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IDENTITY CHANGE AT THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

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ABSTRACT

A good match between an organization’s design (“what we do”) and its identity (“who we are”) is often seen as a key to strong performance. But maintaining a tight fit between design and identity is difficult when a profound external shock forces an organization to change both. How do design and identity change together? Prior research says little on this question because it has tended to study design change and identity change separately. This paper links the two by examining how the United States’ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) transformed itself after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Drawing on 138 interviews within the FBI and archival analysis of Congressional testimonies from 2001 to 2013, we trace how top management shifted the design and identity of the FBI from those of a law enforcement agency to those of a national security organization. Our examination reveals multiple ways in which design change and identity change interacted. We find instances in which urgent focus on design change consumed top management attention and crowded out identity change; in which experimentation in design made it premature to develop a new identity; and in which identity changed in order to support the design that emerged from experimentation. Interpretation of such observations leads us to new propositions about the interplay of design and identity in times of radical change. Overall, the propositions suggest that after a dramatic shock, efforts to ascertain and implement changes in “what we do” will often delay efforts to change “who we are.”

Key words: organizational design, organizational identity, managing change

“We are what we repeatedly do.” Thus the historian and philosopher Will Durant (2006: 98) summed up Aristotle’s view of how individuals develop their virtues. Identity – who we are – is bound up intimately with routinized activity – what we do. The same has been argued of organizations. Galbraith (1977, 1995) noted that an organization’s design not only guides its routinized activity but also provides the organization with meaning and purpose – what others have called the organization’s identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Schultz & Hernes, 2012). A good match between an organization’s design and its identity is often seen as a prerequisite for strong performance (Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Maintaining a tight fit between design and identity, however, is extremely difficult when an organization’s environment changes. Following a profound external shock, an organization’s design must change (Chandler, 1962; Gulati & Puranam, 2009; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Meyer, 1982; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Thompson, 1967) as must elements of its identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998; Glynn, 2000; Reger, Gustafson, Demarie, & Mullane, 1994). But how do they do so? Do both change at once? Does one lead and the other follow? Does the sequence depend on the circumstances, and if so, how? Prior research offers little insight on the joint dynamics of design and identity over time. Though identity scholars have long recognized the importance of organizational design at a point in time (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985), and though some design scholars have acknowledged the centrality of identity (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2013), the literatures on design *change* and identity *change* have, by and large, developed separately and in parallel.

We start to build theory on the interplay between design and identity change over time by means of an in-depth, longitudinal inductive case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Specifically, we examine how the United States’ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) transformed itself after the extreme shock of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The tragic attacks provide a powerful setting for our research because they challenged both the design and the identity of the FBI in fundamental ways. Prior to 9/11, the Bureau’s identity centered on law enforcement, and its organizational design was honed to achieve the primary goal of a law enforcement agency – to solve crimes after they occur. After 9/11, a different goal became an absolute priority: preventing attacks before they occur. This goal corresponded to a different

possible focus of identity: national security. It also demanded a starkly different organizational design; only with major changes in structure, systems, and processes would the FBI be able to gather, analyze, and act on intelligence in ways that would prevent future attacks.

The FBI's subsequent journey poses an intriguing mystery to design scholars because, after 9/11, the Bureau's organizational design evolved in ways that differ from what many prior students of design would predict. Similarly, the FBI's identity underwent a sequence of changes that much of the earlier research on identity change would not have forecast. Having conducted 138 field interviews with personnel at all ranks within the FBI over several years, and having analyzed all 45 testimonies that the Director of the FBI delivered to Congress between 2001 and 2013, we are well positioned to unravel this mystery. The trajectory of change at the FBI makes sense, we argue, only if one considers the *interplay* between design and identity. Our detailed examination of the FBI's post-9/11 transformation reveals multiple ways in which design change and identity change interacted. We find instances in which an urgent focus on design change consumed top management attention (Ocasio, 1997) and crowded out work on identity change; in which uncertainty about and experimentation in design made it premature to develop a new identity; and in which identity changed in order to support the design that emerged from experimentation. Interpretation of such observations leads us to new propositions about the interplay of design and identity in times of radical change. Overall, the propositions suggest that after a dramatic shock, efforts to ascertain and implement changes in "what we do" will often delay efforts to change "who we are." Our major contribution, then, is to illustrate how the study of design change and identity change can enrich one another.

The paper is organized as follows. We first set the stage by distinguishing between organizational design and organizational identity and reviewing how prior research predicts that design and identity changes like the FBI's would unfold. We then describe the unusual combination of field and archival data we gathered to track change at the FBI and the methods we used to analyze the data. In the heart of our analysis, we trace the coevolution of the Bureau's design and identity before the 9/11 attacks and through

three subsequent phases; we focus especially on how and why changes in design interacted with shifts in identity. We close by discussing theoretical implications and proposing directions for future research.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN AND IDENTITY DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE

To explore the joint dynamics of organizational design and identity, we must first be clear about the meanings of “design” and “identity” in the context of organizations. This is not trivial because the prior literatures on design and identity are diverse and still developing.

Following Galbraith (1977: 5-6), we use organizational design to mean the combination of what tasks an entity chooses to prioritize; which products or services it delivers to which clients in which locations (its domain); how it decomposes tasks into subtasks but then assures coordination across subtasks; and how it integrates individuals into the organization by selecting, training, and rewarding them. Achieving coherence among such organizational arrangements is a fundamental challenge of organizational design (Galbraith, 1977; Nadler & Tushman, 1980). All in all, design captures “what we do.”

Organizational identity is a younger concept than organizational design, and some elements of its definition are still being contested (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013). In launching scholarly interest in the notion, Albert & Whetten (1985) defined identity as the central, distinct, and enduring elements that give meaning and provide purpose to an organization— in essence, “who we are.”

Prior literature has portrayed both organizational design and identity as hard to change in and of themselves and as sources of inertia in an organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gulati & Puranam, 2009; Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2003; Nickerson & Zenger, 2002). Classic works in organizational design point to the sticky and multi-faceted nature of an organization’s design elements that are mutually reinforcing and can be immutable (Nadler & Tushman, 1980) . While change is not impossible, it is portrayed as difficult, time consuming, and full of hazards that come from having to align the design to an organization’s strategy while also ensuring that the various design elements reinforce each other. The same is true of identity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Kreiner, Hollensbe, Sheep, Smith, & Kataria, 2014). Indeed, because it consists of “enduring elements,” identity resists change almost by definition. Despite the inertial tendency of identity, or perhaps because of that tendency, scholars have paid increasing

attention to the challenge of changing identity. (For a review, see Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The resulting, diverse literatures do not make simple, unanimous predictions about change, but they do identify potential paths that an organization might follow after an external shock.

Organizational Design after a Shock

To understand what prior research says about the likely evolution of the FBI's design, it is necessary to understand the basic nature of the FBI and the shock of 9/11 – topics we cover in depth later in the paper. Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the primary goal of the FBI was to solve crimes after they occurred. To do so, the FBI had developed the design of a law enforcement agency, as summarized in the left column of Table 1. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 made a different goal an urgent priority: prevent future attacks before they occur. Doing so required that the FBI prioritize the national security tasks typically undertaken by a domestic intelligence agency, not a law enforcement agency (Posner, 2010). And as the right column of Table 1 suggests, the design elements of an effective domestic intelligence agency are starkly different than that of a law enforcement agency. In fact, law enforcement and domestic intelligence are so distinct that almost all national governments assign the two to separate agencies. The attacks, then, challenged the Bureau's leaders to create an organization that could accomplish two goals simultaneously – an old and a new one – requiring different, perhaps incompatible designs.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

How might scholars of organizational design expect such a situation to unfold? Three possibilities emerge from prior research. First, the FBI might simply have *failed* at achieving its new mandate. The rise of domestic terrorism potentially constituted a competence-destroying discontinuity in which “the skills and knowledge base required to operate the core technology shift[ed]” and became “fundamentally different” (Tushman & Anderson, 1986: 442). In such situations – as Hannan & Freeman (1984: 149) have suggested – existing organizations with their “strong inertial forces...seldom succeed...in making radical changes in strategy and structure” and consequently fail in the altered environment.

Second, following the work of O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) on *structural ambidexterity* and Skinner (1974) on focused factories, the FBI might have succeeded by pursuing two separate mandates in separate

business units—one tailored to law enforcement and one aligned to domestic intelligence. “What we do” would be very different in the two units. The very top team would then connect the two units and make crucial decisions about how resources are allocated to, leveraged across, and coordinated between the structurally separated units (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2008).

Third, following Gibson & Birkinshaw (2004), the FBI might have achieved its dual goals through *contextual ambidexterity*. Here, front-line employees throughout the Bureau would be called on to conduct both law enforcement and domestic intelligence, and the organization’s senior managers would create processes and systems—an organizational context—to enable the front-line to strike a balance between the two.

