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Camouflaging as identity work: A study of how professionals position themselves in the intersection of professional work and sales work

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Abstract

This paper examines how professionals position themselves and negotiate their identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work in the context of two professional service firms. We propose the concept of camouflaging as identity work to illustrate how professionals (re)construct their identity and position themselves as professionals by integrating and blurring the lines between the various discourses of professionalism and sales in a way that makes sales work appear as a natural part of their professional work and identity. We identify four ways in which professionals position themselves in relation to sales work, namely, as relationship builders, trustworthy partners, problem solvers and helpers. The present paper contributes to 1) the literature on professional identity by emphasizing the importance of work for professional identity construction, 2) previous studies of identity tensions by illustrating camouflaging as a way to navigate and negotiate various discourses and 3) the literature on identity work by showing how a variety of available social identities propels identity work in unexpected ways.

Keywords

Professionals, professional identity, identity work, identity tensions, professional service firms

1. Introduction

In 1958, a survey found that the most common words used to describe sales were greed, selfishness, aggressiveness, money, fast-talking, appearance and high pressure, suggesting that sales work had a poor image (Swenson et al., 1993). Since then, the stereotypical understanding of what it means to be a salesperson has changed little (Fournier et al., 2014; Swenson et al., 1993). Popular culture, movies such as *The Death of a Salesman* and caricatured images of insurance salespeople as aggressive and devious have continued to fuel this stereotypical discourse (Darr, 2006). In research, however, this conventional understanding of sales has been challenged and more current literature point to a discursive construction of the 'salesperson' that goes well beyond the stereotypical currents. For example, literature on client relationships (e.g. Broschak, 2015) and CRM (e.g. Shemwell & Ugur, 1998) suggest that sales work is complex, multifaceted and flexible in nature. This is also evident in today's organizations, where numerous employees not necessarily hired as 'sales personnel' are engaged in sales work one way or another. This is particularly true in professional service firms (PSFs) and in industries such as accounting, law, IT, consultancy, finance and engineering (Darr, 2002, 2006; Løwendahl, 2000; Shemwell & Ugur, 1998; Sheth & Sharma, 2008).

PSFs are populated with professionals who are engaged in commercial activities such as sales (Hanlon, 1998; Lander et al., 2012, 2017; Sommerlad, 2011), yet who still maintain a strong social identity as a professional. As such, what Freidson (2001) labels the "ideal type" professional remains a significant identity resource for many professionals, such as adhering to the notions of public service, professional ethics, technical competence and knowledge-intensive problem solving. Professionals working in PSFs draw on the ideals of being 'a professional' in their identity formation (Alvesson et al., 2015b; Brouard et al., 2017; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007; Francis, 2020) and are increasingly found to navigate a landscape where the commercial interests of their organization intersect with the professional interests of professional associations and peers (Brouard et al., 2017). For example, professional accountants and lawyers working in PSFs draw on the ideas of "ideal type" professionals because they obtained their accounting designations or passed their bar exams and therefore are subject to the societal and professional regulations connected to their profession. In other words, the social discourses of professionalism and social identities of being an accountant or lawyer are central for how these professionals understand and see themselves.

While several studies have pointed out that professional work and the meaning of being a professional are changing in a more commercial direction (Alvehus, 2018; Darr, 2002), we have little insight into how this influences professionals' identity work and how they navigate in reference to those public and often stereotypical discourses, which are a central part of their daily work. Others have argued for the need to build on and enrich our understanding of how professionals experience and negotiate the coexistence of multiple discourses guiding their work (Alvehus, 2018). Darr (2006) and Geiger and Kelly (2014) further call for research on sales in industries and roles that are not normally associated with sales, while Chreim et al. (2007) call for more focus on the dynamics underlying professional roles and identities based on changes in professional fields such as accounting and law.

In this paper, we respond to these calls by examining how professionals talk about their everyday experiences of sales work to answer the research question: *How do professionals discursively position themselves to manage their professional identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work?* We address this question empirically by interviewing 14 lawyers and 14 accountants working in PSFs. Further, theoretically, we draw on theories of professional identity (Chreim et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), identity tensions (Ashcraft, 2007; Frandsen, 2012; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Meisenbach, 2008) and identity work (Alvesson et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2019; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Watson, 2008).

This paper contributes to and advances the literature on professional identity and identity work in a context in which various prevailing discourses are at play. We propose the concept of camouflaging as identity work to understand how professionals navigate and negotiate the various discourses. Camouflaging as identity work captures how professionals (re)construct their identity and position themselves as professionals by integrating and blurring the lines between the discourses of professionalism and sales in a way that makes sales work appear a natural part of their professional work and identity. Specifically, the professionals in our study use camouflage as identity work by discursively positioning themselves as 'relationship builders', 'trustworthy partners', 'problem solvers' and 'helpers'.

These findings advance our understanding of professional identity and identity work in three significant ways. Firstly, we highlight the importance of the work activities in which professionals engage to understand changes to their identity. Secondly, we advance the literature on the management of identity tensions (Ashcraft, 2007; Frandsen, 2012; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Meisenbach, 2008) to illustrate the novel ways identity work serves to camouflage elements of the available social identities professionals navigate in the intersection of professionalism and sales. For example, we observe that the professionals in our study tend to blur the lines between professional work and sales work by making the less-preferred identity of working with sales appear a natural part of their preferred identity of being an accountant or lawyer. Thirdly, we add to the literature on identity work, which has previously highlighted the importance of preferred or aspirational identities (Brown et al., 2019; Ibarra, 1999; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009), by pointing out the role of a less-preferred social discourse and identity for identity work.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Professional identity

Chreim et al. (2007) state that professional identity is the individual's self-definition as a member of a profession and is related to the professional role. Professional identity traditionally refers to a certain profession, to the "constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Therefore, professionals are often defined by what they do rather than where they work (i.e. organizational membership). Eliot and Turns (2011) highlight that socialization into the profession starts early and strong identification processes play a crucial role in shaping the professional identity.

