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Business Partnering in Risk Management: A Resilience Perspective on Management Accountants' Responses to a Role Change*

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a resilience perspective to examine the opportunities and challenges that management accountants may experience when they are given a role as a business partner in risk management. Drawing on insights from an in-depth case study in a large European bank, our study sheds light on management accountants' responses to a change from a compliance-oriented role to a business partner role. In the bank studied, part of the management accountants' new role was to balance various performance objectives and thereby to incorporate risk considerations in managerial decision-making. Our findings suggest that this role challenged the management accountants due to the ambiguity inherent in the role and also due to unfavorable conditions that surrounded the role change. We find that these circumstances culminated in a move backward, with the management accountants falling back on practices that were consistent with the values and beliefs they had developed in their previous role. In doing so, they emphasized what the resilience literature labels "well-learned responses." These responses contributed to an emphasis on a narrow risk management approach and had implications for the management accountants' long-term position within the organization. We discuss these findings against the background of previous research that suggests that management accountants move forward to the business partner role by engaging in job crafting (i.e., adapting their work) or identity work (i.e., redefining their role identity). By utilizing the concepts of lingering identities and identity asymmetries to explain the management accountants' move backward, we also shed light on new facets related to role identity.

Keywords: business partner, management accountants, resilience, risk management, role change, role identity

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Le partenariat d'affaires dans la gestion des risques : une perspective de résilience sur les réponses des contrôleurs de gestion à un changement de rôle

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude utilise une perspective de résilience pour examiner les opportunités et les défis que les contrôleurs de gestion peuvent rencontrer lorsqu'ils se voient remplir un rôle de business partner dans la gestion des risques. À partir d'une étude de cas approfondie dans une grande banque européenne, cette étude met en lumière les réponses des contrôleurs de gestion à un changement de rôle, d'un rôle orienté vers la conformité à un rôle de business partner. Dans la banque étudiée, une partie du nouveau rôle des contrôleurs de gestion consistait à équilibrer divers objectifs de performance et, par conséquent, à intégrer des considérations liées au risque dans la prise de décision de la direction. Les résultats suggèrent que ce rôle a mis au défi les contrôleurs de gestion en raison de l'ambiguïté inhérente au rôle et aussi en raison des conditions défavorables entourant le changement de rôle. Les auteurs constatent que ces circonstances ont abouti à un retour en arrière, les contrôleurs de gestion se repliant sur des pratiques conformes aux valeurs et aux croyances qu'ils avaient développées dans leur rôle précédent. Ce faisant, ils ont mis l'accent sur ce que la littérature sur la résilience appelle les « réponses bien apprises ». Ces réponses ont contribué à mettre l'accent sur une approche étroite de la gestion des risques et ont entraîné des répercussions sur la position à long terme des contrôleurs de gestion au sein de l'organisation. Les auteurs discutent ces résultats dans le contexte de recherches antérieures suggérant que les contrôleurs de gestion progressent vers le rôle de business partner en s'engageant dans un travail d'élaboration de leur emploi (c'est-à-dire en adaptant leur travail) ou d'identité (c'est-à-dire en redéfinissant l'identité de leur rôle). En utilisant les concepts d'identités persistantes et d'asymétries d'identité pour expliquer le retour en arrière des contrôleurs de gestion, les auteurs mettent également en lumière de nouvelles facettes liées à l'identité de rôle.

