have written down agreed policies and processes, then every year you end up solving the same problem again. Every year you end up reinventing the wheel and wasting time. But if those structures don't exist, you can end up with different rules for everyone. You can create big problems by not having those kind of corporate principles" (Consultant)

"We don't have a health and safety policy so when we take people on walks or excursions or are using took well this lectures ought to be governed by the health and safety policy of this place of hosting. We should really – I mean there's a whole list it's in the governance report of things who weren't doing we're keeping proper record the charity commission requires you to keep written records the meetings" (President)

"In a charity is it very important to have a set of regulations so that people will know what they are supposed to do because they think that they are volunteering so they are not aware of the rules and some kind of conduct. Very specific um set of goals yes and mechanisms for delivering those goals uh they are all effectively a legal document that has to be followed um but to add to that all charities should actually have additional guidance for their trustees yes and they should also have regular training for trustees to make sure that they are aware why they are" (Vice President)

Beside those elements, the Former Treasurer and the Trustee also mentioned the charity's ***selling points***, which were activities, transactions, field work and lectures. These elements proved to be of great value as intellectual products which might not be obtainable from other organisations or sources. In particular, the Former Treasurer emphasised the opportunities in the charity to learn new things without pressure, which might not exist in non-charitable organisations.

"Activities and experiences, I'm thinking the opportunity for the archaeological society of people to visit sites they might not normally get, opportunity to learn new skills and learn, experience things without pressure. Ugh because if those skills experiences uh were being offered by another organisation particularly by an employer, then there's

going to be a bit of pressure behind there's going to be expectations where I think there are expectations of the charity but no different type of expectations that I would hope respect the individual more than other organisations. Because we expect differently in a charity they're more likely to have entered into that activity voluntarily and similarly the people who are running that charitable activity um again unlike the most likely people who are doing that voluntarily so basically doing because they want to and not doing it because they've been told they have to do it." (Trustee)

"The lecture program has to ensure that it's – um - delivered in such a way that it's not repeating what people can get elsewhere because think about the lecture brain specifically very often our lectures that have been given through other cultural societies" (Trustee)

"The object for transactions is to get um archaeological work that people have done published or at least a summary of it published" (Former Treasurer)

Another element mentioned by the interviewees from the charity was the ***partnership***. According to them, this proved to be very important to the charity because it could grant them the legal power to help the organisation.

"The future is firstly to form more partnerships and do things in partnership with our other organising organisations" (President)

"Another future opportunity is to do things with that working the national sites to do things with other related local societies and something that we can offer and the interactions with other organisations can bring us more opportunities right and can bring us more members as well" (Trustee)

"Charities cannot function unless they have more powers, it's the legal powers to do things, to enter into contracts, to employ staff; so we can solve the problem of the unwell resourcing and managing the organisation and managing projects that they're involved with" (Vice President)

Although various elements were shared by different interviewees, some stood out in being discussed by only one participant. In the first place, it was the status of being a ***non-political*** organisation. The Trustee believed that being non-political was of great value because long-term strategies and benefits could be obtained.

"Let's say a local government organisation that's going to have a political background all the time because ultimate local government is run by politics. With a charity, that's completely independent of that. I think the charity can have as well longer-term aspirations because particularly look at things like local governments and applies to private companies I think it's very short term because local governments being politically driven. It can also help to think in the long term, what it would like to do and how it can build in that post project into the longer-term aspirations and of course particularly important incredibly for a publishing charity like me, it always has that long term activity anyway so publishing transactions is something that happens all the time and will

happen all the time obviously. It has to be budgeted for; it has to be predicted for rather a constant" (Trustee)

Likewise, the Consultant talked about the ***customer database*** which was a crucial factor in helping the charity to grow.

"If you think about the membership database. There's a value in that information - information that gives access to people of a specific interest has a value to others. BWAS is trying to get more people to lectures. And we've seen other charities that have a wider reach Birmingham civic society, the Friends of Birmingham museums, we're offering them discounts opportunities to partner to get access to their mailing list, so that we can promote our events through them." (Consultant)

Moreover, only the President mentioned ***harmony*** as something vital to the charity.

"One of the problems with BWAS is that the community became so dominated by a small number of individuals with very distinct personality that a lot of people just didn't want to join because he didn't want to have to deal with those personalities now that's really unhealthy. People have to learn to disagree with each other politely. It's not it's not fair to other people because we both we are devoting our time, so we deserve some respect." (President)

6.4.2. How have they constructed their ideas?

During the interviews with people from the charity, they all attributed their current understandings to similar experiences they had had in other organisations. For example, with regard to the organisation's structure, the Consultant clearly stated that she realised the importance of having a structure in an organisation and how that knowledge became common sense to her now.

"For me also feels very common sense that, you know these things, support a more efficient running organisation, but I suppose I only know that because I've worked in big beasts like the NHS, small businesses, start my own companies all those things and having those structures has meant when I left it's not collapse when I've joined up know where to go, what to do next. So that definitely have influenced how I feel about structure." (Consultant)

The Vice-President gave a lot of examples about other organisations and charities where she worked to indicate that when she compared with this charity, she saw the differences. Indeed, this was how she came up with her conclusion regarding pro-active members on the board and the importance of having the legal power to employ staff and to diversify the skillsets of the charity's staff.

> *"The trust that I'm involved with we always had a website which was run by a volunteer and she did it her own way um and it wasn't user friendly so we had to move our website onto our Wordpress platform okay which anybody can use with a little bit of training we had Twitter and Facebook, but there was no strategy for how you actually use those to communicate with people. So last year we managed to employ staff and we got a grant. We employed staff and one of the roles was specifically to develop our front end" (Vice President)*

In terms of partnerships, both the President and Vice President agreed on the importance because they had both worked for a long time in different charities and could see the decline in partnerships between the charity and other organisations, which currently hampered the development of the charity. With that said, the length of service they had in the charity could be part of the reasons why they constructed their thoughts in such a way.

> *"I was also aware that the museum and society were no longer close partners which they used to be" (President)*

> *"I was involved and was a trustee for a number of years off and on yes, so I've watched those organisations grow and I've also watched the challenges, how much more difficult things have been become" (Sue)*

Moreover, it was noticeable that the President, the Trustee and the Former Treasurer were the only ones who mentioned transactions as being something of great value in the charity. This point supported the argument that education might have some influence on the way people perceive what was of value. Here all three participants obtained their doctorate in the field and had a great passion for archaeology, which was why they valued the intellectual products which contain a lot of precious knowledge about the field. In terms of the other two interviewees, the Consultant and the Vice-President had mainly worked in local government and dealt with business management, so they did not show as much appreciation of the Transactions as the other archaeology professionals.

As analysed in the previous section, although the interviewees shared some common ideas regarding people, structure, expertise and selling points, some elements were only mentioned by one participant. This evidence again indicates the influence of the experience that the interviewees gained in their different sub-worlds. For example, the Trustee believed that being non-political could be very beneficial in different ways. He came to such a thought because he used to work for local organisations, and he sensed the immense impact of politics on their operation. More importantly, this seemed to leave some negative impression on him when he was not able to see the long-term benefit. When talking about what was of value in a charity, he asserted that being independent from politics was indeed a big advantage, which was the case not only the workplace but how individuals' experience affects their way of thinking. Interestingly, the Trustee had also worked with the British government in Westminster where he doubtlessly got the clearest picture of politics and its influence.

"It's not something that's um certainly a politician, for example in the case of locals which I would not do this anymore, that would never happen, that would be worse because that's a long-term activity." (Trustee)

"I have long-standing experience in the archaeology of the region but also in broader research. Then my archaeological work has always been within the Westminster." (Trustee)

Another example can be seen in the interview responses regarding customer database, which no-one mentioned except the Consultant who saw the importance and value of the membership database because it could help the charity to grow, insofar as the more access the charity had to a customer database, the more chance it had of gaining memberships. This perspective could be said to have come from her experience as a commercial director at different organisations who had to think a lot about approaching and attracting customers.

"I was commercial director for Birmingham museum, so that was the bulk of my last 10 years of my career. And before that was commercial development manager" (Consultant)

Similar explanations can be given for the quality or attribute of harmony which only the President discussed. As the organisation's leader, she had not only to lead a lot of meetings but also to manage and maintain the harmony between trustees of the board. In essence, she was concerned that other Trustees who joined the meetings to contribute their ideas might not see the need and the importance of being in a harmony. As the charity's leader, this issue might emerge as important as those questions discussed directly in the meetings. Moreover, she had the responsibility for recruiting people and could hence see the difference between old and new Trustees which caused an unhealthy atmosphere within the board. If she had not taken that leading role of taking responsibility for the task of dealing with different people, she might not have recognised the ultimate worth of harmony. In other words, the role of harmony certainly impacts on the way people perceive what is of value.

"I recruited quite a lot of new people and it's exactly the difference yes again the distance and behaviour between the old people and the new people is very noticeable. In fact, quite a lot of time the new people just sit there looking horrified at the behaviour of the old people" (President)

6.5. Summary and comparisons

This section will present the summary of the findings obtained from the three cases studied. Moreover, some comparisons were made among the three cases studied to see the similarities and difference which might indicate some other potential influences, for instance, the sector or the type of organisations. Comparisons with the extant literature will also be laid out to propose some arguments regarding the coverage of the idea of IC currently. This can help to highlight the contributions of this research into the field of IC.

6.5.1. How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings?

Between the three cases, a lot of elements were shared by the interviewees from the different cases. ***People***, ***harmony*** and ***products*** related issues were the three most commonly discussed. However, although they named the same terms, they did reveal different layers of meanings. For example, in terms of people, they referred separately to the turnover of the board, the do-er attitudes and the value of certain groups of people who can speak the same language with target customers.

On the other hand, some elements were only mentioned by interviewees from one particular case. For instance, only in the case of the restaurant did the participants deem ***location*** as something to be of value, which could be attributed to the nature of service the organisation provides. The industry of professional restaurants, bars and other food service providers allow customers to enter, order food and eat on the premises; therefore, locations are very important, not only to ensure the customers have ultimate comfort and enjoyment but also to be visible to more customers. Meanwhile, providing law services or doing charitable work might not need locations as much as the restaurants, especially in today's virtual office world.

In terms of structure, this element was only mentioned by the people from the charity, rather than the restaurant or the law firm, which can be explained by the different types of the organisations. With charities, people volunteer to join and help, and might therefore not be forced to do jobs as in commercial firms. As the Consultant to the charity observed, having structure and policies in an organisation is common sense to her, but it is still missed in the charity. In commercial firms, people are paid to work and follow certain rules and regulations. In charities, this element might not very visible because people are not legally tied. With that said, in order to keep the charity well run and well-organised, building and maintaining the structure is very crucial, which would be why this issue was raised only in the case of the charity.

Furthermore, it may be observed that compared to the law firm and the charity cases, the participants from the restaurant case provided far fewer answers when asked what they regarded as being of value. Although the conversations were all in Vietnamese, the participants were quite brief when giving the answers. From my personal experience and knowledge, this can be attributed to their educational background. For most of the Vietnamese migrants who came to the UK for a better life, they hardly had any proper education in Vietnam before migrating to the UK. They came to the UK doing any kind of work just to survive and make ends meet. They were not very well educated with a high level of knowledge. Indeed, apart from the Head Waiter who was doing his PhD in Tourism, the other three were migrants. Even the Head Waiter did not have any background in business or management. Hence, to any question which sounded quite academic, they could all be quite limited in addressing it properly and in detail. On the other hand, in the case of the law firm and charity, the interview participants all had a higher education, with a background in business, management or law which possibly allow them to give comprehensive discussion on this topic.

> *"For other restaurants, we, Vietnamese people, mainly work to make ends meet. Just a few of us really have the love for their career." (Chef 1)*

The table below summarises all the elements mentioned by the interviewees across the three cases: the law firm, the restaurant and the charity. It might be necessary to explain that this table indicates the occurrences of these elements in each case, not the frequency. With the aim of exploring the impact of contexts on people's understandings, I have thus placed more focus on whether something was mentioned or not, rather than how many times it appeared in the participants' responses. If a particular element was only found in one organisation, then that might signal some impact I was looking for, as I have analysed above. Meanwhile, as stated earlier, from the social construction perspective, it is believed that people construct their knowledge differently in different contexts, entailing that there would be no point in "counting" the repetition across the cases. For example, the three contexts were obviously different, but being that "people" was the most common element in all cases, it is not reasonable to put repetition down to social construction here.

Items discussed by interviewees	***The law firm***	***The restaurant***	***The charity***
People			
Products			
Team spirit/ harmony/ support			
Management style			
Motivation policy			
Brand name			
Work ethic			
Customer feedback			
Customer database			
Non-political			
Structure			
Location			

Table 1: Summary of what were deemed to be of value according to different people in the three cases

However, to construct our understanding of IC, it is necessary to look at the extant literature, to see how this case study can contribute further to our knowledge of IC. By making the comparison between what has been discussed in this case study and the literature, the section below shows two major differences: (i) the case study also touched on some popular IC items in the literature, but the interviewees brought them in at a more detailed level, and they showed very little agreement on the terms; (ii) the case study revealed some elements which have not yet been discussed in the literature at all.

Items discussed by interviewees	***Findings from cases studied***	***Similar findings in IC literature***
People	- More detailed meanings. - No consensus in terms of meanings.	- Mainly referred to as Human Capital with different indicators (Pedro et al., 2018; Ferenhof et al., 2015) - Most similar item found in literature "Geographical diversity" (Corbella et al., 2019)
Product	- Discussed by interviewees from the law firm and the charity.	- Mainly referred to as Structural (Demartini and Paoloni, 2011; Huang et al., 2007; Montequin, et al., 2006). - Also placed under different dimension: Customers, Structural and Human (Rodov and Leliaert, 2002)
Brand name	- More detailed meanings. - No consensus in terms of meanings. (Some interviewees even showed little knowledge of the term.)	- Mainly placed under different IC dimensions in various frameworks, such as Customers (Lev, 2001; Rudež and Mihalič, 2007), Relational (Sällebrant et al., 2007; Grimaldi et al., 2013), Innovation (Choong, 2008), Organizational (Tai and Chen, 2009); Structural (Rodov and Leliaert, 2002)

Motivation policy	- Mainly deemed to be of value in the company (equivalently to structural capital). - No consensus in terms of meanings.	- Mainly placed under human capital dimension (Litschka et al., 2006; Tovstiga and Tulugurova, 2009; Halim, 2010). - Most similar item found in literature: "Training and compensation system" (Lev, 2001)
Management Style	- Discussed by the interviewees from the law firm.	- Not yet discussed thoroughly in the literature. - Most similar items found in literature: "Culture" (Dumay and Roslender, 2013; Benevene et al., 2019), "Organizational culture" (Yi, 2012), "Corporate Culture" (Zarandi et al., 2012; Cricelli et al., 2013) or "Administrative practices" (Pedro et al., 2018), "Culture routines and practices" (Marr et al. , 2004), "Culture" and "Management philosophy" (Rudež and Mihalič, 2007), "Leadership/Leadership skills" (Abhayawansa, 2014; Grimaldi et al., 2013; Ousama et al., 2011; Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002; Mayo, 2000)
Team spirit/ harmony/ support	- Discussed by interviewees from the law firm and the charity.	- Not yet discussed thoroughly in the literature. - Most similar items found in literature: "Group cohesiveness" (Mura and Longo, 2013), "Culture/ Management Philosophy" (Rudež and Mihalič, 2007); "Group cohesiveness" (Mura and Longo, 2013), "Team's social interactions" (Hormiga et al., 2011)
Customer feedback	- Mentioned and clearly discussed by a junior staff in the law firm.	- Mainly used as a measurement of customers' satisfaction (Ousama et al., 2011; Guthrie et al., 2006; Bollen et al., 2005) - Most similar items found in literature: "customer feedback systems" (Bozbura, 2004)
Work ethic	- Mentioned and clearly discussed by a junior staff in the law firm.	- Not yet mentioned in IC literature. - In wider literature, claimed to be connected with different IC elements such as competence (Lou et al., 2019; Wang, 2013; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003); work attitude, work commitment, or work satisfaction (Saks et al., 1996) which are popularly listed as IC elements under Human capital dimension (Ferenhof et al., 2015)
Structure/Policy	- Mentioned and discussed by the interviewees in the charity.	- Most similar items found in literature: "Structure and Routines" (Rudež and Mihalič, 2007)
Partnership	- Mentioned and discussed by the interviewees in the charity.	Mainly placed under relational capital (Wasiluk, 2013; Rudež and Mihalič, 2007)

Customer database	- Mentioned and discussed by the consultant in the charity.	- Mainly referred to as Customer Capital (Huang et al, 2007). - Most similar item found in literature "Data on customers" (Huang et al, 2007).
Political independence	- Mentioned and discussed by one Trustee in the charity.	- Not yet mentioned in IC literature. - In wider literature, organizational politics is claimed to have negative influence on employees' performance (Eldor, 2017)
Location	- Mentioned and discussed by the interviewees in the restaurant.	- Not yet discussed thoroughly in the literature. - Claimed to have impact on IC performance (Schiavone et al., 2014), future wealth of start-up businesses (Peña, 2002)

Table 2: Comparisons between what has been found in the case study and what has been revealed in IC literature

During the interviews, the participants mentioned and discussed some terms that commonly appear in IC literature. However, what they meant when referring to those terms is not the same as what has been usually seen in the literature. And also, there was no consensus among their perceptions. For example, "people" is mainly considered as "human capital" in IC literature. Various terms have been used which imply this dimension, such as "staff's knowledge", "number of employees", "capacity for innovation and creativity", "commitment", "motivation" (Pedro et al., 2018). These indicators have been used popularly in the literature (Ferenhof et al., 2015). However, recently, when investigating a European oil and gas company's Integrated Report, Corbella et al. (2019) pointed that "geographical diversity" was also one of the key elements of the "people" category. This to some extent shares the ideas brought forward by one of the interviewees. As discussed above, the IT & Accounting Director claimed that the Vietnamese staff were of great value to the company, indicating his understanding of the value generated by different employees from different locations. However, in the Corbella et al. study (2019), no adequate explanations were provided. Hence we may not be able to understand the context and the construction of such an IC element. Therefore, no further comparison can be made. Apart from work done by Corbella et al. (2019), most of the IC studies so far seem to accept that "people" are of value in the company in the same way. Many studies have used only a single framework, or lack detailed elaboration on the participants' perceptions of the human capital dimension. For example, as Benevene et al. (2019) claimed, the senior managers of Italian SEs perceived that "all the people (who are part of our organisation) are valued and involved in all our processes because we think that they can bring great benefits to our organisation in terms of competence, efficiency and quality" (Benevene et al., 2019, p.166). However, what was obtained in the present project does not show the same! Different participants provided different understandings about how people are of value.

Next, while the literature has witnessed a considerable amount of discussion on “brand name”, and this has been reported as the most commonly recognised IC item, in the interviews at the law firm, the opposite was true. Brands/Company brand has been considered under different dimensions of IC in various frameworks, such as Customers (Lev, 2001; Rudež and Mihalič, 2007), Relational (Sällebrant et al., 2007; Grimaldi et al., 2013), Innovation (Choong, 2008), Organizational (Tai and Chen, 2009); Structural (Rodov and Leliaert (2002). This shows the popularity of the term in IC literature. Whereas, “Brand name” was one of the least shared among the participants when they talked about value. Primarily, two of the three of them showed very little knowledge about the term. Hence, to fully construct our understandings of IC, there are some questions requiring answers. Could this be due to the small size of the firm? Or to the age of the interviewees? To answer this, we need to understand why and how particular participants can come up with their answers. Also, from the responses obtained, we can see that it would be dangerous to assume that all accounting managers would be knowledgeable about the “brand name”. This hints that a particular IC framework would not fit all the cases or even similar cases. And consequently, this raises a call for a more appropriate methodology that can allow the researcher to obtain in-depth answers from the interviewees and understand why they have such perceptions.

In terms of ***motivation policies*** in the literature, early in 2001, Lev included “Training and compensation system” as one subsection in the human capital category. He asserted that “the third nexus of intangibles, those related to human resources, are generally created by unique personnel and compensation policies” (Lev, 2001, p.6); however, since the proposal of such an IC framework, no study has been conducted to explore whether it has been adopted at a practical level or not. Another noteworthy point here is that, in Lev’s proposed framework (2001), incentive-based compensation was listed under the human capital dimension. Similarly, since then, what can mostly be found in IC literature is the term “motivation” under the human capital dimension (Litschka et al., 2006; Tovstiga and Tulugurova, 2009; Halim, 2010). Meanwhile, in the present case study, “motivation policies” was deemed a kind of value generated by the company itself. It can be seen that the term “motivation” is not unpopular in IC literature; however, it has only been explored from the employees’ perspective. The implication that whether the staff is motivated or not will contribute to the value generation. Further, IC scholars have overlooked the company's motivation policies, which can also generate value to the company (or at least generate the employees’ motivation). In my case study, three interviewees offered two different explanations for the policy of their own company. And it can be seen that the two groups of ideas correspond to the cultural category of the participants: the Vietnamese shared the same thought, and the British provided another one. When talking about the tendency to take responsibility, or the willingness to do so, an interviewee in Habersam and Piber's study (2003) described the differences between the Italian private and public sectors as "the hospital's staff cannot be dismissed as easily as in the private sector and are therefore less inclined to take individual responsibility" (Habersam and Piber, 2003, p.760). Although the authors did not provide any clarifications or confirmation regarding the influence of culture on how people are motivated to work, this example may still hint that we can look at the cultural dimension to explain the differences among the participants' responses about IC. It would also be significant to add that an analysis using some knowledge of the participants' culture would be very valuable. The researchers' knowledge would play an essential role in offering a better understanding of the issue. Therefore, it would be crucial for a researcher to blend in their own knowledge and co-construct the knowledge which forms the findings of a study.

