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The making of a diplomat: The case of the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute as an identity workspace.

Donoxti Baylon

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the creation of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and conceptualizes this new professional school of diplomacy as an ‘identity workspace’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010) following the analysis of a cohort’s learning experience. This article aims to spark a debate from a practice perspective on diplomatic training as offered by Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Europe.

KEYWORDS

Practice approach, diplomatic training, professional learning, identity work, identity workspace.

Introduction

The opening of the new Diplomatic Academy by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2015, and the opening of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2010, call for further research on why and how Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Europe have opened an in-house training program to complement entering diplomats’ academic education in diplomacy and international relations.

I argue that a practice-base perspective on learning, knowing and work can illuminate some aspects of the development of these new initiatives in the field of diplomacy. Going back to what constitutes diplomatic work, the literature has adopted, to simplify, two views. One view is that diplomatic work is composed of a series of activities, such as negotiation, representation, and political analysis (see, for instance, Barston 2014, p.2). Taken separately, these activities can be learned as they are based on an explicit knowledge base as found in textbooks for instance. The commercial success of Satow’s diplomatic practice (now in its seventh edition, Roberts 2016) is a testimony to this dominant approach. Another view is that we should shift the focus from knowledge to knowing, i.e. being knowledgeable (Lave 2008). Knowing in this perspective is tacit (Giddens 1984; Duguid 2008; and Pyrko, Dörfler, and Eden 2016) and enacted as a situated competent performance (Gherardi 2006; Sandberg and Pinnington 2009; Gherardi 2011; Gherardi 2014). As Lave argues (2008):

To speak of ‘knowledgeability’ rather than ‘knowledge’ implies that whatever it is, knowledge is always knowledge in persons in practice. Thus, ‘knowledge’ is not reducible to something distinct from other aspects of practice which would include its locations and its situated production. It is not knowledge that produces social life or is

social life but rather, it is praxis, the making and doing of social life that produces changing knowledgeabilities as part of ongoing practice.’ (Lave 2008, p. 292)

A practice-based perspective allows for such shift. Based on this latter approach, this article focuses on the case of the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute, and I draw from observation, interviews, and internal organizational documents to analyse a cohort’s learning experience. Of course, this is merely a pilot study and it is meant to encourage further empirical research on diplomatic training as provided by Ministries of Foreign Affairs to entering diplomats. My hope is to spark a debate on what constitutes learning in this occupational community, often referred to as professional learning (Fenwick and Nerland 2014; Gherardi 2014). In this article, I draw from recent developments in social theory of learning and identity work, and I argue that the Diplomatic and Consular Institute is a case of ‘identity workspace’: a holding environment in which individuals (in this case entering diplomats) engage in identity work through three key mechanisms, i.e. social defences, sentient communities, and rites of passage (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010). I then discuss how learning unfolds in such context.

The rest of this article is divided as follows: I will first position this article within the broader debate on practice-based studies, from my perspective as a management and organization studies scholar. I will then focus on some current debates on professional learning from a social theory of learning standpoint (communities of practice, professional learning as identity work) and I will discuss a recent development in the literature of professional learning, which conceptualizes a professional school as an identity workspace. I will then present the mixed qualitative research method I have adopted and the data sources I have collected. I will trace the history of the emergence of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute, describe one cohort’s curriculum (2014) with some level of detail, and I will draw on specific episodes from three courses which I believe help understand further how learning unfolds. I argue that we can conceptualize the Diplomatic and Consular Institute as an identity workspace, and therefore it makes sense for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to create this hybrid solution of in-house training, which combines elements of traditional academic learning and some elements of experience-based learning, as often found in apprenticeships and internship programs. Finally, I will engage with existing debates on practice-based approaches to diplomacy and how this pilot study may shed a new light on professional learning in this context.

Practice

Practice-based studies in management and organization studies as a field has grown in the last twenty-five years (Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni 2010), drawing from a variety of philosophical and sociological approaches (for a genealogy see Nicolini 2013). Practice-based studies are an ‘umbrella term’ (Gherardi 2011), and the ‘bandwagon’ of practice studies (Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni 2010), while developing a coherent research agenda of focusing on ‘orderly mediated doing and sayings (‘practices’) and their aggregations’, ‘lack[s] epistemological unity’ (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017, in press). There is no unified theory of practice: ‘practice theories constitute, in fact, a rather broad family of theoretical approaches connected by a web of historical and conceptual similarities.’ (Nicolini 2013, p.1).

There are varying definitions of what constitutes a practice. For instance, practice can be defined as a routinized type of behaviour (Reckwitz, 2002).

‘A ‘practice’ (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.’(Reckwitz 2002, pp. 249-250)

A practice can also be defined as human activity (Bell 1992).

‘To focus on the act itself practice must be taken as a nonsynthetic and irreducible term for human activity. I will use the term to highlight four features of human activity. Practice is (1) situational; (2) strategic; (3) embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world...’ (Bell 1992, p. 81)

A practice can also be defined as ‘a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleo-affective structures, and general understandings’ (Schatzki 2002, p. 87 and Schatzki 2012, p. 14).

In addition to the variety of definitions, another question is that of the status of practice-based studies, as to whether it is a theory (practice theory as a type of cultural theory, see Reckwitz 2002), an ontology (practice theory as a ‘flat ontology’, see Schatzki 2016a), a sensitizing concept to study other social phenomena, such as the construction of agency (see Bueger in this collection), or the production and reproduction of social relations (Gherardi 2011).