Mots-clés : partenaire d'affaires, contrôleurs de gestion, résilience, gestion des risques, changement de rôle, identité de rôle

1. Introduction

Within organizations, professional groups compete with each other over the application of their knowledge to specific tasks. The balance between groups may change whenever external and internal forces create vacant task domains (Abbott 1988). Some professions may extend their jurisdiction, giving a new impetus to the competition between professional groups. This paper focuses on risk management as a new task domain within organizations, which has gained considerable momentum in business practice due to regulatory initiatives and stakeholder pressures (Arena et al. 2017; Baxter et al. 2013). We are particularly interested in the involvement of management accountants, one of the professional groups that may apply its knowledge to the domain of risk management and hence expand its jurisdiction (Arena et al. 2010; Giovannoni et al. 2016; Soin and Collier 2013). A vast body of literature on management accountants suggests that this professional group has assumed new tasks in recent years, leading to the change from a bean counter to a business partner role (Byrne and Pierce 2007; Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018). However, this literature has primarily focused on how the role of management accountants is changing within conventional task domains, such as performance measurement, reporting, and planning processes (Byrne and Pierce 2018; Goretzki et al. 2013; Morales and Lambert 2013). We aim to add to this literature by scrutinizing the processes through which management accountants attempt to gain a foothold in risk management.

Although gaining jurisdiction over a task may be important for the professional group itself, the group may also shape some of the task characteristics, depending on how they perceive the inherent problems, and develop corresponding solutions (Abbott 1988). Our paper draws on this idea by arguing that both the management accountants' position and the practices within an organization may be influenced by the management accountants' involvement in risk management. How their involvement shapes risk management is likely to depend on the role that management accountants adopt. A compliance-oriented role may well reinforce risk management becoming a box-ticking exercise that is detached from managerial decision-making (Hall et al. 2015; Soin and Collier 2013). Alternatively, if management accountants assume a business partner role in risk management, this may bolster the adoption of a business-oriented "risk-envisionment" approach (Mikes 2011, 235). Such an approach involves frequent interactions with managers, aiming to strengthen intra-organizational reflections and discussions on risk taking (Arena et al. 2011; Hall et al. 2015; Mikes 2011).

Management accountants may thus have a deeper influence on the organization if they adopt a business partner role in risk management. However, research on the business partner role of management accountants has shown that such a role may be difficult to establish (Burns and Baldvinsdottir 2005; Mack and Goretzki 2017; Morales and Lambert 2013), not least because it would require a change in role identity (Goretzki et al. 2013; Goretzki and Messner 2019). Our paper adopts a resilience perspective to shed light, not only on the opportunities and challenges that management accountants may experience when they want to or need to assume a business partner role in a new domain, but also on how the management accountants' responses to the role change are linked to the way in which they experience this change. Resilience, in broad terms, refers to the capacity to deal with disturbances (Hillmann and Guenther 2021), and the concept can be applied to different levels, including professional groups (or occupations) and work teams (Hartwig et al. 2020; Hartmann et al. 2020; Kossek and Perrigino 2016). In these contexts, resilience refers to the ability to positively adapt to disturbances at work (Kossek and Perrigino 2016; Stoverink et al. 2020). In the accounting literature, resilience has received scant attention, with the paper by Durocher et al. (2016) on resilience in the accounting profession being a notable exception. We introduce the resilience perspective to the occupational field of management accountants as this enables us to frame a change toward a new role as a potential disturbance, given that such a change implies new job demands and hence may represent a stressor for the individuals attempting to meet these demands (Kossek and Perrigino 2016). Similar to resilience, the impact of disturbances on the self has received almost no attention in the accounting literature, with the exception of Gendron and Spira (2010). Therefore, the framing of a role change as a potential disturbance emphasizes that individuals do not necessarily embrace a new role, but may respond in other ways. Hence, the resilience perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how a role change (toward business partnering) may be enacted.