Professionals working in PSFs are likely to have a variety of responsibilities in addition to their professional work such as sales, marketing, production and development, which necessitate a certain combination of skills and social flair (Alvesson, 2004; Løwendahl, 2000). Client interaction and relationships are vital, not only calling for expertise and professionalism as the critical aspect of the role, but also for the "management of the interactions process" (Løwendahl, 2000, p. 162). The differences between the professional knowledge discourse and commercial and corporate sales discourse make it both relevant and interesting to understand what this intersection of professional work and sales work means for how professionals position and negotiate their professional identity.

Based on the foregoing, we stress the importance of focusing on work to deepen our understanding of professional identity in the context of PSFs. The importance of bringing work into focus is highlighted by Ashcraft (2007) and Barley and Kunda (2001) to understand how it influences identity construction in contexts outside PSFs. For example, in a study of medical residents, Pratt et al. (2006) find that work influences and reinforces professional identity construction. Professional identity construction in PSFs is, however, most often studied with a focus on the intersection of individual and organizational identities (Alvesson et al., 2015a; Alvesson & Empson, 2008), with little attention paid to the work in which professionals engage. Chreim et al. (2007) highlight that with changes in professional fields such as accounting and law, it is timely to understand the dynamics underlying professional identity construction and the extent to which these changes affect how professionals manage their roles and identities.

Professionals working in PSFs form their professional identity in a context in which sales is part of their everyday work. Sales work is often different to professional work. It is typically introduced to professionals when they start to work in PSFs and it becomes a more prevalent part of their work as their tenure at the firm increases. Therefore, professionals working in PSFs are likely to experience multiple demands that may influence how they navigate in relation to professional and sales discourses, which in turn may have implications for how professionals behave, interpret and view themselves. It is thus both crucial and relevant to understand the underlying dynamics of professional identity in the intersection of professionalism and sales because the way professionals view and understand their identity is central for how they interpret and act in work situations (Pratt et al., 2006). Still, little attention has been paid to professionals working with sales or how they navigate the intersection of sales work and professional work.

2.2 Identity work

In this paper, we are particularly inspired by Watson's (2008) conceptualization of identity work, which focuses on the discursively constructed aspects of the multitude of social identities available to the individual. This understanding of identity work makes it possible to explore how professionals actively navigate the intersection of socially available discourses of professionalism and sales and how discursively constructed social identities may influence their self-identity.

Watson (2008, p. 129) argues that "elements of discourse are personified in the form of 'social-identities' in a way which makes them meaningful, accessible, and appealing or unappealing to the individual". This view of identity work recognizes the wide variety of discourses to which individuals are exposed as part of both their professional and their private lives, indicating that identity work is an essential part of human life (Giddens, 1991; Watson, 2008). The multiplicity of discursively constructed social identities is central to individuals' identity work, as it provides inputs into an individual's self-identity. In this way, identity work becomes the mediator between social identities and self-identity in an iterative, recursive manner in which individuals both draw on and make inputs into available social identities. In this study, this conception of identity work helps us explore how lawyers and accountants interpret, act and modify the role given to them in the intersection of the variety of available social identities of 'a lawyer/an accountant' and 'a salesperson'. Hence, the degree to which professionals may accept or reject the appealing or unappealing elements of the available social identities as part of their self-identity may help us understand how they discursively position themselves to manage their professional identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work.

Discursive positioning plays a vital role in identity work (Watson, 2008), as it illustrates how individuals take up multiple positions of self in their talk, drawing on as well as constructing various discourses in relation to specific social identities. Based on discursive social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), focusing on the discursive positioning of self enables us to understand how professionals in PSFs engage in identity work produced by discourses around professional work and sales work (Davies & Harré, 1990). When taking a subject position, a person

> *"[...] sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice, in which they are positioned."* (Davies & Harré, 2004, p. 262).

By studying the discursive positioning of professionals, we can understand how they manage their identity between various discourses, which creates distinct and perhaps incompatible versions of reality. Davies and Harré (2004) point out that cultural stereotypes may be drawn on as a resource in discursive positioning: "One speaker can position others by adopting a story line which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which they are 'invited' to conform" (p. 266). Individuals may conform to such stereotypes or choose to challenge, resist or tweak them. Focusing on discursive positioning, we see that individuals do not necessarily form a unified, coherent identity, but rather shift between ways of positioning themselves according to the positions made available to them in their own and others' discursive practices (Davies and Harré, 1990, 2004). The concept of identity work helps us explore and better understand how individuals respond and recognize the process they adopt to (re)construct their identity. Identity work highlights ways in which individuals may construct their self-identities in an interpretive activity and on an ongoing basis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Watson, 2008) and may help us capture the ways (tactics and processes) in which individuals attempt to construct their identities, including in the intersection of various discourses and social identities.

Alvesson et al. (2017) and Thornborrow and Brown (2009) point to identity work as a way to respond to and manage the tensions arising because of the increasingly changing nature of organizational life. For example, Alvesson et al. (2017) highlight that "(w)orking life in contemporary organizations is frequently portrayed as unstable, ambiguous, and conflicted [...]. Employees as well as managers [...] are also frequently affected by ambiguous and contradictory expectations and demands, also exposed to incoherent organizational discourses" (pp. 110–111). By adopting this perspective, we understand not only what happens when professionals are affected by ambiguous and contradictory demands and expectations, but also what the possible ambiguous and contradictory demands look like. In this sense, identity work allows us to explore the stories that professionals tell themselves and others about the work they do (Ashcraft, 2007).

To unfold this further, it is useful to understand how Thornborrow and Brown (2009) use the terms 'preferred identity' and 'aspirational identity'. They use the term 'preferred identity' to explain how the parachuters in their study create and recreate their identities based on the aspiration of being/becoming a parachuter. Similarly, Watson (2008) discusses social identities that may be appealing or unappealing to certain individuals and Brown et al. (2019) study how business school deans construct preferred identities that reinforce and bolster the leadership identity. Concurring with these studies and inspired by Brown et al. (2019), we use the labels 'preferred' and 'unpreferred' identities to denote the "conceived (…) normative identity narratives that capture aspects of who one would like to be and how one desires to be regarded by others." (p. 16). This helps us explore professionals' identity narratives of who they would like to be – or in our case *not to be* – to understand their discursive positioning of self in the intersection of professional work and sales work.

By drawing on the idea of preferred and unpreferred identities, we do not suggest a dialectic or twofold take on identity or identity work. Rather, we follow Brown et al. (2019) who point out that individuals may have several preferred work identities, which are fragile and continually created and recreated in complex, nonlinear constructions.