One risk however is that scholars confuse ‘what people do’, i.e. the description of the daily, mundane activities of practitioners, with the study of a practice. I concur with Nicolini’s critique of a weak program of returning to practice by describing what people do, and the risk of a proliferation of cases of ‘mimetic isonomism’, i.e. merely labelling ‘what people do’ as practices (Nicolini 2013, pp. 12-14) to join the ‘bandwagon’ of practice-based studies (Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni 2010). Practise-based studies with a strong program, as opposed to a weak program of describing ‘what people do’ (Nicolini 2013, pp.12-13), ‘strives to explain organizational matters in terms of practices instead of registering them.’ To adopt a strong program means to commit to an ‘ontological choice, a recognition of the primacy of practice in social matters’ (Nicolini 2013, p.13) and to the idea that ‘practices are the locus for the production and reproduction of social relations.’ (Gherardi 2011, p. 51)

Another risk is to adopt the dominant dichotomy in social theory of agency and structure, which will box practice-based studies into ‘a reductionist tendency (...) which locates practices at an intermediate level between the actor and the structure. Explanations therefore oscillate between one level and the other, remaining trapped in the actor/system dichotomy first introduced by the researcher and from which s/he then seeks to escape.’ (Gherardi 2006, p.37)

Having mentioned this, what is the starting point to study a practice? If a practice is a human activity, it is ‘locally situated’ (see Bicchi, in this collection, and also Neumann 2012): ‘human activity is situational, which is to say that much of what is important to it cannot be grasped outside of the specific context in which it occurs’ (Bell 1992, p. 81). This article concurs with this approach. It is reflected in the study of communities of practice in its early formulation (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), as opposed to its later developments (Wenger-Trayner et. al. 2015, see Bicchi in this collection for a discussion on ‘landscapes of practice’). One of the challenges for practice-based studies has been on how to study large-scale phenomena,

conceptualized as ‘large nexuses of practice-arrangement bundles’ (Schatzki 2016b), and studied by ‘connecting sites’ (Everts 2016).

Within the field of practice-based studies, this article positions itself by studying a local site of diplomacy –the Diplomatic and Consular Institute 2014 cohort initial training- and uses the practice of training as a sensitizing concept to analyse organizational phenomena of learning and knowing in the context of French diplomacy.

Professional learning

The field of study of professional learning is vast and wide-ranging (for a practice-based perspective on professional learning, see Kennedy et. al. 2015 and Fenwick and Nerland 2014; for a more general focus on learning in communities of practice see Amin and Roberts 2008). Among the various approaches, the social theory of learning argues that learning unfolds through a socialization process as newcomers engage in legitimate peripheral participation to a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, and for a critical review see Lave 2008; Duguid 2008; for a summary see Wenger 2010). A community of practice is defined by three elements: a sense of a joint enterprise, a relationship of mutuality, and a shared repertoire of communal resources, i.e. ‘language, routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles, etc.’ (Wenger 2000, p. 229). In the context of a community of practice, competence is established by the group and learning results from the tension between competence and personal experience: ‘it is a dynamic, two-way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which they participate. It combines personal transformation with the evolution of social structures.’ (Wenger 2000, p. 227)

Learning therefore provides newcomers with an identity as they belong to a community of practice: ‘identity needs a place where a person can experience knowing as a form of social competence.’ (Wenger 2000, p. 241) This notion of identity is central in the communities of practice literature (see especially Wenger 1998 pp. 149-163). Jean Lave (2008), reflecting on the success of the concept of community of practice in ‘Situated Learning’ (Lave and Wenger 1991), warns us against an instrumental view of the concept to produce knowledge as an output –i.e. ‘increasing knowledgeability’ (Lave 2008, p.287), and reminds us of the centrality of the identity construct in ‘Situated Learning’ (Lave and Wenger 1991):

Learning is situated activity, indeed, legitimate peripheral participation (...). This is a social phenomenon – newcomers can only become old-timers by participating in communities of practitioners. Legitimate peripheral participation is a way to speak about relations between newcomers and old-timers, activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of practice. Each of the five ethnographies of apprenticeship that illustrated our argument was concerned with apprentices mastering practice, and we enclosed this in a glove called a community of practice whose structure and purpose was acting masterfully. At the same time we were trying to say that the development of identity in relation to the identities of others was more fundamental than knowledge or mastery. (Lave 2008, p. 284)

I concur with her emphasis on identity development in the process of peripheral participation to a practice. In a similar vein, knowing as situated enactment of competent performance has later been conceptualized as identity in a more fundamental existential ontological perspective (Sandberg and Pinnington 2009):

It is the existential meaning of a specific human way of being that distinguishes and integrates central aspects of practice such as theoretical and tacit knowledge, knowing-in-action, and understanding of work into a specific professional competence in work performance. (Sandberg and Pinnington 2009, p. 1145).

Put differently, from the perspective of a social theory of learning, professional competence – i.e. knowledgeability- and identity are inseparable (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; 2000; 2008; 2010; Lave 2008; Sandberg and Pinnington 2009). This does not mean that identity is static. The social theory of learning emphasizes professional identity formation as a developmental process, as ‘a trajectory in progress’ (Wenger 2000, p. 241).

Professional identity formation as a process is also examined by management and organization studies, with a focus on individual agency and change of sub identities during career and role transitions, or on the ways in which organizations actively shape their members’ identity (socialization, see Van Maanen and Schein 1979; Jones 1986; Allen and Meyer 1990), or both (identity work, see Ibarra 1999). During professional transitions, for instance, individuals engage in identity work and ‘adapt to new roles by experimenting with provisional selves that serve as trials for possible but not yet fully elaborated professional identities’ (Ibarra 1999, p. 764). This iterative process of variation creation through observing role models (role prototyping and identity matching), experimenting provisional selves (imitation or true-to-self strategies), and variation retention (evaluating provisional selves against external and internal feedback) shows how learning – i.e. adapting to a new professional role- is a dynamic process which ties professional competence and identity formation.

This body of literature contributes to the analysis of professional schools and diplomatic identity formation. In particular, two contributions in the field of management and organization studies shed a light on whether, and if so, how professional schools contribute to identity work.

In a longitudinal interview-based case study of professional identity formation and change for medical professionals in a graduate medical education centre, Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006:235) found that ‘identity construction was triggered by work-identity integrity violations: an experienced mismatch between what physicians did and who they were. These violations were resolved through identity customization processes (...), which were part of interrelated identity and work learning cycles.’ Without going into too much detail, the authors have contributed to conceptualizing the residency experience in this graduate medical education centre as an environment where learning unfolds in cycles where professional self-conceptualization and work progressively align through identity customization processes, be it enriching (gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of one’s professional identity), patching (a temporary composite identity to align with one’s work), or splinting (using one’s prior identity as a splint to transition to the new identity).