Organizational Identity after a Shock

Scholars of organizational identity have also examined how shocks to an organization initiate processes of identity change as members attempt to make sense of their new environment (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Weick, 1996). Gioia, Schultz & Corley (2000), for instance, posited that such changes are composed of shifts in labels and meanings. Labels help members answer “who are we as an organization?” whereas meanings underlie those labels and serve as conduits for shared sensemaking throughout the organization (Weick, 1995). Applied to our context, this research would suggest that immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the meanings and labels attached to the FBI’s identity would have become ambiguous, with “multiple possible interpretations about which core features should define the changed organization, so tensions can accompany the process of deciding which interpretations will prevail in shaping the company’s future [identity]” (Corley & Gioia, 2004: 173).

Diverse identity scholars have theorized that an initial period of identity ambiguity following an organizational shock will eventually yield to one of three outcomes. First, an organization like the FBI might have quickly redefined itself with a new *unified* identity. “Who we are” would be different from the past but the same throughout the new organization. Second, multiple but isolated identities might have emerged as separate business units were created to fulfill the FBI’s new mandate. Albert & Whetten (1985: 271) referred to this structural separation of multiple identities as *ideographic*, whereby “the

organization's pluralism is evident across units but not within units." Under this possible path, the FBI would have pursued structural separation in organizational design, made a clear distinction between the labels and meanings related to its dual mandates, and reinforced these two identities by keeping the members and practices associated with each in separate units. Third, after a period of ambiguity, several new identities could have emerged and coexisted indefinitely across multiple business units in the organization. Albert & Whetten (1985: 271) refer to this structural dualism between multiple identities as *holographic*, whereby "different, and to some extent conflicting, management styles are blended together and diffused evenly throughout the entire organization." Here, the top leaders of the FBI would have allowed the old and new to coexist, attaching new meanings to the old mandate but also introducing labels related to the new mandate across the entire organization.

With these ranges of possible outcomes in mind, we turn to our data on the actual paths of the FBI's design and identity. As an extreme case of external shock and internal transformation, the FBI's journey provides fertile ground to explore the relationship between design change and identity change.

SOURCES AND METHODS

To grasp how the FBI's organizational design and identity evolved after 9/11, we drew from both field research and analyses of archival data. We first became familiar with the inner workings of the FBI in 2006, when one of us gained permission to write teaching cases about the Bureau. The resulting cases focused on organizational change and highlighted the pervasive differences between law enforcement and domestic intelligence. In 2009, we asked the Bureau's leaders if we could update the teaching cases and launch a research project to study the dynamics of organizational change at the FBI.

Subsequently, we interviewed a total of 138 individuals (43 individuals at the FBI's headquarters and 95 individuals at five field offices). The individuals at the headquarters, in essence, included the entire senior leadership team. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was semi-structured (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and emphasized understanding the individual's account of major changes and remaining challenges at the FBI, especially in the areas in which the interviewee had responsibility. Recording

devices are not allowed in many FBI facilities; therefore, we relied on extensive handwritten notes, which we reviewed and annotated at the end of each day.

The five field offices we visited were selected to provide variety in terms of size, local threat environment, and progress toward the FBI's new mission and model of operation. In each field office, we individually interviewed the office's top leader—the Special Agent in Charge (SAC)—and the assistant SAC responsible for intelligence. In focus groups ranging from 4 to 18 individuals, we interviewed front-line special agents, intelligence analysts, front-line supervisors, and other assistant SACs. We were concerned initially that interviewing personnel in focus groups might suppress open conversation. On the contrary, most groups engaged in candid dialogues and even heated debates, which exposed perspectives we might have missed. The typical field office visit lasted for 10 hours. After each field visit, we compiled our handwritten notes and created summary sheets (Yin, 2008). This process led to 232 pages of notes that were used in our analysis. To avoid confirmation bias, we asked one of the authors who did not participate in the initial interviews to review the field notes and develop an independent assessment of the emerging themes. All three authors then met and discussed discrepancies until agreement was reached.

At the end of the field research process, the Bureau allowed us to review our reflections with top executives, a group of roughly 100 headquarters' staff, and with a gathering of SACs from all 56 offices. We also produced a series of teaching cases and an accompanying teaching note on the evolution of the FBI. Senior FBI personnel visited classes on multiple occasions when the cases were taught to executives and MBA students. The in-class reflections of the senior personnel further refined our view of the FBI's trajectory. Reviewing the videotaped comments of Robert Mueller, the FBI's top leader or "Director," in six classroom sessions over the years allowed us to follow in real-time how he was experiencing changes at the FBI and thereby mitigate retrospective bias (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Because our field research commenced well after the 9/11 attacks and because interviews cannot provide a comprehensive, longitudinal view of a large organization, we complemented our field research by analyzing archival sources. Specifically, we compiled and examined the texts of all 45 testimonies that the Director of the FBI delivered to Congress between 2001 and 2013. The FBI's Director sometimes

delivers identical testimonies to different branches of Congress so we eliminated redundant testimonies. The 45 remaining testimonies include 43 delivered by Robert S. Mueller, III between 2002 and 2013 and two testimonies delivered in 2001 by Mueller's predecessor Louis Freeh. These testimonies focused on annual budget requests, status updates on the Bureau, general threat analyses, and specific responses to the 9/11 attacks. Although the FBI is part of the executive branch of the U.S. government and therefore reports to the President, Congress exercises considerable oversight over the FBI and holds the Bureau's purse strings. External and internal audiences, including members of the President's budgetary team and FBI employees, often paid close attention to these testimonies because the testimonies regularly confirmed or dispelled rumors about the Director's strategic and operational plans for the Bureau. Consequently, senior FBI leaders put great effort into framing and wording Congressional testimonies.

The analytic approach we employed can be described as analytic abduction (Peirce, 1955), whereby we iterated between our empirical data and preexisting theoretical constructs (e.g., Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008). As such, our findings unfolded over a gradual process of going back and forth among our data, existing theory, and emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As themes became salient (i.e., organizational design and identity), we iterated between data and existing theory to evaluate the unexpected trajectory of the FBI.

For example, we analyzed the component parts of FBI's organizational design as encompassing an organization's tasks, domain, decomposition and coordination of tasks, and mechanisms for integrating individuals (Galbraith, 1977). We examined the evolution of the FBI's organizational design by assessing the shifts it made in each of these component elements and iterated between our data and existing theory.

To examine the trajectory of the FBI's identity, we drew on several concepts from prior research, also going back and forth between data and prior theory. First, we searched for instances in which multiple identities appeared to emerge in the FBI, relying on Albert & Whetten's (1985) contrasting views of identity pluralism. For example, the authors suggested that organizations experiencing change will adopt either ideographic identities (i.e., identity pluralism across units but not within units) or holographic identities (i.e., multiple identity components blended together and diffused evenly throughout the entire

organization). This distinction was especially salient for our analysis because it also oriented us toward the organizational design decisions that may have accompanied shifts in identity. We were also sensitive to shifts in the meanings and labels attached to the organization's identity over time (Corley & Gioia, 2004), placing particular importance on instances where members of the FBI reported identity ambiguity or conflict (e.g., Gioia et al., 2000; Glynn, 2000). Lastly, we explored the relationship between organizational design and identity formation, searching for patterns in our data where changes in "what we do" were either preceded or followed by changes in "who we are" (e.g., Nelson & Irwin, 2014).

To validate the emerging themes, we analyzed the text of the Director's testimonies to learn whether shifts in organizational design and identity observed in our field interviews also appeared in statements to Congress. Using NVivo 10, one of the authors and a trained research assistant conducted two rounds of pilot coding on a randomly selected group of four to five testimonies per round. Each individual analyzed a random subset of the testimony data to create a preliminary codebook. After each round, they met to evaluate codes and discuss discrepancies. After the second pilot round, the refined codes were then discussed with all the authors to ensure coding was commensurate with the themes from our field interviews. This iterative process led to a final codebook (see Table 2) that was subsequently used to analyze the entire sample of archival testimonies. The resulting codes focused on three separate components of the FBI's transformation: descriptions of change, organizational design statements, and identity. We describe the specific codes below when we introduce particular findings. In sum, our use of multiple and diverse data sources allowed a process of data triangulation (Creswell, 2003), helping us obtain greater certainty about the concurrent themes and patterns that were most salient.

----- Insert Table 2 (Codebook) about here -----

HISTORICAL ORIGINS: THE FBI BEFORE THE 9/11 ATTACKS

In this section, we describe how the history of the FBI gave it the design and identity of a law enforcement agency, not an intelligence organization, prior to 9/11: before the attacks, the FBI closely resembled the "law enforcement agency," and shared very little with the "domestic intelligence agency," described in Table 1. In fact, the Bureau was so distinct from an intelligence agency that after the 9/11

attacks, many observers called for the U.S. government to stand up a new agency for domestic intelligence and strip the FBI of its (historically secondary) responsibility for domestic intelligence.

The Bureau was founded in 1908 as part of the Department of Justice (DOJ), which prosecutes federal crimes and represents the United States in legal matters. Today, it remains part of the DOJ. The FBI's public image was forged through episodes related to law enforcement, including a successful campaign in the 1930s against gangsters such as Al Capone and a dramatic battle in the 1960s and 1970s against the American mafia. J. Edgar Hoover, who served as Director of the FBI from 1924 to 1972, held a law degree, as did all five of his successors. Two Directors were also federal judges. Fittingly, when testifying before Congress during his confirmation hearings in the summer of 2001, Robert S. Mueller III called the FBI "the finest law enforcement agency in the world" (DOJ, 2001). A *New York Times* profile of Mueller at the time carried the headline "A Man Made for Law Enforcement" (Lewis, 2001).