2.3 Identity tensions

In this paper, we emphasize professionals' identity work with a focus on the intersection of professional work and sales work to understand how they position themselves and navigate the space between the two discourses. Hence, this paper focuses on the tensions, uncertainty, contradictions and inconsistencies in relation to identity work. The literature on identity tension focuses on the individual's identity construction efforts when s/he is navigating contradictions and varying demands (Alvesson, 2010).

To unfold this further, we highlight four studies of identity tensions. Firstly, Larson and Pepper (2003) show how employees and managers navigate during change and transition through three discursive strategies labeled 'comparison', 'logic' and 'support'. Organizational members use these strategies to manage the identity tensions they experience because of the organization's transition. In this way, the authors highlight *how* organizational members respond to identity tensions and point out that they do this as "(t)hey compare and contrast identity options, they rely on 'logical' arguments, and they look for real and implied support from others" (Larson & Pepper, 2003, p. 551). Hence, they focus on the agentic way in which organizational members position themselves.

In the second study of US commercial airline pilots, Ashcraft (2007) focuses on how discourses of difference – and different discourses – influence pilots' identity and work. A main point is that pilots' responses to identity tensions are connected to a fall in their status as elite and powerful captains. In other words, pilots navigate the tensions between the historical discourses of being a pilot and the occupational changes they experience. They respond by "actively preserv(ing) their historical legacy" (Ashcraft, 2007, p. 27) in their accounts. In this way, they tweak the discourses as they navigate the identity tensions, which the author points out functions as a way of organizing and reinforcing occupational identities.

In the third study, Meisenbach (2008) points out that the participants in her study attempt to manage tensions in their occupational identity construction by shifting among framings rather than trying to eliminate the tensions. In this way, the fundraisers in Meisenbach's study manage to navigate the tensions and make meaning of their work and sense of self in a productive and positive way by engaging with one or several overlapping relevant "discourses and empowerment opportunities" (p. 267). This study also adds to our understanding of working with and navigating identity tensions in organizations by engaging shifting discursive framings, in what we observe as a twofold way of navigating various and contradictory discourses.

The fourth study is by Frandsen (2012). In this study, we see how finance professionals struggle with identity tensions in the intersection of holding a high prestige occupational identity and working in a low-prestige organization. Frandsen's (2012) findings indicate a parallel or twofold response by organizational members to the tensions they experience. While the respondents seem cynical about outsiders' attitudes toward the organization, they hold a more positive attitude by focusing on the organization as an employer and themselves as professionals and team members. Thus, the employees respond to identity tensions by adopting "a cynical distance from the organizational identity and image" (Frandsen, 2012, p. 369).

The highlighted studies agree on how organizational members respond to identity tensions. This is evident in the twofold nature of the responses, where respondents navigate varying discourses in what may be characterized by separation and balancing through acts of comparison, shifting, tweaking and downplaying/up-playing. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that we largely know and understand what identity tensions may look like, the responses they may spark and how these may influence identity construction. Still, knowledge is scarce not only in the context of PSFs, but also when it comes to exploring identity tensions in a more nuanced manner. This is why we find it particularly valuable to draw on Watson's (2008) conception of identity work to open up the analysis and broaden the understanding of how professionals navigate the intersection of professional work and sales work in the context of PSFs.

3 Methodology

In this paper, we draw on a qualitative study of respondents working in two PSFs and two professions, namely, law and accounting. Both types of professionals work in PSFs in which sales are part of their everyday work. This focus on sales in the two firms is expressed in similar ways, even though the firms are different. Sales is a central part of the professionals' daily work, which means they actively work with sales KPIs and performance management systems. They are financially rewarded when they bring in new business to their firms. Moreover, career paths and advancement in the PSFs are linked to making sales and building a client base. For the professionals to reach their sales goals and incorporate sales into their everyday work, sales courses, information meetings, individual development meetings and mentoring are all part of their work. We choose to focus on accountants and lawyers because both can be characterized as part of the professions (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). At the same time, the two professions are also different when it comes to, for example, the degree of commercialization and its effect on them, their work and identities underlying the two professions (see e.g. Empson et al., 2015; Francis, 2020; Hanlon, 1997, 1999; Lander et al., 2012, 2017; Willmott & Sikka, 1997). Still, research within both professions also indicates that commercialization, globalization and digitalization influence both accountants' and lawyers' work (see e.g. Cooper & Robson, 2006; Francis, 2020; Hanlon, 1998; Kronblad, 2020; Lander et al., 2012; Skjølsvik et al., 2017). During data collection, we were therefore intrigued to explore to which extent patterns of differences or similarities would emerge.

3.1 Data collection

This study draws on interview material collected as part of a larger research project in which the first author employed a multi-method approach of conducting interviews, observations and document studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data were collected in two PSFs. One a global accounting firm and the other a smaller Swedish law firm, both offering a wide range of services. The lawyers sell services in the areas of labor law, dispute settlement, contract law, property law, tax law, public procurement, company law and construction law to both public and private organizations in southern Sweden and their client base includes small, medium-sized and large organizations. The accountants sell services in the areas of audit, assurance, financial accounting, advisory and tax to organizations of all sizes – many international - in an array of industries.

We anticipated that the lawyers may distance themselves more clearly from sales work, as they are traditionally perceived as a 'purer' profession, while the accountants have historically been seen as a more commercial profession.

However, we found no notable difference in how they described their sales work. Thus, because of the patterns of similarities between the two PSFs, we did not conduct a comparative analysis of the two. In the early phase of this study, we expected to see more differences between the larger accounting firm with an international headquarter and the smaller Swedish law firm in terms of how the professionals position themselves and negotiate their identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work. However, we found that despite the different contexts, in terms of size, place of headquarter and clients, the sales efforts and activities and how the professionals responded to them followed similar patterns, which lead us to explore and focus on these patterns of similarities rather than conducting a comparative study.