To investigate the dynamics surrounding an expansion of management accountants' jurisdiction through a role change, we have conducted a case study in a large European bank. In this bank, the head office established a business partner role for a particular group of management accountants with the aim of balancing various performance objectives of the bank in managerial decision-making. The idea was that the management accountants would act as a countervailing power to balance the commercially oriented operational managers and would introduce risk considerations to managerial decision-making. As such, the business partner role involved the management accountants in risk management. In practice, the management accountants welcomed the idea of becoming more influential in the organization, but they also struggled with their new role. Instead of advising managers over making trade-offs between different performance objectives, they narrowly focused on risk-related issues, relied on process controls, and strictly interpreted the rules set by regulators and internal auditors. In doing so, the management accountants fell back on practices that were consistent with the work-related values and beliefs they had developed in their previous compliance-oriented role. These responses contributed to an emphasis on a

narrow risk management approach and counteracted the head office's intention to reduce the bank's vulnerability to future disturbances. As a consequence, the management accountants jeopardized their relevance to the bank, building up to the head office's plans to eliminate their positions. These plans suggest that the management accountants' adaptability to their new task domain did not meet the head office's expectations, and this casts doubt on their occupational resilience.

We believe the main contribution of our paper is at least twofold. First, we extend prior research on how management accountants deal with a change toward a business partner role. Previous research documents how, despite struggles, management accountants engage in identity work and job crafting to move forward to the aspired business partner role (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Goretzki et al. 2013; Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018; Morales and Lambert 2013). In contrast, the management accountants in our case moved back to their previous role by emphasizing what the resilience literature labels as "well-learned or dominant responses" (Staw et al. 1981, 502; see also Linnenluecke 2017). Our findings indicate that the move backward may be related to the circumstances surrounding the role change in the case company. Therefore, we add to previous research, which primarily identified struggles in the business partner role as being related to a lack of confirmation by the managers (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013),[1] by shedding light on additional struggles, including those arising from the ambiguity inherent in the new role.

Second, we advance our understanding of how role identity may affect the business partner role of management accountants. We mobilize the concept of lingering identities proposed by Wittman (2019) in finding that the management accountants' emphasis on well-learned or dominant responses was anchored in their prior identity, which we label as "guardians of process management." Whereas previous research showed that management accountants may develop their role identity in such a way that it contributes to the fulfillment of the business partner role (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018), our findings suggest that individuals may adhere to their previously developed role identity when a role change represents a significant challenge or even threat, particularly when rites of passage are missing and role reactivation appears possible. Moreover, we find that the managers and management accountants in the bank identified more strongly with their peers than with the organization and its overarching objectives. This resulted in an identity asymmetry (Mell et al. 2020) between the managers and the management accountants that was related to a mismatch between the head office's expectations concerning the management accountants' role, and the way in which the performance of the local operational managers was evaluated. The identity asymmetry hampered the managers in confirming the management accountants as business partners. We argue that this lack of confirmation in combination with unfavorable conditions under which the management accountants had to enact their new role challenged their occupational resilience.

2. Theoretical background

Over recent decades, developments in the business environment have created opportunities for management accountants to expand their responsibilities and to become involved in new task domains (Becker and Mahlendorf 2018). This paper refers to risk management as one such domain. Research into the involvement of management accountants in risk management is scarce and provides ambiguous results. Soin and Scheytt (2009) highlight the diminishing relevance of management accountants in organizations that have an increasing emphasis on risk. In a similar vein, Collier et al. (2007) find that, in many organizations, management accountants are being marginalized in risk management. Other researchers view risk management as an emerging sphere

1. By a lack of confirmation, authors refer to managers not acknowledging the management accountants as business partners. This is evident when, for instance, managers do not respond to the implications of the management accountants' advice (Byrne and Pierce 2018; Goretzki and Messner 2019).

of action in which management accountants are likely to be involved (Arena et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2015; Soin and Collier 2013). However, empirical studies also suggest that management accountants may have to share the responsibilities for risk management with other functional experts and operational managers (Collier et al. 2007; Giovannoni et al. 2016). The new and yet-to-be-settled responsibilities in risk management thus create a battleground for professional groups within organizations.

Whichever professional group gains jurisdiction over a task may shape some of the task's characteristics (Abbott 1988). For this reason, higher organizational levels may not be indifferent to the outcome of the competitive process between various groups. It is against this background that the head office in our case company gave one group of management accountants a business partner role in risk management in an attempt to increase the emphasis that local managers gave to risk-related issues. This study focuses on the opportunities and challenges that these management accountants experienced in relation to the role change, their responses to this change, and the implications of the role-change dynamics for the position of the management accountants as well as for the wider organization.