Organizational Design

Reflecting its historical mission, between 1908 and 2001 the FBI developed an organizational design fit for law enforcement. Prior to 9/11, the Bureau's formal structure was predominantly geographic: mirroring the traditionally local nature of most crime, the FBI operated from 56 field offices in major cities. A SAC in each field office enjoyed considerable local autonomy—"princes with their own little fiefdoms" (Lichtblau, 2002: 1). At headquarters in Washington, DC, personnel were organized by programs like public corruption, narcotics, white-collar crime, and so on. Headquarters provided only light-handed, advisory coordination across offices. The need for coordination was reduced by an "office-of-origin" system, which allowed a field office that started an investigation into a particular matter to stay with it even if it expanded beyond one geographic area. For instance, the New York Field Office first indicted Osama bin Laden in 1998 and thus became the hub for all bin Laden cases through 9/11.

Within this decentralized structure, FBI agents focused on solving crimes after they occurred. Agents organized their work around cases, which often corresponded to specific crimes committed within their regions. In turn, the FBI evaluated leaders based on objective performance metrics such as the number of arrests, prosecutions, and convictions that each office generated. The resource allocations and output of

the organization reflected its focus on law enforcement. In 2000, the FBI assigned 76% of its agents to criminal cases, roughly 21% to counterintelligence, and just 2% to 3% to counterterrorism (DOJ, 2003). Of the FBI's 12,730 convictions in 1998, more than half involved drugs, bank robberies, and bank fraud, whereas only 37 related to terrorism.

To support its field offices, the FBI developed central services that were necessary for law enforcement. For example, its Technical Laboratory in Virginia was, and remains, legendary for pioneering and applying forensic techniques. In contrast, the Bureau's information technology (IT) was insufficient to meet an intelligence agency's standards. The antiquated IT reflected a belief that, as one long-time agent put it, "The only thing a real agent needs is a notebook, a pen, and a gun, and with those three things, you can conquer the world" (Lichtblau & Piller, 2002: 01J).

Organizational Identity

In 1907, United States Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte testified before Congress for the initial funding of the FBI. In this seminal testimony, he articulated the Bureau's founding identity:

The attention of the Congress should be, I think, called to the anomaly that the Department of Justice has no executive force, and, more particularly, no permanent detective force under its immediate control. I venture to recommend, therefore, that provision be made for a force of this character. It seems obvious that the Department on which not only the President, but the courts of the United States must call first to secure the enforcement of the laws, ought to have the means of such enforcement subject to its own call (FBI historical archives).

From its inception, the labels and meanings used to describe the FBI's identity were associated with practices related to enforcing laws. Future Directors, most notably J. Edgar Hoover, built both internal and public support for this identity, reaffirming what it meant to be a federal law enforcement agency. In a 1925 report, Hoover said, "The agents of the Bureau of Investigation have been impressed with the fact that the real problem of law enforcement is in trying to obtain the cooperation and sympathy of the public" (FBI archives). Thus, management's explicit attention to the FBI's identity helped reinforce and galvanize others around its core mandate related to law enforcement.

In the years leading up to World War II, the FBI continued to label itself a law enforcement organization, but the meanings attached to the label changed slightly to include practices associated with

investigating potential acts of espionage and sabotage. With the rise of Communism in the 1930s, for example, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the FBI to collect intelligence on domestic organizations such as the American Communist Party. During World War II, the FBI almost doubled its number of agents to accommodate searches for potential spies and continue its domestic criminal investigations. Although the Bureau took on domestic intelligence responsibilities, they remained secondary and circumscribed. In 1956, for example, Director Hoover launched a secret program to monitor and disrupt the Communist Party. The program later expanded to scrutinize figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1970s, disclosures about this domestic spying program shocked and angered many Americans and led to legislative limits on the FBI's latitude to conduct domestic intelligence. This further affirmed the Bureau's law enforcement identity and, in turn, reinforced the FBI's focus on criminal justice.

In the years that followed, the Bureau's law enforcement identity remained relatively consistent. There were no specific guidelines covering the FBI's national security responsibilities until 1976 when the FBI instituted several policy changes in response to Congressional and media scrutiny following the Nixon Watergate investigations; therefore, such practices remained part of how the agency defined law enforcement. By the end of the Cold War, the FBI focused squarely on solving crime, both domestically and abroad. In 1993, Director Freeh began his tenure by issuing a statement that reconfirmed the FBI's agenda and identity, stating "*Law enforcement* is at the forefront of our national interest in this part of the world" (FBI historical archives, emphasis added). Through the end of the 20th century, law enforcement continued to serve as the dominant label associated with the Bureau's identity.

In sum, prior to September 11, 2001, the FBI's design and identity reaffirmed its focus on law enforcement with its ensuing emphasis on arresting and convicting those who had broken federal laws. In turn, top management devoted significant attention toward activities that communicated and reinforced this core mandate to its members. The Bureau developed a cadre of people well-tuned for this task: the heroes of the Bureau were clearly the 11,000 special agents, not the 17,000 support personnel. A typical agent was a person of action with little tolerance for bureaucracy, one who longed to be on the street,

working a case. “I’m here to fill jail cells, not filing cabinets,” an interviewed agent stated. Likewise, in the interior courtyard of the FBI headquarters stood a prominent quote by Hoover reinforcing the Bureau’s identity and design: “The most effective weapon against crime is cooperation—the efforts of all law enforcement agencies with the support and understanding of the American people.”

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FBI’S ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN AND IDENTITY, 2001-2013

On September 4, 2001, Robert Mueller was sworn in as the sixth director of the FBI. One week later, terrorists crashed four airplanes into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, killing nearly 3,000 people. FBI personnel at all levels described that tragic day and its aftermath in deeply emotional terms. When sharing his experience with us in 2012, Director Mueller recalled a meeting with President Bush soon after the attacks:

I remember the briefing going something like the following: “Mr. President, we have command centers that have been set up at each of the sites and we’ve started to identify the persons responsible for the attacks by their seat number.” The president stops me and says “Bob, that’s all well and good, and that’s what I expect the FBI to do. The FBI has done it throughout its existence. But my question to you today is, ‘*What are you doing to prevent the next terrorist attack?*’” I did not have an answer for that question. I was prepared to discuss what the FBI was doing to bring the persons to justice. I felt like a high school student who got the assignment wrong. I did not have a good answer. But it was that question that was asked daily afterwards.

When we interviewed him in 2009, Director Mueller divided the FBI’s development after the 9/11 attacks into three phases: a period of *triage* (2001–2003), which involved direct responses to the attacks; a period of *search* (2003–2006), during which certain intelligence foundations were built; and a period of *crystallization* (2006 onward), when the new systems and behaviors were institutionalized and a new organizational identity emerged. Based on our analyses, we then assigned these labels to each phase.

Archival analyses of Congressional testimonies corroborate the Director Mueller’s depiction of three phases. Using the codebook detailed in Table 2, we reviewed the Director’s Congressional testimonies and flagged comments about triage (i.e., initiating changes to address immediate threats or concerns), search (exploring new elements for change), and crystallization (institutionalizing changes that had been adopted). Figure 1 depicts the relative frequency of phrases in those categories over time.

----- Insert Figure 1 (phases) about here -----

References to triage peak in 2002 and give way to phrases about search by 2005, while phrases about crystallization surge from 2007 onward. Each phase appears in the testimonies slightly later than Director Mueller described when interviewed. This delay is sensible: an action would likely be underway at the Bureau for some time before appearing in one of the Director's periodic progress reports to Congress. We turn next to consider how the FBI's organizational design and identity evolved during each phase.

Triage (2001–2003)

Agents describe the days immediately after the attacks as frenetic but in some ways straightforward. The Bureau was called on to do what it did best—investigate crime scenes—in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. In the months that followed, Director Mueller reset the FBI's espoused priorities, shifting focus from law enforcement to national security, particularly counterterrorism. In May 2002, he issued a new list of the FBI's top ten priorities, which started with “protect the U.S. from terrorist attack.” He directed field office leaders to allocate as many resources as necessary to achieve this first goal before allocating any resources to other goals. Mueller declared that the FBI would track down *every* terrorism lead it received. (By 2010, the number of leads received totaled to more than 180,000). The manpower implications were significant: the portion of agents allocated to criminal programs dropped from 74% in 2001 to 51% in 2007. In the months after 9/11, resource reallocation was managed from the very top of the organization, with headquarters reassigning hundreds of agents.

Organizational design. In terms of organizational design, the triage period was marked by two major developments and, perhaps most significantly, a non-development. First, Mueller increased the structural separation of national security pursuits from law enforcement and centralized national-security decisions. At headquarters, ongoing and new counterterrorism and counterintelligence activities were merged under a single Executive Assistant Director (EAD), who also led a new effort to enhance the FBI's analytical capabilities. For terrorism cases, Mueller terminated the office-of-origin system (in which an office that opened a case owned it going forward) and instead empowered headquarters to oversee all such cases, regardless of where they originated. Henceforth, headquarters personnel would coordinate field office efforts on terrorism cases. The centralization reflected the fact that, as the counterterrorism head for the

Washington Field Office put it, “There is no such thing as a local terrorism problem. Something might happen locally, but within two seconds, you discover national and international connections.” On-the-ground counterterrorism activities, however, continued to take place in the Bureau’s field offices. More agents were devoted to counterterrorism, but otherwise, little changed in the field offices.