The interviews were conducted at the firms' offices in southern Sweden. In total, 28 full-time professionals participated in this study, 14 accountants and 14 lawyers. 15 women and 13 men; tenures ranged from six months to 39 years. The first author gained access to the two PSFs through a business network consisting of professionals from different industries. Based on presentations and sharing in this business network by the two firms, it became evident that sales were a central part of the professionals' everyday work. After initial talks with office managers at the two firms respectively, the participants were selected based on two criteria: 1) The participants should professionals working with sales as part of their daily work and 2) should be diverse in terms of sex, age and tenure.

The semi-structured interviews were completed with five junior lawyers, six lawyers and three lawyers/partners as well as with three junior accountants, five mid-level accountants, two senior accountants and four accountants/partners. The interviews were carried out in English or Swedish based on the participant's choice. The interviews lasted between 21 and 82 minutes and were conducted in a meeting room at the participants' office building over a three-week period with follow-up interviews over the subsequent three months. The shorter interviews were caused by the professionals' deadlines and client meetings. In the interview setting, the researcher could actively engage participants with a focus on certain issues (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The interviews provided an opportunity to focus on sales work in a professional context. The semi-structured interview approach was based on an interview guide with open-ended questions in order to focus the conversation while also giving the respondents the opportunity to talk freely and address areas that they felt were of relevance. The interview guide consisted of four sections containing both general and specific questions about the professionals' typical day, their work as lawyers/accountants and their experiences with and views on sales. Examples of the interview questions were: *What does being a professional involve for you? What does sales/selling in your position involve?* and *How do you experience the sales part of your work? These questions prompted the professionals to reflect and express how they view sales work, how the position themselves in relation to sales and navigate between their sales work and professional work.* All the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the first author and NVivo software was used to sort and categorize the data. In addition to the interviews, the first author spoke informally with the professionals in the office kitchen, over lunch and in meetings such as the daily morning coffee meeting.

3.2 Data analysis

Our data analysis process was inspired by a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018; Tracy, 2013), while adopting this process to include a sensitivity toward the discursive elements of identity work using Potter & Wetherell's (1987) ideas of 'interpretive repertoire' and especially 'discursive positioning'. The analysis unfolded as follows.

The first phase includes data immersion (Tracy, 2013) in which we familiarized ourselves with the material by reading and re-reading the transcriptions. During the interviews, the first author noticed certain language being used by the professionals when they talked about and reflected on sales and sales work. Thus, the focus of this preliminary phase simply was to inquire "what is happening here?" (Tracy, 2013). We were especially curious as of why the participants did not freely, directly and without hesitation say 'I sell', even though it was evident that the professionals engaged in sales activities on a daily basis.

The second phase entailed primary-cycle coding, focusing specifically on the language used, when the professionals talked about sales and how sales was understood by them (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). We found that, while the professionals did not talk about sales directly, they used specific words to describe and reflect on sales and sales work as professionals. They consistently used words and phrases such as "building a relationship", "having a cup of coffee or lunch", "creating trust", "helping the client" and "solving problems and answering questions", which suggests they draw on a number of similar "discourses or interpretive repertoires when answering questions." (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 164). These words were indicative of the professionals' interpretive repertoires understood as "recurrently used systems of terms used to characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). Using open coding to explore these first-level codes we coded all interviews using tin vivo codes to more fully understand the interpretive repertories of the professionals in relation to sales. (Tracy, 2013).

In the third phase, we began to identify patterns and grouping codes within our data. The secondary-cycle coding included hierarchical coding (Tracy, 2013) in which we categorized our first-level codes into 2nd order, focused codes

(Charmaz, 2006). This was performed in relation to our research question and with a focus on how the professionals discursively position themselves to manage their identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work (Davies & Harré, 1990). As such we aimed to understand how the interpretive repertoires were linked to the discursive self-positioning of the professionals vis-à-vis sales. By focusing both on the consistencies and on the variation in language use, as suggested by Potter and Wetherell (1987), we generated the four analytical categories of this paper in an iterative process of sorting and reducing the material, namely, *relationship builder, trustworthy partner, problem solver* and *helper*. These categories directly reflect how the professionals discursively position themselves in the intersection of sales and professional work. Important to this discursive approach (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) is also the idea of shifting positions, meaning that the four categories in our case are not stable 'attitudes' or categorizations of individual professionals, but rather shifting self-positions of which several were present in each interview transcript.

In the final phase, we worked with the 2nd order codes of self-positions as well as studied the frequent shifts. We returned to the initial question of 'what is happening here?' and the idea of camouflaging began to emerge. This resulted in bringing together the four second-order codes in one principal concept (theoretical aggregate) that helps make the phenomenon of *camouflaging as identity work* more explicit. In other words, the codes pointed to the main contribution of this paper (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

As a concluding remark, we do not suggest that the categories presented here are exhaustive. Rather, we set out to present our findings and analysis to show that the empirical examples and interpretations are linked to our analytical claims, so that the reader can assess not only our process but also our findings and conclusions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

4 Analysis

4.1 Working in the intersection of professional work and sales work

In the interviews, the professionals state that they often find experience a tension between their professional work and the sales work they are required to do. Here the professionals often draw on the stereotypical understanding of sales by stating that they find it hard to see themselves as 'a salesperson', which they describe as significantly different than their self-understanding of being a professional. As one accountant states,

> *"It's very, very difficult I think to work with sales, because that's not the person I am. I am really a bookkeeping person. I really like the numbers and I'm a social person so I like to talk with people. But I mean to sell, that's really, really hard (...). I don't feel like a salesperson. No. I feel like a numbers person and an auditor and a salesperson is someone who sells a car (...) I know that I'm not an accountant in the evening but for me it's a way of living in a way."*
> *(Helen, Accountant)*

Here, Helen points to the tension between being "a numbers person" and the stereotype of a salesperson as "someone who sells a car". She associates the words "really, really hard" and "difficult" with being a salesperson, while the professional accounting person is described not only as a work identity, but also as a way of life. While most respondents argue that they do not see themselves as salespeople, they still point out that sales work is part of their working lives. In this example, Hans states,

> *"I do not see myself as a salesperson, as I do not have that background (...) In a room full of salespeople, I feel that I am actually not a salesperson. There is a clear difference, and I see that difference in that they sell 40 hours a week, which I don't. I sell a few hours a week. And I have not attended any sales courses or education (...) So, I don't see myself as a salesperson, I see myself as a lawyer, which also means that I cannot use the same strategies salespeople normally use."*
> *(Hans, Lawyer)*

While Hans positions himself as a lawyer as opposed to a salesperson, he still points out that he is engaged in sales work. He highlights that he is not a real salesperson, because of the number of hours he spends selling, the strategies he uses and the fact that he is not trained. This illustration of how he sees himself in contrast to "a real salesperson" helps him position himself as a professional.