In the various IC frameworks created during the development of the discourse over IC, the terms used which are most similar to "management style" are "Culture" (Dumay and Roslender, 2013; Benevene et al., 2019), "Organizational culture" (Yi, 2012), "Corporate Culture" (Zarandi et al., 2012; Cricelli et al., 2013), "Administrative practices" (Pedro et al., 2018) or "Leadership/Leadership skills" (Abhayawansa, 2014; Grimaldi et al., 2013; Ousama et al., 2011; Bontis and Fitz-enz, 2002; Mayo, 2000). The only explanation of this term was found in Mayo's work (2000, p.526) which says "Leadership is the clarity of vision of top management and their ability to communicate it and behave in a way that is consistent with it." This does not seem to match with the view shared by the interviewees in this study. More generally, Marr et al. (2004) placed "Culture routines and practices" as one of the organizational capital categories in their work. They claimed, "Culture embraces categories such as corporate culture, organizational values, employees' networking behaviour and management philosophies (Marr et al., 2004, p. 562). Furthermore, in a study done by Rudež and Mihalič (2007), the terms "Culture" and "Management philosophy" were broken down into detailed items[2] , but it seems that both the terms do not fully share the meaning of "management style" revealed by the interviewees in my case study. In other words, it can be said that the particular item "management style" has never been mentioned in the literature.

[2] *Culture (Structural)*
Atmosphere in the firm is pleasant; Managers and staff communicate well; Knowledge increase among employees is excPresidentt; Communications in the firm are exclusively informal; Knowledge increase is well supported.
Management philosophy
Employees are highly empowered; Customers are put in first place; Staff is stimulated to take initiatives; Co-operation across departments is well developed.

With regard to “Team spirit/ harmony/ support”, in a research published in 2015, Jimenez et al. claimed that organisational harmony had been defined as a value; however, the element has not been included in any IC framework (see Pedro et al., 2018 and Ferenhof et al., 2015). Moreover, very little research has mentioned this content. For example, though Morris and Snell (2011) noted the term “Sharing capability”, they meant the exchange of ideas within the organisations instead. Mura and Longo (2013) included “Group cohesiveness” in the structural capital dimension. Nevertheless, this item's breakdown did not seem to match with what was shared by the interviewees in the case study, as they did not mention anything about the sharing, helping culture within the team, and the company.

> *“People in my workgroup encourage one another to work as a team; People in my workgroup exchange opinions and ideas; The company favours communication with employees; I find that I generally get along with the other members of my workgroup; The members of my work group will readily defend one another from criticism from outsiders; I enjoy belonging to this working group.”* (Mura and Longo, 2013, p. 441)

Another exception that discussed similar content was the study by Hormiga et al. (2011). When analysing the role of intellectual capital in the success of new ventures, they believed that the team’s social interactions were of great value to companies. This aspect was labelled as a part of human capital. It can be seen that their work and this project study similar cases which are small firms. Therefore, to confirm whether “organisational harmony” is perceived to be of value only in different types of small organisations, there should be further research. However, when Hormiga et al. (2011) used the scales proposed by Lechler (2001), they only focused on three components of social interaction within entrepreneurial teams: communication, coordination and cohesion; and ignored the other two aspects, “mutual support” and “conflict resolution” which are also included in Lechler’s framework. Whereas, as in the quotes shown above, these two aspects were mentioned as useful for building up the firm's harmony.

The term “Customer feedback” has been used to measure customers’ satisfaction. For example, in the 2002 Australian study (Guthrie et al. 2006), the customer satisfaction category was renamed “customer loyalty” to take into account the entire range of information about the positive feedback from customers. Ousama et al. 2011 quoted a study by Gan (2001). The author suggested that the number of customer complaints and feedback was one of the very useful pieces of non-financial information to indicate external capital. Bollen et al., 2005 demonstrated that “customer relations” was one of the components of relational capital. In this view, customer relations comprised customer orientation which was measured by the accessibility of customer feedback. Apart from those studies, which referred to customer feedback as a kind of customer relations measurement, Bozbura (2004) clearly stated that relational capital includes brands, customer loyalty scales, and the company's image in society, suppliers and customer feedback systems. However, the term "customer feedback systems" was explained as "inter-operate dispersal of customer feedback". Therefore it does not share the same meaning as revealed in the present case study. In the interviews, only the junior staff member mentioned it, and provided a lengthy discussion on the item, in which she asserted that customer feedback which could help her improve her performance would then benefit the company. Consequently, from a social construction perspective, it can be questioned whether the position has impacted her understandings of IC. Scholars have conducted different studies aiming at particular people in the company (such as managers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), or analysts (Abhayawansa et al., 2018) with the hope of providing more specific viewpoints regarding IC. However, they have tended to focus on people at the management level, who were deemed to be more knowledgeable about IC. This choice of participants may have limited our understandings of IC comprehension. As a result, researchers may need to consider a single case study which covers different positions in an organisation.

Finally, looking at the different IC frameworks proposed, the item "work ethic" has never been included. In order to carefully make sure I did not miss any studies mentioning "work ethic", I searched the literature using the pairs "work ethic" and "intellectual capital", or "work ethic" and "firm/organization value"; however, no reliable results came up. Whereas, looking at the wider literature which discusses work ethic, it was found that "work ethic" has been claimed to be connected with different IC elements, such as competence, work attitude, work commitment, or work satisfaction, which are all popularly listed as IC elements under the human capital dimension (Ferenhof et al., 2015). For example, Wang (2013) claimed that work attitude and work ethic had been emphasized as essential career competencies. His work exemplified that statement with the competencies framework proposed by the Columbus Vocational Instructional Materials Laboratory, Ohio State University (1995), which includes work ethic as one of the twelve core items. Similarly, Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) introduced ethics in a four-behaviour-based factor as a competency model to help organisations and employees maintain their competitiveness. Recently, Lou et al. (2019) adopted the Delphi approach and concluded that a strong work ethic was ranked as one of the most critical employee competency attributes. Besides, Saks et al. (1996) firmly believed that work ethic has a direct relationship with job satisfaction and commitment. This reinforced the early claim about the link between work ethic and work attitude. Despite such relationships, which have been significantly explored in the broader literature, it seems that IC literature has not developed far enough to cover the item “work ethic”.

To conclude this section, after analysing the data and looking at the literature again, I would suggest that IC literature does not fully reflect what people deem to be of value in a company, and does not fully capture what they mean when they mention specific IC terms. There are some items that have not been thoroughly discussed, and even one not mentioned at all in IC literature. These could be fruitful areas for IC scholars to delve into and shine more light on IC's hidden perspectives. However, the next concern emerges is whether or not it would be ever possible to fully capture IC with a single definition or framework? Or should researchers help to provide more insights about IC in different contexts so that the task of adopting and managing IC done by practitioners would be more feasible?

Sub-conclusion

Drawing on what was found out from the interview transcripts from some comparisons with IC literature, it can be said that the present case study has brought some new insights to the field of IC. Evidenced by the differences, it comes out clearly that IC literature has not fully covered how people understand IC, and not fully captured what people mean when they mention the IC items. Some pieces of the jigsaw still remain uncollected. Researchers may need to reach them, bring them into the field, and fit them into the IC picture which we all have been depicting.

So what does this signify? It is crucial to understand what people think about IC rather than adopting a single IC framework in an organization, assuming it will nicely fit under any circumstances. Sometimes people just follow it but do not understand what it means. Therefore, exploring their thoughts on IC would help develop the most effective strategy for managing IC. Some studies in the literature have focused on particular people in the company, such as managers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), or analysts (Abhayawansa et al., 2018) with the hope of providing more specific viewpoints on IC. However, from a social construction perspective, even when they perform at the same level, holding the same job titles and carrying very similar responsibilities, they may have different thoughts about the subject. Hence, it would be even more critical to understand why certain people possess certain understandings. Only with that information can scholars and practitioners better understand how to implement the term IC in particular contexts. The next part of this section provides answers to the question "How have people constructed their thoughts of what was of value?".

6.5.2. How have the conceptions been constructed?

As discussed in the previous chapters, it is critical to be able to detect the construction of people's understanding about IC. From a social construction perspective, different people would have different perceptions at different points of time, entailing that it is almost impossible to collect all their individual answers. Instead, analysing what can influence their understanding, and how these construction processes take place, would be more helpful in comprehending how IC has been understood. Therefore, in this section, a summary of the answers found to the second research question will be provided expressing how people have constructed their understanding of what was of value. Relying on the data obtained, the analysis will suggest some answers to the two sub-questions, which are: What can influence the way people deem things to be of value? and How do the social construction processes take place?

6.5.2.1. What can influence the constructions of their thoughts

Across the three cases, the data obtained indicates the influence of culture, education, the experience that the interviewees had in similar and other organisations, the roles that they adopted, the amount of time that they have worked in the organisations and the type of organisations they have worked for. According to Berger and Luckmann's arguments (1966), these factors exemplify influencing factors in the home world and the sub-worlds that individuals experience. As discussed in Chapter 3, according to the Social Construction viewpoint, home-world is where individuals are born and receive their very first impact from family members whom they cannot choose. The traditions and culture transmitted from generations and generations could thus be one of the factors that shape the way in which people perceive the world around them. With that said, culture can also have a remarkable influence on what people deem to be of value and how they think about those elements in a detailed way.

As Berger and Luckmann stated, secondary socialisation then takes place in sub-worlds where individuals start carrying their social roles. This phenomenon can easily be seen when it comes to the division of labour. Although working in the same organisations, if in different roles, different people can have different understandings. This issue appeared obvious across the three cases where directors' thoughts differed those of junior staffs, while the perception of consultants differed from those of the trustees, and Head waiter's differed from chefs in a similar respect.

However, in some cases, despite holding different positions, some of the interviewees did share the same ideas when asked about what was of value. This can be attributed to the similar experience they have had in other organisations and the similar education they have received. For example, those who were educated in Business and Management proved to be more knowledgeable about terms related to IC, whereas migrant workers who were ill-educated gave very brief answers and had little knowledge about the issue discussed. For that reason, from what was shared by the research participants and Berger and Luckmann's ideas, it may be highlighted that experience can have some impact on the way the participants understood what was of value. As discussed earlier, experience can be accumulated over time; in other words, the amount of time spent in the role can help to construct such an understanding. To illustrate this, in the cases of the restaurant and the law firm the newly joined staff admitted their limited understandings about their workplace while on the other hand, the Directors in the law firm and the Trustees in the charity believed their understandings came from their life-long experience with the society.

And finally, to repeat what was indicated above, the type of organisations involved might have a certain impact on the way their people apprehended what was of value. The interviewees from the restaurant highly appreciated the location, while the participants from the other two cases did not take this into account when asked what was of value. Likewise, organisational structure and policies were deemed to be crucial in the charity since volunteers needed to be guided towards what to do rather than letting them follow their ideas freely and potentially create a mess.

To sum up, this study has argued that the factors influential to the construction of people's understandings about what is of value touch upon culture, education, experience in similar and other organisations, the roles, the length of service in the organisations and the type of organisations themselves. However, the question remains of how do these constructions take place? And would they only happen in official meetings as the extant IC literature suggested? The next sections will shed more light on this matter.

6.5.2.2. *Internal interactions*

The preceding sections have provided examples and explanations of how different participants have different understandings about IC at different times. This is attributed to their primary socialisations in their homeworlds, and secondary socialisation and maintenance in their sub-worlds. But how have these steps happened? According to Berger and Luckmann, social construction always occurs via interactions among individuals. Without exchanges, there would be no social construction at all. Therefore, this part will share some ideas obtained from the participants regarding how they have interacted to construct their understandings about IC – both internally within the company, and externally with other people.

Across the three cases, the participants shared the view that they did interact with each other within the organisations to build up a shared understanding of specific company issues. These interactions mostly happen via daily communications and informal talks, and are primarily solidified by everyday actions.

For example, in the law firm, as mentioned above, “team spirit” was considered to be of value in the company. The participants all believed that the directors were aware of the need for harmony and they had been doing their best to communicate this with their staff. However, the directors did not come directly to them and say, “Look, this is the core value, and we need to practice it”. Instead, they performed; they showed it via actual daily actions. That was an effective way to communicate the idea.

> *“We said that the firm’s core value is sharing and caring, the teamwork spirit, we have to implement it at a practical level. For instance, if, when I was about to leave the office, I saw one of my colleagues working exhaustedly to meet an urgent deadline, I would stay and offer some help. That reflects the culture of sharing. Since I joined the company, I have organized weekly meetings. The company did not have such meetings before; people just cared for their own business, saying unpleasant things behind others’ backs. I told them not to do it. If there are any troubles or conflicts, they have to sit down and talk openly to understand each other better. Then, the board of directors will address those issues and offer the fairest judgments so that everybody will feel respected. ” (Vietnamese Director)*

The Vietnamese Director also talked about the communications among the directors via Whatsapp, discussing certain issues regarding the company's people. They also spoke during lunchtime if they happened to be at the office on the same day.

The Head Waiter from the restaurant also stated that all communications were conducted very informally, mainly during daily conversations and during the trainings.

With the charity, since they did not have a lot of daily interactions, they shared their thoughts in quarterly meetings; however, they also had some exchanges when attending the lectures or personal meetings to discuss other issues. These were the times they together build up the draft strategies and visions before bringing them to the Board officially. In other words, they also used non-official communications to construct the shared understandings about what was of value.

“We just discussed a bit when providing the initial trainings to the staff. We can also talk about these daily when any issue emerge.” (Head Waiter)

Meanwhile, looking at the extant IC literature, it can be seen that there have been analyses of who to involve, what to be discussed and what to be produced; however, most of these discussions took place in formal meetings and among different departments (Veltri and Bronzetti, 2015). For example, in Giuliani and Marasca’s study (2011), which examined the construction and valuation of intellectual capital in a case study of Ankon, the CEOs, the CFO, the area managers, the purchase manager, the R&D manager and the production manager were all included in a focus group which mainly contributed to the development and implementation of IC indicators via meetings and discussions. Similarly, Corbella et al. (2019) conducted in-depth interviews with different actors to study the preparation process of a European oil and gas company’s integrated reporting. They mainly engaged in the process via meetings and round-table discussions. Additionally, Chiucchi (2013) sought to uncover how measuring IC could favour IC mobilization, and he found out that actors involved in the design and implementation of the IC system took part and communicated with each other in formal one-to-one meetings, focus groups meetings, Board of Directors meetings and budgeting meetings. Likewise, when exploring the techniques of benchmarking the operational management of IC in an R&D organization, Marr (2004) concluded that team members mainly interacted via regular meetings and shared databases. Shih et al. (2010) suggested that the exchange and sharing of information were fulfilled in workshops in the banking industry. To sum up, it has been shown in the literature that formal meetings were considered the main platforms to spread the idea of IC within the organisations.

Another issue concerning the company's interaction lies with the way the participants captured what is deemed to be of value. They showed that they had constructed their understandings mainly via daily observations. For example, when talking about customers’ satisfaction, the IT & Accounting Director believed that he could see the satisfaction from the large number of flowers, chocolates and thank you cards sent by their customers. This was even strengthened by an example given by the Junior Paralegal in another interview. In her opinion, customers' satisfaction could be evidenced by their returning for further services.

> *"Yesterday, one client was coming back to us to continue with their application after two years' suspension. This is very interesting, because they obviously trust us, and they thought of us when they needed the service. Our process is transparent, and everything was recorded. When they came back, they did not have to waste time and effort preparing and submitting anything else, and they just needed to talk and carry on with the current application." (Junior Paralegal 1)*

It can be concluded that, in the law firm, there were no figures or specific index to indicate what was deemed to be of value, or the value itself. Instead, they captured the elements through informal communications and daily observations.

Looking at the extant literature, it seems to be quite the opposite. Scholars have made huge attempts to capture and measure IC by means of various models and frameworks (Osinski et al., 2017; Ferenhof et al., 2015). Different classifications have also been created, which helped define and group different IC evaluation methods (Guthrie et al., 2006; Boedker et al., 2008; Ricceri, 2008). And as Catasus and Grojer (2006) claimed, "although there are different outlines for the production of indicators, there seems to be general agreement that indicators are numerical information that has been selected for their perceived ability to give information beyond the number *per se*" (p.188). Empirically, some fieldwork-based research has also been done to examine how the procedures are implemented in practice. However, they all shared the same idea that the indicators had been developed by drawing on some kind of preset models. For example, to reach a definition of IC as the first step in achieving a consensus on the meaning of IC, Giuliani and Marasca (2011) provided some support to the focus group, and the definition reached seemed to be exactly aligned with what was discussed in the Meritum project (2002). To understand the perception of IC in hospitals, Habersam and Piber (2003) conducted some semi-structured interviews but "all questions refer directly or indirectly to the Meritum taxonomy distinguishing between human, structural and relational capital" (Habersam and Piber, 2003, p.758).

Comparing what was revealed in this study with what has been discussed in the literature, it can be seen that IC literature seems not to cover all IC issues fully. What was obtained from the interviewees hints that more construction of IC can lie in daily, informal activities, which the extant IC literature seems to have forgotten!

6.5.2.3. External interactions

In addition to internal interactions within the company, which can help construct their understandings about IC, the participants also revealed that what they knew also came from their interactions with other people outside the organisation.

For example, in the law firm, the Vietnamese Director talked a lot about the brand name, and he confirmed that brand name is one of the company's core values. However, what is even more important is how he investigated or learned about the law firm’s brand name. He did not have any particular index or figures for the brand name’s value. Instead, he tried to work it out by informal talks with his acquaintances.

> *“Two years ago, I started cooperating with Ian; then I realised that if I could move to the UK for work, that would be very beneficial because I already had a law firm in Vietnam. I have run it for ten years. So I wanted to invest in a law firm, using my brand name and my current resources. Consequently, I decided to buy a portion of the shares and became one of the owners/directors of the firm. I spent a very long time learning about the company, before buying its shares to become one member of the directors’ board. I asked my friends who used to use the legal services about their top brand, and whether they have heard about the company and know the company. I believe that the value the intangible assets bring to a service company is extremely great. That was why I had to spend a huge amount of money to buy a proportion of the firm’s shares. That is because they already have a brand name, and goodwill. It means when people hear the name of the firm, they can know that is a company based in Birmingham, UK, and they also know its service.” (Vietnamese Director)*

In addition, the participants also talked about their interactions with customers, which could help to form their understandings. For example, when talking about customer feedback, the Junior Paralegal claimed that only by working with them, was she able to learn more, and then she could adjust herself to be more effective in her work.

> *“When we work with customers, we can educate them on how to live and work legally in the UK. Besides, when working with them, we can be educated a great deal. For example, once a customer saw my documents, she said, “Oh dear, I don’t think you can work with me like this” or “I hope you can do something like this.” So I think those feedbacks can help to shape my working style. In other words, those will help me to know how best to work with customers, and given that, I can gain more access to customers, and that can result in a win-win outcome when cooperating.” (Junior Paralegal 1)*

In the charity case, it is obvious that they had a lot of external communications to construct their understandings of what was of value. They hired different consultants to advise them what to improve to grow up. The Board had numerous meetings with these consultants to construct the strategy and visions. In the meeting, Trustees shared their thoughts, then the consultants summarized and wrote reports which later were received and digested by the Board again.

Obviously, via what was shared by the participants in the cases studied, it can be seen that the interactions between them and others outside the company remarkably help to construct their knowledge of IC issues. In the IC literature, only one-way communications between the company and other stakeholders have been examined. Those are the disclosure and reporting practices, one-way communications from the company to the stakeholders. For example, Castilla-Polo and Gallardo-Vázquez (2016) analysed the channels used to communicate information on intangibles, including annual reports, annual reviews, interim reports, and corporate social responsibility information brochures, company websites, specialized publications, and IC reports. Among all the channels explored and discussed in the literature, daily interactions have never been taken into account. Primarily, there has been no study working on communications among external stakeholders.

Consequently, this can be a hint for further research. All these potential research strands could further contribute to constructing our understanding of IC. The table below summarises the comparisons between what was found in the case study and what has been revealed in the IC literature regarding the social construction of knowledge within the company sub-world.

Main findings from the case study	**Similar findings in IC literature**
Internal communication channels	
Mainly via daily interactions: communications, actions, observations.	<u>Similar findings in literature</u>: Construction of IC disclosure • Formal one-to-one meetings, focus groups meetings, Board of Directors meetings and budgeting meetings (Chiucchi, 2013) • Regular meetings and shared databases (Marr, 2004) • Workshops (Shih et al., 2010)
External communication channels	
Brochures, leaflets, events, websites, direct interactions with customers.	<u>Similar findings in literature</u>: IC reporting, IC disclosure (one-way communication): annual reports, annual reviews, interim reports, corporate social responsibility reports, information brochures, company websites, specialized publications (Castilla-Polo and Gallardo-Vázquez, 2016)

Table 3: Comparisons between what has been found in the case study and what has been revealed in IC literature in terms of interactions in company sub-world

6.6. Conclusions

After the data from these cases had been obtained, I analysed it to seek the answers to the two research questions in this project: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings – What they deemed to be of value; and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed. On that basis, the findings have been presented case by case and the main contents were divided into two main parts to present separate answers.

