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Navigating Role Identity Tensions: It Project Managers' Identity Work in Agile Information Systems Development

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Abstract

Purpose: This research seeks to examine identity tensions in IT project managers involved in developing Agile Information Systems Development (ISD). It looks at the transition from the hierarchical functional PM structures to the non-hierarchical decentralised decision-making forms of Agile. These tensions relate to how the organisational tensions affected the roles of project managers. The third study concerns role tensions leading to conflicts and identity work about traditional and agile paradigms.

Materials and Methods: The study employs a qualitative research technique involving semi-structured interviews among the participants, the IT project managers. It gathers data on the project managers and explores the nature of their conflicts and how managers resolve these conflicts regarding tensions concerning compliance and cooperation, role definition, and leadership adaptations in the Agile context.

Findings: The research identifies three primary areas of tension for IT project managers; Lack of coordination between attempts to enforce bureaucracy (laws and policies) and coordination (work incorporation). Ambiguity of the roles played in various organisational settings Failure of the organisational structures to provide clear roles that individuals play during their operations. Agile leadership challenges moving from decision-making

authority to a more coordinated leadership position. Organisational officials and project managers use measures including endorsing peripheral positions, engaging peers and enrolling for organisational development to deal with such opposing forces. Importance is placed on the organisational climate, resources and training within the study to focus on organisation adaptability and identity work within Agile frameworks.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study suggests practical measures for management organisations to improve individual and organisational outcomes in Agile ISD settings; Develop suitable training courses as a measure to help people adapt to the Agile type with effectiveness. Make networks and peer support systems for project managers. This increases role conflict, which should be minimised by establishing a clear structure of responsibilities and tasks within the company. The findings also advance theory by discussing how professional identity develops and the psychological and social changes that occur when transitioning to Agile culture.

Keywords: *Role Identity Tensions, Agile Information Systems Development (Isd), Facilitative Leadership, Organizational Support*

JEL Codes: M15, M12, D23, L86, O33

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Moving from bureaucratic and rigid ‘Waterfall’ system development methodologies, Agile ISD has recently come into vogue, focusing on flexibility, iterations, and collaboration (Beck et al., 2001). To assess the current value of Agile methodologies, this paper incorporated the original research of Beck et al. on the creation of Agile, which offers background knowledge on the formation of the new theories on Agile. Huda et al. (2021) extend from this by pointing out how these changes create alterations to the roles of project managers, adding new vectors of accountability and interaction. Using the Agile literature of the present day to form the basis of the argument, this study becomes fundamental for this research. To this end, the work by Tripp and Armstrong (2018) helps understand how these changes reconfigure identity on the part of the project manager. Their discussion of the shift from decision-making specialists to empowering coordinators for leadership is a fact that captures the contradictions of role identification. In this relevance, these role adaptations provoke identity threats among the managers, which, in a way, affects team relations and the results of the project.

Berggren and Söderlund (2020) enrich the concept by associating role identity with performance and team conduct, particularly considering the systemic nature of identity conflicts. Also, Ibarra’s (1999) grounded findings related to role negotiation and reconstruction processes are core to conceptualising how managers manage change within Agile settings. These theoretical contributions justify the systematic investigation of identity work and role adaption in Agile ISD work environments. They are helpful in positioning this paper’s contribution to the literature on managing identity tensions during Agile adoption.

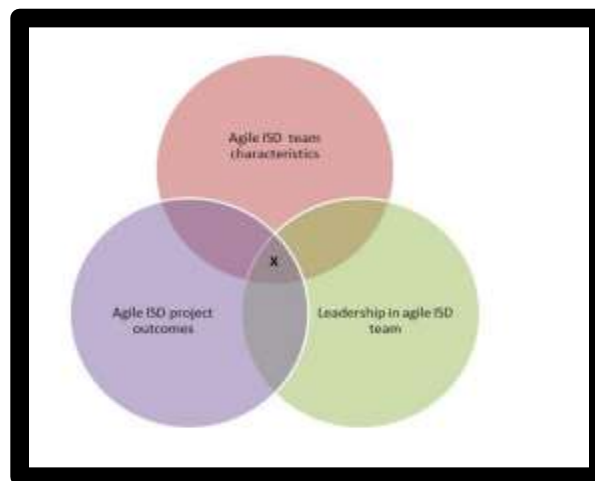


Figure 1: Agile Approaches

As Agile approaches to IT projects are gaining interest, there needs to be a stronger scholarly focus on how IT project managers navigate their identities during the changes in power relations and processes that characterize agile work. Current literature focuses on the process aspect of agile implementation and the practicalities surrounding the change and does not consider the psychological and social changes required for role transformation. Thus, this study is concerned with understanding the identity work that IT project managers perform to manage role identity tensions in Agile ISD environments.