In a similar vein, Bella reflects on sales work by talking about her role in the different tasks related to her profession and sales. This gives rise to an understanding of sales as something alien and difficult for her – as a lawyer – to practice:

"I also think there is a big difference between sitting here in the office working as a lawyer and then being a seller who pulls in clients. For me, it's not one and the same role; it's two different ones. The sales role … requires more effort from me. I can do it but it is like I have to take on another role."
(Bella, Lawyer)

These examples suggest that professionals working in sales experience tensions and contradictions in their daily work. They juxtapose the two identities of being a professional and being a salesperson as related to two sets of activities and two roles that do not complement each other easily. Their descriptions primarily draw on the stereotypical understanding of sales and the sales persona as a problematic social identity. Moreover, lawyers and accountants clearly position themselves as professionals and talk about sales as something challenging in comparison to their professionalism. It is evident that sales for the professionals signifies something difficult and uncomfortable that goes against how they see themselves.

Despite the expressed tensions between the professional and sales identities, it is impossible for the professionals to reject the sales identity entirely. While they distance themselves from being 'a real salesperson', they point out that sales work is an important part of their professional work life as well as a personal interest because of certain incentives such as bonuses and career advancement. Sabina states,

"If you put billable hours into a network for example, then you want that to generate something, to get something back. Also because if I want to aim tat becoming a partner one day, then I have to build a client base. So, it is in my interest to have a sales strategy, even though it is very difficult, I have not studied this. We studied law."
(Sabina, Lawyer)

Here, sales work is positioned differently from our previous examples and its importance for being a successful professional is highlighted. It becomes a strategic part of the puzzle that Sabina embraces and strives to integrate into her professional work to advance her career. This illustrates why the sales identity cannot be pushed aside or rejected by the professionals.

4.2 Professional identity work and camouflaging sales

In the following, we illustrate four key ways in which the professionals talk about sales work, which enable them to manage and navigate the intersection the social identities of "being a professional" and "being a sales person". The empirical material shows that the professionals often talk about sales work using different terms than 'sales' or 'selling'. We identify the four key positions of self they use when talking about sales work that seek to camouflage such work as a natural part of their professional identity: relationship builders, trustworthy partners, problem solvers and helpers.

Camouflaging as identity work captures how the professionals (re)construct their identity and position themselves as professionals by integrating and blurring the lines between the discourses of professionalism and sales in a way that makes sales work appear a natural part of their professional work and identity. By engaging in camouflaging, they draw on vague and ambiguous positions of self; further, they cover up or integrate sales work and make it appear an important professional work activity. At the end of our analysis, we develop the concept of camouflaging further, but first we provide insight into these four positions.

4.2.1 Relationship builders

The professionals consistently camouflage sales work as relationship building. This way of camouflaging sales shows that they discursively construct sales work as 'building relationships' with their clients. By using this euphemism, they make sales activities such as customer interactions, sales meetings and cold calling seem positive, embracing it to the extent that it fits their understanding of what a lawyer or accountant does. The discursive line between sales and professional activities then becomes blurred. Marcus expresses,

"I mean if you focus on building relationships, you are involved in sales as well. So, I mean where do you draw the line between what is what? And that's exactly the exciting part because I also see that the things we call accounting work for example, well that's also sales in a sense right? (…) And if you're able to build that relationship, you are going to be able to deliver more services."
(Marcus, Accountant)

The professionals use the 'relationship building' position to challenge or expand the meaning of 'sales work', making it hard to see what constitutes sales work and what constitutes professional work. Another accountant also suggests that sales can be understood as having a cup of coffee or lunch:

"When it comes to clients that I already have, it's usually having a cup of coffee or having lunch. I mean you could be out there auditing but you should take the time to drink coffee and work with them or go to lunch with them because that is usually when you are able to discuss sales within a normal conversation."
(Tony, Accountant)

In this way, Tony positions sales work in more positive terms, broadening its understanding to be more acceptable within his profession. From coffee and lunch to being active and social with clients, the professionals acknowledge that sales is a regular part of their everyday work. Still, they camouflage sales as relationship building and thereby obscure its appearance to make it more relatable to professionalism such as obtaining knowledge and focusing on the client. As one lawyer says,

"The way I am selling, I don't think: now I have to sell. Rather I am thinking: I want to get to know this person, what type of person they are, what they are doing and get to know their company. And very few people are not interested in telling you about that."
(Martin, Lawyer)

In this way, the professionals camouflage sales work by integrating and blurring the lines of professional and sales work as building relationships and positioning themselves as the well-intentioned professional that spends time with his/her clients and is interested in them. While the professionals distance themselves from the sales identity and seeing themselves as 'real salespeople', they still engage in sales work. Sales work is, however, camouflaged by using the bridging concept of 'building relationships with clients'. This indicates that being a professional becomes the preferred social identity to aspire to, while notions of sales are seen as an unpreferred social identity from which they want to move away.

From the self-position as a relationship builder, the professionals discursively construct sales work as closely connected to themselves and the quality of their professional service by focusing on their relationships with clients (e.g. being social, drinking coffee and having lunch with prospects). Rather than having selling in the front of their minds, they prioritize getting to know clients and their companies. In this way, the professionals position sales work and professional work as overlapping by drawing on the professional discourse, where building a relationship with clients is a cornerstone of professional work. This camouflaging strategy means that they can easily identify with sales work as part of being a relationship builder.

4.2.2 Trustworthy partners

The idea of trust and being the trustworthy partner is another way the professionals camouflage sales work. Trust and ethical conduct are also an inherent part of professional work. The professionals are seen to contribute to society and are often governed by codes of ethics, which guide both their decisions and their everyday work routines. Ethical codes are in place to justify and promote trust in the profession as well as in the relationship between professional and client (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). By contrast, sales work is not guided by the same codes of ethics and the stereotypical understanding of sales work is often associated with self-interest and greed.