Our analysis draws on several streams of research, discussed in the following subsections. We first outline the various approaches to risk management and the related roles that are distinguished in the literature. Then, we review the literature on the business partner role of management accountants, and the challenges that may arise in establishing such a role. Next, we argue why we adopt a resilience perspective to increase our understanding of how management accountants may experience and respond to a change toward a business partner role in a new domain, such as risk management. We end this section with our research questions.

Approaches to and roles in risk management

Prior research suggests that if risk management follows a relatively narrow approach, it can be considered as a box-ticking exercise (Soin and Collier 2013; see also Arena et al. 2010; Mikes 2009). This approach, which focuses on documenting compliance with internal as well as external requirements through the use of risk registers and checklists, audit trails, and box-ticking, has been labeled as a "rule-based compliance" approach (Power 2009, 852). In such a rules-based approach, risk identification often amounts to the isolated quantification of single types of risks without further aggregation (Mikes 2009). While the corresponding risk registers do signal a company's adherence to rules and regulations, their impact on managerial decision-making is usually limited (Arena et al. 2011; Palermo et al. 2017). With the focus on rules and regulations, risk experts act as "independent overseers" with a clear focus on compliance (Kaplan and Mikes 2016, 11).[2]

The emphasis of the rules-based approach on risk identification and mitigation is problematic since many of the risks that an organization faces are unknowable and unpredictable (Fiksel et al. 2015), are outside people's realms of experience (Kaplan et al. 2020), or have long-term consequences that are difficult to measure (Klein Jr. and Reilley 2021). To deal with such risks, a broader approach to risk management may be needed. The corresponding risk-envisionment approach (Mikes 2011) relies on the "critical imagination of alternative futures" (Power 2009, 852). Such an approach goes beyond risk measurement (Giovannoni et al. 2016) and aims for risk management to permeate managerial planning and decision-making, and to reinforce intra-organizational reflections and discussions on risk taking (Arena et al. 2010, 2011; Hall et al. 2015; Mikes 2011). Accordingly, risk experts are supposed to act as business partners by being involved in managerial decision-making, questioning managers' plans, and challenging

2. In recent decades, the rules-based approach has developed into more holistic forms of risk management by the introduction of enterprise risk management (ERM) (Mikes 2009, 2011). Despite the positive effects of ERM (Jordan et al. 2013), it is also criticized for viewing risk management as a controls-based exercise, with an inherent tendency to follow an audit trail logic (Power 2009).

their assumptions (Kaplan and Mikes 2016; Power 2009). However, the risk-envisionment approach can create ambiguity as it requires managers as well as risk experts to deal with different scenarios (Mikes 2011; Tekathen and Dechow 2020). In this regard, Gendron et al. (2021) suggest that the in-depth imaginations of existential threats, which the risk-envisionment approach encompasses, may be too worrying and distressing for the actors involved, including those who are responsible for risk oversight. Therefore, we argue that a risk-envisionment approach may create uncertainty and evoke discomfort for both managers and risk experts. Against this background, establishing a business partner role in risk management seems challenging, particularly as it implies that risk experts serve as "proactive assessor[s] and communicator[s] of uncertainty" (Hall et al. 2015, 5). In this regard, Mikes et al. (2013) argue that the influence exerted by business partners in risk management depends heavily on their personal involvement with senior executives, indicating that there is no standardized approach to business partnering in risk management.