Problem Statement

The transition from the classical mechanistic ISD paradigm towards Agile ISD has impacted many aspects of the organisational processes and the role of the IT project managers. They have traded defined mechanistic tasks for roles that are inherently contradictory to the Agile approach. This transition introduces psychological and social challenges as managers navigate dual roles: the strict hierarchical or authoritative form of leadership followed by the traditional system compared to the empowered, self-organising system found in Agile (Hoda et al., 2021). They create confusion, stress and lower work output if not managed effectively, and we see them as critical factors that affect well-being and group performance.

Even though the overall applicability and advantages of Agile have been investigated extensively by focusing on the technique, process and people, and managing resources and stakeholders, the psychological and social changes related to the introduction of Agile have hardly been investigated at all, more so if seen from the project manager perspective. Paradoxes of the new role—decisive decision-maker on the one hand and Agile team member on the other—can put managers under pressure and destabilise interpersonal relationships at work, jeopardising the project's success.

This study fills this void by closely examining how IT project managers deal with role identity breaches during transformation to Agile ISD. This is why it is so important for organisations to help managers navigate this process, promote their health, and build up the skills needed for Agile alignment. As such, the paper provides theoretical concepts and applied solutions to help managers address those psychosocial challenges and facilitate the corresponding balancing of these two conflicting roles for the success of Agile projects.

The Rationale of the Study

Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature on professional identity by discussing the dark side of both authoritative and facilitative roles assumed by IT project managers in Agile ISD environments. In contrast to previous research, which of the ten structural or organisational elements, this research examines identity tensions in psychological and social contexts. The paper contributes a fresh angle by identifying the tactics managers use to manage competing roles, mimicry and identity work, and conceptual insights into processes of constant change solicited by presenting rapidly evolving modern organisational structures.

The research underlying this study is grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT), which offers a solid foundation for explaining the decision-making processes of subjects exposed to multiple and often conflicting roles and groups in the organisational environment. SIT presupposes that a person acquires his/her identity from group affiliations, and conflict may occur where there is a difference between group and role. In the context of Agile ISD, project managers are in a dilemma in which the traditional project manager is an authoritative figure in contrast to the new Agile project manager, who is a facilitative figure.

Based on SIT this paper explores how managers navigate these conflicting roles and performs 'identity work', with consideration given to the psychological and social aspects. This research builds on prior literature on professional identity by elucidating sources of tension and mimicry at work to suggest how organisations may develop more effective strategies for training and organisational culture interventions to help managers navigate Agile transformations.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the study is essential in that it constitutes one of the few investigations of Romantic-era poetry in the context of social cognition. Consequently, applying the proposed theory aims to fill an essential void in the existing scholarly body of knowledge by investigating the identity work of IT project managers in the context of Agile ISD. Unlike prior works that focus on the execution and structures in the context of Agile, this study examines psychological and social changes in role transition from the traditional working environment about various theoretical contributions to professional identity formation.

Indeed, the research offers practical implications for organizations that aim to help IT project managers during agile enactments. Understanding the sources of role identity tensions and the strategies managers use to deal with them helps organizational designers develop specific approaches, including leadership development and team-building exercises, to help the transition go more smoothly. The studied results also provide insight into enhancing team performance, project results, and the quality of life of managers on the agile teams.

Structure of the Study

This article has five sections: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, and Conclusion. The students are requested to present an Introduction that helps them give details of the research background, problem statement, rationale, objectives, and significance. The following section, Materials, and Methods, describes the research design, approach, and methodology and also provides information on the subjects' selection criteria and data collection. The Results section accounts for the themes elicited from the data analysis process under each research aim.