By positioning themselves as the trustworthy partner, the professionals' identity work is directed toward camouflaging these stereotypical understandings of sales work as driven primarily out of self-interest and gain. Instead of positioning themselves as a salesperson working to sell professional services, they instead position themselves as a trustworthy partner working in the best interests of the customer. From the empirical material, it is evident that the majority of the professionals refer to trust *as* sales. They express that trust and sales go hand in hand and that they cannot sell their professional services without having a trustworthy connection with their client. One senior accountant says, "*I think (…) what you sell is trust. It's extremely hard for them [the clients] to know whether you're right or wrong. So, you can come a long way with trust.*" *(Elisabeth, Accountant)*.

The interview extracts also indicate that the professionals see trust as both a relational and a quality factor. You can build trust in several ways such as by being a technically proficient professional, by ensuring quality and accountability in your work and by being a trustworthy person, which is further exemplified in the quote below:

"It is all about creating and building trustworthiness and – in a way – loyalty with the client. Building a relationship that is a little deeper. I think this is an important step in our sales work and then it is about other ways of showing quality, everything from when our clients are greeted at the door, also when they are just passing by, to how our delivery looks and that it is done in the right time and scope."
(Sebastian, Lawyer)

While trust is important to professional identity, we also see that the term is used in connection to sales work. Hence, 'trust' becomes the bridging concept that enables the professionals to both draw on their professional identity and

acknowledge sales; yet, they continue to camouflage potential self-interested intentions behind sales by drawing on familiar ideas from the professional discourse of trust, integrity and helping the client.

Trust is not only understood as relating to quality and loyalty; some professionals talk about trust as a personality trait (i.e. being trustworthy) that can be strategically mobilized to sell more. Ulricka expresses that trust is a cornerstone of her work:

> *"It is a combination of creating trust and being trustworthy but at the same time also being the correct and to some extent bureaucratic lawyer. And then in order to sell, you have to find the balance, let go a little and not be too stiff and dry, you have to show some personality. Because you sell with your personality and that is a balance that I find difficult. Trustworthiness and being personal at the same time."*
> *(Ulricka, Lawyer)*

This quote also summarizes how the professionals talk about trust as being similarly crucial for both sales work and professional work, which helps them broaden the understanding of sales and position sales as naturally fitting in a professional relationship with the client. The positioning as a trustworthy partner is characterized by emphasizing clients' interests first, exuding quality from start to finish, being a trustworthy person and being both personal as well as 'bureaucratic' at the same time. While trust is typically associated with professional identity, our respondents point out that it is also crucial to sales work and that being seen as a trustworthy partner is important to them not only as professionals but also in terms of their sales work. Using trust as a 'bridging' concept thus makes sales work appear as professional work and blends in naturally to their professional identity.

4.2.3 Problem solvers

A third way the professionals camouflage sales work is by positioning themselves as problem solvers. While the stereotypical understanding of sales entails pushing (unneeded) products and services 'down the throats' of customers, the professionals instead describe themselves as problem solvers. As Brian, an accountant, expresses, "*I enjoy being in contact with clients and feel that when they lay out their problems to us, we actually have a solution for that problem and we can solve it (...) I really like that.*" While discovering and solving problems is crucial to professional work, it is equally important in sales work. When asked about client relations, the professionals not only highlight problem solving as a crucial part of what they do; they also use problem solving to disguise the promotional aspect of client contact.

From the interviews, it is evident that the professionals position themselves as problem solvers by not only finding the right legal solutions but also reaching the best solution for the client. In these instances, they tend to emphasize the professional work first and position sales work as something secondary. As Alexander explains,

> *"When you get this ah-ha experience. That there really is a problem and questions that we can offer good solutions to. And you can convey it in a trustworthy way. Obviously, I think that is good. Then, I find it difficult in situations where it is all about selling (...) I find it hard to think about sales first as the primary goal. I think more about that we are meeting people and we are going to have a nice time, finding things we have in common (...) it has to feel like it's coming up in a natural way that there is a need that I can actually fill or solve."*
> *(Alexander, Lawyer)*

In this quote, Alexander distances himself from the stereotypical understanding of sales work as being pushy in interactions with clients and instead highlights that problem solving is a win/win for both parties. Problem solvers find solutions to crucial problems for the client, which benefits both clients and the professional. This is also illustrated in Allison's interview:

> *"When it comes to sales, (...) most people consider it lifting the phone and doing a cold call. But it's more like finding solutions. For example, a client of mine, where there's two people owning 50 percent each of the company, and they really didn't have a plan. 'What happens if one of us wants to quit? What happens if anything happens to one of us?' They had many concerns and so we set up a partnership agreement with a person from another business area within the company. So, now they have a partnership agreement and they have an insurance policy to cover if anything happens to the other person."*
> *(Allison, Accountant)*

In this way, both Alexander and Allison discursively distance themselves from the sales identity and instead construct themselves as problem solvers who solve vital issues for their customers. By using the term 'problem solver', the professionals boost their identity as skilled and successful professionals who solve clients' problems, while at the same time minimizing the sales identity in the sense that sales work is described as secondary to their professional work. This way of engaging in camouflaging as identity work highlights how the lines between sales work and professional work

are blurred and integrated by discursively positioning sales work and problem solving as intertwined. Martin, a lawyer, sums this up by saying, "*I'm not making sales. I'm trying to solve a problem and that is good sales*."

In this way, the professionals manage and navigate the intersection of sales and professionalism by camouflaging sales work as solving a problem for clients. They recognize the financial aspects of solving a problem for their clients (i.e. that they have to set a price for that solution). Yet, they smooth the tensions by positioning themselves as problem solvers and focus on the solutions they offer to clients' problems, creating a win/win for the customer and themselves.