Establishing business partnering

Although our knowledge on the involvement of management accountants in risk management is limited, there is a substantial literature stream that deals with the business partner role of management accountants in their conventional task domains (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Mack and Goretzki 2017; Morales 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013). The core of this role is the management accountants' collaborative involvement in strategic and operational decisions (Byrne and Pierce 2007; Goretzki et al. 2013). In a business partner role, management accountants advise and assist managers by ensuring that they integrate financial and nonfinancial objectives into their decision-making (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018; Janin 2017; Maas and Matějka 2009). This role requires a good knowledge of the business (Burns and Baldvinsdottir 2005; Granlund and Lukka 1998) as well as information exchange with operational managers to facilitate the blending of different perspectives (Lambert and Sponem 2012; Morales 2019).

Much research focuses on how management accountants may become business partners and conceptualizes the relation between role and role identity as a point of departure (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018; Morales and Lambert 2013). Role identity refers to one's self-understanding in a social or organizational position (Chreim et al. 2007), and thus constitutes a complement to a role. Whereas a role represents "outward specifications or expectations related to a position," role identity refers to the "inward expectations" of the person assuming the role (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018, 40). Role identity provides an individual with specific values, beliefs, and norms (Ashforth 2001). Accordingly, role identity represents a lens for interpreting one's own work (Chreim et al. 2007; Pratt et al. 2006).

According to the literature, the establishment of a business partner role requires a corresponding role identity (Goretzki et al. 2013). Conflicts between a management accountant's role and their role identity may trigger job crafting and identity work, both aimed at reducing conflict (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018). Job crafting involves management accountants changing their jurisdiction to increase the alignment with their role identity. Such job crafting has, for instance, been observed in a case study by Morales and Lambert (2013) in which the management accountants delegated or reduced tasks that were inconsistent with their role identity. Instead, management accountants are engaging in identity work when they redefine their role identity. Such a redefinition may culminate in changed roles and management accounting practices (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018). In this regard, the paper by Goretzki and Messner (2019) advances our understanding of the importance of internalizing a role for the development of a new business partner role identity. In their study, they show that management accountants' identity work to establish a business partner identity is not only contingent on their managers' confirmation (i.e., the managers' acknowledgement of management accountants as business partners), but may also be affected by other actors, such as the human resource department. Job crafting and identity work can occur on the individual level and may

be directed at individual interests, but they may also be collective endeavors aimed at organization-wide changes (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018).

The literature not only sheds light on the fragility of the business partner identity and the importance of its confirmation by managers (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013), but it also highlights the ambiguity inherent in the business partner role. Previous research explains this ambiguity primarily by referring to the dual responsibilities (Maas and Matějka 2009) stemming from this role. Management accountants are accountable to the CFO and are expected to provide information for corporate control and to ensure that operational units comply with corporate standards (Goretzki et al. 2018; Puyou 2018). This functional responsibility requires greater independence than the management accountants' local responsibility (Maas and Matějka 2009), that is, their support of local managers and their involvement in local decision-making processes (Byrne and Pierce 2007; Lambert and Sponem 2012). Prior research documents that the resulting dilemma, between independence and involvement, leads to ambiguity as to how a business partner role can be enacted. Recently, how management accountants cope with this ambiguity, through tactical information distribution and symbolic categorization work, has started to be explored (Byrne and Pierce 2018; Goretzki et al. 2018; Morales 2019; Puyou 2018).

Irrespective of these challenges, an important insight emerging from this stream of research is that the management accountants in the various organizations studied did strive for a business partner role and were, at least to some extent, able to establish one (see also Goretzki et al. 2013; Mack and Goretzki 2017). Accordingly, the current accounting literature sees the business partner role as an aspirational one that implies "undeniably progress" (Morales and Lambert 2013, 229), corresponding with the positive image put forward in the professional literature (Baldvinsdottir et al. 2009).