Going one step further, Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) argued that professional schools such as business schools provide a ‘holding environment’ – i.e. a closed, and separate environment- in which individuals (in their case, professional managers) engage in identity work: a business school is therefore an identity workspace. Put differently, an identity workspace is a site (Neumann, 2012) that provides a holding environment in which individuals can engage in identity work. Identity work is comprised of ‘the activities that individuals undertake to create, maintain, and display personal and social identities that sustain a coherent and desirable self-concept’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p. 45). Examples of identity work are identity

stabilization (consolidating an existing identity) and identity transition (acquiring a new one) (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p. 44).

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) propose three key mechanisms through which identity work occurs: a coherent set of social defences, sentient communities, and vital rites of passage. Social defences are ‘collective arrangements-such as an organizational structure, a work method, or a prevalent discourse-created or used by an organization’s members as a protection against disturbing affect derived from external threats, internal conflicts, or the nature of their work’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.47). Social defences may emerge out of existing practices, but also as organizational structures, explicit norms and rules, and the latter explains how social defences differ from boundaries of practices (see Wenger 2000). Sentient communities satisfy the emotional needs of individual members as they invest in, relate to, and identify with such communities (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.48). As Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010, p.48) observe, sentient communities differ from communities of practice:

Communities of practice are characterized by joint enterprise, mutuality, and a shared repertoire of communal resources (Wenger 1998). They are based on mutual engagement in some kind of practical work. The concept of ‘sentient community,’ on the other hand, highlights a process of relating [to] as much as a formal or informal social structure. It brings belonging and identification to the foreground, rather than joint activity, support, or advice.

Examples of sentient communities in business schools can be a close group of classmates but also organized alumni networks. What they have in common is that they are ‘often stable, independent of one’s current employer, and usually reciprocate the degree of investment put into them. They provide an experience of belonging despite whether one develops and uses a network or a community of practice within them.’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.53). This is an important theoretical distinction: belonging and identification to a sentient community develop even though its members do not partake in the same community of practice any more. With the example of an MBA alumni network as a sentient community, while all its members have engaged in a community of practice (the MBA cohort has partaken in joint enterprise, developed a relationship of mutuality, and a shared repertoire of communal resources), they have moved on to different career paths. They however all belong to and identify with being an MBA alumnus. Finally, rites of passage comprise three stages: separation, liminality, and incorporation following an initiation ritual that transforms an individual role within a social system (Van Gennep 1960).

The concept of ‘identity workspace’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010) has since been applied to leadership development programs (Nicholson and Carroll 2013), and to development programs for academics (Haynes et. al. 2014), and is gaining traction in management and organization studies, as it draws from social theories of learning –including the communities of practice approach- and applies them to hybrid settings, i.e. settings with elements of apprenticeship and elements of traditional schooling. Examples of hybrid settings are leadership development programs, executive retreats, training offered by organizations, etc. The burgeoning literature on identity workspace has, to simplify, applied an anthropological lens (i.e. a non-cognitivist view of learning, see Lave 2008 and Duguid 2008) to professional learning involving some level of identity transition. The literature on identity workspace is therefore developing in two directions: one is a focus on liminality during identity transitions (Beech 2011; Nicholson and

Carroll 2013; Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016), and another is the emotional component of identity work (Winkler 2016 and Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016). I suggest they enrich our understanding of identity in the communities of practice approach.

Liminality ‘originated from anthropological studies and is concerned with the rituals of passage between one social status/identity and another (...) liminal individuals thus find themselves ‘temporarily undefined’, given that existing social structures and orders are disrupted in the transitional phase.’ (Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016, p. 409). This state of liminality is experienced during professional identity transitions, such as from managers to leaders (Nicholson and Carroll 2013), or from practitioners to academics (Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016), and involves identity work. Identity work to transition from competent practitioner to competent academic during a doctorate of business administration for instance, is deployed through ‘scaffolding, putting the past to work and bracketing’ (Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016, p. 408). Beech (2011, p. 289) suggests that liminal identity work is dialogical, and views ‘the self as situated in a dialogue that always incorporates both the inner-self and the outer social-identity (...), but the orientation of the dialogue can vary between a greater emphasis of the external onto the internal, a more even interplay between the two or an emphasis from the internal onto the external.’ These different emphases lead to different identity work practices: ‘experimentation, in which the liminar constructs and projects an identity; reflection, in which the liminar considers the views of others and questions the self; and recognition, in which the liminar reacts to an identity that is projected onto them’ (Beech 2011, p. 290).

Liminality therefore involves some level of psychological discomfort (Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016). There is an emotional component to identity work, which is an aspect often overlooked by the literature on professional learning (to the exception of Winkler 2016 and Hay and Samra-Fredericks 2016). Emotions and identity work are interwoven: emotions (both positive and negative) trigger identity work, while identity work is an emotional experience, and also a form of emotional labor to conform to norms and expectations, i.e. a ‘technology of the self’ (Winkler 2016, p. 5). Emotions and identity work are therefore ‘mutually constitutive’ (Winkler 2016).

While the construct of identity workspace has developed and enriched our understanding of identity work during liminality -otherwise referred to as peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) - it has focused on the psychological processes of professional learning to the detriment of the social and cultural aspects. I suggest going back to Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) initial formulation of the social mechanisms of identity work, i.e. social defences, sentient communities, and rites of passage. One way to do so is to focus on the practices of training as developed by the Diplomatic and Consular Institute. How does the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs provide a holding environment in which entering diplomats can engage in identity work?

I will now turn to the aim of this article, which is to conceptualize the creation of an in-house school of diplomacy within a Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an identity workspace (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010), and how learning unfolds in such context.

Methodology

I will draw from a sample of the data set I had collected for my doctoral research, which adopted a grounded approach to theory building on the role of a practice (i.e. diplomatic drafting) for an

occupational community. This article has emerged out of my doctoral research, as I had observed many courses on diplomatic drafting and on related topics (such as information systems and knowledge management), and other courses for comparison (such as protocol, but also negotiation). During these observations, which took place at the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute, another topic emerged, which was the nature of diplomatic work and how to transmit diplomatic knowledge, whether through explicit knowledge (i.e. textbooks), or tacit knowledge (conveyed through anecdotes and stories), or through experience.