4.2.4 Helpers

The professionals also frequently position themselves as helpers. This way of camouflaging sales work is close to the problem solver positioning explored above. However, there are principal differences. The professionals camouflage sales work as being a helper when they talk about carrying out unpaid complementary work such as fixing small issues quickly for clients, listening to clients and answering initial questions. In this way, the helper positioning is often constructed when talking about work outside 'core' professional activities (i.e. unpaid initial work that may develop into sales work over time). Using the term 'helper' camouflages the initial sales work and makes it appear simply a matter of helping clients. They therefore use 'helper' as a bridging concept from professional identity by emphasizing providing services to their clients as a primary goal of their work (Abbott, 1988; Brante, 2011; Freidson, 2001). Anna reflects on sales as helping her clients:

> *"For me good sales is answering initial questions, what is this about, what does the law say about this. If the answer is simple, I do not have to register a case for this question and that is a way to help the client, show that we can solve this and be service-minded. We are here and we are competent (...) You actually have to be generous with the small questions to build trust and help your client (...). Something else that I have started doing, I get a lot of information about new laws and rules all the time, for example when it comes to tax and VAT. Then, I send this information to some of my clients, like practical tips, to the ones where I know it makes sense. Just to build some goodwill. Kind of free help and guidance to the clients."*
> *(Anna, Lawyer)*

In this quote, Anna, when asked about her sales work, lists a number of activities, while simultaneously arguing that this is "a way to help the client, show that we can solve this and be service-minded". She ends up stating that this is a "kind of free help and guidance to clients". While these peripheral activities have the purpose of selling, they are often camouflaged as something the professionals do to help the client.

Emily, a senior accountant, shares a similar point; however, she also talks about helping more in terms of doing a good job and finding opportunities:

> *"We believe that we need to do a good job because when we're doing a good job for our customers, we are also selling (...) Selling is very important, but maybe we say that we find opportunities to present the other service lines and so on (...) It's important to know what we can offer our clients and it's important that we find opportunities to do that and also to help the client because I think we always have serving the client top of mind."*
> *(Emily, Accountant)*

This interview excerpt indicates how the professionals manage the tension between the discourses of professionalism and sales work by referring to sales work as something "important" but still camouflaging it by using words such as doing a good job, helping, opportunities and service. In this way, Emily, similar to our other professionals, constructs her daily (sales) work within the professional discourse and positions herself as a 'helper' – even when performing sales work.

The position of the helper is thus an effective way of camouflaging sales and reinforcing a professional identity by offering advice and services to the client, listening to the client and being proficient and competent in one's field. In this way, camouflaging sales work as 'helping the client' shows how the professionals distance themselves from sales as promotional, commercial and driven by self-interest and rather draw on the professional discourse of helping the client when talking about sales work. This makes it easier for the professionals to integrate sales work as part of their professional identity.

5 Camouflaging as identity work

In this paper, we propose the concept of camouflaging as identity work, which captures how the professionals (re)construct their identity and position themselves as professionals by integrating and blurring the lines between the discourses of professionalism and sales in a way that makes sales work appear a natural part of their professional work and identity. In other words, the professionals draw on vague and ambiguous positions of self to make the unpreferred

aspects of the sales identity appear as aspects of their preferred social identity as professionals. From zoology, we know that camouflaging by animals occurs through two methods: crypsis and minesis. Crypsis entails hiding and making the animal hard to see, while minesis entails making the animal look like something else (e.g. resembling a natural landscape). These methods blur the line between the animal and its habitat and thus make it difficult to distinguish one from the other. We draw on this metaphor of camouflaging to understand how the professionals in PSFs manage the identity tensions between their sales identity (the largely unpreferred identity) and professional identity (the largely preferred identity). We see that the professionals navigate through a discursive maneuvering in which they use a vague vocabulary to construct 'camouflaging' positions of self that blur the lines between the unpreferred and preferred identities, hiding the appearance of the former (crypsis) and making it resemble the latter (minesis).

The empirical material illustrates that the professionals primarily construct four positions: relationship builder, trustworthy partner, problem solver and helper. This enables them to simultaneously resemble and hide aspects of their sales identity and sales work, while covering up those aspects so they appear part of their professional identity. Being a good relationship builder, a good trustworthy partner, a good problem solver and a good helper mean that you are both a good salesperson and, more importantly to the professionals, a good professional. We anticipated before this study that the ways in which junior and senior professionals discursively position themselves to manage their professional identity in the intersection of professional work and sales work might differ. However, we found that the professionals draw on these four positions regardless of seniority. In particular, we found that some senior professionals seem well rehearsed in actively integrating sales work and professional work by using one or more of the four positions, whereas others still maintain that they see themselves more as a professional than a salesperson (e.g. Helen, a senior accountant).

It is furthermore evident that the professionals often use overlapping and constantly shifting camouflaging positions. In our examples, Sofie, Peter and Tony talk about sales as relationship building, helping and trust at the same time. We know from the literature on the discursive positioning of self that people often adopt such constantly shifting positions, where they both respond to dominant discourses and draw out particular self-positions (Frandsen et al., 2018). In this way, the self is "always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the position made available within one's own and others' discursive practices" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). The camouflaging positions detected in our study should thus not be seen as stable expressions of underlying values, but rather as a collection of positions of self that are situational and flexibly performed in constant shifting accounts of the professionals' narration of 'who I am' in the intersection of professional work and sales work. The flexible adoption of camouflaging positions enables the professionals to blend the unpreferred identity of sales into the preferred professional identity even further.

Camouflaging as identity work differs from other ways of managing identity tensions (Ashcraft, 2007; Frandsen, 2017; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Meisenbach, 2008). For example, Pepper and Larson (2003) show that identity tensions are often managed by comparing two (separate) identities to evaluate their advantages and disadvantages. In our case, the professionals refrain from this form of comparison between the sales identity and professional identity, as they continuously attempt to blur the lines between them. In other words, camouflaging as identity work suggests that the professionals actively navigate the intersection of socially available discourses of professionalism and sales and that the variety of available social identities around professionalism and sales influences their identity.

Our findings furthermore suggest that camouflaging as identity work is prevalent not only in our interview setting, but also in interactions with customers. Tony, who positions himself as a relationship builder and often initiates coffee meetings with clients when working at their premises, states that even sales is a precarious endeavor, particularly in interactions with customers. If Tony notices that the client is dismissive or disinterested in his attempts to sell, he will quickly cover up the sales talk and talk about something else: "*If they're not interested in it, I just start talking about something else.*" This interview excerpt illustrates that professionals are careful when engaging in camouflaging and that sales work is rarely pursued directly.