Second, the FBI deepened its relationships with local law enforcement authorities. Between September 2001 and May 2003, the FBI increased the number of joint terrorism task forces (JTTFs) from 35 to 66. Each JTTF brought FBI agents, local authorities, and others into a shared facility to manage terrorism cases in a region. Such task forces met routinely to simulate crises and decide how to handle them in a coordinated manner. Top FBI executives directed SACs who did not have a local task force to establish one. Underlying this move was a belief that a lot of the intelligence related to national security resided within local enforcement agencies. Partnering with them would provide the FBI with valuable and timely access to useful intelligence.

Perhaps the most important development in the FBI’s organizational design during the triage period was a change that did *not* occur: despite loud calls from key stakeholders, the national security activity of the FBI was not spun off into a separate entity. Virtually all other developed democracies maintain two separate organizations: a law enforcement agency for criminal cases and a domestic intelligence agency for national security (e.g., Scotland Yard and MI5 in the UK; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Security Intelligence Service in Canada). In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, many policymakers and observers called for the U.S. government to follow these examples and establish a domestic intelligence agency distinct from the FBI, a so-called “American MI5.” But no such agency was set up.

Advocates for keeping both law enforcement and national security within the FBI pointed to three complementarities between the two activities that would be lost if they were split across agencies. First, the law enforcement activities of the FBI gave the Bureau deep relationships with thousands of local law enforcement agencies – relationships that were essential for national security. Separating the two would leave national security personnel with less access to valuable, local intelligence. Second, the information generated in law enforcement was valuable for national security, and vice versa. Aspiring terrorists

frequently commit ordinary crimes before their main, intended attacks, especially crimes to fund their activities (O'Neil, 2010). By one estimate, one-third of the activities that a typical terrorist undertakes to facilitate an attack are criminal (Smith, Damphousse, & Roberts, 2006). As a result, law enforcement personnel sometimes have early information on potential terrorists. Third, the power of arrest, bestowed on the FBI due to its law enforcement mandate, can promote national security efforts. Suspected terrorists are often arrested on lesser criminal charges before they commit attacks. The threat of arrest and prosecution or the offer of a reduced sentence, which only a law enforcement officer can make credibly, can encourage lesser members of a terrorist cell to share information related to more important members, their overarching plans, or future attacks. Other countries that lack such a plea bargain system and maintain separate agencies for law enforcement and national security are usually severely handicapped in obtaining valuable information from terrorists who have been arrested.

Organizational identity. In addition to evaluating the FBI's structure, the Director and his leadership team began to formulate new labels to communicate the organization's identity. In a 2002 testimony to Congress, Mueller stated, "Starting immediately after the planes hit, when over half of our 11,500 agents suddenly found themselves working terrorism matters, it became clear that our mission and our priorities had to change." During the triage period, the Director redefined how the expanded tasks and practices needed for the Bureau's new mandate would align with the preexisting organizational identity, which focused on law enforcement. In October 2002, the Director Mueller stated:

Implementing the revised FBI priorities...and redirecting the FBI workforce toward these priorities requires a concurrent shift in how the FBI manages these cases from a national perspective. These changes will also require changes in how we operate within our offices and perform our work.

Our archival analyses illustrate this trend. Throughout the triage phase, the Director increased his use of "national security" as a label to describe the Bureau's new practices. Simultaneously, his use of the term "law enforcement," the dominant label associated with the FBI for nearly a century, subsided (Figure 2).

Our field and archival analyses suggest a surprising *absence* of identity ambiguity during this phase. We might have expected the 9/11 attacks to have triggered numerous questions about the meanings and labels attached to the FBI's identity. To the contrary, however, the Director focused squarely on defining

and organizing the tasks related to the national security and law enforcement mandates (“what we do”). Identity-related issues (“who we are”) were less prevalent and received far less consideration from those at the top during this stage. Within the organization, one special agent summed up the general sentiment about the Bureau’s post-9/11 dual mandates: “It was necessary to have both.”

----- Insert Figure 2 about here -----

To summarize, during the triage period the organizational design of the FBI saw some structural separation of law enforcement and national security within the Bureau. These design changes were reinforced by the marked migration of decision rights to the top of the organization, especially for decisions about how to conduct counterterrorism and how to balance national security with law enforcement. Senior Bureau leaders focused on the task at hand and did not spend much time explicating a new unified identity for the FBI. Instead, they augmented the FBI’s law enforcement identity with a second clear, separate, and preexisting identity, centered on national security and supporting the FBI’s expanding activity in counterterrorism.

Search (2003-2006)

By early 2003, Muller and his top management team believed their organizational design efforts allowed them to tackle the terrorism threats they were facing at the time. They realized, however, that the structural changes made thus far were a stopgap. For the long term, they needed a plan to build an intelligence service capable of delivering national security without abandoning law enforcement. Mueller thus began an effort he later called “building foundations for intelligence.” In February 2003, he testified before Congress: “As these terrorist organizations evolve and change their tactics, we, too, must be prepared to evolve. Accordingly, the FBI is undergoing momentous changes—including the incorporation of an enhanced intelligence function—that will allow us to meet the terrorist threat head-on.” Other senior executives were more skeptical, describing this period in interviews as a time of “searching,” “diffused initiatives,” and “lack of traction.” During this period, we find that the FBI’s senior team continued to focus primarily on organizational design, with less attention given to identity.

Organizational design. Organizational design during this period was marked by structural separation within the FBI based on the distinct tasks associated with national security and law enforcement. At the same time, FBI leaders instituted changes that would pave the way for subsequent decentralization of the intelligence activity that underpinned national security. The Bureau established two unique structures: Field Intelligence Groups (FIGs) and the National Security Branch, described later in this section.

As of early 2003, the FBI's organizational structure was not optimal for pursuing national security. The FBI's counterterrorism efforts remained largely reactive, with activity sparked by tips. Bureau staff lacked the ability to analyze threats systematically, allocate resources to the most important threats, identify gaps in information, and deploy resources to fill the gaps. To address this weakness, in May 2003 Mueller established a new organizational unit at headquarters – a Directorate of Intelligence – whose leader would report directly to him. To head the Directorate, Mueller hired an outsider, a senior executive of the National Security Agency. This individual built a cadre of intelligence analysts tasked with integrating and disseminating valuable intelligence information. Distinct from special agents, the analysts did not develop informants, make arrests, or carry weapons. Between fiscal years 2001 and 2006, the number of analysts in the FBI more than doubled, from 1,023 to 2,161. Whereas many of the pre-9/11 analysts were promoted into their roles from clerical positions, many of the new analysts had graduate degrees or military intelligence backgrounds.

The newly appointed head of the Directorate made several organizational design changes, placing many of the new analysts in field offices, not at headquarters. In each field office, she established a Field Intelligence Group (FIG)—a set of analysts and agents instructed to analyze and disseminate intelligence gathered in their field office, to serve as a central point of contact with headquarters on national security issues, and to coordinate intelligence across offices. Each field offices was told to set up a FIG quickly, with little central guidance. A veteran agent, working at headquarters in 2003, described the outcome:

No one knew in 2003 how a FIG should operate, so we let a thousand flowers bloom. Nearly every FIG was different. Some were conducting high-end strategic analysis, but many were supporting the tactical casework of squads—analyzing the telephone calling patterns of suspects, for instance.

Many aspects of the FBI's organizational design that had been perfected for law enforcement hampered the creation and development of FIGs. The FIGs' tasks were unclear. Analysts struggled to establish credibility within the FBI, and their career paths were not defined. Formal organizational arrangements, especially role definitions and metrics for intelligence success, were vague. Analysts were viewed as second-class citizens, some reporting they were told to fetch coffee for agents. Conversely, agents working on conventional law enforcement cases, previously the heroes of the FBI, felt their value was diminished. The directorate head—an outsider attempting rapid change—had limited rank-and-file support. Despite the challenges, these changes meant that intelligence efforts were underway in every field office at the end of 2003. Because “nearly every FIG was different,” the FBI was conducting, in essence, dozens of inadvertent experiments on how to manage intelligence.

In 2004-2005, a Presidential Commission assessed the FBI's progress since 9/11. While praising some of the FBI's strides, the Commission concluded that “the FBI's law enforcement legacy is strong” and “the FBI is still far from having the strong analytic capability that is required to drive and focus the Bureau's national security work” (Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States [CICUS], 2005: 453-455). The Commission expressed concern that the Executive Assistant Director (EAD) for Intelligence had little control over most analytical personnel or intelligence funding. Analysts in FIGs reported to the SACs in each field office, with dotted lines to the EAD of Intelligence.