For this article, I have first and foremost relied on internal organizational documents to understand how and why the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute was created, and further down the line of inquiry what type of knowledge was transmitted and how, by analysing curricula through programs, pedagogical materials, notes, etc. I also have relied on interviews and observations. The value of internal organizational documents to trace the emergence of practices has often been understated. For instance, there exists a bias towards ethnographic observation to capture practices (see Kuus 2013), and while they certainly provide researchers with rich understandings of ways of doings and sayings in a given setting, they are mere starting points to further trace connections with the pre-existing context in which they have emerged (for a similar argument on the shaping role of the social and political contexts for communities of practice see Lave 2008). For instance, when observing a diplomatic drafting course, I may fail to capture the role of the field-level forces that have shaped the current practice of writing a diplomatic note, such as the role of communication technologies, or of other media in reporting political events. Meanwhile, while interviews can help researchers elicit the meanings that participants ascribe to a practice in a community of practice, for instance, they may be subjected to a series of biases, such as social desirability bias (adopting skilfully frontstage behaviour, for instance in professions where representation is a necessary skill), post hoc reconstruction, and a tendency to overstate one's agency to the detriment of background knowledge.

Since my research is in partnership with the Diplomatic Archives Digitalization Team, the Information Systems and Knowledge Management, and the Diplomatic and Consular Institute on organizational knowledge production and circulation through diplomatic drafting, I did not focus on the European dimension as such, nor on professional identity per se. The European dimension is however embedded in the joint training organized each year with the German entering diplomats' cohort from the Diplomatic Academy of the Federal Foreign Office, and separately with the British diplomats from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. My observation notes, however, reveal important aspects of professional learning, knowing, and identity work.

I will now present with more detail the data sources I have relied on for this article. I have accessed during my research stay at the Diplomatic Archives all documents from the 1960s on from the organization and methods service, human resources, general secretary and Minister's cabinet related to diplomatic work and training, and all reports related to diplomacy and diplomatic work (including the 1992 Picq report). They represent about over 600 pages. I have selected some documents (n=32), which I have been given a copy for review as they met clearance criteria. They help trace the emergence of a professional school of diplomacy developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and these documents reveal internal debates about how to complement existing institutions of higher education in the teaching of diplomacy.

I have led interviews for my doctoral research with French diplomats (n=24) from all levels on diplomatic work, and training, among other topics, including 11 entering diplomats (2013-2016), eight of them from the 2014 cohort of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute (five male, three female, six in their mid-twenties, two with more experience, in their mid-thirties). I have relied on these eight interviews for this article.

I have observed diplomatic training at the Diplomatic and Consular Institute, which include courses on diplomatic drafting, and on information systems and knowledge management between 2013 and 2016 (two of the four sessions of four hours each year for diplomatic drafting, the two sessions of four hours each year for information systems and knowledge management), and in 2014 all courses on protocol (one session of four hours for protocol) which were used as data points for comparison. I choose to focus therefore on the 2014 cohort as I have more data points. Notes during the sessions were taken, and also after lunches and coffee breaks (which I took systematically with the cohort) as they provided occasions for more informal exchanges. Notes represent for the 2014 cohort about over 80 pages, and are handwritten and annotated in my native language, i.e. French. I have translated my notes into English and I have decided to use the past tense for all sentences of these vignettes. As a matter of fact, I used the present as I recorded the events, and I used the past as I took copious notes following the events (coffee and lunch break discussions, for instance) as I recalled them in my annotations.

I have also relied on informal email exchanges with six cohort members ex post (between 2015 and 2016), five of which I had already interviewed during 2014, and with several key informants (including the head of the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute, and two trainers). I have relied on these ex post email exchanges to reconstruct the missing pieces of the 2014 cohort program over email in the last few months, and I have obtained additional archival data from the Diplomatic Archives and from the Diplomatic and Consular Institute.

The next section of this article will present the context in which diplomatic training in France as emerged, before focusing on the 2014 cohort of entering diplomats of the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute with a detailed presentation of their program, supplemented with observation notes for illustration.

Diplomatic training in France

Based on internal organizational document accessed during my research stay at the Diplomatic Archives (March-May 2016), I will present the contemporary (1980s-present) history of diplomatic training in France. Following the passing of national competitive entrance examinations, successful candidates are incorporated into the diplomatic corps with a specific status- 'Secrétaire' or 'Cadre'- and a level of specialization: either cultural area specialists ('d'Orient') or generalists. Ensues a period of initial training to diplomatic work. This period of initial training has taken different forms over time, following the creation of the Consular School (1992), of the Diplomatic Institute (2001), and the merging of the two as the Diplomatic and Consular Institute (2010). Prior to the creation of such internal schools, the initial training consisted of a period of immersive internship in their future administrative services, between two and eight weeks, organized by human resources.

The creation of the Consular School in 1992 was a response to the growing computerization of visa delivery processes, and to the increasing complexity of administrative law and regulations. Based in Nantes, where the consular services are located, the Consular School has had to adapt

its training to the legal and technological evolutions of visa delivery, and to the growing consular role of protecting French citizens abroad.

The creation of the Diplomatic School in 2001 was a response to ‘a logic of self-service’ (note from the Human Resources Director, October 18th 2000) where diplomats could choose freely from a catalogue of specialized modules (language training, management, and information technology) organized by human resources. Human resources has since systematized the career trajectory of diplomats and defined it as being organized in three steps: 1) an immersive internship and an intensive language training as diplomats enter the diplomatic corps, 2) an evaluation which comes after ten years of service, and for those who are selected to reach higher levels of management, 3) a dedicated training to management and human resources. To deliver such executive training, the Diplomatic School was created by human resources in 2001. If the Diplomatic School was a success in terms of delivering executive training, the need for structuring initial training remained, as expressed in the 2008 ‘White Paper on French Foreign and European Policy’ (available on the Ministry’s website), and the Raymond Le Bris’ Report ‘Proposals for a Reform of Civil Servants’ Training’ published the same year (in French, ‘Propositions pour une réforme de la formation des agents de l’Etat’).

The creation of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute in 2010 has led to the structuring of a period of initial training, and to the development of a cohort-based model, all entering diplomats receiving the same fifteen-week training to diplomatic work (diplomatic drafting, communication, team work, public speaking, media training, negotiation, crisis management, European affairs, etc.). By merging the two schools in 2010 (the Consular School created in 1992, and the Diplomatic Institute in 2001), the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has professionalized all aspects of training, i.e. initial and continuous training for both consular and diplomatic activities. Besides, the Diplomatic and Consular Institute has drawn from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomats’ knowledge base by asking them to be in-house trainers, and therefore has recognized the specificity of consular and diplomatic work, as constituted by high-level operational knowledge, or ‘knowing-in-practice’ (Gherardi 2014).