The subsequent Discussion translates the findings to prior theory and practice considerations for further meta-analytical inquiry or theoretical advancements. Last, the Conclusion provides an overview of the findings in the present study, drawbacks encountered when undertaking the research, and recommendations for future studies.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The qualitative method used in this research explores and analyses the identification work undertaken by IT project managers in an Agile Information Systems Development (ISD). Since roles, conflicts, and their functioning are intricate, particularly in organisations, and role identity is subjective, qualitative methods are ideal for describing participant experiences. Semi-structured interviews were considered the main type of data collection as they are more informative than unstructured but provide more flexibility compared to structured interviews.

While other methods like focus groups, which may only allow for the depth of response given under group pressure, or surveys, which give only breadth but no depth of investigation into experience, semi-structured interviews are helpful in that they offer a more in-depth exploration of individual experiences. They allow the participants to express their management of identity work and obstacles they encountered without limitations and, simultaneously, offer the researchers to steer the conversation towards particular research questions. This method effectively determines the individual and psychological aspects of identity tensions in the Agile ISD environment.

The collected data were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis, an appropriate data description technique. The process also included getting to know the data and the themes and sorting the data to look for themes and novel meanings. This structured analysis gave a rich description of the working conditions in which IT project managers find themselves and offered insight into the identity work in Agile ISD environments.



Figure 2: Research Methodology

Research Approach

Based on the research question, the phenomenological research method for studying the life experiences of the participants, the IT project managers, was chosen. Phenomenology focuses on the participants' experiences and how they make sense of them, a feature that makes it useful for investigating identity work in Agile ISD organizations.

This approach involves identifying people's conceptions of their tasks and processes, as well as their issues and successes, consistent with the study objectives to explore identity tensions and solutions. Phenomenology allows capturing the participants' first-hand experience of identity work's dynamic and context-sensitive processes.

The phenomenological method suppresses the pre-suppositions and concentrates on the participant's experience. Measures like bracketing were applied to minimize bias that might be posed by the researcher in order to provide an accurate view of participants' lived world. This commitment to being neutral and deeper offers an understanding of how IT project manager's deal with the dynamics of Agile ISD.

Phenomenology also helped identify how participants construct and negotiate their identities regarding their roles and responsibilities in agile contexts. The focus on the lived experience reveals the relationship between perception and structure as an essential addition to the study of identity work strategies. This approach proves that I and other students can use subjective stories while analyzing difficult professional occurrences.



Figure 3: Research Strategy

Research Philosophy

The study is informed by an interpretivism research paradigm emphasizing the construction of reality from the participants' frame of reference. In contrast, Interpretivism thinks that reality is socially constructed and that context plays a crucial role. This philosophy accords well with the study goal of understanding the identity work of IT project managers in Agile ISD contexts.

Closely linking to this is the rationale for adopting an interpretivism perspective for this research; it is highly individualized and context-dependent. Thus, the study's objective is not to identify patterns that might provide a universal view but to learn more about Agile IT project managers' reality. Hence, the idea of interpretation is the epitome of this approach, given that the data collected through interviews is rich and elaborate.

This philosophy is applied to each research process, from question formulation to data analysis. It confirmed the concerns of how, beyond and through the data, the researcher's presence and operations could influence the outcome. That is, by adopting subjectivity in the study, it is possible to understand all the emotions, thoughts, and social aspects involved in identity work.

Finally, interpretivism philosophy ensures that the research focuses on the participants' views, providing a detailed description of identity tensions and strategies. This approach enhances a deeper understanding of various aspects of the role of individual and organizational culture in the Agile ISD environment.

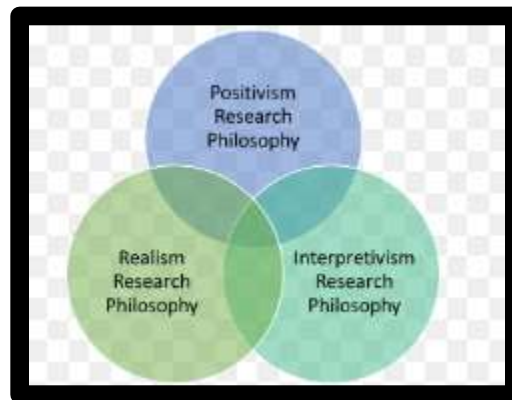


Figure 4: Research Philosophy

Inclusion Criteria

The participants selected for the study must be 18 years and above, diagnosed with type II diabetes, and on an insulin sensitizer. Any participant who is currently a smoker, pregnant or breastfeeding, or taking any anticoagulant medication...