Regarding the participants' understanding of what was of value, the case study revealed some new elements and layers of meaning that the extant IC literature has not covered yet. "Management style", "Team spirit/ Harmony", "Work Ethics", "Customer feedback", "Location" and "Political independence"- are some newly uncovered items in this case study. The detailed comparison with the literature also indicates that IC literature has not fully covered how people understand IC and what people really mean when mentioning some IC elements.

In terms of the social construction of such understandings, the study indicated the idea of what was of value can be constructed both through the socialisation stages in the home world and also the temporal movements within a sub-world. Using Berger and Luckmann's framework, it was argued that the cultures, education, the experiences, the role in the organisation, the length of service and the type of organisations they were working for could lead to different understandings. Some extracts from the data have been presented to clarify these issues. These findings are supported by the social science literature and IC literature as well. However, it would be more insightful if further research can be conducted to dig deep into these issues, so that the social construction of IC can be fully uncovered. Besides that, the chapter also provides the answers to the question how these social construction processes take place. Relying on Berger and Luckmann's framework and the data obtained, the study presents some striking findings about the way people interact to socially construct their knowledge which have not been covered in the IC literature. According to the information gained from the interviewees, the interactions mainly took place via daily communications, observations and daily actions. This seems to be the opposite of what has been revealed in the literature, as scholars have discussed only formal meetings and workshops as the main internal communication channels. In terms of external communications, the participants also claimed that they had direct interactions with customers and other people in order to understand some issues related to IC. Meanwhile, only one-way communications, such as reporting or disclosing practices, have been taken into account in the literature.

Given the analysis of the participants' responses, the chapter has provided some findings which can help to resolve the untouched issues in IC literature. These also raise some calls for more research into the influences on IC construction and how that really happens in practice. The next chapter will further discuss how these findings can be important to both the IC literature and the practical contexts.

CHAPTER 7 - EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC MATERIALS

7.1. Introduction

As repeatedly stated throughout the thesis, this study aims at seeking answers to two research questions: 1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings? What do they deem to be of value; (2) How have these conceptions been constructed? As argued in the previous chapters, we have drawn on Berger and Luckmann's work (1966) to assert that people's understandings can be reflected via communications. In chapter 6, I have largely drawn on the transcripts from the interviews to conduct my analysis and pinpoint some of the elements discussed extensively by the interviewees which can be deemed to concern IC. However, what remains questionable to me after such an analysis is the issue of other channels of communication. The interviewees also mentioned some conversations they had had with their consultant or a journalist alongside some other means used by the organisations to communicate with outsiders, such as the website, brochures and leaflets, and other advertisements. Hence, there was some concern as to how the idea of IC could be conceptualised from those communications, and whether the organisations' message was consistent in all its public contacts, or whether differences arose. Then the question arose of how the communication of such ideas was constructed. Consequently, a further analysis of those materials was conducted to gain more insight into the construction of the idea of IC via these other communications.

The additional materials chosen to be used in this analysis were primarily pointed out by the interviewees. However, looking at the literature, similar sources have been used widely to facilitate triangulations, which is a good way to assess the validity of each piece of evidence (Scapens, 1990) and help increase the robustness of the findings (Verleye, 2019). In fact, the use of multiple sources of evidence has been strikingly emphasised in the literature, especially in case study research (Verleye, 2019; Baxter and Jack, 2008). Hence, I decided to make use of them to learn more about how IC is understood, how the idea of IC was communicated and how such communication was constructed. This has been discussed in more depth in Chapter 5 – Methodology.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, some descriptive results are provided, then the similarities and differences will be highlighted first between the materials themselves, and second in comparison to the interview responses with a general aim of answering the question "How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings". Meanwhile, in terms of the issue raised by the question "How can the idea of what is of value be constructed?", conclusions are drawn to posit that: (i) Different people may be involved in the construction of the idea; (ii) The target audience might influence a decision on what is communicated; and (iii) Technical and technological boundaries may also determine what is communicated.

7.2. How can the idea of IC be conceptualised from the communications with others?

7.2.1. The law firm case

When talking to The Vietnamese Director, I raised a question "How are those things which are deemed to be of value communicated within the company and with outsiders?" What he shared about the communication within the company has been discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter. He also mentioned the brochure as the main means of sharing the information with outsiders, especially the customers. Being curious, I wondered what could be included there in the brochure. Then, when I was told that another team was in charge of preparing the brochure, I really wanted to find out whether the preparers and the users could have any impact on what was shared in the brochure. A lot of questions came into my mind. Hence, I decided to ask him for a copy of the brochure to have a close look. For that reason, the brochure became the first material I decided to use for this further analysis.

A week later, during an interview with the Vietnamese junior staffer, and also a member of the team responsible for preparing the brochure, I was told that the team was also in charge of the website. More importantly, she revealed that not only the internal team but another external designer was also involved in the production of such information sources. This triggered even more interest in me with regard to the engagement of an outsourcing person. Would there be any differences? If any, how could that happen? Those were all roots I really wanted to dig up. Therefore, I decided to include the company's website in this analysis. And indeed, websites have been deemed to be a rich platform for researchers to gain more insights about the studied issues (Gerpott et al., 2008). When studying the firm's website, under the "Careers" section, I saw nothing except one recruitment advertisement. In this way the recruitment advertisements formed the last set of materials for this analysis.

7.2.1.1. The brochure

The brochure is all in Vietnamese, as this was aimed to be delivered to Vietnamese customers exclusively. On the front cover is a picture of Big Ben, the UK's flag and the company's logo (the English version). However, it is worth to note that the logo on the brochure is a bit different from the current logo on the website. Although this difference does not indicate any remarkable issue related to IC, this shows that the perception, the understanding and the decision of the company to communicate with others could change over time.

Figure 5: Logo on website

Figure 6: Logo on the brochure

The main content in the brochure is the description of different services which can be provided to Vietnamese customers. In addition to the advertisement of a wide range of services available, the brochure also highlights the competency of the company's staff. However, differing from the details given on the website, the information about the staff mainly focuses on their ability to speak, consult and work with the customers in Vietnamese. The company, again, stresses the value of their people, but in this case, those are particularly the Vietnamese people who can speak the same language with the potential customers. This is exactly what the British director told me in the interview.

> *"We have a very experienced Vietnamese team who are always available to support you. No matter who you are, how good your English is, we are here to help." (Law firm, Brochure – Why choose us?)*

> *"With an experienced and responsible Vietnamese team, you will be consulted in your mother tongue when coming to us." (Law firm, Brochure – Why choose us?)*

Additionally, the brochure also mentions the company's "brand name". Although the expression "brand name" is not used, the content clearly indicates that the company is aware of, and values, their position in the market as being the leading and most well-known law firm in the UK which is especially for Vietnamese people. This is exemplified by the terms used in the brochure – "famous, leading legal firm", "the first choice as a prestigious and responsible legal firm" for Vietnamese people in the UK. Indeed, the Vietnamese Director and the junior staff also talked about this, and they both believed that the company had its own brand name.

7.2.1.2. Website

The website has five main sections which are: "About us", "People", "Legal Services", "News & Events" and "Contact Us". The moving slides which take up a significant space on the homepage contain both Vietnamese and English. I will talk about the Vietnamese version of the website later on. Under these slides are four different sections for the services provided: Commercial, Criminal, Dispute Management and Immigration. At the bottom of the homepage, there is a section entitled "Client Service". Within a short paragraph, not only the philosophy, but the quality (speed and an advantageous solution) and the cost of the service are also highlighted. The text is put into a box filled with darker colours compared to other contents on the page. Therefore, it does stand out. It is also worth noting that this kind of "message box" stays the same even when the audience moves to other pages of the website. It can indicate that this part is deemed to be the central message that the company would like to share with the audience, hence they would like to make it the most visible to the audience.

This philosophy is reiterated in the section "About us". In this section, they save a separate part to highlight "Why choose us?". Here, they claim:

> *"We distinguish ourselves with a philosophy grounded on personal service to our clients and a disciplined approach to advancing clients' interests in a balanced way, in order to produce the quickest and most advantageous commercial solutions. Based on this philosophy the firm is able to offer effective services while ensuring clients' control of their timing and legal expenses budget. We work on the basis that no case is too big or too small and we always treat our clients with the respect, discretion and commitment they deserve." (Law firm, Website – Why choose us?)*

However, it would be interesting to recall that no interviewees ever mentioned philosophy in their responses to the question "What is of value in the company?" Consequently, another concern may arise regarding this difference. Why was philosophy not discussed at all by both owners/managers and staff members? Is it because they did not consider philosophy as something of value? In that case, what led to the statement about philosophy on their website? The answer to this question would be worth being explored.

Another thing which is kept still on the website together with the “Client service” section is customer feedback. The feedbacks do not only indicate that the company are providing very good services to customers but more importantly, they prove the high customer satisfaction the company have earned; and by sharing these positive customer opinions, the firm shows that they do see customers’ feedback as something of great value, which is in line with what the interviewees shared. Also, different from other contents which are illustrated by some images, the “customer feedback” section (similar to “Client service”) is put into a colour-filled rectangle which makes the text stand out markedly.

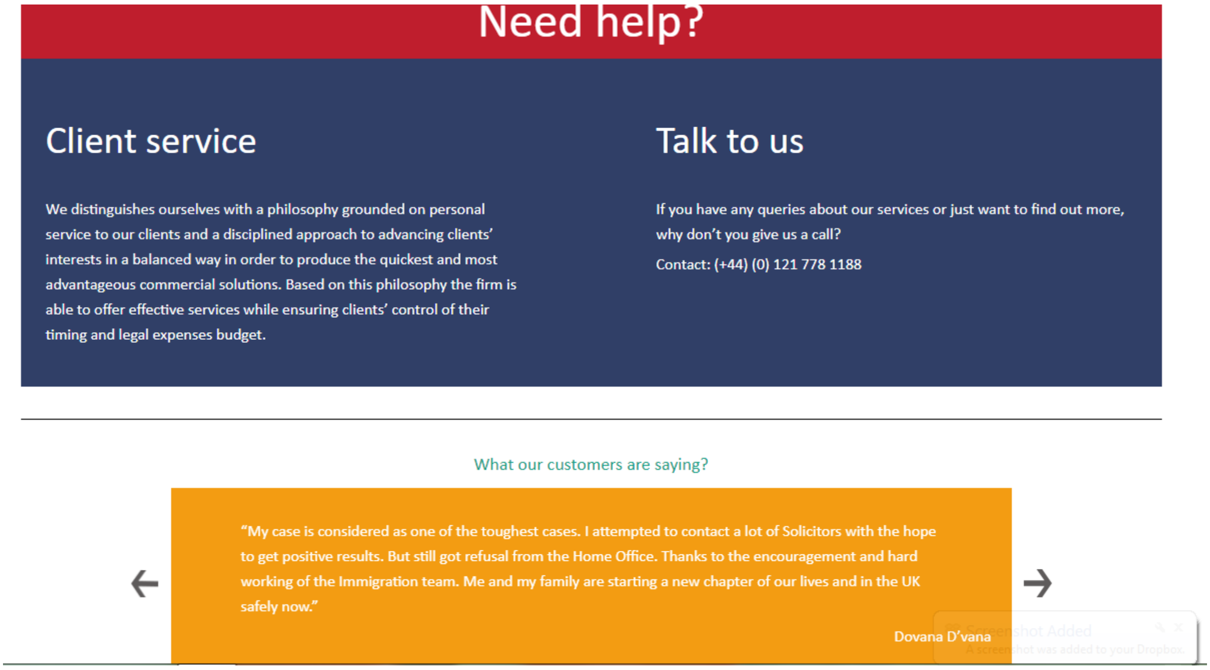

Figure 7: The Client Service and customer feedback sections on the website

At the very end of the home page lies a hyperlinked icon saying “Regulated by Solicitors Regulation Authority” and showing the current date. When I clicked on this, another window popped up as the result of the verification. It is obvious that this indicates the legal status and the authenticity of the website. It also helps to assure the audience about the reliability of all the information provided on the website at the current time.

Although given no space on the homepage, “people” is the most mentioned issue on the website. Information about “people” is shared in different sections and with a lot of details.

For example, in the “People” section, detailed information about their people is fully disclosed. There are twelve personnel listed, and for each person, there are details regarding practice, experience, education and admissions to university. In the same way, in the “About us” section, they advertise their knowledgeable and experienced staff:

> *“The firm’s attorneys and solicitors have profound knowledge in British law thanks to academic education and numerous years’ practising in international law firms and extensive ‘hands on’ practical experience dealing with commercial interests.” (Law firm, Website, Why choose us?)*

In addition, in each description of the services provided, the competency of the staff is also stressed. For instance, to deal with criminal issues, the company claims to “have extensive experience in these areas, and have staff members qualified to go to the Crown Court” on their customers’ behalf. They also have “five expert Solicitors dealing with motoring law”. In order to evidence their claims, they give more details regarding the practical experience, such as “Our criminal lawyers have over 80 years of combined experience and enjoy an excellent reputation in cases” and “We have attended many police stations where the Police have confiscated cash in the belief that it’s the proceeds of crime.” It is obvious that all the information provided can give the audience who are reading the website some kind of trust and assurance, as the company is “indeed” capable of dealing with different issues given their experienced and outstanding staff. This is perfectly in line with what the participants told me during the interview; all of them believe people are of great value in the company.

One of the elements which was also mentioned by the interviewees and discussed on the website is the position of the company in the market. The company claims itself as “a leading international law firm based in the UK” (About Us). This can correspond to the brand name issue shared by the participants during the interviews.

Another matter which is also frequently mentioned in different sections is budget. For example, within the area of criminal law, they claim to “provide you with a reasonable fixed price to deal with the matter”. It seems to be clear that the price strategy is one of the core values that the company wants to show off to appeal more customers. Why did no research participants mention this in the interviews? What drove them to the decision to advertise this on the website? Was it because in the interview, the audience was a researcher, and it would not be beneficial to talk deeply about price? This could be a very interesting point to explore.

Also in terms of the product- and service-related issues, the website emphasizes the speed of the staff presence at the scene – “we will be there within 45 minutes to help you in an interview”. To customers, this would be a crucial criterion in determining the quality of the service. That is why it was highlighted on the website. But in the same way as the price, this was not mentioned by any of the interviewees.

And last but not least, looking at the website, it is inevitable to see the logo, as it appears on every page of the web. In fact, the logo can say a lot about the organization. It contains an icon of shaking hands, the name of the firm and the slogan “Defining the legal edge”. The Vietnamese Director talked about the meaning of the slogan:

> *“We have the main slogan in the UK which is “We define the legal edge”. This slogan is quite abstract but it has many layers of meaning. We would like to use it to remind our customers that there are some boundaries in law and we could find them and will help to prevent the customers from crossing the boundaries. It also means we can only do this, you must not do that.”* (The Vietnamese Director)

However, the English version and the Vietnamese version of the logo do have some differences. In the Vietnamese logo, the slogan is not “translated”, instead it is re-written with a totally different meaning. While in English, the slogan says “Defining the legal edge”, in Vietnamese, what is included in the logo means “Vietnamese lawyers provide services to Vietnamese”. Why is there such a big difference in the slogan? There must be some reasoning behind their decision to make such a big change. This can trigger further interesting discussion.

Not only different in its logo, the Vietnamese version of the website also bears several differences compared to the English version. There is no information labelled “People”, or “About us”. Does this mean the company thinks that the Vietnamese audience would not care about those things? What dominates the Vietnamese version of the website are the news and events. Especially, there is a lot of news which is not posted in English. Why so? What caused the differences? Digging into these issues would bring us a lot of valuable insights about the construction of IC.

7.2.1.3. Recruitment advertisements

If the Vietnamese brochure places a lot of emphasis on the availability of the Vietnamese team in the company, the company has used English in the recruitment advertisements, (although they were posted in Vietnamese Facebook groups) and does not mention anything at all about the staff's language competence or the benefit of having Vietnamese staff. Why there is such a difference, when the company in both cases is talking about people issues?

Furthermore, the two recruitment advertisements I obtained were issued at two different times, and show differences in their perceptions. The one posted in December 2020 included the following statements which were not shown in the recruitment advertisement in April 2020.

> *"[] is an international law firm based in Birmingham. We specialise in Criminal, Immigration and Commercial law. Drawing on over 9 years of combined experience, we aim to provide a personal, completely independent and confidential service. We work on the basis that no case is too big or too small, and we always treat our clients with the respect, discretion and commitment they deserve. We are an equal opportunities employer and the position will be offered on merit, regardless of race, sex or any disabilities." (Law firm, Recruitment advertisement, December 2020)*

In this advert, the philosophy is mentioned again. But why only in December 2020 was this included in the advert? Why is there no such information in the one issued earlier, in April 2020? More fruitful insights could be obtained if such a construction can be further investigated.

To sum up, when studying the three types of material, it was noticed that they do share similar ideas regarding IC. For example, "people" is the popular issue which is mentioned in these channels. This also aligns with what was shared by the interviewees when all of them brought up the "people" matter very extensively. The result has helped to reinforce the conclusion made by various scholars, that human capital is the main source of IC in SMEs (Cohen and Kaimenakis, 2007; Durst, 2008). Very similar to what was shared by the interviewees, brand name, harmony, motivation policy, and customer feedback were all mentioned on these communication channels. Only one exemption is the philosophy – it was newly added to the list of elements which could be deemed as IC since no participants talked about this in the interviews.

7.2.2. The restaurant

As stated earlier, the choice of additional materials for this research can mainly be attributed to directions given by the interviewees. In the case of the restaurant, before I started the conversation with the Head Waiter, he mentioned that the staff had already been interviewed by a professional journalist and the restaurant appeared in a magazine issue. He promised to show me the magazine later. Wondering if what was shared with the journalist had anything to indicate the idea of IC and anything in common with what he shared with me, I then decided to use the magazine article as one of the addition data sources. Besides, during the interview, the Head Waiter also mentioned the website and the Facebook page as other communication channels where they advertise their cooking to customers and receive bookings or orders in return. Consequently, both the website and Facebook page were also analysed.

7.2.2.1. Magazine Article

Interestingly, when I finally read the article, I realised that the main idea the interviewees shared with the journalist was quite the same as what they had told me. In the interviews, they all emphasised the value of serving Vietnamese vegan food, which could be considered "unique" in London. They also highlighted their opportunity to spread Vietnamese culture to the world via the food served in their restaurant. And here, the article affirmed very much similar views regarding the value of their products – Vietnamese vegan food.

> *"Speaking to the Head Waiter, this place is also unique in combining Vietnamese food with the beliefs of kindness and health that guide so many of their dishes". (Restaurant, Magazine article)*

> *"Talking to chefs, they set out to share their contemporary Vietnamese food with the world but to disperse some of the myths about their national food. They sought to focus on regional cuisine and the multiplicity in their country, reflect on the diversity that they've experienced, and stand shoulder to shoulder with the other delicacies of the world. For them, it is incredibly important to dispel the idea that Vietnamese cuisine is "other" and lacking in refinement." (Restaurant, Magazine article)*

7.2.2.2. Website

The very first thing that stood out in their website was its name 'Vegan Restaurant'. This special characteristic is indicated clearly almost everywhere on the website. For example, the welcoming message says, "Welcome to SV vegan restaurant". They seemed clear in showing their pride in being the only vegan restaurant.

"Proudly No.1 Vietnamese Vegan Only Restaurant!" (Restaurant, Website)

In other words, the restaurant had deliberately attempted to make it extremely obvious to all the audience. Such a communication aligns with what was shared by all the interviewees when they emphasised the value of being the only restaurant serving 100% vegan food in London.

Moreover, there is a separate section on the website telling the story "Where our vegan journey begins" to share more about this specialness.

"The pure purpose of opening this veggie place is to provide healthy and delicious cuisines that have been carefully selected to bring out the tastes from our origins of Vietnam. We would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to bring our healthy and tasty cuisine from Vietnam to your table." (Restaurant, Website)

Again, such assertions match all the interview responses. They praised the values that vegan dishes can bring to the eaters, which are not only the health benefits but the food's spirit, or the spiritual values brought by vegan food. More importantly again is the communication of the value of food carrying Vietnamese culture because not only is the restaurant vegan, but it is Vietnamese vegan. As one of the interviewees explained, this communication is crucial because they are based in London where people come to explore and so introducing a new culture to non-Vietnamese would be something of great value. This ambition was also revealed in their choice of logo. The lotus was chosen as the base for the logo because in Vietnam the lotus is deemed as the national flower, while it is also the most iconic flower in Buddhism where vegan food is a must.

Figure 8: Restaurant's logo

The website also continues with different pictures of dishes served at the restaurant. Unlike the law firm, more visuals were found in the case of this restaurant because they offer 'tangible' products. They have hence used the pictures to 'show off' what the restaurant offered in a clear and attractive way, indicating that different types of companies might need to utilise different means of communication.

At the end of the website various five-star reviews from customers can be found, entitled "Google review of SV Vegan Restaurant by …" which all are linked to actual reviews on Google. Quoting different reviews and providing links to their origins suggests that the restaurant understood how crucial the customers' opinions are. And indeed, this point was also shared by the Head Waiter when he mentioned the importance of having special customers coming to support the business.

7.2.2.3. Facebook

Right at the beginning of their Facebook page is the number of five-star reviews, which again highlights how important the customers' opinions were deemed to be in this case as customers' reviews are frequently shared or posted with pictures attached. It should be noted that these photos were not pictures of the food but of customers smiling or with thumps up which might better signify how satisfied the customers really were. Indeed, as Jeacle and Carter claimed (2011), "Internet evaluations of goods and services are now commonplace" (p. 306), and reviews on online platforms could elicit trust. In this regard, the restaurant recognised the importance of receiving great reviews and the importance of showing them clearly on public channels.