The French Diplomatic and Consular Institute and the case of the 2014 cohort

The creation of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute in 2010 had been widely debated within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, especially in how it would articulate with the entering diplomats’ previous training. Given the competitive nature of the entrance examinations, and the relative homogeneity in prior training for successful candidates (often Sciences Po and a rare foreign language specialization at INALCO), general knowledge in public administration and international law was assumed.

To understand the complementarity of the entering diplomats’ prior training (Sciences Po, INALCO, etc.) and the training offered by the Diplomatic and Consular Institute, I will provide an example with the 2014 cohort program. In 2014, the program was fourteen weeks, and started on April, 7th with a cohort-wide all-day opening ceremony, including a one-hour introduction by the Ministry’s head of human resources in the atrium of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute site in La Courneuve. Before the ceremony, everyone was given a roster of the cohort participants (which contained a photograph of each, and biographical detail along with contact information) and a detailed program. On April, 9th, after having met with the French unions for a presentation and discussion about the unions’ activities and agenda the day before, the head of administration, a high-level role within the Ministry, opened the day with an induction speech

and the cohort took a ‘family picture’ with him. During two weeks, all services were presented in a conference format, with a focus on political and management functions. But the program culminated with a three-day trip (April 22nd-25th) to Beynes, in the Paris region. Following a morning visit to the Crisis centre in the morning in Paris (April, 22nd), where they discussed the missions of the Crisis centre, including managing hostage situations abroad, the cohort took the bus to Beynes. Participants were asked to dress comfortably for outdoors activities, and rumours had spread about what to expect. They knew it would be a military exercise. They arrived to a full-on, three days simulation of a hostage-taking situation in a French embassy, where military personnel enacted the hostage takers. This experience was a full simulation, and they had been experiencing for three days the stress and emotions of an acute crisis situation. It culminated with the helicopter evacuation of the hostages by the military personnel as the teams managed to flee from the hostage takers. This definitely acted as a ‘memorable moment’ for the whole cohort (I met with them a few days later at La Courneuve for the negotiation simulation, and the discussions were mostly about this experience, quote from a participant during informal conversations in the patio during coffee break).

In the next few weeks, two other ‘memorable moments’ were organized with the German cohort from the Diplomatic Academy of the German Federal Foreign Office (45 attachés). First, following an intensive four and a half days of training in German on the Ministry’s ‘Convention site’ in Paris, which hosts the language labs (May 12th-16th), and two panels organized on May, 14th by a university lecturer specialized in German civilization from La Sorbonne University on German politics and the bilateral relations, the cohort left on Sunday, 18th to go to Berlin for joint training with the German cohort from the Diplomatic Academy of the German Federal Foreign Office (May 19th-23rd). The first day started with a formal opening ceremony at the Federal Foreign Office building with the head of the German Diplomatic Academy and its staff, a formal welcome lecture by the Head of European Affairs at the Federal Foreign Office, followed by a full day of conferences, and discussions with top-level officials from the Federal Foreign Office. The next day (May 20th) at the same location, the German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs delivered a lecture based on the ‘2014 Review’ Report on German Foreign Policy, followed by a buffet lunch as an opportunity to socialize further, and the afternoon was devoted to eight joint workgroups on the challenges of foreign policy and bilateral relations, and a presentation and discussion with one of the two Ministers of State. The same organizing of workgroups was repeated the next morning, before the joint cohorts travelled to the Bundestag to visit the Reichstag dome, and then to the Chancellery to meet with the Chancellor’s diplomatic advisor, before they all met back in the evening at the Federal Foreign Office for a private screening of a movie on diplomatic encounters (‘Zwischen Welten’) with the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and the movie director (Feo Aladag), followed by a discussion and debate, a wine toast and closing reception to socialize further. The next day was dedicated to work groups on policy issues, i.e. writing of joint papers, at the Diplomatic Academy site, and debriefing sessions in front of senior officials, followed by a lunch in a restaurant nearby, and an afternoon with a German member of the European Parliament, followed by the traditional German-French soccer game (there was a similar game in Paris, teams were mixed during both occasions), before an evening of dancing at a tavern. The last day (May 23rd), at the French Embassy, was more formal, as it started with a welcome ceremony with the French Ambassador, before a full day of conferences and lectures with members of the staff. Then, both cohorts travelled to Brussels (July 2nd-July 4th) to study further European Union institutions, and diplomacy. While the French cohort had a separate day on July, 2nd to

meet with the French Permanent Representation to the European Union services and to discuss about the French strategy and influence, both French (63) and German (45) cohorts spent the next two days together. On July, 3rd, they went to the Council of the European Union for conferences in the morning, and to small groups joint meetings of ten to eleven French and German diplomats (5-6 of each nationality) with twelve European Council and European Commission high-level policy makers (there was a sign up list so that each diplomat could sign up for a meeting with a policy maker that she felt was most relevant to her interests), and an afternoon at the French Permanent Representation to the European Union for debriefing, followed by a social evening in a restaurant. On July, 4th, both cohorts spent the morning at the European Parliament to meet and discuss with French and German European MPs, before they left to NATO for a conference and discussion on European defence strategy with the French and German Permanent Representations, and a conference with the Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges at NATO. Then, following a coffee break, the evening ended as they took the Thalys train.

The French cohort also hosted the British diplomats from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (43) in Paris (June 16th-20th), following a three-day intensive course in English in small groups organized by levels of proficiency (June 10th-13th at the Convention site in the language labs). The first day started (June 16th) with a formal opening ceremony in the prestigious salons of the Minister's aisle at the Quai d'Orsay, followed by a toast and a 'family portrait', and a private visit of the landmark rooms of the aisle (historically the King's and Queen's Chambers), an afternoon of exchanges, and a social evening in a Parisian bar, organized by the French cohort. The next two days were organized at the French War College ('Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale'), and were conferences and lectures on defence and security issues. At the end of these two days, a reception was held by the British Ambassador in its residence. The last two days were more interactive (June 19th-20th), as they were negotiation simulations in mixed groups organized by ESSEC IRENE at the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute in the La Courneuve site, in the smaller classrooms, in sub-groups.