Adopting a resilience perspective

In this paper, we adopt a resilience perspective because this enables us to develop a broader view of how management accountants may experience and respond to a change toward a business partner role. It also helps us to explore the implications of different responses, both for the management accountants themselves and for the wider organization. Resilience refers to the ability to respond to disturbances (Hillmann and Guenther 2021; Linnenluecke 2017) and can be analyzed on various levels. Although resilience is frequently studied at the individual (Youssef and Luthans 2007) or organizational (Lengnick-Hall and Beck 2005) level, our study adds to the emerging stream of research on resilience at the group or occupational level (Durocher et al. 2016; Hartmann et al. 2020; Kossek and Perrigino 2016). More precisely, our study focuses on occupational resilience of management accountants, but we also explore its relationship with organizational resilience. In so doing, we address the scarcity of research on interdependencies between resilience at different levels (Branicki et al. 2019).

Resilience can be defined as a positive capability "to rebound, to 'bounce back,' from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress, and increased responsibility" (Luthans 2002, 702). Disturbances calling for organizational resilience usually result from socio-political, technological, or economic changes occurring in an organization's environment (Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003). In an occupational context, such a disturbance might emerge from a role change because it implies new job demands, which may amount to a stressor for the individuals assuming the new role and trying to meet the related demands (Kossek and Perrigino 2016). In the context of our study, the resilience perspective may thus shed light on why, depending on the responses of the management accountants, the business partner role may remain fragile or, if the management accountants positively adjust to the role change and prosper in their new role, may become firmly established.

The literature on resilience emphasizes a paradox in situations of disturbance. According to Staw et al. (1981), individuals, groups, and organizations tend to emphasize well-learned or

dominant responses when facing a negatively framed situation. However, such responses lead to inertia and a lack of adaptability (Weick et al. 1999). Consequently, research on resilience stresses the need for adaptability and flexibility, and it analyzes how this can be achieved.

Studies on resilience at the individual level suggest that a plethora of behavioral, cognitive, and affective characteristics influence an individual's resilience (McLarnon and Rothstein 2013). The literature referring to the organizational level suggests that organizational resilience is a collective capacity (Kahn et al. 2013; Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003) that arises from employees' characteristics, but also from social relationships and interactions between individuals (Kahn et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2017). The existing literature highlights that such relationships and interactions may reinforce information sharing, organizational learning, and the development of adaptive solutions (Hartwig et al. 2020; Powley 2009; Stephens et al. 2013; Stoverink et al. 2020). A broad exchange of views and information may result in a better comprehension of difficult situations, the exploration of adequate responses, and the coordination of their implementation (Gittell 2008; Stephens et al. 2013). In other words, sharing diverse expertise, experiences, and perspectives may enhance an organization's capacity to deal with disturbances. The emphasis on social relationships and interactions appears particularly intriguing in light of the previously discussed risk-envisionment approach that encompasses the interaction between operational managers and risk experts and the blending of different perspectives. The corresponding intra-organizational reflections and discussions on risk taking, and alternative future scenarios, may strengthen the adaptability to disturbances. Therefore, such a broader approach to risk management may be expected to contribute to building organizational resilience.

As noted previously, endeavors to put a risk-envisionment approach into practice may extend the management accountants' jurisdiction. The core of their task domain may be seen in the support of managers in solving organizational problems (Goretzki et al. 2021), implying that management accountants eventually work toward the organization's objectives (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018). As risk management concentrates on identifying potential events that may jeopardize the achievement of organizational objectives (Power 2009), it might be a complement to the management accountants' conventional task domains.[3] In this regard, we argue that management accountants may fit the business partner role within a risk-envisionment approach and that, by assuming this more influential role, they may extend their jurisdiction. Specifically, the involvement of management accountants as business partners, in operational as well as strategic decision-making processes, is likely to initiate an exchange of perspectives with operational managers. Moreover, the management accountants' organizational embeddedness, particularly given their in-depth business knowledge, may enable them to properly assess the consequences of developments inside as well as outside the organization. In particular, if management accountants in a business partner role succeed in challenging managers (Goretzki and Messner 2019), they can be expected to act as a critical counterpart that stimulates disagreement and, as such, mobilizes a risk-envisionment approach. Against this background, and drawing on the insights from the three previously reviewed streams of literature, we suggest that, if management accountants enact a business partner role in risk management, they may help organizations in putting a risk-envisionment approach into action, which in turn may contribute to building organizational resilience.