Moreover, most of the Facebook posts introduced the restaurant's products on their page, such as what new dishes were being served on particular days, what was special about particular dishes and what were their ingredients. To put it bluntly, the Facebook page looked like the main communication channel to advertise and introduce their products in a detailed way. With this in mind, together with what has been observed on the website and what had been shared by the interviewees, we might understand product-related elements to be vital aspects in this case.

Moreover, similar to the website and interview responses, a Facebook page also draws audience's attention to the Vietnamese culture which was thought to be of great value. Some posts introduced the culture in different ways, such as the staff in traditional costumes (Ao dai), and decorations for the biggest traditional holiday (Tet). All these posts with photographs attached might make readers feel the Vietnamese cultural spirit, not only from the food themselves but from the Vietnamese people running the business as well:

> *“Our angels - Dear friends, we are from today presenting you another specialty of the Vietnamese origin: 'Ao Dai' or long dress. Don't be surprised as if you were in a wedding or fashion show when being with us.” (Restaurant, Facebook)*

Furthermore, in one post, they “proudly” announced their ranking as the best Vietnamese vegan restaurant in London. They emphasised their business as a vegan restaurant and highlighted their position in the market at the current time. Similar to the law firm, although the term “brand name” was not used, the content might still reveal their perception of the value of the “brand name”.

> *“We are proudly the one among the best veggie restaurants of London, Not only the best Vietnamese veggie, buddy, we are now entering the top 5% of all London veggie restaurants. Thanks for your support.” (Restaurant, Facebook)*

To sum up, all the restaurant’s communications with other people shared similar ideas about what was deemed to be of value. The fact of being a Vietnamese vegan restaurant in London was stressed clearly on the website, the Facebook page and the magazine article. Additionally, the customer reviews also gained a great deal of space for display on these channels. In line with what the respondents discussed with me in the interviewees, this communication strategy has been chosen because customers and customers’ reviews were considered to be of great importance in this business.

7.2.3. The charity

In the case of the charity, the first additional material I decided to use for the analysis was the report from the external consultant on planning strategies. The board had a virtual planning session with the consultant where all the members shared their thoughts about what was important to the charity and how to grow the organisation strategically. As one of the members of the charity at that time, I knew that a lot of exchanges were being made and hence believed that the report recording all those ideas would be a vital material reflecting the communications with others apart from me. In addition, in order to recruit more members and volunteers, the charity issued leaflets at an exhibition while their recruitment adverts were posted on various online platforms. Anticipating the different purposes of communicating with different target audiences, I then analysed these two materials to gain further insights about the charity. Finally, I explored the organisation’s website because of its principal role of presenting all the necessary information about the charity.

7.2.3.1. Consultant's Report

In the report, two main themes emerging obviously are the activities and the partnerships. These two aspects were all agreed to be extremely crucial to the organisation and the charity needed to plan strategically to expand correctly. All the members were in agreement in searching for ways to ensure the charity had more connections with other organisations. In this sense, they proposed a wide range of solutions, some of which are given below:

> *"Collaborating with those with similar views, e.g. Black Country Society, B'ham University (undergraduates and extra-mural), 'A' level courses, e.g. Sutton College; Partner with other organisations to attract key speakers to draw larger audiences (example of Solihull Archaeology Society given); Raise research credentials through more involvement with academic institutions." (Charity, Consultant's Report).*

They also suggested some new activities which had not currently been trialled. The hope was that new initiatives could help gain more interest from the public and bring the charity closer to the community.

> *"Vary programme to offer on-line talks/lectures as well as social meetings and hands-on archaeology; Include landscape archaeology and wider heritage topics within programme; Look at world archaeology for inspiration/lectures; Running a Field Group (not current activity)" (Charity, Consultant's Report).*

It can be said that these two themes were the main issues discussed during the planning session and recorded in the report. In fact, they were also the most commonly mentioned elements during the interviews with me. This match indicates that despite there being different communications with different people at different times, the participants from the charity remained consistent with their thoughts about the activities and partnerships pursued when they were asked about what was of value in their organisation.

7.2.3.2. Leaflet and recruitment advertisement

As stated earlier, the leaflet and recruitment adverts aimed at different audiences. These leaflets were given to potential members, while recruitment advertisement was published on online platforms to seek volunteers to join the Board.

> *"At this time we a looking to increase the number and type of activities we have on offer to members, including more family friendly events." (Charity, Recruitment advertisement*)

Such activities are also seen highlighted in the leaflet. These are not only displayed on part of the first page but also cover the entire second page with very detailed descriptions. This content signifies that the charity understood how important these benefits were, hence placing a lot of emphasis on them and provided as many details as possible to persuade potential members to join the charity.

> *"Membership is open to anyone with an interest in history, heritage and archaeology in particular. As a member you will be able to attend our lectures and take part in our excursions for free or at a reduced rate. You will also receive a regular newsletter and a copy of our annual transactions. In addition you will have the opportunity to meet other people with an interest in the archaeology and heritage." (Charity, Leaflet)*

It is notable here that each of the activities – lectures, excursions or transactions - are illustrated with the pictures of the past events, which will hopefully raise interest and generate trust from the readers by providing "real" evidence.

Also, another noticeable element is the expertise demonstrated by the communication materials. For instance, the leaflet also stressed the expertise that the charity had and could provide, which fully aligned with the ideas shared by the interviewees.

> *"We organise excursions and visits to archaeological sites, museums and places of historic interest, hosted by expert guides between May and September including guided walks to local places of interest." (Charity, Leaflet)*

> *"The Society has a lecture programme given by leading archaeologists, authors and academics" (Charity, Leaflet)*

7.2.3.3. Website

There are several sections on the website, but all of them share the main theme: What the charity could offer to its members. What is on offer are transactions, excursions, lectures and other activities. These benefits of membership displayed online were also mentioned and repeated by the interviewees from the charity, especially those who had their qualifications and experience in the field of archaeology.

> *"The Society aims to support and raise the profile of the region's archaeological heritage, providing a monthly lecture series, annual transactions and many other benefits to members." (Charity, Website – Home)*

> *"Membership Benefits include: 1. Access to our popular lecture series free of charge (tickets are £5 for non-members); 2. A copy of the [] Transactions, our annual publication of reports and investigations into the region's archaeology; 3. A copy of the Society's newsletter; 4. Discounted rates on Society events and excursions" (Charity, Website – Become a member)*

Especially, to introduce the benefits to having membership to the charity, the organisation put some pictures on the website next to the texts. The particular focus was on photos of past events already taking place. Indeed, in this case, the pictures were able to speak more than words since they represented what the charity really offered as in evidence captured. This again suggests that these activities are really important in the charity because as stated by the participants, they would earn the attraction from the community, gain more members and enable the organisation to survive and grow up.

However, apart from the news about excursions, lectures and transactions, the website is otherwise not very rich in information. The key word "people" is only mentioned very briefly in the section entitled "Become a member", shown as follows:

> *"Join today, meet like-minded people and get access to some fantastic membership benefits." (Charity, Website – Become a member)*

Moreover, although details about the Board members could be found in the "Contact us" section, only the names and roles were given while no background information was provided. This is very different to the law firm's website where the profile of each staff was presented in a very detailed and attractive way. The difference here might be attributed to the type of the organisation. While the commercial organisations need to polish their image to be reliable to customers, the charity might feel less inclined to do so because volunteers might not need to seek a very professional charity to volunteer their help. In other words, they join voluntarily purely because they have a passion for the charity's scope of activity and they want to make some contributions to the community. This is understood clearly from the message given on the website when it makes reference to "like-minded people".

Another element which was both shared during the interview and found on the website is the business plan. As analysed in chapter 6, various interviewees mentioned the system, the policies and the structure of the organisation as something very important and crucial in the charity but it seemed to be missing. Therefore, on the website, only one brief sentence talks about this with the aim of calling for more volunteers to steer the society to fulfil this newly set up plan.

> *"The Society is relaunching itself with a new business plan focused on community engagement and we are looking for people to help us deliver it." (Charity, Website – Volunteer with us)*

To sum up, compared to what was shared with me during the interviews, what was shared in other communications was quite similar in terms of what was regarded as being of value. The charity's lectures, excursions and transactions were among the elements most repeated across the various channels. Likewise, partnerships are mentioned as a crucial aspect of a strongly developing charity. The communications also mentioned people, expertise and the charity's structure despite only touching on these elements briefly.

Sub-conclusion:

In the analysis of the interview transcripts, some IC elements have been isolated as manifestations of the perception of what is of value. In this analytic stage, what was revealed on different communication channels also further contributed to our understanding about how IC could be conceptualised. Although there are some slight variances among the ideas shared on these channels, they mostly bear a lot of resemblance to what was discussed in the interviews From these similarities, it can be interpreted that the company (that is, the people in the company) indeed perceived these elements as something of value to it. Despite creating the materials for different purposes, they made efforts to show these items in all of the sources. Only when they believed an issue to be of great value would they want to showcase it via all the available channels. Furthermore, the similarity of the answers in the interviews with the disclosures in the public materials also demonstrates that what they shared was actually what they thought about IC. It seems unlikely that they made up or exaggerated the answers to boast with me – an academic – because they said exactly the same when they were communicating with a lot of other people.

However, when dealing layer by layer with the disclosure's detailed contents, as earlier mentioned, there are differences among the materials themselves, and differences when compared with the interview transcripts. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily cause any conflict with what I have analysed above; instead, these variances serve as a very fruitful area to explore the construction of their perceptions and their subsequent communication. What needs to be answered is why there are such differences, and what made the company reveal different ideas regarding what was of value. The next section will elaborate on this.

7.3. How have the idea of what is of value communicated via the materials been constructed?

As it can be seen from the preceding section, there are some differences noticeable both when making internal comparisons among the materials, and when comparing the materials with the interviewees' responses. By drawing on both the materials and the interviewees' discussions, the following parts will provide suggestions regarding how the idea of what was of value was decided on and brought into life via the communications, and what could have caused such differences.

7.3.1. Different people could be involved in the construction of the idea

Actually, this is not a new idea regarding the construction of IC communication. There have been studies exploring how different departments in organisations have interacted to construct the communication about IC issues.

For example, Stacchezzini et al. (2019) used in-depth interviews with managers and employees to study who were involved in the integrated reporting (IR) preparation process, and how IR preparers came to share a collective view about the role of IC. The findings revealed that there were various departments taking part in this process. The accounting and finance department was the "owner" and "coordinator" of this process. They defined the IR's contents, collected non-financial information from other departments, interacted with the chief executive officer (CEO) to agree on the IR "philosophy", and then refined the final version before approval by the board of directors. While preparing the IR, the accounting and finance department were particularly supported by the sustainability department and the planning and control department, who provided the information on specific social and environmental initiatives, and the company's mission, strategy and business model. The study concluded that the company's departments engaged in several cooperative behaviours that led to a collective acceptance of the interpretation of IC. However, although it was indicated that the different departments expressed different opinions about how IC could create value, that study did not dig deep into the issues of how these differences are incorporated, or how much they have influence on each other and on the final version of IR products issued by the company. And especially, there are no detailed discussions regarding how and why they had such different opinions. This might be attributed to the fact that the study explored the issue using the concept "Departmental unit", which can be formed by a lot of different individuals. Meanwhile, in order to reach a conclusion within a department, there must have been different processes of construction there. Lacking this, it would be hard to really understand how the process of IR preparation went on, how IR statements came to life, and particularly how the idea of IC was finalized at the departmental, and then company, level.

Another example is a study by Corbella et al. (2019). The authors drew on in- depth interviews with the IR preparers of a European oil and gas company, to explore the role of organisational actors in defining, classifying and valuing IC within the process of preparing an integrated report (IR). The case study reveals that the definition, classification and valuation of IC stimulate ongoing interaction among various actors. For instance, the study asserted that an active role was played not only by the staff of the department responsible for the IR preparation process (i.e., the financial reporting department), but also by organisational actors who were not directly involved in this process (i.e., the sustainability department, the risk management department and the investor relations department), and also by external actors, such as the company's peers, IIRC representatives and the company's accounting advisors. It was also pinpointed that "the financial reporting department gathered contributions and mediated positions among the Company's various souls" (Corbella et al., 2019, p.468). However, the authors did not provide a detailed description about how in fact the mediating role was performed by the financial reporting department, or what drove them to the final decisions. Instead, they concluded that "Even though the preparers engaged in a difficult debate regarding the previous BM, they agreed to retain the IC element classification in terms of assets, drivers and strategic guidelines". In that case, how they were able to reach the agreement was still unanswered. Although it was clarified that "such diverse actors shaped the IC definition according to their competencies, skills and focus on value creation" (Corbella et al., 2019, p.468), it still seems to remain too general, and it is uncertain whether the "actors" mentioned referred to departments or individuals. Nevertheless, this does signal that any information revealed has undergone some social construction processes among different people.

In this research, relying on the responses from the interviewees, across the three cases, dit is clearly demonstrated that how the idea of what is of value is communicated has been influenced by the different people involved in the process of preparing, editing and approving the published information and material.

> *"Because this is a small-medium sized company, its resources are quite limited, hence I only assign a group called BD – business development – to be in charge of the website, Facebook page and marketing brochure. These people will do all the related tasks, part-time. We do not hire any specific external people. There are some things we need to outsource, for example printing, designing, but we create and take the responsibility for the contents. BD team will develop the contents as per the instructions from the board of*

directors. Then the board of directors will edit those drafts and approve them before having them published." (The Vietnamese Director)

(Regarding the brochure) "The designing company gives us four or five options, then we will decide what we like best, or what we prefer but need some edits. We will provide our comments, and after that, we will approve the final version. When we have finalized all the contents and the layouts, we send them to the printer." (The Vietnamese Director)

"Another staff member and I were in charge of it. This is because at that time, I had just joined the company, hence did not well understand about the company. The other staffer had worked in the company for a longer time than me, so she was more knowledgeable about the services provided. Therefore, she prepared all the contents, and I only helped to polish them, and edit the minor errors. And I worked with the designer to reach the final version. The contents were approved by Ms. P (her supervisor – the researcher). Because our BD team has only four people, we work closely with each other. Whenever I have finished something, I have to call or email her to inform her about the work." (Junior Paralegal 1)

"He [the Head Waiter – Researcher] is in charge of all the communications on our website and Facebook page. He will sketch the idea, draft the contents and share with me. I will then approve for them to be published." (Chef 3, Owner)

And as I have analysed in Chapter 6, each individual would have his own ways of perceiving what is of value; therefore, the idea which was officially published must be constructed by those different understandings. The previous studies did point out that various people and departments can engage in the process of communicating IC, however those studies did not mention the influences of their perception on how the idea of IC had been communicated. In this case study, drawing on the social construction perspective, it has been revealed that they are not only simply involved in the physical action of preparation. Their thoughts and their opinions also affect the IC-related communication and products. In particular, studying a SME where each member of staff fully takes the responsibility for each step in the procedure helps to clearly indicate that the construction takes place at an individual level in the first place, not the departmental or company level. However, the other important question that needs addressing is how these different people can "sit" together and reach the final decision when communicating about what can be deemed as IC as "the company"? Are there any other elements which can decide their choices of how to communicate the ideas via public channels? Relying on the data obtained, the next sections will discuss the two factors which can assert some impact on what can be considered to be of value and how it is communicated.

7.3.2. The target audience could decide what is communicated

Obviously, the responses from the interviewees and what is revealed on public channels have differences. This, of course can be attributed to the different factors which have been discussed in Chapter 6. However, another influence that would be worth being taken into account is the audience itself. According to Bakhtin (1986), what is communicated depends a great deal on who is listening.

> *"The role of the others for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great*. *Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees."* (Bakhtin, 1986, p.94)

Indeed, the role of the audience in accounting communications has been discussed in the literature. According to Craig (2006, p.38), "accounting communication is also a social practice" and "it constitutes the communication of information to external audiences either affected by [..] or interested in [..] the organisation, its activities, and performance.". Also, recently, Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2017) identified, organised, and synthesised research perspectives, traditions, and associated theories from the communication studies literature in the form of a typology. The focus is on accounting communication with external audiences via public written documents outside the audited financial statements, i.e., annual reports, press releases, CSR reports, websites, conference calls, etc. The authors encouraged research from alternative traditions which explores how organisations and their audiences engage in a dialogue and interactively create, sustain, and manage meaning concerning accounting and accountability issues. Besides, some empirical evidence has proved that their audience has a certain impact on the companies' communication. For example, Sotorrío and Sánchez (2010) examined 26 non-Spanish multinational corporations, and discovered significant differences in the degree of disclosure and the type of social information reported by MNCs for each audience - worldwide stakeholders and domestic ones.

In this study, the differences can be seen obviously among the materials which aimed at different target audience.

Take the restaurant case as an example, firstly, in the interviews, the only audience was me – an academic researcher. Possibly therefore, there was not much discussion regarding the quality of the services, such as their price, and the speed of their availability. In contrast, when communicating with potential customers, all these characteristics would become the company's core value in attracting more customers, and consequently, this must be discussed in detail.

Secondly, the most obvious difference can be seen between the English version and the Vietnamese version of the logo. When particularly aiming at Vietnamese customers, the key message has been modified accordingly. No longer advertising the philosophy generally ("Defining the legal edge"), the Vietnamese logo clearly indicates the availability of Vietnamese staff in the company who can support Vietnamese customers. Here, the perception of the core value can be seen to transit from the philosophy to the particular group of staff. And this is further reinforced by the brochure in Vietnamese. This brochure was intended to be delivered to Vietnamese customers.

> *"First, we can deliver to walk-in customers at the office. This is a way to show off to them that we are very professional, and to give them some basic information. For customers who contact via email, we can also send them the soft copy. We can read out the website address during the very first call they make to us. For example "if you want to know more about our company, please visit **.uk. We also add the brochure to the website, so they can click on that to find more information they need."* (The Vietnamese Director)

What can be noticed throughout the brochure is the emphasis placed on the Vietnamese staff the company has. The ability to speak the customers' mother tongue has become the core value which can help to bring a lot of customers, then increase the sale and create a lot of value to the company.

Another example which can illustrate the influence asserted by the audience is the information regarding the working environment. During the interviews, the friendly environment, the team spirit, and the harmony and the motivation policy were concluded to be of value in the company. However, there is no such information revealed on the website or in the brochure. With the brochure, the reason is straightforward, as this merely aims at customers (as discussed above), therefore, it would be understandable when nothing regarding the working environment can be seen. Without a doubt, this kind of information would not benefit the customers, or to put it simply, it would be irrelevant to be included in the brochure. On the website, only in the "Career" section, which mainly focuses on those who are looking for jobs at the company, these kinds of information were mentioned. More particularly, when coming to the communication directly with potential staff, the company clearly indicated there is "[a] friendly environment and plenty of scope for personal development”. These are stated in the recruitment advertisements. This evidently signifies the differences in the way they communicate IC issues when targeting different audiences.

Similar differences can also be spotted in the charity case. When talking to me (as a former member of the Board) and the consultant, the interviewees seemed to be more comfortable sharing their concern regarding the lack of system, policy, partnerships and skillful members who can do particular tasks. Because they believed these were very important and considered as pillars of growth, they were worried when seeing them being missing in the organization. Meanwhile, in the leaflet to the potential members and the recruitment advertisements to the potential volunteers, none of those things are included. This is totally understandable, as no-one would want to join when being told about the lack of those important elements in the charity. In fact, the ideas shared between these two materials are not alike either. For the leaflet, the expertise is obviously highlighted and the benefits are described much in depth, whereas, in the recruitment advertisement, these issues are not mentioned at all. And again, this is reasonable – communications with those who could pay to become members and with those who could volunteer to contribute freely would be and definitely need be different! Indeed, the contents of the materials very much depend on who they are aiming at.

7.3.3. Technical and technological boundaries could decide what is communicated

According to Bakhtin (1986), “*individual speakers do not have the kind of freedom parole assumes they have: (..) "utterance," (..) can in no way be regarded as a completely free combination of forms of language*” (p.xvi) and “*There is no pure spontaneity, for breaking frames depends on the existence of frames*” (p. xix). For example, it means that in daily life, the language used can be different from what is used in journalism. In other words, in some particular cases, the terms or even the ideas are communicated as per some “invisible” rules set by the field, or determined by the language in a particular context. In fact, some hints about this kind of influence were given by Bukh et al. in their work (2001). When studying the development of intellectual capital statements in Danish firms, the analysis of three cases showed that every firm in this project was interested in all areas of intellectual capital development, but their efforts were guided by different priorities that were tied to the local situation (Bukh et al., 2001). Therefore, in this case study, the decision to talk deeply about particular quality criteria and practical experience on the website can be further attributed to the need of any law firm to attract more customers.

In addition, as discussed earlier, although the philosophy is revealed on the website and in the recruitment advertisement in December 2020, no research interviewees mentioned this at all when talking to the researcher. This signals another issue that further explorations can focus on – why did the firm emphasize the philosophy on their website, but neither the two owners nor the employee expressed any thoughts about this? Was this because they really considered the philosophy as something of value, or were they were just following some kind of guidelines or template? In answer to the question of whether this section could have been set up according to some kind of website template, yes, it can be done in such a way, especially when the designing process has been assigned to an external person.