I will now provide more detailed data based on my observation notes (from the same year) of the training in diplomatic drafting, in information systems, and in protocol. These represent three events which I will later analyse further.

The training for diplomatic drafting was similar from year to year, and from session to session, and always took place in smaller groups (fifteen) in small rooms, in a square setting, with the trainer often being a peer from the previous cohorts, with about two years of experience. The room was located at La Courneuve, in the outskirts of Paris, where the Diplomatic Archives are located. Two groups were trained simultaneously in nearby rooms, for four hours, before they merged in the afternoon to receive training on information systems and knowledge management.

In the second session I observed in 2014, for instance, the trainer set up a PowerPoint presentation, where she described the different genres of diplomatic drafting. First, she introduced herself, and emphasized that she 'was just like you a few years ago'. She then distributed a set of documents, and started by presenting the slides which described the different genres. For each genre, she specified what it was. Then, she asked them to take a copy with a number on it, as an example of the genre. She specified that it is 'her working document as she wrote it', and then explained the context in which the document was requested, and the time

frame to write a draft. Then, she used a case study for each genre. For example, the press briefing, where she handed out a press clipping of an event, and asked ‘what would the Ministry’s spokesperson would say on the daily press briefing at 10:00 am about it?’

An example of press briefing in the first session I observed in 2014 was the revelation a year ago that a European head of State personal cell phone was taped by another country. An article was released in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and trainees were asked about ‘what to say’. Groups of two to three were formed, and they were asked to draft a statement within ten minutes. Then, all groups had to read their statements, standing up, as if they were the Ministry’s spokesperson. The first group was called, and one of the trainees (a man, in his mid-twenties) stood up, wearing a suit, and spoke out, softly at first, before the trainer (a more experienced diplomat, former ambassador, as opposed to the usual younger peers as trainers) asked him to speak louder and enunciate clearly, with more assurance. The man then started by saying ‘France took note of the incident’ while the trainer nodded, and all groups seemed to approve. He went on and then said ‘France is going to request a moratorium on spying activities’. The room went silent. There was a long pause as the young diplomat looked for approval. The trainer stopped him with a hand gesture, and said ‘are you sure? Why?’ Then the young diplomat looked for his two groupmates’ approval, and one of them, a woman in her mid-twenties (I later learned during our lunch break that she was his classmate at ENA before they joined the diplomatic corps) said ‘we thought it would send a signal.’ Then, the experienced trainer, who was in his sixties, said ‘is [spying country] the only one to do that? What would happen if we were to ask for an international moratorium against spying activities?’ There was a long, heavy silence. I started smiling, and one of the trainees looked at me and smiled too. The experienced diplomat said after a pause ‘well, if we were to ask for this moratorium, then we would be scrutinized as well. I think we would be caught too.’ He laughed, and said ‘I think all of us would be caught red-handed [translation of ‘la main dans le pot de confiture’] anyway.’ The young men who had stood up blushed.

After all groups had passed, the experienced diplomats started talking about what it means to prepare for a press briefing as diplomats, and said ‘you don’t write for French journalists. Journalists from other countries are in Salle Clergier too [the room where press briefings are held], and in any event your statements will be heard worldwide... they are signals you send to other countries. So you pick your words carefully. Remember words have consequences. [Emphasis on his last sentence].’

What we see during this session is how diplomats are asked to embody a certain role within the organization (i.e. the Ministry’s spokesperson), and act as if they wrote or spoke from within this role. During each session, they take a wide range of roles (preparatory meeting memo for the Ambassador in a bilateral meeting, ex post meeting memo, diplomatic cable, agreement draft in a multilateral negotiation, response from the Minister to a parliamentary question, etc.) which reflects the variety of their future assignments.

The training for information systems happened in a large group of thirty trainees, in a larger room at La Courneuve. Each session lasted for about four hours, usually less. The trainer was often the same, and was the head of the knowledge portal ‘Diplomatie’ at the Ministry. The room was set up in a large square, with no computers. Just the trainer’s laptop, connected to the projector, and his PowerPoint presentation was already set up before we arrived.

In the second session I observed, he started by congratulating the audience for passing the entrance examinations, and said that he knew that while some were new to diplomacy, others had accumulated experience before they reached the ‘Secrétaire’ or ‘Cadre’ status that led to following the Diplomatic and Consular Institute initial training. He then explained that the knowledge portal ‘Diplomatique’ was created recently and that he knew ‘some of you are frustrated with the new system’. He then started with the presentation of the features of the portal, and how a diplomat belonged to a functional community in the portal, which reflected the vertical chain of command, and that they could ask to join a community of interest, which was a virtual community where all accepted diplomats could discuss about policy issues on which they would like to contribute. However, while the presentation seemed to be quite technical, some started to ask questions which, across presentations, were similar, about the seemingly restrictive definition of functional communities. They seemed to be frustrated with the functional community, and the vertical chain of command embedded in the affordances (i.e. what the portal allows -and doesn’t allow- users to do). The trainer argued that in the functional community, you needed to send your draft to your superior for approval before it could “move up the chain of command”. One man, in his early thirties, who was passionate about Middle East policy [I discovered that over lunch break], asked about what to do in case of an emergency. ‘What constitutes an emergency?’ asked the trainer. The man seemed upset, and remained silent. One woman, in her fifties, who passed the internal entrance examination to move up to ‘Secrétaire d’Orient’, and who was experienced, said ‘well what if the results of an election are announced in the country?’ The trainer seemed perplexed. I wasn’t not sure as to why. The woman then said, addressing the younger man, ‘in any event if it’s urgent you send it directly via email to the Minister’s Cabinet using the generic address [xxx] @diplomatie.gouv.fr.’ The trainer was upset, and asked the woman ‘what makes you think the Minister doesn’t know about it already? You don’t bother him with this, he knows already. I mean, it’s on the news, what’s the value added to it?’ The woman was even more upset, and said ‘well what if he needs political analysis, and how it would affect the relationships with France?’ There was an awkward pause. Then the trainer said ‘in any event your analysis has to be sent up to our superior for approval.’ The atmosphere in the room shifted.