The Commission considered establishing a separate “American MI5,” but citing the “FBI's hybrid nature [as] one of its strengths” (CICUS, 2005: 466), they rejected the idea. Instead, it urged the FBI to create a new National Security Branch (NSB) that would encompass the Counterterrorism and Counterintelligence Divisions and the Directorate of Intelligence at headquarters. The FBI complied. With this move—largely imposed from the outside—the Bureau came as close as it ever would to structural separation, with integration at the top. With headquarters split into a National Security Branch and a Criminal Branch (for law enforcement), and with headquarters continuing to direct counterterrorism cases and prioritize goals, the organizational design ensured that decision-making authority remained firmly at the top of the FBI.

Organizational identity. During this search period, the FBI's senior team paid little attention to changing the Bureau's identity. The continued use of the term "national security" reflected the FBI's increased focus on counterterrorism. It was a familiar label that had been used in past and so reflected change but also continuity; top management could use it during this period to avoid questions about whether they would eventually need to change the organization's identity. In addition, those within the Bureau reported limited top management attention on identity.

In the Director's 2003-06 testimonies to Congress, identity-related statements associated with national security far exceeded those referencing a historical focus on law enforcement (see Figure 2). In light of the discussed structural changes made during this phase (e.g., the establishment of FIGs), the Director emphasized the importance of national security to the Bureau's identity. On June 18, 2003, he testified, "The operational challenges facing the FBI over the next 5 to 10 years will be defined, in large part, by the threats posed to the *national security* of the United States" [emphasis added].

At various points during this search period, however, Mueller and his top team began to explore how the organizational design changes, which focused the Bureau on activities related to national security, would affect the FBI's historical identity, which had been rooted in law enforcement. Thus, throughout the search period, the Director began to introduce a small number of new labels (e.g., threat-based, national security intelligence) that co-mingled prior meanings associated with law enforcement and national security. These new labels were used only rarely (no more than 3% in any given year; see Figure 2) and were typically evoked from the Director only when Congress asked him to respond to specific questions about national security.

Overall, the search period was defined by a focus on exploring, and resolving ambiguities related to, the FBI's organizational design ("what we do"). The Bureau experimented with practices and organizational elements needed to support its new national security mandate. Recalling this period, one special agent commented, "the [organizational] structure was set up for compliance, not interpretation." In parallel, the management team also began to deliberate how the FBI's law enforcement identity ("who we

are”) might need to be addressed. However, law enforcement remained largely unchanged, coherent, and deliberately separate from the notion of national security.

As structural separation took place across the FBI, the labels and meanings attached to national security and law enforcement were largely bifurcated. For example, in his March 6, 2002 testimony, Director Mueller articulated what it meant to be an organization focused on national security while also accommodating the Bureau’s responsibilities for law enforcement: “The FBI will continue its transformation into the world’s premier law enforcement *and* counterterrorism agency (March, 17, 2004).” From 2003 to 2006, the Director attended to defining new practices and organizational design structures; indeed, questions about how the FBI might change its identity were rarely an area of attention for the management team. The next period proved to be quite different.

Crystallization (2007-13)

During the crystallization phase, we found the FBI experienced two distinct, but related, challenges related to design and identity. First, the Bureau had to develop systems and processes to support the new organizational design established in the search phase. Second, several shifts in the FBI’s organizational identity emerged, leading to higher levels of identity ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004) until the Bureau adopted a new unified identity.

Organizational design. To institutionalize the design changes that the FBI explored from 2003 to 2006, the FBI began to integrate law enforcement and national security practices more tightly by moving the locus of decision-making further down in the organization—giving personnel in field offices the authority to decide how to balance and connect the mandates of law enforcement and national security. To do so, Mueller established several new formal processes.

First, a “Strategy Management System” was established to set goals and manage performance against those goals. An Executive Assistant Director reporting to Mueller took on the task of “convert[ing] the shifts into management processes.” He implemented balanced scorecards (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) that translated strategies for pursuing law enforcement and national security into metrics and goals. Teams throughout the FBI then constructed “strategy maps” that highlighted objectives and linked their

strategies to that of the FBI as a whole. By 2009, such maps gave the FBI a hierarchy of objectives linked to specific metrics and to annual performance reviews and budget requests.

Second, Mueller moved to shore up the FBI's weaknesses in intelligence. In 2007, as one of his priority initiatives, he launched a Strategic Execution Team (SET) to build the FBI's intelligence capabilities and integrate intelligence into FBI operations. With strong senior support (Mueller reported that he spent 35% of his time on SET in 2008), the team focused on standardizing and upgrading the FIGs and enabling the FIGs to manage tradeoffs between national security and law enforcement. SET members reaped the benefit of earlier experiments: they visited field offices, identified best practices among FIGs, codified models of FIGs in a 61-page document, and rolled out a training program for all field personnel in 2008. The new standard model of the FIG emphasized integrating national security and law enforcement at a new, lower level of the organization.

As part of the SET program, the FBI developed formal processes to integrate the strategy maps with intelligence-related practices. In an iterative process labeled the "intelligence cycle," special agents collected and disseminated information. Analysts then converted the information into intelligence that might lead either to action (e.g., an arrest) or to recognizing that additional information was required. Analysts gave agents "requirements," such as questions to be posed to sources or surveillance to be undertaken, and agents collected new information to fulfill those requirements. Looking back from 2009, Mueller assessed the FBI's performance in parts of the intelligence cycle and gave it mixed marks:

FBI agents had always been world-class collectors, and in the context of a criminal case, no one could beat our analysis—our forensics, for instance. But our intelligence cycle was driven by cases, not by the underlying threats to the nation. We weren't very good at conducting long-term analyses of threats rather than cases. We needed to get better at using analyses to identify gaps in our intelligence and at tasking agents to collect against those gaps.

Addressing these weaknesses was key to shifting the locus of decision-making in the FBI. If each field office analyzed threats in its region and shifted agents toward the gravest threats, then field offices themselves, not headquarters, would be prioritizing and allocating resources between the goals of law enforcement and national security.

Third, FBI executives implemented formal and informal processes to assess progress. If critical tradeoffs were to be managed low in the organization, top executives needed to ensure that field office leaders were balancing and coordinating law enforcement and national security well. One senior executive of the National Security Branch reflected on a reality of assessing performance:

What metrics can apply to intelligence? It's an art, not a science. Ultimately, there's no substitute for putting the SAC in the chair and asking, "What are the most important threats and vulnerabilities in your domain? Why are they your priorities? Are you allocating your resources against your priorities? Where are the gaps in what you know about your domain? What are you doing to fill those gaps?"

Toward this end, the FBI started a series of Strategy Performance Sessions (SPSs) in early 2008. During each session, the leadership teams of several field offices joined Director Mueller and other top executives on a secure videoconference. The group reviewed the threats in the domain of each field office, plans to fill intelligence gaps, and resource allocation choices. A session included deep dives into particular threats and avoided a focus on cases. Field office leaders might be pressed, for example, on why they considered the MS13 criminal gang a higher-priority threat than Al-Qaeda in their region; whether they were developing the right array of human sources across different threats; why they had sent agents to a new training program on counterterrorism and not to an alternative program on drug trafficking; and so on. After each session, top executives and their aides sent a field office's SAC frank feedback on the office's performance. Mueller set a goal to hold a strategy session with each field office every 90 days. Such conversations were meant to ensure that each SAC had an adequate focus on his or her top threats and enough support from headquarters to build local intelligence capabilities.

A new, unified identity. Late in the prior search phase, Mueller began to speak of an "intelligence-led, threat-based FBI" that served as "not a law enforcement agency or an intelligence agency, but a national security organization." During the crystallization phase, Muller and his team began to devote significant attention to redefining the FBI's identity in a way that combined law enforcement and national security, with intelligence as the common theme. At a meeting of all SACs in 2006, Director Mueller had unveiled a new identity and announced a series of strategic shifts that such a change would require. The reaction at the meeting, which one author of this paper attended, was quiet—perhaps because the SACs

did not support the new vision or maybe because they were unsure what it would really entail. Given the tensions and the FBI's strong law enforcement legacy, from 2007 onward Mueller faced skepticism about how the FBI should pursue national security simultaneously. In response to the skepticism, Mueller took clear steps to redefine the Bureau as an intelligence-led, threat-based FBI.

During the crystallization stage, the FBI began to explore and explicate concepts related to national security more fully. To begin, Mueller appointed a CIA veteran to serve as the second-most senior executive in the NSB and help him develop ways for the Bureau to integrate law enforcement with national security. When interviewed, the individual described an FBI that would “look at threats in the U.S. and determine how to address gaps in our understandings of those threats.”

A new FBI identity was seen as an augmentation of the old identity in that it did not deny the role of law enforcement, but at the same time it signaled the need to align with the additional intelligence-related practices the FBI had adopted after 9/11. Historically, an agent would open a case in reaction to some incident or tip. Such a case might lead to an arrest but not be the best use of resources. It also might leave dangerous gaps in the FBI's intelligence about terrorist and criminal threats. Now, the Bureau's leaders were urging agents to work with analysts to assess potential threats in a region and then build an intelligence-gathering strategy to mitigate those threats. The “intelligence-led” identity label served as an umbrella construct (c.f., Hirsch & Levin, 1999) that began to reframe how personnel defined their law enforcement and counterterrorism activities. In 2007, the Associate Deputy Director described the shift:

We want agents to ask if the issue that just popped into their in-box [as a conventional case] is more important than filling a critical intelligence gap. It's all about forcing them to make these tough, but important choices about how to spend time and resources.