> *"I worked with the designer also in an informal way. We mainly worked via Skype. I said "Could you please help me with this?" or, "I would like it to be this, could you help me please?" What I can do myself, I will do it. This designer is in Vietnam."* (Junior Paralegal 1)

It could be the website designer who suggested mentioning the company's philosophy, and it could be him who proposed to put the "client service" and "customers' feedback" as the central messages on the website. Of course, the final version was chosen and approved by the company, however, we also need to take into account the influence of the designer, who inevitably played some role in proposing, by consulting over the different options. But there needs to be more research to deeply explore how much influence comes from his own ideas, and how much is decided by the "common" website template which might have been used, as it is by most companies nowadays. That would be a very interesting issue to delve into.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has mainly been devoted to presenting the analysis of additional materials obtained from the three cases, the law firm, the restaurant and the charity. All the materials chosen to be analysed were pointed by the interviewees and the choice of these sources (websites, Facebooks, brochure, leaflet, advertisement) was also enforced by a lot of supportive arguments by other scholars (Stake, 1995; Scapens, 1990). Pursuing the social construction viewpoint, the analysis of the texts and visuals in the materials has not only revealed how the idea of IC could be conceptualised from these communications via the public channels, but also how the idea disclosed was constructed and how the construction took place. In this study, relying on the interpretation of the materials and the interviewees' responses, it is argued that different people could have been involved in the construction of the idea, hence there can have been different construction processes behind what was mentioned in the materials – it can be individual construction (as analysed in Chapter 6), or collective construction when the production processes require various actors to engage in it. Besides, what is communicated can be decided by the target audience. And finally, the technical and technological boundaries could decide what is communicated. These all hint that in order to fully understand the construction of IC ideas, either in direct conversations or via public channels, it would be worth taking into account these influences to provide more profound insights about why those ideas were discussed and why those ways of communicating were chosen.

To sum up, these conclusions were not generated with the intention of finalizing the conversation about the construction of IC; instead, they open up more debates about the influence of those dimensions, and call for more research to testify their further contextual impact, for instance, can a similar influence exerted by these elements be observed in different contexts, in different companies, at different times, and by different researchers?

CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

The preceding chapters have presented thorough discussions on each aspect of this research – the context, the viewpoint, the topic, the methodology and the analysis. This chapter aims at giving an overview of the whole project. Concluding remarks will be provided to see how much the study has fulfilled the aim and how it can be of value to IC scholars, accounting scholars and practitioners.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section provides some key findings obtained from the analysis of the interview transcripts and the materials from the public communication channels. Next, the contributions will be discussed from empirical, methodological and practical aspects. In addition, the chapter also presents some discussions about the limitations the study has. In the final section, the author suggests some directions and ideas for further research, in order to contribute more to the area of IC studies.

8.2. Overview of the research

This research stemmed from the researcher's interest in, and ambition to explore the topic of IC. That was particularly the case after finishing my Master's thesis on the disclosure of IC by Vietnamese listed companies, since I had found out that different companies have different reporting practices regarding IC issues. I also noticed that Vietnamese companies showed various differences when discussing IC in their annual reports compared with China – a country with very similar historical, cultural and economic conditions. I questioned myself over what could have caused such variances, and I have cherished the ambition to discover the origin since then.

When exploring the literature, I found the ideas of social construction greatly appealing, and believed this epistemological lens could help me to fulfil my cherished research ambition. Therefore, I decided to pursue the social construction perspective, particularly Berger and Luckmann's work, to conduct this study. After I started wearing the social construction lens, I understood that behaviours are constructed according to the stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). According to them, the fact that companies have different disclosing practices can be explained because they have different understandings about IC. And their understandings have been socially constructed in their home-world and sub-worlds via interactions with others. Consequently, to explain why and how companies have diverse disclosing IC practices, it would be fruitful to uncover why and how they have different ways of comprehending IC.

Moreover, I was even more motivated when I saw claims regarding a large gap between IC perception in the literature and in practice (Nielsen et al., 2017; Dumay and Garanina, 2013). Also, there were calls from the literature to study how the concept of IC actually works and evolves in practice (Schaper, 2016). And it has been stressed that one of the matters that need addressing is what we mean when we talk about IC (Marr and Chatzkel, 2004). Given that, I decided to study the idea of IC in practice – how the idea of IC can be constructed in practice, which we approach through a discussion of what is of a value to a company.

Adopting the social construction lens, the literature of IC has also been reviewed to see how the issues have been addressed so far, and how my potential research can fill the literature gaps to enhance our knowledge about the topic IC. Drawing on Ian Hacking's idea (1999) which argued that we can treat "something" either as an object, or as an idea, I found that most of the empirical IC studies treated IC as an object when exploring the implementations of IC concepts and frameworks (Dumay and Garanina, 2013), figuring how these frameworks can fit with their IC. Meanwhile, just a small number of IC studies explored the idea of IC – what people think about IC. With a few attempts to explore IC as an idea, how IC has been understood has not yet been extensively addressed because IC scholars seemed to have over-relied on predefined IC frameworks, and provided too much support when interacting with participants, which partly eclipsed the actual understandings of participants. Moreover, although assuming that different people have different thoughts about IC, they did not explain such diversity. The concern over why and how these different understandings had been constructed was not paid much attention. Comparing it with what I desired to study, the current literature seemed to provide some space for my research to fill in. For that reason, the two research questions have been finalised as (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings. What do they deem to be of value? and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed?

To explore the social construction of the idea of IC, I not only aimed to investigate how people think about what was of value, but also wished to unveil the background stories behind why people have such understandings. In this regard, the means I chose to fulfil the ambition was the case study, as it helps to "locate practice in its historical, as well as its economic, social and organizational contexts" (Scapens, 1990, p.268). And it is a descriptive and explanatory case study, according to the categorization made by Scapens (1990). The choice of carrying out interviews arose from the social construction viewpoint, which guided me through the steps of selecting the company and the participants. Three SMEs were used: a law firm, a vegan restaurant and a charity. Instead of asking the participants directly about the term IC, I approached them with the question “What do you think to be of value in the company?”, which facilitated the exploration of the idea of IC. Also, without any preset IC framework, the semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to be free to talk, and their answers were not eclipsed by academic knowledge. The analysis mainly relied on Berger and Luckmann’s framework to understand the social construction of the idea of IC. In fact, those were the co-constructions between the participants and the researcher. Hence, a great deal of my reflections and the stories behind the research have been revealed to emphasise my role as a researcher and co-constructor in this study as called by De Loo and Lowe (2017).

Furthermore, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, knowledge is obtained via communication. Thus, in this study, it is developed that the research participants’ understandings are reflected in the communications between them and the researcher; and between them and other people, verbally and nonverbally. With the aim of exploring how IC can be conceptualised from people’s understandings, the study employed the materials from public communication channels in addition to the interviews. The choice of the particular materials was mainly directed by the interviewees during the interviews and in line with what has been claimed in the literature, these sources have been used widely to facilitate triangulations (Scapens, 1990; Verleye, 2019). For this reason, websites, brochure, leaflet, magazine articles, consultant’s report and recruitment advertisements were analysed. Thematic analysis was conducted on both texts and visuals. Visual methodologies were guided by Rose (2016).

The next section will further elaborate on the key findings from the study.

8.3. Answers to the research questions and beyond

This section will summarise the key findings from the research and provide some discussions around what has been found. It is divided into two parts according to the two main research questions: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people’s understandings. What do they deem to be of value? and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed?

8.3.1. How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings?

Drawing on what was discovered from the interview transcripts and the additional communication materials investigated, it can be concluded that the understanding of IC/what is of value were often different, both within the organisations themselves and among them.

Across the three cases, the element most commonly mentioned both by the interviewees and in the other materials was "people". This finding aligns with various IC studies in the past, especially those on SMEs, because scholars have asserted that human capital is the main source of IC in SMEs (Cohen and Kaimenakis, 2007; Durst, 2008). However, although all the interviewees mentioned the element of "people", the participants' opinions differed on how this particular factor could generate value. Some attributed it to the competency of staff, others specifically to the Vietnamese team, or to the expertise of the senior staff (in the law firm case), or to the turnover of the board and do-er attitudes (in the charity). Although the human capital has been studied and framed in various ways, this study suggests that there are some layers seemingly missing, which might provide IC scholars with more insights when building their IC frameworks for further research. Such a level of comprehensive description would make it clearer for the research participants to understand the concept, and easier for the researchers and participants to communicate and effectively co-construct the knowledge of IC. This element has also helped to provide what the literature requires. As Steenkamp and Kashyap (2010) suggested, exploring the meaning of "people" might shed more light on the components classified in the human capital category.

Other elements discussed by the interviewees and in the additional materials from the case study were "products", "structure/policy", "brand name", "motivation policy" and "customer feedback", which have also been covered in the extant IC literature. Nevertheless, the findings from this research support a few claims made by performative IC scholars that "some IC elements are transformed out of the arguably "default" functional properties ascribed to them in ostensive research and made to assume identities and functional properties normally ascribed to other IC elements" (Abhayawansa et al., 2018, p. 963). In this study, this can be seen in the way respondents categorised these elements, where "motivation policy" was treated as structural while in the literature it has usually been placed under the dimension of human capital (Litschka et al., 2006; Tovstiga and Tulugurova, 2009; Halim, 2010). Moreover, where "customer feedback" is normally used as a measurement of a source of value and reflected in customers' satisfaction (Ousama et al., 2011; Guthrie et al., 2006; Bollen et al., 2005), here it is deemed as one of the sources of value per se. This finding first challenges the traditional/mainstream viewpoint on IC by pointing out that IC elements can be mobilised within organisations. In the second place, it also reminds IC scholars to be cautious with their assumptions before taking any steps further into the field of empirical research.

Drawing on both the interviews and additional materials, it was seen that other elements such as “management style”, “team spirit/harmony”, “work ethic”, “customer database” and “political independence” were also deemed to be of value in organisations. However, interestingly, these elements have not yet been mentioned in the extant IC literature. The wider accounting literature has established some connections between organisational harmony and value (Jimenez et al., 2015), management style and organisational culture (Yi, 2012; Dumay and Roslender, 2013; Benevene et al., 2019), work ethic and career competencies (Wang, 2013). Yet these dimensions still appear to be missing in IC frameworks. Despite the numberless efforts to build up IC frameworks and aim to establish a universal one, the findings from this study indicate that the extant IC literature is yet to fully cover how IC can be conceptualised. In other words, there might thus be fruitful areas for IC scholars to delve into and shine further light on IC's hidden perspectives.

However, the more important consideration here is whether or not such an ambition to establish one generally accepted IC definition and framework is feasible. Could it ever be achieved in our fast-changing world? And do we need a fixed definition/framework or should we be flexible enough to adapt suitably to environmental and contextual changes? As Benevene et al. (2019) asserted, “IC is context-specific and its transformational power lies also in a praxis, which is tailored to the specific features of their organisation” (p. 169). Instead of adopting a predefined framework to measure and disclose the IC of social enterprises, there might thus be a need to develop indicators based on the specific features of IC, as well as on the perspectives of users.

No matter which direction IC scholars eventually decide to go for, it seems vital to understand the background stories behind people’s understanding of it which have been causing such huge variances. Consequently, the findings with regard to the second research question will play a key role in this research and are expected to introduce valuable insights to the field. These issues will be discussed in the next section.

8.3.2. How have the conceptions been constructed?

In pursuing the social construction viewpoint, this study has shown that the understandings of IC could be affected by different elements. Both the fieldwork and additional communicational materials have provided valuable evidence about the influential dimensions and the process of socially constructing IC perceptions and corresponding communications.

8.3.2.1. What can impact the construction of people's thoughts?

- ***Culture***

Through the interviewees' responses and the researcher's interpretation, it has been concluded that cultural background could have a profound impact on the way people understood what is of value in IC. Indeed, various excerpts from the interviews have clearly indicated that the interviewees themselves were aware of the difference in cultures determining their understanding of particular issues. This finding is both in line with Berger and Luckmann's ideas and with the conclusions of previous studies (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Andriessen and Van den Boom, 2007; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011). The finding regarding the impact of culture on IC issues can be said to provide supplementary explanations to other previous studies which only proposed that culture might influence IC perceptions and management but have not yet given any further justifications for it (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011). This perspective also answers the call for more research from "an interactionist strategy" (Zhu, 2004) seeking to explore broader cross-cultural contexts in which cultural differences and diversity are important sources (Benevene et al., 2019; Zhu, 2004). Being conscious that culture might impact the way people perceive IC not only helps scholars to prepare themselves for any differences they might observe when doing such cross-cultural studies, but it may also inspire them to work on particular cultures about which they have profound knowledge. Such an approach can remarkably enhance our understanding about IC from the practical aspects.

- ***Education***

Based on what can be extracted and interpreted from the interviews, it can be observed that what people have learned can really help to shape their perception of IC. For example, even if they have no qualifications, or only a degree in accounting but some knowledge about business, marketing and strategy could still help them come up with some commonly used terms when talking about what is of value in their company. Yet if the education a person had received has not prepared him to be knowledgeable about such accounting terminology, then he tended not to mention as many IC elements as the other research participants.

This trend can be explained using Berger and Luckmann's argument regarding secondary socialisation. Although they emerge from the same home-world, individuals opt for different sub-worlds given their roles in society and their interests. In this way, individuals are supposed to further the knowledge they need to obtain to serve their roles in society. The impact of education has been mentioned once by Valentine St. Leon (2002) when exploring managers' perception of IC. However, here the author merely observed the differences in education that different managers had received, not claiming on any influence the education might have on their perceptions.

Drawing both on Berger and Luckmann's theory and the evidence from the interviews, this study further theoretically and empirically supports the previous descriptive research. Exploring the role of education more deeply in the construction of the idea of IC can be helpful to IC researchers. In dealing with different participants, the researchers might want to have a good plan to communicate with their participants on this subject. For example, for those who have better knowledge of accounting, researchers can provide them with more space and time to allow their own thoughts. In contrast, with those who major in other disciplines, the researchers might want to provide more support or seek some other ways to explain the accounting terms and the relevant contexts therein or explore the issue from a non-accounting angle.

The revelation of the influence of education also helps IC scholars to spread the awareness of IC to other people, especially the younger generation. This approach might be more effective when introducing IC issues at different educational levels across different fields. Moreover, it can work in broader contexts rather than solely in accounting training and workshops.

- ***The role people carry in the organisation***

The data extracts showed that people in different positions and carrying different roles in the company had constructed their understandings of what was of value differently. The wider literature has indeed demonstrated that the nature of their role can significantly impact how an individual constructs their knowledge (Darr et al., 1995; Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011). This findings are completely in line with what Berger and Luckmann claimed, that secondary socialisation requires the acquisition of role-specific knowledge. Different roles lead to different secondary socialisation, and hence to different understanding of a concept like IC. In terms of IC itself, the impact of the organisational roles can be a good indicator for those who wish to explore IC issues in smaller contexts, such as departments and groups of participants. Indeed, it is interesting to see that a lot of IC studies focus on particular people in companies, for example, managers (Benevene et al., 2019; Brosnan et al., 2019), analysts (Abhayawansa et al., 2018), auditors (Ahmed and Hussainey, 2010), but none of them have explained why they wanted to add these insights to the field. Without any justifications but claiming that no similar research has been conducted before, these authors seemed to assume differences among the roles. With that said, the finding from this research could well serve as a reasonable rationalisation for similar research in the future.

❖ ***Amount of time spent in a role or in similar roles (experience)***

In this study, it can be seen, from what was expressed by the research participants, that experience can have some impact on the way people understood what was of value in their organisations. As discussed earlier, experience can be accumulated over time, entailing that the length of time spent in a role can help to construct an individual's understanding about different issues in the organisations, including IC-related matters. Drawing on the idea of the maintenance processes in Berger and Luckmann's work, this is understandable since the individual's previous knowledge is constantly updated. And in wider management literature, Martensson (2000) suggested that some kinds of knowledge are experience-based. Furthermore, Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) have indicated that a large, deep, and diverse experience base is evidenced to contribute to creativity because it increases the number of potential paths one can search, and the number of potential new combinations of knowledge. These authors have also called for research to help explain how, when and why prior experience affects knowledge creation in organisations. Together with the empirical evidence collected, this research draws on Berger and Luckmann's thought to shed light on how and why experience affect people's knowledge of what is of value. Since this issue has never been discussed in the IC area, the findings here might prove a helpful contribution to ongoing research in the IC area, and even in accounting and wider management field too.

❖ ***Amount of time spent with the organisation (length of service)***

Likewise, due to the maintenance process as discussed by Berger and Luckmann, the understandings of IC can also be affected by the amount of time individuals spend with an organisation (length of service). To put it simply, although an individual stays with the same company, what he thinks about IC would be different at different times. Since this issue has not been raised in IC area, the research can be said to ring an alarm to those who study IC in groups of participants with similar roles and backgrounds. They would need to be aware that the length of service can influence how people perceive IC; hence junior staff would have different perceptions and behaviour compared to the senior. The opinions of a new manager recently joining the company might very much differ from that of a long-standing manager. It might be dangerous (or even unreliable) to assume that all the managers share the same ideas. With this in mind, it would be very interesting to approach a group of participants with a diverse level of length of service, which can provide more insights to the topic studied.

❖ ***Type of organisations***

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), organisations can be considered as sub-worlds to participants, and for that reason, the organisations will have a major impact on the way they construct their knowledge. In this study, it has been observed that people from different types of organisation had different thoughts about what was of value. For example, only those in the charity talked about the structure, while only restaurant staff appreciated the location. In fact, numerous studies have been conducted in different sectors and industries as part of the IC literature, but apart from the reasons of no exploration done in those sectors and the needs of being knowledgeable about particular areas, the authors did not provide any theoretical explanations. Why could they not have used the findings from one sector to apply to another? Possibly, because they assumed there should be some differences among them. In adopting Berger and Luckmann's perspective, this study has helped to provide a foundation of logical reasoning for any similar research.

❖ ***Target audiences, technical and technological boundaries could decide what is communicated***

When talking to the interviewees, it was recognised that their understandings of what was of value could be communicated in different ways. By analysing the responses from the participants and the additional communication materials, it has been argued that both the target audience and the technical and technological boundaries could determine what is communicated. For instance, in the case of the law firm, the materials issued to the

Vietnamese customers would prioritise revealing some information about IC which was not covered by other general sources. In addition, as this is a law firm, they might want to emphasise particular aspects of their work, such as their experience in court, or the speed of staff availability at the scene. Or in the case of the charity case, they obviously put different pieces of information on the leaflet to target the potential members and in the recruitment adverts which targeted the potential volunteers. Plus, as websites have rapidly become the main public communication channel in many organisations, the company's IC disclosure style could be limited to a particular template. Similar to the previous influential dimensions, this element has not been discovered in the IC area. Consequently, what has been revealed in this study can be seen as helpful to other IC scholars when they investigate websites or other materials. In fact, a number of IC studies have employed these materials (Benevene et al., 2019); Stacchezzini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2018; Striukova et al. 2008), however, they did not take into account the construction of these data sources. They literally assumed that these represented the voice of the "company" and took it from there. Without considering the involvement of different people - including external actors - and the influence of technical and technological boundaries, these research might have analysed the mistaken "companies' communications" because these might not originate inside the companies only or might not be what the companies really want to communicate. Uplifting this issue in IC area, this study can open numerous avenues for further research into these kinds of communication channels.

8.3.2.2. How do people interact in order to construct their thoughts?

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), all social construction processes take place by means of interaction with other people. In this study, evidence from the interviews has helped to strengthen this argument. In the cases studied, the participants revealed that they interacted with each other to build up a shared understanding of specific company issues. These interactions mostly happened via daily communications or informal conversations and were primarily supported by everyday actions. Also, was discovered that there were no figures or specific index indicating what was deemed to be of value and its value. Instead, these elements were captured through informal communications and daily observations. In addition to internal interactions within the company, the participants also revealed that what they knew about what was of value came from their interactions with other people outside the organisation. For example, they talked to friends to learn more about the company's brand name, or they talked to customers to explore the quality of the services provided.

All of these findings go against what is shown in the IC literature. Most IC scholars have examined formal meetings and workshops to study the IC topic in practice (Chiucchi, 2013; Shih et al., 2010; Marr, 2004). In contrast, this research indicates that most of the communications constructing knowledge about IC take place daily in informal activities and conversations. With that said, the extant IC literature seems to miss an enormous part of the data which can provide a lot of useful insights about IC. Moreover, previous IC studies have only investigated internal communications while overlooking external ones. Drawing on what has been revealed here, IC scholars might want to update their methodology to capture IC issues in their field work.

Furthermore, in relying on the interviewees' responses in this case study, it is noticeable that how the idea of IC was communicated had been influenced by the different people who were involved in the process of preparing, editing and approving the published information and material. Previous studies have pointed out that various people and departments can engage in the process of communicating IC, but these studies have not mentioned the influence of those people's perceptions on how the idea of IC has been constructed. In this case study, drawing on the social construction perspective, it has been revealed that it is not just their physical involvement in the action of producing the materials, but people's thoughts and their opinions that influence the production of IC-related communication. This could be a broad avenue for further research.

8.4. Contributions and implications

By exploring the idea of IC from social construction viewpoint, this study has taken a different standpoint from most other IC research and can arguably make various valuable contributions and present significant implications in this regard. In particular, since this is the first study to apply the ideas of Berger and Luckmann to the topic, it is believed that in this way many fresh insights will be generated.

8.4.1. Theoretical contributions

First, by exploring the *idea* of IC rather than the *object* IC, this study lies among only a small number of studies in the voluminous IC literature. From a social construction perspective, (particularly Hacking's study of 1999), when somebody mentions "intellectual capital", they may refer to the company's human resources, or the brand name, or the patent, which are some very common IC elements discussed over the past decades. All these elements can indeed exist within certain companies, and they know they possess them. However, in other cases, when somebody uses the term “intellectual capital”, they actually mean the *perception* of intellectual capital; that is to say, what they think can be deemed to be IC, no matter whether such things really exist in that context, or not.