What we see from this episode is that the vertical chain of command is embedded in the affordances of the knowledge portal, and that it encounters resistance from diplomats during the training session over ownership of the written production: as the draft moves up the chain of command, they lose authorship, and do not get feedback from the end recipient (often the Minister and its Cabinet). This seemed to contradict the morning sessions on diplomatic drafting, and the emphasis on the importance of careful wording and its consequences. This creates a tension about what their role is as diplomats producing high-level policy analysis for the decision-maker and what the affordances embedded in the knowledge portal imply, i.e. ‘being a cog in a machine’ (informal discussion with the man who asked about the emergency during the session during coffee break). This may explain why the atmosphere shifted and why the trainer was met with polite indifference in the second-half of the session.

The training for protocol took place in the auditorium in the La Courneuve site, where the first day opening ceremony was. Four members of the protocol services were sitting on the podium, along with the head of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute. They each presented their mission to the cohort, which was sitting in the middle of this large auditorium. They all insisted that they acted as resources during hosting events and that they should contact them to receive help in organizing events.

During the presentation from the head of protocol and hosting of dignitaries, the man, in his mid-fifties, shared his experience about hosting a head of State in Paris. He discussed where to host, and how to host. The discussion shifted about the cost of such event given the context of budgetary restrictions [the day before (April 11th), the cohort had a tough budget negotiation simulation with the Ministry of Finance on the 2015 planned budget for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for three hours in the afternoon]. He smiled, and said: ‘well, it is based on a principle of reciprocity. It’s always been the case. So, yes, of course, removing the road signs in the middle of the road on the Champs Elysées avenue costs about [xxx] euros, but sometimes you need to spend. You need to ensure that the head of State will be met with the appropriate amount of respect, if you will.’ The audience paused in a long silence. Trainees looked astonished at the amount [the training on budgetary negotiations with the Ministry of Finance the day before emphasized budgetary restrictions]. Then, the head of protocol said ‘In any event, we act as a resource, and we will take care of this. It’s about the symbolic, if you will, and it’s about what signal you send about how you value the relationship. It’s political, in a way.’

In this episode, we can see that protocol, while an important function, is presented in a different format, and it seemed the main role of this session was to present to the entering diplomats the protocol services and who to contact to organize a diplomatic event. The training session differed from diplomatic drafting, a highly interactive session. While all entering diplomats will have to write according to different genres during their career, not all will have to organize hosting events. Protocol acts as a support function, not as a role that defines the entering diplomat. Since this role isn’t part of their identity, the training session differed, and was more of a presentation format of what protocol is, and how to contact them.

Following these illustrative vignettes as part of the description of the training of one cohort at the Diplomatic and Consular Institute, I will now turn to data analysis as I conceptualize the creation of an in-house school of diplomacy within a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and how learning unfolds in such context.

The Diplomatic and Consular Institute as an identity workspace

Consistent with the research question of this article, I will conceptualize the creation of an in-house school of diplomacy within a Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an identity workspace. Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) conceptualized the business school, a professional school for managers, as an identity workspace, i.e. a holding environment for aspiring managers to engage in identity work. Could this apply to the context of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute? As Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010, p. 44) argue, ‘institutions offering reliable social defences, sentient communities, and vital rites of passage are likely to be experienced as identity workspaces.’ I will analyse each element in turn.

Social defences

Social defences are responses to external threats and internal conflict (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.47). An example is an alumni network (ibid.), which acts as a social defence against the lack of future professional opportunities. Professional schools such as business schools advertise their alumni network with an implicit message: gaining a professional degree means joining an alumni network, and therefore being assured of future employment opportunities. Another example is in France, when civil servants pass the national competitive examinations. They are guaranteed, with a few exceptions, lifetime employment. It acts as a social defence

against the external threat of being demoted arbitrarily by policy makers, for political reasons. An example of external threat in the context of diplomacy is the perceived reduction of the diplomats' monopoly of jurisdiction over political representation on behalf of their governments, over political analysis and reporting of events, and over negotiation. First, heads of States have adopted direct communicative practices, and international summits have facilitated direct bilateral exchanges. Second, political analysis is increasingly provided by multiple actors outside of traditional diplomacy, and instantaneous reporting by news agencies over satellite media have forced diplomats to refocus the drafting of diplomatic cables on the value added of their analyses. The second vignette on information systems training earlier illustrates this latter point ('what makes you think the Minister doesn't know about it already?'). Third, while diplomats negotiate, other actors increasingly participate to these negotiations (see the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change - "COP 21"- in Paris in 2015 for instance). As a response to this threat, the structuring of diplomacy as a profession, with a dedicated professional school and specific training (i.e. the Diplomatic and Consular Institute) acts as a social defence. Besides, the status – and lifetime employment- granted by entering the diplomatic corps acts as a social defence against the increasing budgetary constraints, and therefore the threat of reduction of workforce, observed in the French public administration, including the diplomatic network. Entering the Diplomatic and Consular Institute means in effect having joined the diplomatic corps, following the passing of the national competitive entrance examinations. Having gained the 'Secrétaire' or 'Cadre' status is a social defence against the looming budgetary constraints, and their effects on the workforce. The budgetary logic of the Ministry of Economy and Finance was even mocked, as the third vignette on protocol training illustrated ('sometimes you need to spend').

Sentient communities

As mentioned earlier, sentient communities satisfy the emotional needs of individual members as they invest in, relate to, and identify with such communities (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.48). Two sentient communities seem to emerge from the study of the 2014 cohort. The first, and most obvious, is the French cohort. On the first day, entering French diplomats were given a roster of the cohort participants, which contained a photograph of each, and detailed biographical information, along with contact information. Then, a 'family portrait' was taken, and cohort members were encouraged to think of themselves as a 'corps'. This was a deliberate goal of the Diplomatic and Consular Institute pedagogy. As one of the 2014 cohort interviewees mentioned in a post cohort interview in 2016, 'the goal of the training was to let us discover the functioning of the Ministry, and to help us get to know each other. It really helps to have this network on the first year of work.'

Another sentient community to emerge is the network created as a result of the joint training between the French cohort and the German cohort from the Diplomatic Academy of the Federal Foreign Office on the one hand, and with the diplomats from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the other hand. The detailed description of both joint trainings has shown that both programs aimed at creating many opportunities to socialize and to learn to work together. As the cohort members interviewees all confirmed, they had exchanged their contact information (phone numbers and email addresses), and have kept in touch. For instance, the British cohort hosted in Paris in 2014 has come back to meet with the French cohort again in January 2015, despite the French cohort having graduated in July 2014. However, one can expect the French

Diplomatic and Consular Institute 2014 cohort to be a tighter and deeper sentient community, given the length of the program.