Of course, to make the work relevant and scientific, the criteria for selecting participants were carefully worked out. These criteria helped to identify participants who would bring valuable knowledge of identity work within the context of Agile ISD.

Inclusion Criteria

Only IT project managers with at least three years of experience in Agile ISD will be included in the study. This threshold guarantees that all participants invited to participate are familiar with agile methodologies and identity issues.

To date, active managers are working in organizations that employ agile methodologies. In Agile conditions, activity participation ensures timely and appropriate viewpoints on the approaches to IDWS.

Exclusion Criteria

Managers who perform activities only within the context of project management and pursue traditional project management careers. Most importantly, they had yet to be exposed to the agile practices that would enable them to bring insights into the Agile-specific identity tensions under study.

People who have worked less with Agile. This eliminates persons who use agile methodologies occasionally or have yet to be involved in it to focus more on experienced persons.

According to the above criteria, the study made it possible to obtain focused and detailed participants, reducing the chances of bias. This approach increases the credibility and generalizability of the findings, promoting the inclusion of identity work concerns in the analysis of Agile ISD project managers.

Data Collection

Twenty semi structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants, including IT project managers from different sectors and industries, to provide diversified participants. This meant that

in the course of data analysis, rich information was possible to gather about participants' identity work strategies and difficulties, as well as their attitudes towards Agile ISD.

These interviews took approximately 45 to 60 minutes and were semi structured. Flexible questions adopted in the study permitted the respondents to express their experiences in the most incredible detail possible. At the same time, follow-up probes kept them focused on the study's objectives. Discussed issues included conflict around identity, conflict concerning expectations as to the role one has to play, and conflict in coping mechanisms.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, audio-taped with the participants' permission, and transcribed for analysis. Thus, the detailed procedure for data analysis guaranteed the assimilation of participants' accounts without distortion, which is critical to the formal analysis of their specific experiences. The data collected was analysed thematically so that the research could establish patterns for similar observations.

To increase the reliability of the research participants, participants were selected from organizations of different sizes and sectors, and industries covering diverse Agile ISD experiences. This diversity proved helpful in enhancing the richness of the data, thus enhancing understanding of identity dynamics within the IT project managers. The essence of collecting the data in a strict methodological way as well as including a set of participants made the results adequately valid and reliable.

3.0 FINDINGS

This section of the paper reports the analysis conducted on the data collected from the interviews based on thematic analysis. The themes emerged based on research objectives and provided an understanding of the identity tensions of IT project managers in AISD, the strategies applied to manage these tensions, and the organizational factors that shape their identity work.

Theme 1: Tensions in Role-Based Identification

This study revealed several primary sources of role identity tensions for working IT project managers in the Agile ISD landscape, as explained below.

Mismatches Concerning Compliance and Cooperation

The primary role identity strain that IT project managers in agile teams reported was the tension between hierarchical structure/autocratic leadership and agile values. Conventional project management knowledge depicts project managers in charge of a project and making critical decisions. On the other hand, agile practices come with the self-organization of teams and management in terms of decisions, though at times, this comes as a challenge to the project managers. One participant described the challenge as follows:

I was used to it, as is the lot of any project manager—or so I thought until recently when the client had the last word. In Agile, I sometimes need to sit back while the team is allowed to manage themselves independently. Sometimes, it is hard to get the two rights."

This comment highlights project managers' central tension: It brings their traditional view of leadership regimes, characterized mainly by control and direction, into conflict with the agile regime, which focuses more on decentralized control and the idea that we are all responsible.

Employers understand that there are always issues entailing discomfort in letting go of control, and such issues make project managers confused about their role in a team.

Lack of Clearly Developed Organizational Procedures

Participants also reported that another source of conflict originated from uncertainty in organizational procedures relating to member roles in agile teams. Some participants observed that their organizations needed to clearly outline or explain what was required from the project managers regarding Agile ISD. As one participant explained:

'Often, one can get the impression that this company has yet to entirely decide what it expects from project managers in agile environments. It is confusing for everyone.'