Drawing on this argument, the literature review indicated that most of the extant IC studies focus on the *object* IC. Meanwhile, just a small number of IC studies have explored the *idea* of IC, and this research belongs to that minor group. Joining this humble group of studies does not mean the study strays off the beaten track or falls behind the fundamental issues currently emerging in the area. On the contrary, this study is expected to contribute new insights about the topic when reaching untouched corners of the field; that is, by uncovering valuable hidden understandings of IC, answering the calls for more investigations of how the concept of IC works and evolves in practice (Schaper, 2016) and ultimately reducing the gap between the perceptions among scholars of IC and IC as it is perceived in practice (Nielsen et al., 2017; Dumay and Garanina, 2013).

More importantly, this study can be seen to pioneer the investigation of why and how people have specific understandings of IC. As demonstrated earlier, the lack of the answers to these questions would leave a big hole in our knowledge about IC. Discovering the social construction of people’s understanding of IC would then help to reduce the large gap between IC perception in the literature and in reality (Nielsen et al., 2017; Dumay and Garanina, 2013). Moreover, this research can answer the calls from the literature to study how the concept of IC actually works and evolves in practice (Schaper, 2016). Scholars have relied on the arguments that different people would have different understandings about IC and then conducted various research studies that involved different ‘types’ of participants; for example, Habersam and Piber (2003), Giuliani and Marasca (2011), Veltri and Bronzetti (2015), Benevene et al. (2019), Brosnan et al. (2019). However, what these studies have revealed has merely satisfied the question “How IC can be understood”, but there seemed to be no exploration of why these different people understood IC in different ways.

From a social construction perspective, in order to generate a fuller picture of the perceptions of IC, there could potentially be an endless number of similar attempts at investigating various groups of people. No-one can guarantee a complete categorisation of people in our life given the different sectors, careers, roles, nations and so on, but if the root causes of their differences in conception can be explored, then that would be more insightful and helpful. Indeed, it has been claimed that the challenge for IC research is not to seek a better IC reporting model, which has been its predilection for the past one-and-a-half decades, but to find mechanisms to situate IC narratives within the organisational and broader environmental contexts and history (Abhayawansa et al., 2018). In this study, by adopting the social construction lens, different contextual factors have been found to have an impact on the way people can conceptualise IC, such as culture, education, organisational roles, experience, length of service, type of organisations, targeted audience, technique and technical boundaries.

With the vast majority of IC research focusing on organisations' struggle with accounting in terms of measuring and reporting intellectual capital, and the corresponding lack of studies addressing the effects of contextual variables (Curado, 2008), what has been revealed in this study can help to shed light on the thinking that underpins such practice. Just as Mouritsen and Roslender (2009) asserted, if the concept of intellectual capital is as central as some claim it to be, then it is vital that it is fully understood and exploited in the quest for social betterment. Hence, uplifting the social construction of the idea is a good means of fulfilling this ambition. Essentially, the analysis conducted at an individual level in this study anticipates that the findings could help to answer several calls for attempts to develop more management accounting practices at the individual level (Matthew Hall, 2016). The author believed that individual-level effects of management accounting translate into effects at the organisational level, entailing that a stronger use of multi-level studies should be adopted. With that said, this study can join the group of ground-breaking studies which could yield new and fresh insights about the issue of IC.

Furthermore, the study can be said to contribute significant pieces to the jigsaw picture of IC issues in SMEs. As Demartini and Beretta (2020) have noted, the IC literature focusing on SMEs' settings is limited and fragmented. This study used a small law firm in the UK as the single case study to hopefully produce some illuminating insights and help to build up our understandings about IC issues in the rarely researched context of SMEs. By taking a charity as one of its case studies, this research can be helpful to those who desire to investigate non-profit organisations when there are very few investigations of IC in this sector (Fletcher et al, 2003). This approach may prove to be even more useful since the concepts of IC are just as relevant and important to the management and performance of third sector organisations as they are in for-profit companies (Fletcher et al., 2003).

8.4.2. Methodological contributions

To fulfil the research ambition of exploring the idea of IC, this study has adopted a different methodology to what is generally seen in the literature. As elaborated extensively in Chapter 4, although the recent literature has seen a growth of studies examining what people think about IC, the issue does not yet seem to have been adequately addressed. IC scholars have made various attempts to explore how different people think about IC, but their approach to collecting the answers from participants seems not to be effective. For example, instead of giving research participants the chance to express their actual understanding of IC fully, researchers have provided too much support. They have also relied on pre-set IC frameworks to guide the participants towards their responses or contributions. To some degree, this approach has eclipsed the participants' knowledge (Habersam and Piber, 2003; Giuliani and Marasca, 2011) and hampered the social construction of research knowledge.

In the name of exploring the idea of IC, my research approach has been to give the interviewees the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences and so decide what was of value without being given any clues about the centrality of the term 'IC' beforehand. In doing so, my belief is that the research participants can have more opportunity to reflect their understanding without being impacted academically and so allowing the idea of IC to be explored thoroughly. Indeed, the findings prove that this study has brought some fresh insights about the perceptions of IC. The results from the case study indicate that the extant IC literature has not fully covered how people understand IC, and not fully captured what people meant when they mentioned the IC items. Some IC items and meanings revealed in this study have not been found in any previous discussions (please see Section 6.2. for detailed discussions on findings). Instead, this study has challenged the conventional IC research paradigm to contribute towards a performativity-inspired conceptualisation of IC and produce a situated model of IC in place of a "predictive model" (Abhayawansa et al., 2018).

Moreover, this study has adopted multiple sources of evidence – interviews, websites, Facebook page, brochures, leaflets, magazine articles, consultant's report and the recruitment advertisements - which together can help to increase the robustness of the findings (Verleye, 2019). In particular, the use of this material has answered the call for a greater adoption of websites as the data source in the IC research area (Cuozzo et al., 2017). Furthermore, in contrast to most of the previous studies which have only appeared to analyse the "surface" of the data sources (e.g. Striukova et al., 2008; Rossi et al., 2018; Atkins et al., 2018), I have sought in this study not only what has been communicated and presented on those communication channels, but aimed to reveal how these communication ideas have been constructed, and how those pieces of IC information have been brought to light in public channels. Especially, this study has also adopted visual methodology to analyse visual data from a social construction perspective. Instead of following what other researchers have done only counting images, graphs and pictures in the annual reports or on websites, I have conducted an analysis of the visuals themselves (to determine what the meaning of the visuals was), of the production site (who created the visuals, and when and why) and of the audiencing site (how to interpret the visuals, by whom and why) (Rose, 2016). This approach has helped me to produce a great number of crucial insights about the construction of the visuals and the construction of the communication of IC.

In short, my choice of methodology can be given some credit for the fulfilment of my research objectives. Indeed, both the findings and the analysis have pointed out that the understanding of IC is dependent on different dimensions, and that the construction of the understandings of IC mainly took place via daily communications and observations (please see Section 6.2. for detailed discussions on findings). These findings have not yet been mentioned in the literature, which opens up plenty of routes for further investigation and debate.

Last but not least, as earlier argued, from the social construction viewpoint, the knowledge derived from research is co-constructed between the research participants and the researcher. However, it is the researcher's own vision which finally determines the uniqueness of the research, which has not been mentioned and discussed in other IC studies. This is because it is based on the researcher's own understanding of their research viewpoint, their choice of case study, the choice of participants, their mode and expertise in conducting interviews, and their own interpretation and analysis, all of which makes an individual study unique. This does not mean that this study does not share any ideas with prior research, but what makes it stand out is something that another piece of research definitely would not have due to its different social construction. As Jack and Kholief (2007b) claimed, these choices would not have produced a better or worse study but may have led to a different piece of research which would help to enrich our understandings about the topic. In this sense, the study has its own value.

For example, I have my own apprehension of the social construction lens. Having decided to follow Berger and Luckmann's framework, I have made a different selection of methods to study the issue of IC. My adoption of Berger and Luckmann's theory would, for now, seem odd in comparison to the literature, where other viewpoints have been embraced, but even if my approach becomes more prevalent in the IC area, my implementation will not be precisely replicated by other researchers, because individuals never share the same construction of knowledge. Moreover, I have been able to provide valuable in-depth explanations of certain cultural and social issues which have a significant impact on how

Vietnamese interviewees understood IC. These results might not have been obtained if a British researcher had dealt with the data. Hence, to reiterate the idea above, although researchers may deal with the same data, they will have different interpretations and analysis which makes their research unique in its own way.

8.4.3. Implications

This study has provided a number of clues to the social construction of the understanding about IC. Hence it can be seen to place an important stepping stone on the journey to study the construction of IC as an idea. Drawing on the findings from this research, IC scholars can be more prepared when they set up their new project studying IC. The findings can serve as a good source of reference if anyone would like to prepare themselves for their future research. For example, if they want to explore the perceptions of a group of people in different countries, they may need to make sure they have approached participants with similar educations, roles, experience and length of service. Given that, they could produce some interpretations regarding the impact of culture on IC issues.

Moreover, the study can also be helpful if scholars would like to conduct a project setting an IC framework for an entire company. They may want to take into account these proposed influential elements and the daily communication channels, so that they can know how best to cater to all the tastes of IC perceptions across the company.

The study has provided some insights which can be of help and value to practitioners. For example, the management could see the findings in this study helpful in communicating IC issues with their staff. Getting to know that education, experience and length of service could have profound impact on the perceptions of IC, the managers would be able to have proper communication styles and methods, so that the IC issue can be discussed thoroughly within the company. This study could prove its significant usefulness when adopted by international corporations or multi-national companies.

Furthermore, policymakers might also find this research useful when preparing or designing guidelines regarding IC issues. Rather than aiming for one universal framework they could instead provide more detailed explanations for different types of organisations to adapt to. Moreover, instead of generalising one fixed definition or framework, could assign the companies the task of building up their own based on some preliminary guidance, including or excluding particular IC elements to suit different contexts. For instance, for a particular type of compulsory report, the policy-makers can consider the target audience, so that they would be able to know how best to communicate the idea of IC, and hence require specific items. Or, for particular sectors, they may need to adjust the requirements to adapt to the industry's characteristics to fully capture what can be considered IC in such cases. The findings of this research might hence serve as valid sources of information and insight that can assist them in creating effective, relevant policies.

8.5. Limitations

Although the study has provided detailed and extensive answers to the two main research questions, (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings. What do they deem to be of value? and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed?, there are still some limitations remaining.

First, despite the efforts to explore how the communication of IC via public channels has been constructed, the study has not been able to obtain more of the interviewees' opinions on these communications. In fact, the analysis mainly relied on the researcher's interpretations. For example, the study has identified particular IC elements mentioned on the website, in the brochure, leaflets, Facebook page, magazine articles, consultant's report and in the recruitment advertisements; however, the answers to why those ideas were discussed and why those ways of communicating were chosen were mainly drawn from the researcher's understandings and interpretations. If more information could be gained directly from the interviewees, the findings would be further supported. Particularly, this limitation lies in the analysis of the visual data. Although I have adopted the social construction perspective to analyse the visuals themselves, their production, and the audience sites, the construction of the visuals may not have been investigated extensively enough. For example, there were obvious differences between the logo in the English version and the Vietnamese version of the website. If this issue had been raised with the interviewees to explore the reasoning, the analysis would have been more interesting and concrete.

Second, although Berger and Luckmann's idea of social construction has significantly helped to explain how the understandings of IC can be constructed, the viewpoint has some limitations in itself. As Lewis (2010) argued, Berger and Luckmann (1966) committed a mistake by viewing society as a voluntaristic creation of individuals. As they suggested, after the process of objectification, people have 'forgotten' that institutions are human products. Barad (2003) shared a similar viewpoint when arguing that social constructivists subscribed to representationalism[3]; "[b]ut representationalism (like "nature itself," not merely our representations of it!) has a history" (p. 806). In this study, the cultural characteristics which impact on the social construction of the understandings of IC were also considered objective, "natural" features. The study did not dig deep into the issue regarding how such characteristics had been formed and became the "natural heritage" for Vietnamese people. Therefore, this can direct us to further research examining the matter.

Moreover, this study observed no exceptions, due to the influence of the pandemic. As per the initial plan, I wanted like to make some further observations in the law firm, which would have been very helpful in understanding how the interactions and communication of IC took place, since I was also allowed to do so by the manager. However, due to the pandemic and lockdown, this step was not done. If more information had been collected from these observations, the study would have provided more detailed findings regarding the internal interactions and communication, in addition to what was already shared by the interviewees. Besides, the plan of doing further interview rounds at different times was also hampered. Due to lockdown rules, no face-to-face meetings were allowed. During a hard time, the company and the participants also had lots of challenges to deal with and they themselves were facing a great number of difficulties, hence they were reluctant to accept my requests for more talks during the pandemic. Therefore, although I managed to obtain one more interview after the lockdown, my ambition of exploring the impact of the time dimension was not fulfilled as much as expected.

8.6. Future research

Given that not everything can be covered in a single research project, further research can dig into potentially interesting issues that have not been included in this study, in order to provide greater understanding about the social construction of IC.

First, adopting Berger and Luckmann's theory of 1966, it has been argued that both homeworlds, sub-worlds and the time dimension could have some significant impact on how IC is understood and communicated. This study has extensively covered the former aspect, but due to the pandemic, the plan of doing different interviews at different times across a longer time period did not work out. Therefore, this would raise a call for more research

[3] *"Representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing."(Barad, 2003, p.804)*

which can delve into the time dimension to investigate how individuals have constructed their understandings, and the communication of the understandings over time.

Second, as analysed above, further research could help to investigate the social construction of cultural characteristics (which we did not address or assume in this study) and see how they impact the social construction of IC. Lewis (2010) introduced the concept of emergence[4]. Adopting this concept could mean, for instance, that we surmise that the social construction of IC is developed in relation to other concepts, which hence need to be jointly investigated. Barad (2003) proposes a specifically post-humanist notion of social sciences studies, discussing the entanglement and basic inseparability of material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural objects and practices. She claims that there is a material side to discursive practices, which is part and parcel of such practices, and which needs to be taken into account as well when the latter are studied. Hence, she reasons in terms of material-discursive practices, which is another way in which our study of IC could have been conceptualized.

Furthermore, researchers in the future may want to adopt different methods to generate more detailed findings. For example, further observations can help to gain more practical information to further support the responses from the interviewees. Visual methodologies can help to explore interesting stories behind the logo, images, or even the shapes, the positions and the colours. Future research can also consider using other data sources, such as information boards in the company, emails exchanged among staff, or other internal guidelines or policies published within the company. Obviously, with more evidence, the construction of IC will be better explored given the huge benefit of using multiple sources of data (Scapens, 1990). Last but not least, although this research has paid certain attention to the language aspect from social construction perspective – the language used in fieldwork, meanings of the language used by the interviewees, and the language used for writing the thesis –, this element could receive greater emphasis in future studies as well. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) provide a summary of five research approaches sensitive to what has been called the ‘linguistic turn’ in the social sciences: grounded fictionalism, metaphoric data construction, literary data construction, discursive pragmatism and discursivism. These approaches may be fruitful paths for the development of language-conscious organizational and social studies (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), and they hence could help to investigate

[4] *The concept of emergence refers to the possibility that, when certain elements or parts stand in particular relation to one another, the whole that is formed has properties (including causal powers, defined as the capacity to behave in a particular way and to bring about effects of a particular kind) that are not possessed by its constituent elements taken in isolation. (Lewis, 2010, p.9)*

the topic of IC, placing a greater emphasis on linguistic practices than has been the case in this study.

8.7. Conclusion

The chapter has provided an overview of the whole research project. This research idea arose from my personal curiosity and my ambition to explore why different companies talked about IC in different ways. After being immersed in social construction thinking, the extant IC literature has been reviewed, the field work has been performed, the study has provided the answers to the research questions: (1) How can IC be conceptualised from people's understandings. What do they deem to be of value? and (2) How have these conceptions been constructed?

The concluding remarks indicate the key findings from the study. It can be concluded that via internal and external interactions, the understandings of IC have been constructed under the impact of culture, education, role, experience, length of service and type of organisations. Moreover, the way such understandings have been communicated is also determined by the different people involved, the target audience, and the technical and technological boundaries. Given that, theoretical, methodological and practical contributions have been highlighted, suggesting the value and usefulness of this study. Nevertheless, although the main research aim has been met and the two main research questions have been extensively answered, the study is acknowledged to have some limitations regarding the lack of further observations, direct responses from the participants to specific issues, and absence of the different rounds of interviewing at different times. Drawing on these discussions, some suggestions about the directions for further research in the future have been presented.

Although the personal ambition of exploring the conceptualization of IC and the construction of such conceptions has been fulfilled, the study has not ended the research journey into the construction of IC and other IC issues. This would be seen as a preliminary step for the researcher to enter a wider area concerning social construction perpsective and other aspects of IC. Just to reiterate, according to Berger and Luckmann's ideas, socialisation is never total and never finished, hence knowledge is unlimited. And doing further research will be an interesting means to study this interesting phenomenon.

REFERENCES

Abels, H. (1998). *Einfu¨hrung in die Soziologie*. Westdeutscher Verlag.

Abeysekera, I. (2011). The relation of intellectual capital disclosure strategies and market value in two political settings. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *12*(2), 319–338.

Abhayawansa, S. (2011). A methodology for investigating intellectual capital information in analyst reports. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *12*(3), 446–476.

Abhayawansa, S. A. (2014). A review of guidelines and frameworks on external reporting of intellectual capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *15*(1), 100–141.

Abhayawansa, S. A., Guthrie, J., & Bernardi, C. (2019). Intellectual capital accounting in the age of integrated reporting: a commentary. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *20*(1), 2–10.

Abhayawansa, S., & Guthrie, J. (2016). Does intellectual capital disclosure in analysts' reports vary by firm characteristics? *Advances in Accounting, Incorporating Advances in International Accounting*, *35*, 26–38.

Abhayawansa, S., Aleksanyan, M., & Cuganesan, S. (2018). Conceptualisation of intellectual capital in analysts' narratives: a performative view. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *31*(3), 950–969.

Ahmed, A., & Hussainey, K. (2010). Managers' and auditors' perceptions of intellectual capital reporting. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, *25*(9), 844–860.

Ahrens, T., & Chapman, C. S. (2006). Doing qualitative field research in management accounting: Positioning data to contribute to theory. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *31*(8), 819–841.

Alawattage, C., Arjaliès, D.-L., Barrett, M., Bernard, J., de Castro Casa Nova, S. P., Cho, C. H., Cooper, C., Denedo, M., D'Astros, C. D., Evans, R., Ejiogu, A., Frieden, L., Ghio, A., McGuigan, N., Luo, Y., Pimentel, E., Powell, L., Pérez, P. A. N., Quattrone, P., Sorola, M. (2021). Opening accounting: a Manifesto. *Accounting Forum*, *45*(3), 227–246.

Alcaniz, L., Gomez-Bezares, F., & Roslender, R. (2011). Theoretical perspectives on intellectual capital: A backward look and a proposal for going forward. *Accounting Forum*, *35*, 104–117.

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the Linguistic Turn in Organizational Research: Challenges, Responses, Consequences. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *36*(2), 136–158.

Amineh, J. R., & Asl, D. H. (2015). Review of Constructivism and Social Constructivism. *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, *1*(1), 9–16.

Andriessen, D., & van den Boom, M. (2007). East is East, and West is West, and (n)ever its intellectual capital shall meet. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *8*(4), 641–652.

Argote, L., & Miron-Spektor, E. (2011). Organizational Learning: From Experience to Knowledge. *Organization Science*, *22*(5), 1123–1137.

Atkins, J., Maroun, W., Atkins, B. C., & Barone, E. (2018). From the Big Five to the Big Four? Exploring extinction accounting for the rhinoceros. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *31*(2), 674–702.

Bakhtin, M. . (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. University of Texas Press.

Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *28*(3), 801–831.

Baruch, L. (2001). *Intangibles – Management, Measurement and Reporting*. Brookings Institution Press.

Baxter, J., & Chua, W. F. (2008). The field researcher as author-writer. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, *5*(2), 101–121.

Bebbington, J., Russell, S., & Thomson, I. (2017). Accounting and sustainable development: Reflections and propositions. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *48*, 21–34.

Bechky, B. A. (2003). Sharing Meaning Across Occupational Communities: The Transformation of Understanding on a Production Floor. *Organization Science*, *14*(3), 332–350.

Benevene, P., Kong, E., De Carlo, A., Lucchesi, M., & Cortini, M. (2019). A qualitative study on the perception of intellectual capital among a group of senior managers of Italian social enterprises. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *17*(2), 161–171.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The Social Construction of Reality. *Penguin Books*.

Beverungen, A., Hoedemaekers, C., & Veldman, J. (2014). Charity and finance in the university. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *25*(1), 58–66.

Bisman, J. E., & Highfield, C. (2012). The Road Less Travelled: An Overview and Example of Constructivist Research in Accounting. *Australasian Accounting Business & Finance Journal*, *6*(65), 3–22.

Boedker, C., Mouritsen, J., & Guthrie, J. (2008). Enhanced business reporting: international trends and possible policy directions. *Journal of Human Resource Costing & Accounting*, *12*(1), 14–25.

Bollen, L., Vergauwen, P., & Schnieders, S. (2005). Linking intellectual capital and intellectual property to company performance. *Management Decision*, *43*(9), 1161–1185.