6 Discussion

This paper examines how the professionals employed in two PSFs discursively position themselves to manage their professional identity in the intersection of their professional work and sales work. The analysis illustrates that the professionals engage in camouflaging as identity work in four key ways, namely, by positioning themselves as building relationships, being a trustworthy partner, solving problems and helping the client in contrast to being, what the professionals understand as, a real salesperson. They do this to blur the lines between professional work and sales work by hiding the unpreferred aspects of one identity and making it appear as aspects of the preferred identity. These findings unfold a broadened understanding of professional identity and the process of identity work in contexts in which identity tensions are part of the professionals' work. Hence, our findings contribute to the literature on professional identity, identity tensions and identity work, which we explain further below.

First, this study extends and helps answer the calls for more research on professional identity (e.g. Chreim et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1999). Our understanding of professional identity seems to be shifting in a commercialized context in which the ideas of professional work are challenged by sales work. In PSFs, the dominant discourse is professionalism, while sales signifies a rather tainted form of work surrounded by a stereotypical public discourse of what it is to be a 'salesperson'. They camouflage their sales work while positioning themselves as a professional first and foremost.

They also engage in camouflaging as identity work by discursively positioning and constructing sales in familiar and preferred terms to reinforce and construct their professional identity. The concepts of building relationships and trust, solving problems and helping clients are all classic characteristics of the professional discourse (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Sales work thus appears to be an integral part of the professionals' everyday work. These findings highlight the importance of studying the influence of work on professional identity, especially in PSFs. In particular, this study highlights how the discourses surrounding different forms of work have direct implications on how the professionals construct their identities as well as make sense of and manage their work. When it comes to sales work and the discourses surrounding sales, we find that lawyers and accountants position themselves in similar ways; that is, we find related patterns in how they navigate the intersection of professionalism and sales. At the beginning of the data collection phase, we expected to find more differences between the two professions because of their different educational backgrounds, contexts and cultures. Based on previous studies, we anticipated that lawyers would position themselves more strongly against the sales discourse than accountants, concurring with the expression of accounting as a more market-focused profession than law. This was, however, not the case and the discursive positioning of the lawyers and accountants in this study were similar, with both groups of professionals using similar words and expressions to position themselves at the intersection of professional work and sales work. For future research, this could be further explored to understand how different forms of work carry certain implications for professionals and their professional identity. In example by looking at other professions like engineers engaged in sales. Darr's (2002, 2006) studies of engineers indicate that their work is also becoming increasingly commercialized.

Second, our findings contribute to research by extending our understanding of how organizational members respond to identity tensions. In the examined context of professionals working in PSFs, such tensions are under-researched. The literature, conducted in various other occupational contexts, points out that the tensions between two conflicting identities are managed by the individual by tweaking discourses to uphold an elite status (Ashcraft, 2007), comparing and contrasting two identities (Larson & Pepper, 2003), shifting between framings (Meisenbach, 2008) and playing down one identity, while playing up another (Frandsen, 2012). In other words, their responses are often characterized by separating and balancing different options in a twofold way. By contrast, our study shows that the professionals refrain from comparing identities and seeing them as distinct. Instead, they continuously attempt to blur the lines between the identities and camouflaging the sales identity by using 'vague' positions of self such as 'relationship building' and 'helping the client'. Such discursive maneuvering enables them to integrate and construct sales work as a natural part of their professional work. Still, the four positions should not be understood as fixed or constant; rather, the professionals constantly shift between ways of positioning themselves based on socially available discourses and social identities. This also highlights that identity and identity work are not necessarily a unified or coherent endeavor for the professionals. Future research could provide valuable insights into how other aspects of organizational life such as attire, workplace surroundings, food/dining choices, titles, behavior and hierarchy may be understood as other forms of camouflaging.

Third, our findings contribute to research on identity work. Camouflaging as identity work indicates that this is an agentic way for the professionals to manage and navigate the intersection of professional work and sales work. Brown et al. (2019) and Thornborrow and Brown (2009) point out the importance of a 'preferred' or 'aspirational' identity for identity work. Our findings, however, suggest the importance of an 'unpreferred' identity for identity work. Brown et al.'s (2019, p. 6) definition of a preferred identity as normative identity narratives and self-positioning that capture the aspects of who one would like to be and how one desires to be regarded by others. In contrast, unpreferred identities captures the aspects of who one would like not to be and how one desires not to be regarded by others. In our study, we find that the professionals go to great lengths to camouflage the stereotypically defined unpreferred sales identity and integrate it with the preferred professional identity. While the professionals distance themselves from being salespeople, they still recognize that sales work is important to their career and thus cannot disregard it – nor disidentify with the sales identity – completely. Instead, they engage in camouflaging as identity work to conceal sales work and instead make it appear as professional work. By focusing on the discursive positioning of individuals in other contexts than PSFs, future research could examine other ways in which unpreferred identities motivate creative forms of identity work.

Future research would also benefit from taking a more critical perspective to understand how camouflaging as identity work may be controlled by management, focusing on identity regulation or identity politics in relation to sales work (Alvesson et al., 2015b; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). While we in this paper focus on camouflaging as an identity work construct, we fully recognize that camouflaging may also be shaped through identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Identity work does not happen in isolation, but is also a product of socialization and cultural engineering (Kunda, 1992). Previous studies have highlighted that career trajectories (Grey, 1994) and HRM practices (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Townley, 1993) have significant impact on the identity projects of employees. Critical research thus suggests that what we experience as our 'wants' and our 'values', our 'identity' is largely internalized corporate needs (Deetz, 1992; Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Deetz, in example, write "The disciplined member of the organization wants on his or her own what the corporation wants" (Deetz, 1992; p. 42). From a critical perspective we may see the camouflaging as identity work as not only an individual project 'beneficial' to the professionals but also to the corporation.

7 Conclusion

Camouflaging as identity work is a way for professionals to position and construct themselves and their work in the intersection of various discourses constructing both unpreferred and preferred social identities. In this paper, we argued that professionals engage in camouflaging as identity work to blur the lines between professional work and sales work. They achieve this by hiding the unpreferred aspects of the sales identity and making it appear as aspects of the preferred professional identity, thus blurring the lines between sales work and professional work. Four key ways of positioning were unfolded, which shows how the professionals discursively construct and position themselves in the intersection of sales work and professional work: relationship builder, trustworthy partner, problem solver and helper. These findings add to the literature on professional identity, identity work and identity tensions.

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