It also led to role conflict because the project managers engaged in agile methodologies without appropriate organizational backing or shifty visions of what they should do. Informally structured roles notably witnessed blurred identity when required to work in Agile teams, hence perceiving their colleagues differently than required, leading to frustration and feeling unsupported in addressing challenges arising from Agile.

Theme 2: It Is for This Reason That This Paper Presents the Following Negotiating Strategies for Handling Identity Conflicts

However, multiple participants explained how they manage Agile and the conflict of role expectations, referencing reconciling multiple roles in agile environments. The strategies proposed in this theme focus on the leader's role as a facilitator and the need for support among peers and the organization.

In this respect, the focus is on what might be more accurately described as Facilitative Leadership.

One of the most essential practices highlighted for project managers in agile teams was to move from 'telling' people what to do to empowering them. Leaders of projects changed their people management style by shifting from an authoritative approach to a more facilitative one. One participant shared:

I always consider myself a leader, not just someone who orders people around. My role is to ensure that the team has no hindrances to growth and that they perform at their best.'

This approach allowed the project managers to maintain power and be involved in supporting the team without intervening in team decisions. Using a facilitative leadership approach, the project managers retained their formal power in a manner that conformed to agile principles while recognizing and honouring team self-organization.

The emphasis on facilitation also included observing the team's progress and resolving issues related to the project, with no supervision of delegating authority or decision-making to the team members. This change of direction from the traditional corporate managerial approach to a more supportive role was incredibly constructive in integrating 'approachable' project managers into Agile Teams, which generally champion teamwork and delegation of authority.

Looking for Help from Peers and Organization

The last method mentioned by participants was the use of peer networks and organizational support, especially training. Most of the project managers identified that it was powerful to meet with friends who experienced similar issues to get views on how to handle such alterations of roles.

Through the peer networks, they got to relate to other people, learn how to build their confidence, and also learn differently about how to embrace their identity within agile frameworks.

Coaching sessions in Agile were beneficial to me. They empowered me to understand how I could better add value without overburdening the team."

This last quote above shows how training sponsored by the organization facilitated the change in project managers to best fit Agile practices. These sessions assisted project managers in gaining a better appreciation of their new roles and offered usable instruments for managing their identity conflicts. Listening to the experiences of colleagues and agile coaches, managers strengthened their flexibility and decided to change their approach to leadership.

Theme 3: In the Context of the Current Study, the Following Organizational Factors Emerge As Influential to Identity Work

Examining role identity tensions showed that the organizational context moderated them considerably in determining the exercise of influence by the IT project managers. In light of the foregoing analysis, several factors within organizations were identified to impact identity work in Agile ISD; these included training programs and organizational culture.

Role of Training Programs

Identifying agile leadership training programs for project managers was crucial for addressing their identity transformation. The players pointed out those programs were instrumental in affording them an understanding of engagement in Agile systems. They said that lacking formative education, they needed to learn how their pastoral management skills could be used to implement Agile. For example:

Agile training is a deficit here, but without it, I think I would have fared even less. This helped me have an independent vision of what exactly an agile team project manager does and how I could aid without overstepping the team.

This statement alone highlights the value of structured training in transitioning project managers. Training sessions not only inculcate theoretical information about Agile but also present practical, pragmatic approaches to handling agile projects and forming successful interpersonal interactions with team members. Therefore, training programs were identified as facilitators of the performance of identity work in Agile ISD.

Effect of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture was the other meso-level characteristic that played a role in how managers at different levels handled their identity tensions. According to the study participants, it has been easier for project managers in organizations with cultures that support flexibility, adaptability, and innovation to incorporate agile practice into their traditionally authoritative leadership posts.

Table 1: Quotation and Coding Table

Theme	Sample Quotation	Code
Conflicting Expectations	“In Agile, I have to step back and let the team lead themselves. It’s difficult.”	Role ambiguity
Facilitative Leadership	“I see myself as a guide rather than a boss.”	Collaborative leadership
Role of Training Programs	“Agile coaching sessions gave me a clearer picture of my role.”	Training effectiveness
Organizational Culture	“A flexible culture makes it easier to adapt to Agile roles.”	Cultural adaptability

Discussion

The discussion categorizes the results of the thematic analysis of role identity, agile practices, and organizational behavior literature. Finally, section 7 presents the conclusion of the results based on the research objectives and an evaluation of the degree to which the findings are consistent with or differ from prior related studies.