Bontis, N. (1998). Intellectual capital: an exploratory study that develops measures and models. *Management Decision*, *36*(2), 63–76.

Bontis, N. (1999). Managing organisational knowledge by diagnosing intellectual capital: framing and advancing the state of the field. *International Journal of Technology Management*, *18*(5), 433–462.

Bontis, N. (2001). Assessing knowledge assets: a review of the models used to measure intellectual capital. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *3*(1), 41–60.

Bontis, N., & Fitz-enz, J. (2002). Intellectual capital ROI: A causal map of human capital antecedents and consequents. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *3*(3), 223–247.

Bozbura, T. F. (2004). Measurement and application of intellectual capital in Turkey. *The Learning Organization*, *11*, 357–367.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews : learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Bromwich, M., & Scapens, R. W. (2016). Management Accounting Research: 25 years on. *Management Accounting Research*, *31*, 1–9.

Brosnan, S., O'Donnell, D., & O'Regan, P. (2019). A performative exploration of the lifeworlds of human capital and financial capital: an intellectual capital case vignette. *Journal of Management and Governance*, *23*(2), 321–344.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Buenechea-Elberdin, M. (2017). Structured literature review about intellectual capital and innovation. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *18*(2), 262–285.

Bukh, P. N., Larsen, H. T., & Mouritsen, J. (2001). Constructing intellectual capital statements. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *17*(1), 87–108.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.

Cammock, P., Nilakant, V., & Dakin, S. (1995). Developing a lay model of managerial effectiveness: A social, constructionist perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, *32*(4), 443–474.

Castilla-Polo, F., & Gallardo-Vázquez, D. (2016). The main topics of research on disclosures of intangible assets: a critical review. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *29*(2), 323–356.

Catasús, B., & Gröjer, J. E. (2006). Indicators: On visualizing, classifying and dramatizing. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *7*(2), 187–203.

Cavicchi, C., & Vagnoni, E. (2018). Intellectual capital in support of farm businesses' strategic management: a case study. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *19*(4), 692–711.

Cavicchi, C., & Vagnoni, E. (2018). Intellectual capital in support of farm businesses' strategic management: a case study. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *19*(4), 692–711.

Chaminade, C., & Roberts, H. (2003). What it means is what it does: a comparative analysis of implementing intellectual capital in Norway and Spain. *European Accounting Review*, *12*(4), 733–751.

Chell, E. (2000). Towards researching the "'opportunistic entrepreneur'": A social constructionist approach and research agenda. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *9*(1), 63–80.

Chiucchi, M. S. (2013). Intellectual capital accounting in action: Enhancing learning through interventionist research. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 48–68.

Chiucchi, M. S. (2013). Measuring and reporting intellectual capital: Lessons learnt from some interventionist research projects. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(3), 395–413.

Choong, K. K. (2008). Intellectual capital: Definitions, categorization and reporting models. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *9*(4), 609–638.

Chua, W. F. (1986). Radical Developments in Accounting Thought. *The Accounting Review*, *61*(4), 601–632.

Chua, W. F. (2019). Radical Developments in Accounting Thought? Reflections on Positivism, the Impact of Rankings and Research Diversity. *Behavioral Research in Accounting*, *31*(1), 3–20.

Chung-Herrera, B. G., Enz, C. A., & Lankau, M. J. (2003). Grooming future hospitality leaders: A competencies model. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, *44*(3), 17–25.

Coakes, E., & Bradburn, A. (2005). What is the value of intellectual capital? *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *3*, 60–68.

Cohen, S., & Kaimenakis, N. (2007). Intellectual capital and corporate performance in knowledge-intensive SMEs. *The Learning Organization*, *14*(3), 241–262.

Colignon, R., & Covaleski, M. (1988). An examination of managerial accounting practices as a process of mutual adjustment. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *13*(6), 559–579.

Corbella, S., Florio, C., Sproviero, A. F., & Stacchezzini, R. (2019). Integrated reporting and the performativity of intellectual capital. *Journal of Management and Governance*, *23*(2), 459–483.

Craig, R. . (2006). Communication as a practice. In G. J. Shepherd, J. St. John, & T. Striphas (Eds.), *Communication as …: Perspectives on Theory*. Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Cricelli, L., Greco, M., & Grimaldi, M. (2013). The assessment of the intellectual capital impact on the value creation process: A decision support framework for top management. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, *12*(2), 146–164.

Cuozzo, B., Dumay, J., Palmaccio, M., & Lombardi, R. (2017). Intellectual capital disclosure: a structured literature review. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *18*(1), 9–28.

Curado, C. (2008). Perceptions of knowledge management and intellectual capital in the banking industry. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *12*(3), 141–155.

Curado, C. (2008). Perceptions of knowledge management and intellectual capital in the banking industry. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *12*(3), 141–155.

Danziger, K. (1997). The Varieties of Social Construction: *Theory & Psychology*, *7*(3), 399–416.

Daou, A., Karuranga, E., & Su, Z. (2014). Towards a better understanding of intellectual capital in Mexican SMEs. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *15*(2), 316–332.

Darr, E. D., Argote, L., & Epple, D. (1995). The Acquisition, Transfer, and Depreciation of Knowledge in Service Organizations: Productivity in Franchises. *Management Science*, *41*(11), 1750–1762.

Davison, J. (2002). Communication and antithesis in corporate annual reports: a research note. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *15*(4), 594–608.

Davison, J. (2014). Visual rhetoric and the case of intellectual capital. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *39*, 20–37.

Demartini, M. C., & Beretta, V. (2020). Intellectual capital and SMEs' performance: A structured literature review. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *58*(2), 288–332.

Demartini, M. C., & Beretta, V. (2020). Intellectual capital and SMEs' performance: A structured literature review. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *58*(2), 288–332.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Dillard, J. F., Rigsby, J. T., & Goodman, C. (2004). No Title. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *17*(4), 506–542.

Downing, S. (2005). The Social Construction of Entrepreneurship: Narrative and Dramatic Processes in the Coproduction of Organizations and Identities. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *29*(2), 185–204.

Dreher, J., & Vera, H. (2016). The Social Construction of Reality, A Four-Headed, Two-Fingered Book: An Interview with Thomas Luckmann: *Cultural Sociology*, *10*(1), 30–36.

Duff, A. (2018). Intellectual capital disclosure: evidence from UK accounting firms. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *19*(4), 768–786.

Dumay, J. (2013). The third stage of IC: Towards a new IC future and beyond. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 5–9.

Dumay, J., & Garanina, T. (2013). Intellectual capital research: A critical examination of the third stage. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 10–25.

Dumay, J., & Guthrie, J. (2019). Reflections on interdisciplinary critical intellectual capital accounting research: Multidisciplinary propositions for a new future. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *32*(8), 2282–2306.

Dumay, J., & Roslender, R. (2013). Utilising narrative to improve the relevance of intellectual capital. *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change*, *9*(3), 248–279.

Durst, S. (2008). The relevance of intangible assets in German SMEs. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *9*(3), 410–432.

Eberle, T. S. (2019). Variations of constructivism. In M. Pfadenhauer & H. Knoblauch (Eds.), *Social constructivism as paradigm? : the legacy of The Social Construction of Reality*. Routledge.

Edvinsson, L. (1997). Developing intellectual capital at Skandia. *Long Range Planning*, *30*(3), 366–373.

Edvinsson, L. (2013). IC 21: Reflections from 21 years of IC practice and theory. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 163–172.

Eldor, L. (2017). The Role of Organizational Politics in the Relationship between Engagement and Performance. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2016*(1), 10245.

Ferenhof, H. A., Durst, S., Bialecki, M. Z., & Selig, P. M. (2015). Intellectual capital dimensions: State of the art in 2014. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *16*(1), 58–100.

Fletcher, A., Guthrie, J., Steane, P., Roos, Gö., & Pike, S. (2003). Mapping stakeholder perceptions for a third sector organization. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *4*(4), 505–527.

Gergen, K. J. (1985). The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology. *American Psychologist*, *40*(3), 266–275.

Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Sage.

Gergen, K. J. (2015). *An invitation to social construction*. Sage.

Gerpott, T. J., Thomas, S. E., & Hoffmann, A. P. (2008). Intangible asset disclosure in the telecommunications industry. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *9*(1), 37–61.

Giuliani, M., & Marasca, S. (2011). Construction and valuation of intellectual capital: a case study. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *12*(3), 377–391.

Graves, O. F., Flesher, D. L., & Jordan, R. E. (1996). Pictures and the bottom line: The television epistemology of U.S. annual reports. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *21*(1), 57–88.

Gray, R. (2006). ocial, environmental and sustainability reporting and organisational value creation? Whose value? Whose creation? *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *19*(6), 793–819.

Grimaldi, M., Cricelli, L., & Rogo, F. (2013). A theoretical framework for assessing managing and indexing the intellectual capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(4), 501–521.

Guthrie, J. (2001). The management, measurement and the reporting of intellectual capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *2*(1), 27–41.

Guthrie, J., & Petty, R. (2000). Intellectual capital: Australian annual reporting practices. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *1*(3), 1469–1930.

Guthrie, J., Petty, R., & Johanson, U. (2001). Sunrise in the knowledge economy: Managing, measuring and reporting intellectual capital. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *14*(4), 365–384.

Guthrie, J., Petty, R., & Ricceri, F. (2006). The voluntary reporting of intellectual capital: Comparing evidence from Hong Kong and Australia. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *7*(2), 254–271.

Guthrie, J., Petty, R., Yongvanich, K., & Ricceri, F. (2004). Using content analysis as a research method to inquire into intellectual capital reporting. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *5*(2), 282–293.

Habersam, M., & Piber, M. (2003). Exploring intellectual capital in hospitals: two qualitative case studies in Italy and Austria. *European Accounting Review*, *12*(4), 753–779.

Habib-Uz, M., Khan, Z., & Ali, M. (2010). An empirical investigation and users' perceptions on intellectual capital reporting in banks Evidence from Bangladesh. *Journal of Human Resource Costing & Accounting*, *14*(1), 48–69.

Hacking, I. (1999). *The Social Construction of What?* Harvard University Press.

Hägg, I., & Hedlund, G. (1979). "Case studies" in accounting research. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *4*(1–2), 135–143.

Halim, S. (2010). Statistical analysis on the intellectual capital statement. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *11*(1), 61–73.

Hall, M. (2016). Realising the richness of psychology theory in contingency-based management accounting research. *Management Accounting Research*, *31*, 63–74.

Hansen, A. (2011). Relating performative and ostensive management accounting research Reflections on case study methodology. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, *8*(2), 108–138.

Harrell, W. A. (2016). Perceived Risk of Occupational Injury: Control over Pace of Work and Blue-Collar versus White-Collar Work: *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, *70*(3), 1351–1359.

Hart, C. (1998). *Doing Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*. SAGE Publications.

Haslam, S. A., Cornelissen, J. P., & Werner, M. D. (2017). Metatheories and Metaphors of Organizational Identity: Integrating Social Constructionist, Social Identity, and Social Actor Perspectives within a Social Interactionist Model. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *19*(3), 318–336.

Healy, M., & Perry, C. (2000). Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability of qualitative research within the realism paradigm. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *3*(3), 118–126.

Heilbron, J. L. (1986). Reviewed Work(s): Constructing Quarks: A Sociological History of Particle Physics. by. *American Journal of Sociology*, *91*(6), 1479–1481.

Hennequin, E. (2007). What “career success” means to blue-collar workers. *Career Development International*, *12*(6), 565–581.

Henry, L. (2013). Intellectual capital in a recession: evidence from UK SMEs. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 84–101.

Hines, R. D. (1991). The FASB’s conceptual framework, financial accounting and the maintenance of the social world. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *16*(4), 313–331.

Hooks, J., Steenkamp, N., & Stewart, R. (2010). Interpreting pictorial messages of intellectual capital in company media. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, *7*(3), 353–377.

Hopwood, A. G. (1983). On trying to study accounting in the contexts in which it operates’. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *8*(2–3), 287–305.

Hormiga, E., Batista-Canino, R. M., & Sánchez-Medina, A. (2011). The role of intellectual capital in the success of new ventures. *International Entrepreneur Management Journal*, *7*, 71–92.

Hruby, G. G. (2001). Sociological, postmodern, and new realism perspectives in social constructionism: Implications for literacy research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *36*(1), 48–62.

Hu, X., Kaplan, S., & Dalal, R. S. (2010). An examination of blue- versus white-collar workers’ conceptualizations of job satisfaction facets. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *76*(2), 317–325.

Husin, N. M., Hooper, K., & Olesen, K. (2012). Analysis of intellectual capital disclosure-an illustrative example. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *13*(2), 196–220.

Inkinen, H. (2015). Review of empirical research on intellectual capital and firm performance. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *16*(3), 518–565.

Jack, L., & Kholeif, A. (2007). Introducing strong structuration theory for informing qualitative case studies in organization, management and accounting research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, *2*(3), 208–225.

Jiménez, M. C. R., Vallejo Martos, M. C., & Martínez Jiménez, R. (2013). Organisational Harmony as a Value in Family Businesses and Its Influence on Performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *126*(2), 259–272.

Jordão, R. V. D., & Novas, J. C. (2017). Knowledge management and intellectual capital in networks of small- and medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *18*(3), 667–692.

Karin, K. C. (1999). *Epistemic Cultures How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Harvard University Press.

Kaufmann, L., & Schneider, Y. (2004). Intangibles: A synthesis of current research. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *5*(3), 366–388.

Khalique, M., Bontis, N., Abdul Nassir bin Shaari, J., & Hassan Md. Isa, A. (2015). Intellectual capital in small and medium enterprises in Pakistan. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *16*(1), 224–238.

Knoblauch, H. (1995). *Kommunikationskultur. Die kommunikative Konstruktion kultureller Kontexte*. De Gruyter.

Knoblauch, H. (2019). The Social Construction of Reality as a paradigm? In M. Pfadenhauer & H. Knoblauch (Eds.), *Social constructivism as paradigm? : the legacy of The Social Construction of Reality*. Routledge.

Knoblauch, H., & Wilke, R. (2016). The Common Denominator: The Reception and Impact of Berger and Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality. *Human Studies*, *39*(1), 51–69.

Kong, E. (2010). Innovation processes in social enterprises: an IC perspective. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *11*(2), 158–178.

Lee, B. (2020). Methodology Matters; Even More. *European Management Review*, *17*(1), 279–284.

Lee, B., & Saunders, M. N. K. (2017). *Conducting case study research for business and management students*. Sage Publications.

Lev, B. (2003). Remarks on the Measurement Valuation, and Reporting of Intangible Assets'. *Federal Reserve Bank of New York Economic Policy Review*, *9*, 17–22.

Levant, Y., & Zimnovitch, H. (2017). Accounting History. *Accounting History*, *22*(4), 450–471.

Lewis, P. (2010). Peter Berger and His critics: The significance of emergence. *Society*, *47*(3), 207–213.

Lindgreen, A., & Wynstra, F. (2005). Value in business markets: What do we know? Where are we going? *Industrial Marketing Management*, *34*(7), 732–748.

Litschka, M., Markom, A., & Schunder, S. (2006). Measuring and analysing intellectual assets: an integrative approach. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *7*(2), 160–173.

Lou, N. M., So, A. S. I., & Hsieh, Y. J. (2019). Integrated resort employee competencies: a Macau perspective. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *31*(1), 247–267.

Lowe, A. (2004). Postsocial relations. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *17*(4), 604–628.

Luft, J. (2016). Cooperation and competition among employees: Experimental evidence on the role of management control systems. *Management Accounting Research*, *31*, 75–85.

Lukka, K. (1990). Ontology and accounting: The concept of profit. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *1*(3), 239–261.

Lukka, K., & Modell, S. (2010). Validation in interpretive management accounting research. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *35*(4), 462–477.

Marr, B. (2004). Measuring and benchmarking intellectual capital. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *11*(6), 559–570.

Marr, B., & Chatzkel, J. (2004). Intellectual capital at the crossroads: Managing, measuring, and reporting of IC. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *5*(2), 224–229.

Marr, B., & Moustaghfir, K. (2005). Defining intellectual capital: a three-dimensional approach. *Management Decision*, *43*(9), 1114–1128.

Marr, B., Neely, A., & Schiuma, G. (2004). The dynamics of value creation: mapping your intellectual performance drivers. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *5*(2), 312–325.

Mårtensson, M. (2000). A critical review of knowledge management as a management tool. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *4*(3), 204–216.

Martin, J., & Sugarman, J. (1996). Bridging Social Constructionism and Cognitive Constructivism: A Psychology of Human Possibility and Constraint. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, *17*(4), 291–319.

Massaro, M., Dumay, J., & Guthrie, J. (2016). On the shoulders of giants: undertaking a structured literature review in accounting. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *29*(5), 767–801.

Mayo, A. (2000). The role of employee development in the growth of intellectual capital. *Personnel Review*, *29*(4), 521–533.

Mehralian, G., Nazari, J. A., Akhavan, P., & Rasekh, H. R. (2014). Exploring the relationship between the knowledge creation process and intellectual capital in the pharmaceutical industry. *Learning Organization*, *21*(4), 258–273.

Merkl-Davies, D. M., & Brennan, N. M. (2017). A theoretical framework of external accounting communication Research perspectives, traditions, and theories. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *30*(2), 433–469.

Montequín, V. R., Fernández, F. O., Cabal, V. A., & Gutierrez, N. R. (2016). An integrated framework for intellectual capital measurement and knowledge management implementation in small and medium-sized enterprises: J*ournal of Information Science*, *32*(6), 525–538.

Morris, S. S., & Snell, S. A. (2011). Intellectual capital configurations and organizational capability: An empirical examination of human resource subunits in the multinational enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *42*(6), 805–827.

Morris, W. R., Conrad, K. M., Marcantonio, R. J., Marks, B. A., & Ribisl, K. M. (1999). Do blue-collar workers perceive the worksite health climate differently than white-collar workers. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, *13*(6), 319–324.

Mouck, T. (2004). Institutional reality, financial reporting and the rules of the game. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *29*(5–6), 525–541.

Mouritsen, J., Nikolaj Bukh, P., & Marr, B. (2004). Reporting on intellectual capital: Why, what and how? *Measuring Business Excellence*, *8*(1), 46–54.

Mouzelis, N. (1995). *Sociological theory: What went wrong?* Routledge.

Mura, M., & Longo, M. (2013). Developing a tool for intellectual capital assessment: an individual-level perspective. *Expert Systems*, *30*(5), 436–450.

Mura, M., & Longo, M. (2013). Developing a tool for intellectual capital assessment: an individual-level perspective. *Expert Systems*, *30*(5), 436–450.

Nahapiet, J. (1988). The rhetoric and reality of an accounting change: A study of resource allocation. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *13*(4), 333–358.

Nielsen, C., Roslender, R., & Schaper, S. (2017). Explaining the demise of the intellectual capital statement in Denmark. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *30*(1), 38–64.

Osinski, M., Selig, P. M., Matos, F., & Roman, D. J. (2017). Methods of evaluation of intangible assets and intellectual capital. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *18*(3), 470–485.

Ousama, A. A., Fatima, A. H., & Majdi, A. R. H. (2011). Usefulness of intellectual capital information: Preparers' and users' views. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *12*(3), 430–445.

Parker, L. D. (2003). Qualitative research in accounting and management: the emerging agenda. *Journal of Accounting and Finance*, *2*, 15–30.

Parker, L. D. (2008). Strategic management and accounting processes: Acknowledging gender. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, *21*(4), 611–631.

Parker, L. D. (2009). Photo-elicitation: an ethno-historical accounting and management research prospect. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *22*(7), 1111–1129.

Parker, L. D. (2012). Qualitative management accounting research: Assessing deliverables and relevance. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *23*(1), 54–70.

Pedro, E., Leitão, J., & Alves, H. (2018). Back to the future of intellectual capital research: a systematic literature review. *Management Decision*, *56*(11), 2502–2583.

Pedro, E., Leitão, J., & Alves, H. (2018). Intellectual capital and performance: Taxonomy of components and multi-dimensional analysis axes. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *19*(2), 407–452.

Peña, I. (2002). Intellectual capital and business start-up success. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *3*(2), 180–198.

Petty, R., & James Guthrie. (2000). Intellectual capital literature review: Measurement, reporting and management. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *1*(2), 155–176.

Pfadenhauer, M. (2019). The reality of social constructivism - Introductory remarks. In M. Pfadenhauer & H. Knoblauch (Eds.), *Social constructivism as paradigm? : the legacy of The Social Construction of Reality*. Routledge.

Pickering, A. (1986). *Constructing Quarks: A Sociological History of Particle Physics*. Edinburgh University Press.

Poppleton, S., Briner, R. B., & Kiefer, T. (2008). The roles of context and everyday experience in understanding work-non-work relationships: A qualitative diary study of white- and blue-collar workers. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *81*(3), 481–502.

Preston, A. (1986). Interactions and arrangements in the process of informing. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *11*(6), 521–540.

Preston, A. M., Wright, C., & Young, J. J. (1996). IMag[in]ing annual reports. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *21*(1), 113–137.

Quattrone, P. (2000). Constructivism and accounting research: Towards a trans-disciplinary perspective. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *13*(2), 130–155.

Riahi-Belkaoui, A. (2003). Intellectual capital and firm performance of US multinational firms: A study of the resource-based and stakeholder views. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *4*(2), 215–226.

Ricceri, F. (2008). *Intellectual Capital and Knowledge Management: Strategic Management of Knowledge Resources*. Routledge.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Sage Publications.