The shift toward redefining the FBI as an intelligence-led, threat-based national security agency created several identity-related challenges. Many preconceived notions about the FBI's identity and what it meant to be an FBI agent were called into question. As one interviewee explained:

On September 10, 2001, many of the intelligence guys really wanted to be on the [law enforcement] side....On counterterrorism, you need an engaged and powerful headquarters. But that means agents in the field have to ask a boatload of “Mother May I?” questions.... In criminal cases, there's a clear thumbs up or thumbs down that comes from the U.S. Attorney, the judge, and ultimately the jury. There's also a statute of limitations, a deadline. Where's that closure on intelligence work?

In contrast to law enforcement, the new identity called for a Bureau in which recognition was given not only to field agents but also to desk-bound analysts. Intelligence personnel had to be patient, expecting little closure or acclaim. An intelligence analyst was likely to have a graduate degree in a field requiring critical thinking rather than experience as a police officer.

Without a clear identity to make sense of the design changes that had occurred during the search period, the FBI had amplified many tensions in the Bureau: between agents and analysts, between criminal and national security agents, between pre-9/11 and post-9/11 analysts, between headquarters and field offices, and so on. Three aspects of how Mueller and his team responded are noteworthy to the way the FBI's new identity evolved. First, the FBI document that laid out the FIG model emphasized that the goal was not simply to create new structures but to establish a new mindset that restored unity to the FBI:

The new field intelligence model challenges us to begin a new way of thinking about ourselves. We need to start thinking about ourselves as part of a national security organization....This is not the job of one "side of the house," but of the entire Bureau.

Although such language was present when design changes were made and the FIGs were created in 2003, the words and concepts now held new meaning when placed in the context of a new identity.

Second, Mueller defined "national security organization" in a way that included the traditional domain and strengths of the FBI. In one internal memo, he wrote:

When we talk about "threats to national security," we are not focused only on terrorism, foreign intelligence, and weapons of mass destruction. A national security threat is one that tries to challenge the very foundations of American society, involving dangers so great that no local authority can handle them alone. It includes gangs that cause violence and disorder in cities, cybercrimes and transnational criminal enterprises that are borderless and have the potential to cause widespread disruption, white collar crimes that undermine the strength of our economy, and corruption that tears at the fabric of our democracy.

Third, Mueller and top executives referred back to the FBI's heritage to bridge the Bureau's past with a new future identity. Among FBI executives and veteran agents who supported the new identity, we often heard the refrain, "The FBI has always been an intelligence organization." Supporters pointed to specific, iconic criminal investigations in which intelligence had been used effectively. For example,

some highlighted the FBI's success in battling the New York mafia by identifying, mapping out, infiltrating, and prosecuting five central crime families.

As such, both "threat-based" and "intelligence-led" were key terms used in the new identity. In a *threat-based* FBI, for example, officials might use intelligence to identify Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Islamist organization, as a salient threat in San Francisco and begin to learn more about Hezbollah activity in that area even without active cases. Importantly, this proactive approach would apply to criminal investigations, not just counterterrorism. For example, field offices in areas receiving large government grants might preemptively develop programs to detect corruption among public officials.

A critical aspect of the envisioned FBI was that it would be *intelligence-led*: analysis would identify leading threats for each field office, as well as gaps in the FBI's knowledge about those threats. FBI agents would then have to develop informants, collect data, conduct surveillance, and so on to fill the gaps. An intelligence-led, threat-based FBI would try to reconcile tensions between intelligence and law enforcement by applying intelligence techniques to law enforcement activities. Framing "intelligence" as *leading* the FBI was a dramatic shift, at least in internal rhetoric.

By early 2010, FBI executives felt that they had made substantial progress toward transforming the FBI into an intelligence-led, threat-based national security organization. In many field offices, supervisors could point to examples in which intelligence regarding threats, not existing cases, had guided resource allocation and action, in both counterterrorism and conventional law enforcement. And yet, execution challenges and skepticism remained. The FBI's leaders continued to refine their approach, and interviewees stated that the ultimate results of the transformation effort, measured in terms of the nation's security, were unlikely to be clear for years. The United States, however, had not experienced a major terrorist attack since 9/11, a critical accomplishment according to most of the people we interviewed.

Overall, the crystallization period can be summarized as a period when top management attended to both design and identity. They continued to change the Bureau's design ("what we do"), pushing down to the field offices critical decisions about national security and its balance with law enforcement. Having postponed redefining the FBI's identity, the Bureau's leaders used this period to create a new identity

(“who we are”). The evolving design and identity changes gradually moved the FBI well beyond its roots as a law enforcement agency.

Temporal Analysis of Organizational Design and Identity Changes, 2001-2013

So far, we have reported how the FBI’s top management team attended to shifts in organizational design and identity from 2001 to 2013. Here, we provide additional data and offer a more integrative view of the temporal interplay between the two constructs. During our field interviews, interviewees often alluded to interdependencies that existed between the design and identity changes over the 13-year period. To validate and triangulate these claims, we revisited our archival data of the Director’s testimonies.

As a proxy to determine how much attention the Director and his team gave to issues related to organizational design and identity, we analyzed the frequency of codes in his Congressional testimony that related to (1) organizational design and task definition (i.e., which we conceptualized as statements related “what we do”), and (2) codes related to identity (i.e., statements related to “who we are”). Figure 3 illustrates the emphasis Director Mueller placed on each of the two constructs throughout the change process. While code frequency is only a rough proxy for managerial attention to design and identity, the testimonies serve as an additional source of data to validate trends that emerged from our field interviews.

Our archival data confirmed our interview analyses. Between 2001 and 2005 (the triage and search phases), the FBI’s Director focused largely on design-related issues that tackled the immediate task of changing “what we do” and placed less emphasis on issues related to organizational identity. From 2007 to 2013 (the crystallization phase), an inverse pattern arose; statements related to design subsided and statements related to identity rose. Finally, we extended our analysis to code for references to the new identity identified in our field interviews (i.e., a threat-based, intelligence-led national security agency). Figure 4 highlights the increased use of the new identity label beginning in 2007. These findings provide additional evidence to support the trends that emerged from our interviews: the Director placed greater emphasis on design between 2001 and approximately 2006. Starting in 2007, identity-related issues became a primary focus.

----- Insert Figures 3 & 4 about here -----

DISCUSSION

The present paper builds on prior research that has examined the importance of adjusting organizational design and identity after an external shock by focusing on the *interplay* between design and identity.

In the wake of 9/11, neither the FBI's design nor its identity evolved as prior theory led us to predict. See Table 3. On organizational design, the Bureau had to fulfill two distinct mandates, law enforcement and domestic intelligence, which many argued needed to be separated. Given their coexistence, past research would have us expect one of three outcomes in such a situation: failure in the new mandate, structural ambidexterity, or contextual ambidexterity. In reality, the FBI succeeded (foreign terrorists carried out no major attacks in the United States between 9/11 and the end of our study in 2013) but not through simple structural or contextual ambidexterity. Instead, we observed a path in "what we do": a rapid centralization of decision rights at the headquarters; a period of searching and structural separation; and the gradual creation of a context in which decision rights about domestic intelligence and law enforcement were (re)decentralized to field offices. Nothing in prior theory led us to expect what we observed – in essence, structural ambidexterity followed by contextual ambidexterity.

In the FBI's identity, prior literature would have predicted a period of ambiguity (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) at the FBI right after 9/11, followed by the emergence of a unified, ideographic, or holographic identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Instead, we observed the rapid emergence of two clear identities, a *subsequent* period of identity ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004), and eventually a new, unified identity.

----- Insert Table 3 about here -----

What accounts for the difference between expectations and reality? We attribute the disconnect to four assumptions that were implicit in our synthesis of prior literature and were ultimately wrong. First, there is often a belief that during times of change, management has enough capacity to attend to multiple facets of change. This notion has been challenged in recent research (e.g., Ocasio, 2011), but not fully incorporated into the research on organizational design. In our context, the question we examine is, could

management tackle both design change and identity change at the same time? A second assumption in prior research on organizational change that may need to be revisited in light of this paper is the notion that once leaders set a course for change, they know their desired destination and proceed toward it with limited iteration or sequencing of change efforts. In our context, we examine how much experimentation and discovery happens as management charts its course of action. A third assumption cast in doubt here is that organization design and identity are independent organizational constructs; each can be changed without regard for the other. Although identity scholars have long accounted for this relationship, implicit theories of organizational design tend to assume the two constructs operate and evolve independently. A final assumption that we explore in this research is that organizational design and identity are equally malleable; they can be changed at the same pace and equally often.

Casting doubt on these four assumptions is our interpretation of the FBI's evolution. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the FBI's senior team was overwhelmed by the triage job before it. Contrary to assumption 1, the team had limited capacity for attention (Ocasio, 1997); it could not work to change both the Bureau's design and its identity. As one special agent recalled, "It's really about attention." The FBI had to protect the country, and that meant acting immediately on "what we do," not pondering "who we are." Facing actual crises, the organization had no time for an identity crisis. Design change took priority.