However, the resilience perspective suggests that management accountants working for a particular organization may not fully embrace a role change toward business partnering in risk management. Although this new role may create opportunities for them to strengthen their influence in the organization and thus to extend their jurisdiction, management accountants may also feel uncertain about the extent to which they will be able to endure the changing job demands, and to meet the expectations of themselves and of others in the organization. Moreover, the new role

3. In line with this idea, Van der Stede (2011, 616) suggests that "performance and risk are two sides of the same coin."

may not align well with their existing values, beliefs, and norms related to their work, and therefore with their role identity. Feelings of discomfort may be particularly pronounced because of the previously outlined ambiguity inherent in the business partner role and the uncertainty ingrained in the risk-envisionment approach. For these reasons, management accountants may experience the introduction of the business partner role in risk management as a challenge, and maybe even a threat, rather than a positive change or progress. The enactment of a new role requires adaptability, which is intrinsic in the concept of occupational resilience. If such resilience is missing, the management accountants may not be able to cope with the changing demands or to transform their existing role into the new one.

Against the backdrop of the paradox of rigid and flexible responses to disturbances as discussed in the resilience literature, we are interested in scrutinizing the dynamics surrounding a change of the management accountants' role toward business partnering in risk management. In particular, we aim to address the following research questions. First, how do management accountants respond to a role change toward business partnering in risk management in light of how they experience such a change? Second, how are management accountants' responses related to their role identity? Third, what are the implications of their responses to the role change in terms of the position of management accountants within the organization—as well as in terms of risk management and of the wider organization per se?

3. Research method

Our paper draws on insights from an in-depth case study of a large European bank. This bank, which we call Comris Bank,[4] is one of the world's largest financial institutions, and it receives high ratings from credit agencies. Although Comris Bank also operates internationally, we focus on its domestic activities. These activities are mostly carried out by its local branches that are responsible for the bank's activities in a particular region of the country. Each of these branches has its own management accounting function, and this function has an important role in operating Comris Bank's risk management system. This key position of the management accountants in risk management makes Comris Bank an appropriate setting to seek answers to our research questions.

Data collection for this study was organized in two stages. First, we held exploratory interviews with three management accountants who represented the three types of management accountants distinguished within Comris Bank: financial controllers, process controllers, and business controllers[5] (see section 4 for more information). During the interviews, they described the risk management arrangements in Comris Bank as well as the various responsibilities and the changes therein.[6] Next, we conducted a series of interviews with management accountants, senior and other managers, an internal auditor, and two operational staff members (see the Appendix).[7] The interviewees were first asked about their personal backgrounds and job histories. Then they were asked how the responsibilities for risk management were distributed among management accountants, managers, and auditors. In addition, all the interviewees were questioned about how

4. Due to the obligation to maintain confidentiality, we adopt the fictitious name Comris, merging "commercial" and "risk" as the two primary performance domains on which the bank focused during the period studied.

5. In referring to its management accountants, Comris Bank uses the term "controllers," which is typical of Germanic countries (Messner et al. 2008). Our paper focuses on the business controller role in Comris Bank. This role is very similar to the business partner role of management accountants as discussed in the international literature.

6. The overview of responsibilities provided in the exploratory interviews helped us to select interviewees for the subsequent interviews in such a way that a variety of perspectives were represented. The exploratory interviews also made us aware of interconnections between risk management practices and the various roles of management accountants, which we further explored in the subsequent interviews.