Rites of passage

One rite of passage which comes to mind for the French cohort is the military training received in Beynes, as it includes the three stages of separation, liminality and incorporation. As the detailed description of this three-day immersive experience shows, this military training included ‘a dramatic separation from the past; movement to a secluded ground; collective isolation; a disorienting transition involving a series of ordeals, ceremonies and instructions; and finally a reintegration into the social structure with a different role.’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p.54) This rite of passage also shows that learning how to handle crises situations in the context of diplomatic work also includes a bodily and emotional experience in a holding environment. As emotions trigger identity work (Winkler 2016), designing immersive learning experiences that entail an emotional component (including stress) may trigger identity work.

The joint training offered by the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute and the Diplomatic Academy of the German Federal Foreign Office may be seen as a rite of passage, as it comprises for both cohorts a stage of separation (being in Brussels), of liminality (engaging with the European Union institutions as French and German diplomats), and of incorporation, having gained a deeper and more nuanced view of the daily functioning of European Union institutions, and of permanent representations.

The Diplomatic and Consular Institute, I argue, is an institution ‘offering reliable social defences, sentient communities, and vital rites of passage’, and is therefore a ‘holding environment’ likely ‘to be experienced as an identity workspace’ (Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010, p. 44). I will now turn to a discussion of these findings and discuss and how learning unfolds in such context.

Conclusion

In this article I have analysed the creation of the French Diplomatic and Consular Institute and I have conceptualized this institution as an identity workspace. I hope to spark a debate about the creation of in-house training initiatives in European Ministries of Foreign Affairs, such as recently with the new Diplomatic Academy in the United Kingdom. I have framed this recent phenomenon from a social theory of learning perspective, and I have focused on the entwinement of learning and identity, arguing that these professional schools offer a promising avenue for further empirical study of how identity work and learning unfold conjointly. For instance, the recent debates on the lack of ‘esprit de corps’ in the European External Action Service could benefit from such debate. Based on the idea that the European External Action Service lacks an organizational ‘esprit de corps’ (Juncos and Pomorska 2015), the literature questions the effectiveness of the European External Action Service training efforts in developing a common organizational culture and shared identity (Cross 2011; Juncos and Pomorska 2014; Carta and Duke 2015; Duke 2012; Duke 2015). The evidence gathered from the case examined here suggests that the training offered by the EEAS would have to complement the acquisition of operational skills (based on an acquisitive view of knowledge) with the social, relational, bodily, emotional, and symbolic elements of learning.

In this pilot study, I offer another avenue on how to conceptualize these professional schools of diplomacy and suggest to shift from a reified view of knowledge as objective and external (which I have labelled the textbook view of diplomacy) to knowing as being subjective (since learning and identity are intertwined) and context-dependent.

By designing learning experiences within a holding environment, the Diplomatic and Consular Institute acts as an identity workspace where entering diplomats can engage in identity work. I will give an example, based on the first vignette on diplomatic drafting. During these two sessions, entering diplomats had to adopt different roles in the drafting of these various genres. By writing from the standpoint of these different roles, they learn what it means to be a diplomat (professional self-conceptualization) through engaging in a practice (diplomatic drafting) commonly found in diplomatic work. As the young man who called for an international moratorium on spying activities engaged in a debate with a more experienced diplomat on what it would mean, he progressively gained a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a diplomat (i.e. “words have consequences”), what diplomatic work entails (diplomatic signalling) and the tacit, background knowledge of a practice (diplomatic drafting of a press briefing in this context assumed a pragmatic view of international relations).

Observing training has been particularly informative of the role of a practice (e.g. diplomatic drafting) as the locus for the production and reproduction of social relations (Gherardi 2011) among French diplomats, i.e. internal stratification as reflected by a hierarchy of genres: only senior diplomats (ambassadors and consuls abroad, and directors within the central administration) can write and send diplomatic cables to the Minister and its Cabinet. The knowledge portal affordances merely mirror the existing social relations embedded in the practice of diplomatic drafting.

Observing training has also helped deconstruct a social desirability bias found in some practitioners’ discourse about diplomacy as an elusive ‘art’, which aims to emphasize the tacitness of diplomacy. I concur with Gherardi’s analysis of practice-based studies as she warns against ‘a romanticizing effect which exalts the indefiniteness and inarticulability of practices. A practice is surrounded by an aura of the ineffable, of something that only adepts are able to describe and reproduce.’ (Gherardi 2006, p.37) In other words, the tacitness of a practice is not an intrinsic property of the practice: a practice can be elicited- in relationship to its local situatedness (Duguid 2008) - through a variety of techniques, such as the interview to the double (Nicolini 2009).

Going beyond the field of diplomacy, this pilot study contributes to the existing practice-based studies body of knowledge in two ways. First, it focuses on the training of entering diplomats in a hybrid structure, which combines elements of a professional school, and of apprenticeship. While the existing literature on communities of practice has focused on learning from within, and the literature on professional learning has examined professional schools, this article has chosen an original setting which combines elements of socialization into a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; 2000), organizational socialization (Van Maanen and Schein 1979; Jones 1986; Allen and Meyer 1990), knowing-in-practice (Gherardi 2006; Gherardi 2011) and professional learning (Fenwick and Nerland 2014; Gherardi 2014). The replication of this study to other settings, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Diplomatic Academy, would be welcome. This pilot study also contributes to practice-based studies as it has added to the literature on communities of practice by focusing explicitly on the

mechanisms that facilitate identification to a community, drawing from organization studies on identity work and identity workspace (Ibarra 1999; Petriglieri and Petriglieri 2010).

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Notes on contributor

Donoxti Baylon is finishing his PhD in Strategy and Organization Theory from ESSEC Business School, and is currently a visiting researcher at the Warwick Business School, by invitation of Professor Davide Nicolini. He has graduated with a Masters in International and European Security and Defence from the University of Grenoble, France, and a Masters in European Comparative Political Science and Public Policy from the University of Montpellier, France.

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