Moreover, contrary to assumption 2, the Bureau's leaders genuinely did not know what design would allow it to conduct both law enforcement and domestic intelligence. Even in 2006, when the authors first met the senior team, debates over the right design were still intense. Not knowing their destination, the senior team immediately centralized decisions related to counterterrorism, to reduce the odds of a disastrous mistake during the triage period. But soon after, during the search period, they began to experiment with design – for instance, by letting "a thousand flowers bloom" when setting up FIGs.

Contrary to assumption 3, the FBI needed basic alignment between design and identity even during the search period; each had to support the other. The FBI accomplished this by allowing for a degree of structural separation between law enforcement and domestic intelligence and by drawing on two preexisting notions of identity – law enforcement and national security, one for each part of the

organization. An alternative might have been to experiment with different integrated designs and to keep shifting identity as design changed. But contrary to assumption 4, it is easier (though not easy) for a management team to adjust “what we do,” which is embodied in systems and structures that management controls, than to change “who we are,” which resides in the hearts and minds of people. By figuring out the necessary design before engaging in identity work, the FBI senior team avoided difficult reversals of course in its identity efforts.

Over time and through experimentation, Director Mueller and his team came to a strong perspective on an appropriate design: critical decision rights related to counterterrorism, law enforcement, and the balance between the two had to reside close to the knowledge required to make those decisions well (Hayek, 1945; Jensen & Meckling, 1992). And that knowledge was at the field office level. Local agents can best judge, for instance, whether a gang, a corrupt public official, or a potential terrorist cell deserves greater attention. The senior team also realized, however, that it could not decentralize decision rights until the systems, processes, and – crucially – identity were in place to allow individuals spread widely throughout the organization to make the right choices. That was the work of the crystallization period. Identity change became a top priority because a strong, unified sense of “who we are” would allow distributed individuals, facing ambiguous circumstances, to make good decisions about “what we *should* do.” The FBI’s new identity enabled its newly (re)decentralized design.

This interpretation allows us to revise our four initial assumptions with four propositions about the interplay of design and identity in times of radical change:

1. *Proposition 1:* Both design change and identity change require management attention, which is a limited resource. (*competition for attention*)
2. *Proposition 2:* At the outset of a change effort, management often does not know what design and identity an organization needs. Instead, it must discover the right design and identity through experimentation. (*change through experimentation*)
3. *Proposition 3:* At each point in time, an organization benefits when its design and its identity are aligned, in the sense that each supports the other. In particular, decentralized decision making requires that individuals have the correct sense of “who we are.” (*dynamic alignment*)
4. *Proposition 4:* An organization’s design is more flexible than its identity, in the sense that design can be changed faster and more often. (*differential flexibility*)

These propositions highlight tensions. Experimentation requires change in design, identity, or both. As experiments unfold, one would like design and identity to be constantly aligned, but the two are vying for attention and are differently flexible, which makes constant alignment difficult. The propositions imply that following a radical external shock, the timing of identity change is likely to depend on design conditions (see Figure 5). Imagine first that the appropriate post-shock design is readily apparent and involves decentralized decision-making. Then if the management team has ample bandwidth, it might begin identity work right after the shock; if constrained, the team might delay an effort to adjust identity until after dealing with the urgent matter of “what we do.” In a second scenario, the post-shock design might be clear but not involve decentralization. With centralization, identity work is not urgent and again might be delayed, especially if capacity is exhausted. Third, if the post-shock design is unclear and must be discovered through experimentation (the FBI’s situation), it makes sense for management to lead with design work and follow up with identity change, in order to avoid difficult reversals of course.

----- Insert Figure 5 about here -----

All in all, our findings suggest that successful changes to organizational identity are likely to be delayed after a radical external shock: management is likely to be constrained, appropriate design is probably unclear, or both. In short, “who we are” efforts are crowded out by urgent efforts to ascertain and implement changes in “what we do.” Any delay in changing an organization’s identity while design change is underway raises the specter of a misalignment between design and identity, at least temporarily. The FBI experience suggests at least two general ways to cope with this issue. The first involves relying for a time on multiple, historically validated identities that are latent in an organization. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, two distinct and clear forms of identity, with separate labels and meanings, emerged at the FBI and coexisted throughout the organization: law enforcement and national security (which encompassed domestic intelligence). Director Mueller and his team introduced behaviors and practices associated with each identity element and used labels that were highly descriptive to clarify the unique tasks required for each. Rather than assign new meanings to prior labels (i.e., law enforcement), Mueller introduced a new label, “national security,” while also taking care to preserve the meanings associated

with the old practices of law enforcement. The emergence of two unambiguous identities at the FBI (law enforcement and national security) allowed the FBI to focus on changing its practices before redefining its identity. Only later, once practices began to crystallize, did management introduce a unifying but ambiguous identity (threat-based intelligence-led national security), which was then clarified over time.

A second coping mechanism at the FBI was to adjust the scope of its operations so that any misalignments between design and identity would be minimized. Classes of crimes differ in how well they lend themselves to an intelligence-led approach. Cybercrime, which is international and networked, is led effectively by intelligence. Local drug cases and bank robberies, in contrast, can usually be resolved using a traditional law enforcement approach. As a result, between 2001 and 2013, the FBI adjusted its law enforcement work to favor heavily the work that fit well with an intelligence-led identity. With the new identity and structural changes, the FBI began to refer cases such as most bank robbery investigations to local authorities.

Thus, the evolution of the FBI's design makes sense only when set in the context of what was going on with the Bureau's identity, and vice versa. Looking at the evolution of the two constructs as related, rather than separate, generates new insights.

Implications and Future Research

By bringing the organizational design and identity literatures together, we have tried to develop a richer understanding of organizational change and adaptation. The present study suggests that future research on organizational design should not only look at "what we do" but also incorporate identity and related notions of "who we are" into its analysis of organizational change. If organizations are what they repeatedly do, it is impossible to divorce the study of change in "who we are" from research on change in "what we do." The key issue that we raise in this paper is how leaders can redesign an organization so that it meets new challenges while also addressing old challenges that persist. This blending of the new "what we do" with the old does not come naturally to most organizations. How to do so remains a central research question for design scholars. We believe our inquiry into the relationship between design and identity opens several new doors for design scholars to consider how design changes evolve over time.

We also believe our work provides avenues for future research in organizational identity. Whereas prior identity change theories have focused largely on how organizations change in light of shifts in “who we are,” the FBI story unearths opportunities for research to explore the importance of attending as well to “what we do” (see Nelson & Irwin, 2014 for calls), especially when change is precipitated by a crisis.

In many ways, our contributions harken back to the work of the early organizational design theorists who were fascinated by the links between formal structure and organizational purpose (Barnard, 1938; Chandler, 1962; Selznick, 1957). Looking forward, we hope our paper encourages scholars in the two fertile domains of organizational design and identity to explore joint opportunities for theorizing. For example, there is ample opportunity to examine not only how one shapes the other, but also how the sequencing of design change and identity change can lead to very distinct outcomes.

Finally, exploring the interplay between “who we are” and “what we do” has important implications for managerial practice. Leaders embarking on radical change efforts face fundamental questions about their organization’s design and identity. They may assume that design and identity must change in tandem, with the two constantly aligned. But changing design and identity together is often difficult; managerial capacity may be constrained, and the appropriate changes might be unclear. The FBI’s leaders resolved this dilemma by focusing on design first while muddling through on the identity front, but then revisiting identity questions later. Other leaders, in different circumstances, might cope differently with “what we do” and “who we are.” But no leader facing a radical external shock can avoid the need to deal with design, identity, and the interplay between the two.

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Table 1: Contrasts between typical law enforcement and domestic intelligence agencies

	LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY	DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Goal	Solve crimes after they occur	Prevent attacks before they occur
Outlook	Reactive	Prospective
Unit of work	A case	A threat
Focal actor	Agent on the street	Analyst at a workstation
Measure of success	Number of arrests, prosecutions, and convictions	In theory, number of bad events that would have occurred but didn't. In practice, difficult to measure
Critical capabilities	Forensics, development of sources	Analyzing data, development of sources
Organization	By city or region	By type of threat
Geography of typical adversary	City or region	Nation or world
Decision rights	Decentralized; local autonomy	Centralized; national coordination
Burden of proof	Beyond a reasonable doubt	Worried enough to act
Basis of resource allocation	Inflow of cases	Threat assessments
Psychic perquisites	Clear closure, public acclaim, putting bad guys behind bars	No closure, invisible successes, stop bad guys before they act