Ritson, P. A. (2002). Social Constructionism in three Accounting journals: 1977-1998. *9th World Congress of Accounting Historians*, 1977–1998.

Rodov, I., & Leliaert, P. (2002). FiMIAM: financial method of intangible assets measurement. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *3*(3), 323–336.

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies : an introduction to researching with visual materials.* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Roslender, R., & Fincham, R. (2001). Thinking critically about intellectual capital accounting. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *14*(4), 383–399.

Rossi, F. M., Nicolò, G., & Polcini, P. T. (2018). New trends in intellectual capital reporting - Exploring online intellectual capital disclosure in Italian universities. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *19*(4), 814–835.

Rudež, H. N., & Mihalič, T. (2007). Intellectual capital in the hotel industry: A case study from Slovenia. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *26*(1), 188–199.

Saks, A. M., Mudrack, P. E., & Ashforth, B. E. (1996). The Relationship Between the Work Ethic, Job Attitudes, Intentions to Quit, and Turnover for Temporary Service Employees. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, *13*(3), 226–236.

Sällebrant, T., Hansen, J., Bontis, N., & Hofman-Bang, P. (2007). Managing risk with intellectual capital statements. *Management Decision*, *45*(9), 1470–1483.

Scapens, R. W. (1990). Researching management accounting practice: The role of case study methods. *The British Accounting Review*, *22*(3), 259–281.

Scapens, R. W. (1992). The role of case study methods in management accounting research: A personal reflection and reply. *British Accounting Review*, *24*, 369–383.

Scapens, R. W. (2004). Doing Case Study Research. In C. Humphrey & B. Lee (Eds.), *The Real Life Guide to Accounting Research*. Elsevier.

Schaper, S. (2016). Contemplating the usefulness of intellectual capital reporting: Reasons behind the demise of IC disclosures in Denmark. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *17*(1), 52–82.

Seidman, S. (2004). *Contested knowledge. Social theory today*. Blackwell.

Shih, K. H., Chang, C. J., & Lin, B. (2010). Assessing knowledge creation and intellectual capital in banking industry. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *11*(1), 74–89.

Sotorrío, L. L., & Sánchez, J. L. F. (2010). Corporate social reporting for different audiences: The case of multinational corporations in Spain. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *17*(5), 272–283.

Stacchezzini, R., Florio, C., Sproviero, A. F., & Corbella, S. (2019). An intellectual capital ontology in an integrated reporting context. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *20*(1), 83–99.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks.

Stewart, T. A. (1998). *Intellectual Capital – The New Wealth of Organizations*. Nicolas Brealey Publishing.

Striukova, L., Unerman, J., & Guthrie, J. (2008). Corporate reporting of intellectual capital: Evidence from UK companies. *The British Accounting Review*, *40*, 297–313.

Sveiby, K. E. (2008). East and West do meet - that is the real issue! *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *9*(2).

Swart, J. (2006). Intellectual capital: Disentangling an enigmatic concept. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *7*(2), 136–159.

Tai, W. S., & Chen, C. T. (2009). A new evaluation model for intellectual capital based on computing with linguistic variable. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *36*(2), 3483–3488.

Talja, S., Tuominen, K., & Savolainen, R. (2005). “isms” in information science: Constructivism, collectivism and constructionism. *Journal of Documentation*, *61*(1), 79–101.

Tomkins, C., & Groves, R. (1983). The everyday accountant and researching his reality. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *8*(4), 361–374.

Tovstiga, G., & Tulugurova, E. (2009). Intellectual capital practices: a four-region comparative study. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *10*(1), 70–80.

Valentine st Leon, M. (2002). Intellectual capital :Managerial perceptions of organisational knowledge resources. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *3*(2), 149–166.

Vamosi, T. (2005). Management accounting and accountability in a new reality of everyday life. *British Accounting Review*, *37*(4), 443–470.

Veltri, S., & Bronzetti, G. (2015). A Critical Analysis of the Intellectual Capital Measuring, Managing, and Reporting Practices in the Non-profit Sector: Lessons Learnt from a Case Study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *131*(2), 305–318.

Verleye, K. (2019). Designing, writing-up and reviewing case study research: an equifinality perspective. *Journal of Service Management*, *30*(5), 549–576.

Walker, S. P. (2016). Revisiting the roles of accounting in society. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *49*, 41–50.

Walker, S. P., & Llewellyn, S. (2000). Accounting at home: some interdisciplinary perspectives. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *13*(4), 425–449.

Wang, Y. F. (2013). Constructing career competency model of hospitality industry employees for career success. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *25*(7), 994–1016.

Wasiluk, K. L. (2013). Beyond eco-efficiency: Understanding CS through the IC practice lens. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *14*(1), 102–126.

Wee, J. C. N., & Chua, A. Y. K. (2016). The communication of intellectual capital: the "whys" and "whats." *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, *17*(3), 414–438.

Yi, C. G. (2012). Intellectual capital indicators for the Korean public research institute. *International Journal of Intelligent Enterprise*, *1*(3–4), 199–214.

Zarandi, F. M. H., Mohammadhasan, N., & Bastani, S. (2012). A fuzzy rule-based expert system for evaluating intellectual capital. *Advances in Fuzzy Systems*, *2012*, 1–12.

Zhu, Z. (2017). Knowledge management: towards a universal concept or cross-cultural contexts? *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *2*(2), 67–79.

APPENDIX 1

Summary of IC elements discussed in the extant IC literature

Author(s)	Customer (C)	Structural (St)	Human (H)	Innovation (I)	Business (B)	Organizational (O)	Processes (P)	Relational (R)	Relational and Customers (RC)	Social (So)	Technology (T)
Edvinsson and Sullivan (1996)		1st level 2nd level (St) Intellectual Assets	1st level 2nd level (H) Human Resources								
Edvinsson and Malone (1997)	2nd level (St)	1st level	1st level	3rd level (O)		2nd level (St)	3rd level (O)				
Roos and Roos (1997)			1st level 2nd level Motivational Skills Tasks Knowledge			1st level 2nd level Business Renewal and Development capital 3rd level Specialization Production Processes New Concepts Sales and marketing New co-operation forms 2nd			1st level 2nd level Customer, Supplier, Channel partners and investor relationships		

						level Business Process 3rd level Flow of information Flow of products and services Co-operation forms Strategic processes					
Wiig (1997)	2nd level (St)	1st level	1st level	3rd level (O) 4th level Intellectual Property Intangible Assets		2nd level (St)	3rd level (O)				
Stewart (1997)	1st level	1st level	1st level								
Sveiby (1997)		1st level Internal structure	1st level Employee Competence						1st level External structure		
Bontis (1999)		1st level	1st level						1st level		
Bontis et al. (1999)		1st level 2nd level Organization Renewal and	1st level 2nd level Competence Intellectual Agility								

		Development Relationship	Attitude								
Can˜ibano et al. (2000)		1st	1st					1st			
Brennan and Connell (2000)		1st	1st						1st		
Sa´nchez et al. (2000)		1st	1st					1st			
Lev (2001)	1st level 2nd level Brands and Trademarks		1st level 2nd level Training and compensation system			1st level 2nd level Organization design and business process					1st level
Francini (2002)		1st level	1st level	2nd level			2nd level	2nd level			
Rodov and Leliaert (2002)	1st level 2nd level Reference List Duration Customer Type Revenue Potential Success Customer Closeness	1st level 2nd level Org. Structure Org. Process Software Database Partners Network Value chain Leverage Brand Trademark Org. Learning	1st level 2nd level Competence Reputation Experience Innovation Skills Customer Closeness Org. Learning Culture Org. Technology Integrated	2nd level							

	Value chain Leverage Brand Trademark Integrated relationship Knowledge Product Patents Data	Culture Org. Technology Integrated relationship Knowledge Product Patents Data	relationship Knowledge Product Patents data								
Bueno et al. (2002a, b)		1st level	1st level						1st level		
Bounfour (2003)		1st level Resources Competence	1st level Resources and Competence				1st level				1st level Named: outputs measured, through an analysis of a firm's product and service market positioning
Bueno et al.		1st level	1st level		2nd	2nd level (St)			1st level	2nd	2nd level

(2003)					level (R)					level (R)	(St)
Castro and Muiña (2003)			1st level			1st level		1st level			1st level
Marr et al. (2004)		1st level Called: Structural resources 2nd level Physical infrastructure Virtual infrastructure 3rd level (Virtual infrastructure) Culture routines and practices Intellectual property	1st level Called: Stakeholder resources 2nd level Stakeholders relationship Human resources								
Chen et al. (2004)	1st level	1st level	1st level	1st level							
Jacobsen et al. (2005)	2nd level (R)		1st level 2nd level Management Employees			1st level (called Organizational Structural Capital) 2nd level	2nd level (O)	1st level (called Relational Structural Capital) 2nd level Network			

						Intellectual properties		Brand			
Cordazzo (2005)	1st level		1st level			1st level					
Cuganesan (2005)	2nd level (R)	1st level	1st level					1st level 2nd level Suppliers – specific expertise			
Leitner (2005)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Tseng and Goo (2005)			1st level	1st level		1st level		1st level			
Subramaniam and Youndt (2005)			1st level			1st level		1st level Called Social			
Wang and Chang (2005)	3rd level		1st level	2nd level			2nd level				
Litschka et al. (2006)			1st level 2nd level Knowledge Abilities, Skills Workability Motivation Job satisfaction Commitment			1st level 2nd level Constitutions Policy and Mission Structure Processes					
Martínez-Torres (2006)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Montequín et al. (2006)		1st level 2nd level ITC	1st level 2nd level People's					1st level 2nd level Customer			

		penetration Product technology Process and business philosophy Organization structure Intellectual Property	competence Competence improvement Staff stability Improvement of capacity of persons and groups					base Customer loyalty Market proximity Sales Effectiveness Suppliers Interrelation with other actors			
Namasivayam and Denizci (2006)	1st level	1st level	1st level								
Ng (2006)	3rd level	2nd level	2nd level	2nd level							
Swart (2006)	1st level	1st level	1st level			1st level		1st level Called Network Capital		1st level	
Huang et al. (2007)	1st level 2nd level Market Perspective Data on customers Customers services and relations	1st level 2nd level Development of Products/ Ideas Organization Infrastructure	1st level 2nd level Employee Capabilities Employee development and Retention Employee Behavior								

	hip										
Nathan and Ribière (2007)		1st level	1st level							1st level	
Nazari and Herremans (2007)	2nd level	Nazari and Herremans (2007)	Nazari and Herremans (2007)			2nd level	3rd level Renewal				
Ramírez et al. (2007)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Rudež and Mihalič (2007)	1st level (Named: Endcustomer relationship capital) 2nd level Customer satisfaction and loyalty Image and brand Direct distribution channels	1st level 2nd level Culture Management philosophy Business Processes Information technology	1st level 2nd level Employee competence Employee attitudes to work Employee innovativeness					1st level (Named: Non-end customer relationship capital) 2nd level Relationships with commercial partners Relationships with other partners and groups			
Sällebrant et al. (2007)		1st level	1st level 2nd level Management				2nd level (ST) Intellect	1st level 2nd level Networks Brand			

			Employees				ual	Customers			
Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2007)			2nd level			2nd level		2nd level		2nd level	2nd level
Tovstiga and Tulugurova (2007)		1st level 2nd level Renewal and Development (R&D , Organizational learning)	1st level 2nd level Competence (knowledge, capabilities, skills) Attitudinal (motivation, behavior, mindset) Intellectual agility (innovation, imitation, adaptation)			2nd level (SC) Structure Infrastructure Process Culture		2nd level (SC) Network partners Alliance partners Customers/ Suppliers			
Choong (2008)	1st level	1st level 2nd level Development Technology	1st level 2nd level Knowledge Competence	1st level Called: Intellectual Property Capital 2nd level Brands Rights							
Liang and Lin (2008)	1st level		1st level	1st level			1st level				
De Castro and Sápez (2008)		1st level	1st level Called Experience					1st level			

			d and Innovative HC								
Joia (2008)		1st level	1st level 2nd level External capital	2nd level (St)		2nd level (St)					
Massingham (2008)		1st level	1st level					1st level		1st level	
Tóth and Kövesi (2008)	1st level	1st level	1st level								
Sharma et al. (2008)		1st level 2nd level Infrastructure Governance	1st level					1st level 2nd level Culture			
Martín-Castilla and Rodríguez-Ruiz (2008)			1st level			1st level		1st level			
Schneider and Samkin (2008)			1st level								
Sonnier (2008)	1st level		1st level			1st level					
Chen (2009)		1st level 2nd level Organizational Infrastructure Organizational patents, trademarks	1st level 2nd level Employee's capabilities Employee's knowledge Employee's skills Employee's Technical	1st level 2nd level Frequent updating Upgrading capabilities				1st level 2nd level Customer's retention/ loyalty Close relationship with internet communities			

								Close relationship with suppliers			
F-Jardón and Martos (2009)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Kong and Thomson (2009)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Longo et al. (2009)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Rodrigues et al. (2009)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Sharma et al. (2009)		1st level 2nd level Infrastructure Governance	1st level					1st level 2nd level Culture			
Stam (2009)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Tai and Chen, (2009)	1st level 2nd level Market share rate Number of major customers Customer loyalty		1st level 2nd level Ratio of employee leave Output value of each employee Training hour of each employee	1st level 2nd level Number of new product or process Number of Patents Fee of research/fee of total		1st level 2nd level Company brand Trademark Information System Index of productivity					
Tovstiga and		1st level	1st level			2nd level		2nd level			

Tulugurova (2009)		2nd level Renewal and Development (R&D, Organizational learning)	2nd level Competence (knowledge, capabilities, skills) Attitudinal (motivation, behavior, mindset) Intellectual agility (innovation, imitation, adaptation)			(SC) Structure Infrastructure Process Culture		(SC) Network partners Alliance partners Customers/ suppliers			
Richard et al., 2009			1st			Marketing Operational management International business Strategies Information systems					
Andrikopoulos (2010)		1st level	1st level			2nd level (St)		2nd level (St)			
Halim (2010)		1st level	1st level 2nd level Professional Competence Social Competence					1st level			

			Employee Motivation Leadership ability								
Laing et al. (2010)		1st level 2nd level Structural Capital Efficiency 3rd level Intellectual capital efficiency	1st level 2nd level Human Capital Efficiency 3rd level Intellectual capital efficiency								
Lee (2010)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Namvar et al. (2010)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Malavski et al. (2010)		1st level 2nd level Infrastructur e Assets Intellectual property	1st level					1st level			
Ramírez (2010)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Secundo et al. (2010)			1st level 2nd level Attractivene ss Efficiency			1st level 2nd level Innovation Knowledge codification Infrastructure Development		1st level			
Sharabati et al. (2010)		1st level	1st level						1st level		

Wu et al. (2010)				1st level named: Intellectual Property Tangible assets 2nd level Innovative Culture Innovative Reference Number of new ideas Number of publications Financial support Research performance 3nd level (associated with all 2nd levels) Research intensive university Teaching intensive university Professional							

				intensive university							
Velmurugan (2010)	1st level	1st level	1st level								
Abhayawansa (2011)			1st level								
Bueno et al. (2011)		1st level	1st level	Considered as one accelerator of the other ones proposed	2nd level	2nd level		1st level		2nd Level	2nd level
Demartini and Paoloni (2011)		1st level 2nd level Products Innovation Patents and Trademarks Knowledge DataBases	1st level 2nd level Skills Competences Behaviors				2nd level (St)	1st level 2nd level Partners/ Suppliers relations Communities and Academic relations Corporate Images Customers Relations			
Elena-Pérez et al. (2011)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Grajkowska (2011)			1st level			1st level 2nd level IP 2nd level Explicit		1st level 2nd level Customer Value Partner			

						knowledge Other Intangibles		Value			
Maditinos et al. (2011)		1st level	1st level								
Morris and Snell (2011)		1st level 2nd level Social interaction Shared vision 3rd level Sharing Capability	1st level 2nd level Local experience International experience 3rd level Generation Capability			1st level 2nd level Codifying systems 3rd level Implementation capability					
Phusavat et al. (2011)		1st level Tax scheme and incentives for R&D spending and promotion of university partnership	1st level Training on knowledge management practices								
Seleim and Khalil (2011)			1st level			1st level		1st level			
St-Pierre and Audet (2011)			1st level	1st level			1st level	1st level			
Fan and Lee (2012)		1st level 2nd level Systems and	1st level 2nd level Knowledge Workers	2nd level (St) Called Innovation				1st level 2nd level Internal Social			

		Processes	Transformational Leaders	Culture				Network External Social Network			
González-Loureiro and Dorrego (2012)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Hsu and Sabherwal (2012)			1st level			1st level				1st level	
Jardon and Martos (2012)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Ling (2012)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Ramezan (2012)		1st level	1st level							1st level	
Sussan (2012)		1st level	1st level				2nd level (SC)		1st level 2nd level B2C interaction C2C interaction		
Yi (2012)		1st level 2nd level Technology innovation Infrastructure IPR Organizational Culture	1st level 2nd level Employee competence Work attitude Employee satisfaction Employee retention					1st level 2nd level Customer satisfaction Brand R&D network R&D value creation			
Zarandi et al. (2012)	1st level 2nd level	1st level 2nd level	1st level 2nd level								

	Market share rate Customer loyalty Customer satisfaction Customer Relationship	Trademarks Operation process Information system Corporate Culture	Employee’s knowledge Innovativeness Satisfaction degree Employee’s turnover rate								
Calabrese et al. (2013)		1st level 2nd level Renewal and Development	1st level 2nd level Competence Attitude Intellectual Agility			2nd level (St)		2nd level (St)			
Córcoles (2013)		1st level 2nd level Bibliograhic resources Resources from empirical primary data Basic infrastructure	1st level 2nd level Full-time researchers Researchers qualification Research Incentives Full-time administrative staff					1st level 2nd level Participation in scientific meetings Membership in scientific associations Collaboration with firms			

								and other institutions			
Cricelli et al. (2013)		1st level 2nd level Intellectual property & Technology Corporate culture and internal relationships	1st level 2nd level Knowledge Competence				2nd level (St)	1st level 2nd level Rel. with institutions, with investors, with partners and suppliers, with customers			
Dumay and Roslender (2013)		1st level 2nd level Organization Structure	1st level 2nd level Employee Skills Employee Attitude Intellectual Liveliness Organization Culture	2nd level (St) Called Innovation Capacity				1st level 2nd level Customer and Supplier Contracts Organization Structure			
Demartini and Paoloni (2013a)		1st level	1st level					1st level			
Demartini and Paoloni (2013b)		1st level 2nd level Portals and processes Databases	1st level 2nd level Skills/ Competence					1st level 2nd level International relations			

			Behavior Knowledge on regulation/ engineering					Reputation Institutional relations			
Grimaldi et al. (2013)		1st level 2nd level Intangible Infrastructur al Assets Information Technology Intellectual Properties	1st level 2nd level Knowledge Skills Manageme nt Skills Creativity and Innovativen ess	2nd level (St)				1st level 2nd level Customers Relations Interfirms Relations Supplier Relations Financial Relations Institution Relations Brand and Image			
Liang et al. (2013)	1st level		1st level	1st level			1st level				
Mura and Longo (2013)		1st level 2nd level Group cohesivene ss Trust Communica tion Contribution	1st level 2nd level Innovation Intrinsic work reflection Practical application					1st level 2nd level Networking Perception of customers			
Piri et al. (2013)		1st level	1st level								
Shariatmadari and Azadi		1st level	1st level					1st level			

(2013)											
Su et al. (2013)	2nd level (SC)	1st level	1st level	3rd level (OC)		2nd level (SC)	3rd level (OC)				
Wasiluk (2013)		1st level 2nd level Internal Resources Corporate identity	1st level 2nd level Human competence					1st level 2nd level Social citizenship, Business relationship , Environmental health			
Kim and Taylor (2014)		1st level 2nd level Transformed part of HC Intangible assets in the balance sheet	1st level 2nd level Pure investments in HC Transforming into SC								
Vargas and Lloria, (2014)	1st level	1st level	1st level								
Wang et al. (2014)		1st level	1st level					1st level			

APPENDIX 2

List of interviews conducted and details of interviewees

Interview No.	Organisation	Position in the organisation	Brief Information
1 + 2	Law firm	Owner/Director	Vietnamese; Owns a law firm in Vietnam for ten years; MBA and qualifications in law.
3	Law firm	Owner/IT and Accounting Director	British; Background in IT and Engineering.
4 + 5	Law firm	Junior Paralegal 1	Vietnamese; MBA and Master in HR, experience in big multi-national corporations in Vietnam.
6	Law firm	Junior Paralegal 2	Vietnamese; PhD in Finance, experience in big multi-national corporations in Vietnam.
7	Restaurant	Head Waiter	Vietnamese; PhD in Tourism, Experience in Tourism industry in Vietnam.
8	Restaurant	Chef 1	Vietnamese; Migrant; Experience in non-vegan restaurants in UK.
9	Restaurant	Chef 2/ Owner	Vietnamese; Migrant; owned non-vegan restaurant in UK.
10	Restaurant	Chef 3/ Owner	Vietnamese; Migrant; owned non-vegan restaurant in UK.
11	Charity	President	British; PhD in Archaeology; Experience in big museums.
12	Charity	Vice-President	British; Experience in local authorities.
13	Charity	Trustee	British; PhD in Archaeology; Lecturer.
14	Charity	Former Treasurer	British; PhD in Law; Lawyer.
15	Charity	Consultant	British; Experience in sales and marketing, worked in/with commercial and charities organisations; own companies.