

**Contribution for the**

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<b>Title of the abstract</b>	<i>Practices of team building and identity shaping in an academic research group</i>
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### ***Practices of team building and identity shaping in an academic research group***

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This study is an ethnography of an academic research group, and it distinguishes itself since it aims to understand how practices of team and identity building unfold in daily routines. In fact, literature on research groups belongs especially to laboratory studies, a sub discipline of science and technology studies, and it is strongly focused on epistemic practices (Doing, 2008; Sismondo, 2011). Consequently, practices of team building and identity shaping are not deepened in the literature on research groups. We will also show how ethnographic work strategically contributes to unveil such practices.

Team building is often very loosely defined. We will keep the definition by Klein et al. (2009): they underline that team building does not directly address the disciplinary knowledge or skills of the field considered, but it refers to the conditions that permit to people in a team to effectively interact and work together, in a collaborative environment. Drawing on an extensive literature review, Klein and her colleagues indicate the four “models” that today are widely recognized to be particularly relevant to team building: goal-setting, developing interpersonal relations, clarifying roles, creating additional capacity for problem-solving.

Concerning team identity, we refer to Hatch’s and Schulz’s (2002) concept of organizational identity: actually, we repute it to be a good construct for defining collective identities in institutional contexts. Identity is an essentially relational phenomenon, developing in time. When applied to groups and organizations, it is strictly related to culture and image, since it expresses cultural understanding and it mirrors images of others.

We conceive both team building and identity as two practices: practices do not exist *per se*, but because they are enacted by people interacting among each other. For this reason, practices have a performative character (Gherardi, 2009).

Building on this conceptual framework, we will assume that the two phenomena of team building and identity are strictly intertwined, and they are worth to be analysed together. We will investigate the two following questions: how practices of team building and identity making emerge in an academic research group; how are these two processes interrelated among them.

Ethnography, with its iterative-inductive approach, is particularly suited to answer “how” questions and to study how practices develop in time (O’Reilly, 2005). This ethnographic research has been conducted in 2010: data have been gathered through observation of group activities, attendance of 23 weekly group meetings, two bunches of individual in-depth interviews, review of the group mailing list.

The field is constituted by a research group from a Swiss Faculty of Informatics: it has been funded in 2007 by its present chief, a full professor. At the time of the empirical research, it was composed by ten members: the full professor, a senior researcher, two post-doc researchers, six PhD students at different phases. The group is highly intercultural, with people coming from different countries, and speaking English as a lingua franca.

Results show that team building practices are enacted mainly by the chief, and that group meetings are a particularly important moment both for team building and for the construction of team identity. First of all, regarding team building, we will show that some artefacts (wiki, mailing list) are essential. Secondly, group

meetings are strategic for two interrelated reasons: the chief always allocates some time slots for reflecting on the group practices; then, their open and participative format permits to everyone to intervene freely, and consequently to give a personal contribution and to propose new activities. This facilitates the work of reflection and negotiation of the team identity. Actually, team meetings are an important place for the group's self-reflection.

Our analysis has important implications for the management practice: actually, we can show that, in a setting where each group member has a high workload, some team building strategies are particularly relevant. Conducting practices of team and identity building in this type of professional setting is especially useful for facilitating academic work. This observation bring us also to highlight the importance of ethnography, not only for gaining in-depth accounts of workplaces, but also for giving very concrete recommendations to the research subjects for improving their own practices.

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