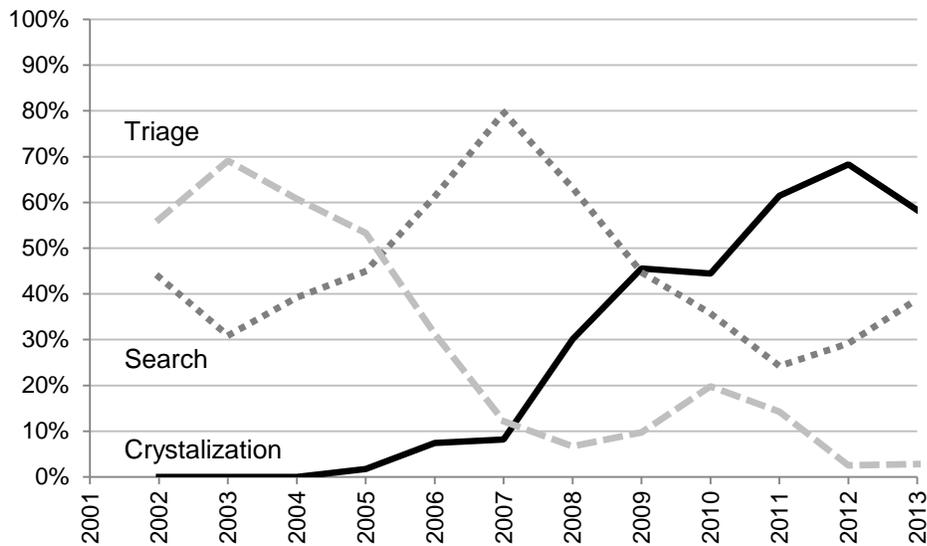
Table 2: Codebook

CODE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Description of phase	1 = Triage 2 = Search 3 = Crystallization	<p>Triage refers to actions and processes in direct reaction to the shock of 9/11 designed to set new priorities, shift resources, and organize itself better to deal with the immediate issue of terrorism.</p> <p>Search refers to actions and processes related to determining how the Bureau fit into the new post-9/11 context and how to create new systems and behaviors to fit that context.</p> <p>Crystallization refers to actions and processes designed to solidify the new systems and behaviors as the new normal for the Bureau.</p>
Organizational design-related statements (i.e., “what we do” and “how we do it”)	1= what we do	<p>Comments referring to the formal structures and systems within an organization that dictate how individuals are to perform various sets of tasks. This refers both to changes in organizational and reporting structures, but also changes in the geographical location of activities, using new buildings (and the ending use of old ones) and other related concepts.</p> <p>Comments referring to decision-making processes that indicate or alter the FBI’s core activities.</p>
Organizational identity statements (i.e., “who we are”)	1 = Law enforcement 2 = National security 3 = Threat-based intelligence-led national security organization (TBILNSO)	<p>Comments indicating how the Bureau is conceptualizing its mission. Multiple identities can coexist. When threat analysis is given, code individual major threats according to this code as suggested by the text. Law enforcement refers to discussing the FBI’s traditional law enforcement role/identity. National security refers to discussing counter-terrorism, intelligence, counter-intelligence, and related facets of the FBI’s role/identity. TBILNSO refers to comments identifying FBI actions within a uniform “threat-based” organization without clear delineation of national security and law enforcement (examples include law enforcement goals, but discuss them in the threat-based, intelligence-led framework).</p>

Table 3: Summary of Organizational Design and Identity Change at FBI

Prior theory		FBI transformation		
Organizational design	Organizational identity	Phase	Organizational design	Organizational identity
Failure or structural ambidexterity or contextual ambidexterity	Identity ambiguity	Triage (2001-03)	Some structural separation, centralization of counterterrorism	Two clear identities (ideographic): law enforcement + national security
	<i>followed by</i> new, unified identity or ideographic identity or holographic identity	Search (2003-06)	More structural separation, centralization, but FIG experiments	Two clear identities (ideographic) + very limited identity exploration
		Crystallization (2007-13)	Contextual ambidexterity supported by SET, SPSSs, and new identity	Identity ambiguity New, unified identity: intel-led, threat-based national security org.

Figure 1: Post-9/11 phases (2-year moving average)



Note: Figure 1 shows an upsurge of search activity after 2010. This reflects the emergence of a new and vexing threat: so-called “cyber crimes,” including computer-based terrorism, espionage, intrusions, and fraud.

Figure 2: Organizational identity codes, 2001–2013 (2-year moving average)

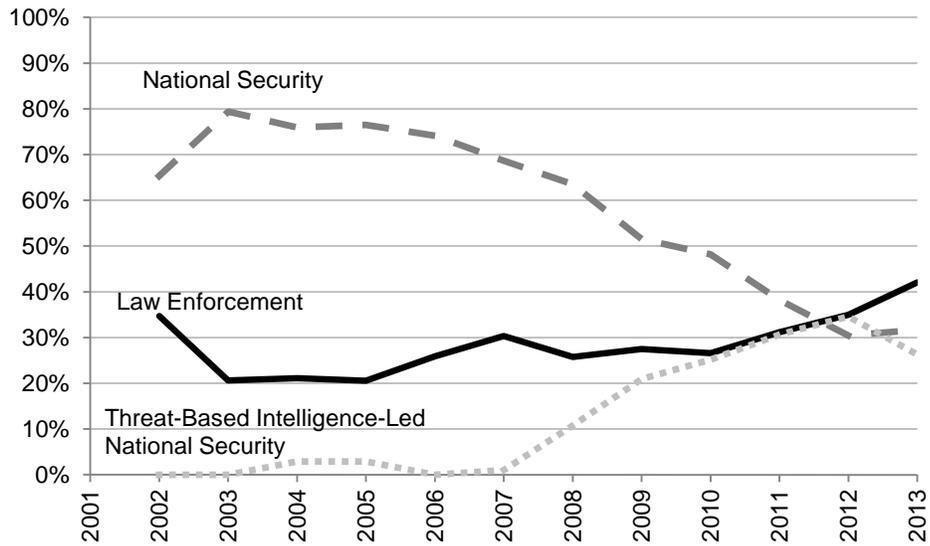


Figure 3: Organizational design (“what we do”) and identity (“who we are”) changes, 2001–2013 (2-year moving average)

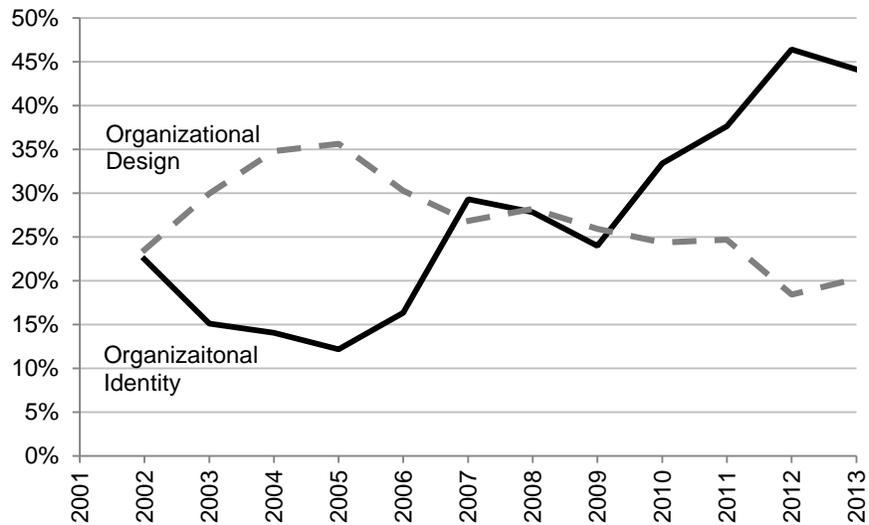


Figure 4: Emergence of a new Organizational Identity (2-year moving average)

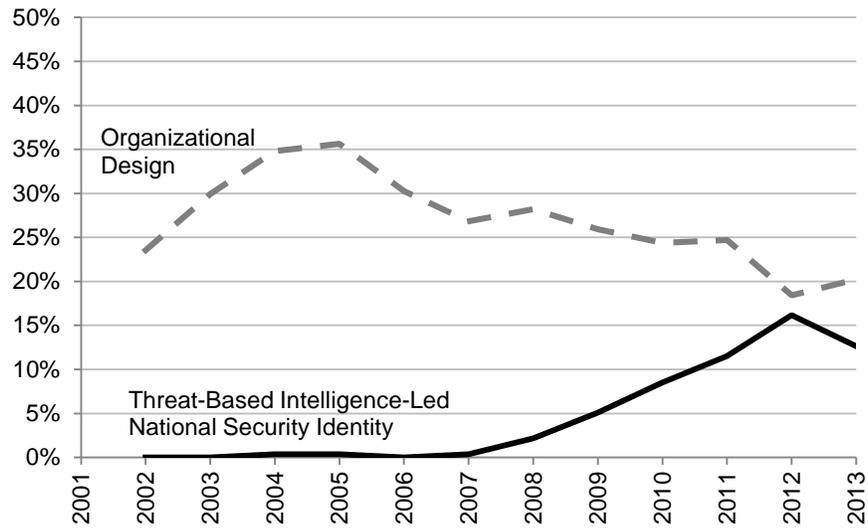


Figure 5: Interplay of Organizational Design and Identity

		Appropriate post-shock design...		
		...is clear immediately and... ...involves decentralization	...involves centralization	...must be discovered by experimentation
Management team has...	Ample capacity	Begin identity change immediately	Ambiguous; change is not urgently needed, but management has capacity	Delay identity change until appropriate change is clear
	Constrained capacity	Delay identity change until management has capacity	Delay identity change; not urgently needed, and management is constrained	