

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Re-weaving threads of member identity
following a church merger**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

in

Psychology

At Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand

Peter John MacKenzie

2018

Abstract

A merger of churches has a large impact on the members and this research explores how member identity is impacted in the merging process. An explanatory metaphor – threads of member identity – was developed to explain how a merger challenges established attachments and to explore the process of re-weaving the threads. It is suggested that the six threads of identity that connect a member to the church are relational, locative, temporal, purposeful, procedural, and valuative.

The research question was considered through exploratory case studies in two merging churches, at different stages of merging. A semi-structured interview format was adopted as a means of data collection. Overall 31 members and leaders of the churches were interviewed, along with observation, participation and written material. The participants were asked about various aspects of their church involvement in the merging process and their understanding of identity.

The mergers were shown to disrupt member identity across the breadth of the six threads in affect, behaviour and cognition. The threads of member identity metaphor also provided an analytical tool for interpreting the identity work that was undertaken by church members in re-weaving their sense of belonging and identity into the merged churches.

Table of Contents

	Abstract	ii
	Table of Contents	iii
	List of Figures and Tables	iv
1	Introduction	
	1.1 The context of the study	1
	1.2 My identity and this research	3
	1.3 Metaphor	4
	1.4 Chapter Outline	7
2	Churches	
	2.1 The church as an organisation	9
	2.2 Mergers in church literature	12
	2.3 Church identity	14
	2.4 The Presbyterian Church	15
3	Identity, Mergers and Managing Change	
	3.1 Identity	19
	3.2 Mergers	22
	3.3 Managing Change	24
4	Spinning the Threads	
	4.1 Relational Threads	26
	4.2 Locative Threads	28
	4.3 Temporal Threads	29
	4.4 Purpose Threads	30
	4.5 Procedural Threads	31
	4.6 Valuative Threads	32
5	Methodology	
	5.1 A preliminary project	35
	5.2 The level of attachment	37
	5.3 How is identity perceived?	38
	5.4 Exploring the effect of a merger	40
	5.5 The merging churches	40
	5.6 Participants	42

5.7	Interviews	43
5.8	Observation, Conversation and Written Material	45
5.9	Analysis	45
5.10	Writing Up	46
5.11	The researcher	46
6	Church Alpha Analysis	
6.1	Introduction	47
6.2	Relational Threads	48
6.3	Locative Threads	53
6.4	Temporal Threads	56
6.5	Purpose Threads	60
6.6	Procedural Threads	63
6.7	Valuative Threads	67
6.8	Chapter Summary	70
7	Church Beta Analysis	
7.1	Introduction	72
7.2	Relational Threads	73
7.3	Locative Threads	75
7.4	Temporal Threads	77
7.5	Purpose Threads	79
7.6	Procedural Threads	81
7.7	Valuative Threads	83
7.8	Chapter Summary	84
8	Discussion	
8.1	A church merger's challenge on identity	86
8.2	Member identity in church life	88
8.3	Member identity in organisational mergers	89
8.4	Re-weaving identity in organisational psychology	91
8.5	Using the metaphor	91
	Appendix 1: Information and Consent Forms	94
	Reference List	97

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 : Review of church analysis models	12
Figure 2 : PCANZ Statistics, 2005 and 2015	17
Figure 3 : Pie graph of parish size	17

Table 1 : Emerging themes from the interviews	40
Table 2 : Total, gender and age of participants	43
Table 3 : Years of involvement by lay people	43