The Role Identity Tensions in Agile ISD

The results support prior studies focused on role identity tensions in an agile setting, pinpointing the issues concerning the role transition of IT project managers from conventional project management to Agile practices. The previous works, for instance, by Lee and Xia (2022), have shown that by changing the structure of work, Agile tends to need clarification regarding the roles and responsibilities of project managers.

Participants in this study also reported very similar ideas regarding clashes between the desire to exercise control and the agile framework of decentralized decision-making. This aligns with Clarke and Wild’s (2020) findings that agile

Project managers may switch between being authoritative and encouraging. Such conflict support calls for more effective role definitions and organizational support during the Transition to Agile Practices.

How to Manage Role Identity Conflicts

The tactics described by participants are accredited with the identity work in the adaptive manner described by Petriglieri (2021) through, for example, facilitative leadership and organization support. In particular, the focus in the analyzed case on the balance between the decision-making power and the involvement of subordinates corresponds to Kline’s (2019) conclusion about the enforcement of agile project managers over being commanders.

Nevertheless, this study contributes to this literature by showing that peer networks are a helpful coping strategy. Unlike prior studies, many of the participants in this study noted how informal

learning through knowledge management networks played an essential role in managing identity tensions. This indicates that improving the concept of a collaborative learning environment at the workplace might be a way forward in encouraging agile

Contribution of Organizational Cash Balance

Organizational culture and training programs as features of identity work have received significant attention in the existing literature. For instance, Lindsjörn et al. (2021) concluded that an open, adaptable, performance-oriented culture helps project managers move through transitions more easily. The results of this study also support these conclusions: people in supportive organizational cultures appealed less often to distress than those in authoritarian and hierarchical cultures.

Moreover, emphasis on training programs shows that organizations probably need sufficient support for developing specific training and development interventions relevant to the specific issues that Agile project managers experience. Unlike earlier research, which has mainly concentrated on implementing technical Agile training, this work points to the fact that leadership and identity work are other elements in such training.

Implications for Practice

The findings have several practical implications for organizations transitioning to Agile ISD:

Role Clarity: Delegation of project management responsibilities must also be described to reduce role crises within Teams. The passage of clear guidelines could assist project managers in doing their identity work better.

Tailored Training Programs: Investment in training should be more comprehensive than the technical skill sets related to Agile and versatility and leadership; psychological interference and identity tensions should also be studied and addressed.

Fostering Peer Networks: Organizations should also support the development of workplace communities because introducing more formal 'knowledge sharing networks' can complement the roles of project managers adapting to new agile processes.

In this regard, the conclusions made in this study correlate with much of the literature considered in the section above but provide new suggestions connected with the relationship between Supporting Structures and Identity Work. In contrast to prior studies, which have centered more on the technological and operational changes affecting agility and implementation, this research elicits the psychological and relational factors that IT project managers encounter.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper focused only on the identity tensions that the IT project managers of ISD experience, the strategies used to manage such tensions, and the organizational factors that impact identity work. The study enlisted several informative themes about the nature of change from traditional/waterfall methodologies to Agile by conducting semi-structured interviews and using different qualitative analysis techniques.

Summary of Findings

Role Identity Tensions: It is not uncommon for IT project managers to find themselves in a leadership dilemma between one given within a traditional hierarchy and one encouraged by

These tensions result from the rivalry of expectations and organismal, ambiguous, and hazy roles and responsibilities.

Strategies for Navigation: Managers practice various approaches, including facilitative leadership, using training programs, and turning to peers to solve these conflicts and handle the changing managerial roles.

Organizational Influences: Organizational support and a good training environment go a long way to ease the processes throughout the adaptation of the IT project managers to

Study Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- A limitation of the participant number of 20 is that the results can only be generalized to some extent to other populations, which may be more or less diverse.
- The study may not respond to other project managers or industries or methodologies other than IT project managers in Agile ISD environments.

Future Research Directions

To address these limitations and build on the findings, future research could explore:

Longitudinal Studies: Exploring how IT project managers build and renegotiate their identities with experience in agile professions.

Cross-Industry Analysis: Exploring the tension between role identities in non-IT sectors and different organizational settings.

Demographic Influences: Exploring how demographic characteristics, which include age, gender, and career level, influence identity work in an agile context.

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