7. Following the procedure at the appropriate institution, we subjected our research plan to an initial standardized screening for potential ethical issues. As the outcome was that the risk of ethical issues was minimal, formal ethical clearance from the institutional review board was not necessary.

developments in Comris Bank and its environment had impacted the role of the management accountants in the bank as well as its risk management practices. Finally, the managers were asked about their interaction with the management accountants. Gradually, during the series of interviews, the emphasis shifted from gathering information about the actual situation (e.g., existing procedures, formal responsibilities) to discussions and exchanges about people's perceptions of the current situation and recent changes in Comris Bank. Since almost all the interviews were conducted by more than one of the authors, it was possible to discuss the interview results between the authors and to develop a shared understanding of the case findings, which served as a basis for later interviews.

All the interviews were recorded. When on occasions, at the request of an interviewee, small parts of an interview were not recorded, detailed notes were taken. At the start of the interviews, the researchers asked the interviewees for permission to record the interview and assured participants their identities would be protected. As the interviews progressed, the researchers became more familiar with the situation at the bank and, as a consequence, the interviews became more flexible, leaving more room for exchanging ideas, which made the interviewees feel that they could talk more freely. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. In total, we held 32 interviews, with an average length of 1:05 hours. In the final stages of data collection, we explored if our understanding of the case could be further enriched by adding other types of interviewees (i.e., an internal auditor and an operational staff member) and by adding another branch. We experienced that both approaches did not lead to new insights relevant for our study, so we concluded that saturation was achieved.

In addition to the interviews, many documents were consulted in the case study. These documents included the job descriptions of the three types of management accountants, policy documents that outline the risk management framework, manuals, and the bank's annual reports. On a few occasions, interviewees also showed us the IT system used for risk management on a computer screen and explained in detail how it worked.

Interviewees referred to different periods in the interviews. Therefore, the data analysis started by developing a timeline of relevant events at Comris Bank. Information provided by the various interviewees was combined and compared to develop a consistent overview of points in time at which particular changes in the bank, its risk management system, and the responsibilities of the management accountants occurred. The interviews focused on the situation in the period in which the interviews took place (August 2015–July 2016) and on the previous decade or so. To describe the relevant events in each of the periods distinguished in the empirical findings section, we triangulated the data collected through the interviews with information from other sources, such as the documents described above, but also online information about the company.

To interpret the interview data, we analyzed the transcripts, using codes derived from our research framework including codes related to roles and role identities and the actual application of risk management ideas and methods. In addition to this analysis, we utilized an inductive approach in which we undertook detailed and repeated readings of the transcripts in order to interpret the material and to allow major themes to emerge. During this part of the data analysis, we went back and forth between the empirical data and the theory concerning resilience, risk management, roles, and role identity in order to ensure consistency between, on the one hand, theoretical concepts and ideas, and on the other hand, our interpretation of the data. Building on these approaches, the next section provides a "thick description" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 316) of our case, where we aim to establish the transferability of our findings in the eyes of the readers.

4. Empirical findings

Research context

Comris Bank is a major player in the domestic markets for mortgages, savings, and financial services. The activities in these markets are carried out by its local branches. They are responsible

for providing banking and insurance products to both businesses and private individuals in the region where they are located. As such, the local branches only conduct commercial activities: they are not involved in investment activities. The branches used to have a relatively autonomous position within the bank. For instance, each branch had its own strategic plan, describing how it wanted to create and exploit opportunities in its local markets. Each branch also had its own board of directors and supervisory board. At the start of the period described in this paper, the head office primarily fulfilled a supportive role. In particular, it designed new banking products and initiated the development of new policies in areas such as marketing, distribution, accounting, and human resource management. However, as time progressed, and closely related to the developments described in this case study, the head office increased its control over the activities in the branches.

Comris Bank and similar financial institutions have experienced considerable turbulence in the past two decades. The 2007–2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent European debt crisis are obvious examples of events that created a lot of turbulence, but also the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and scandals at individual banks have had long-lasting effects on the banking sector as a whole. Not only did these events shake the foundations of the sector at the time, they also brought particular business practices to the fore that are generally seen as evidence of poor governance and irresponsible behavior. In this context, banks have been accused of facilitating illicit financial flows and insufficiently protecting clients against excessive risk taking.

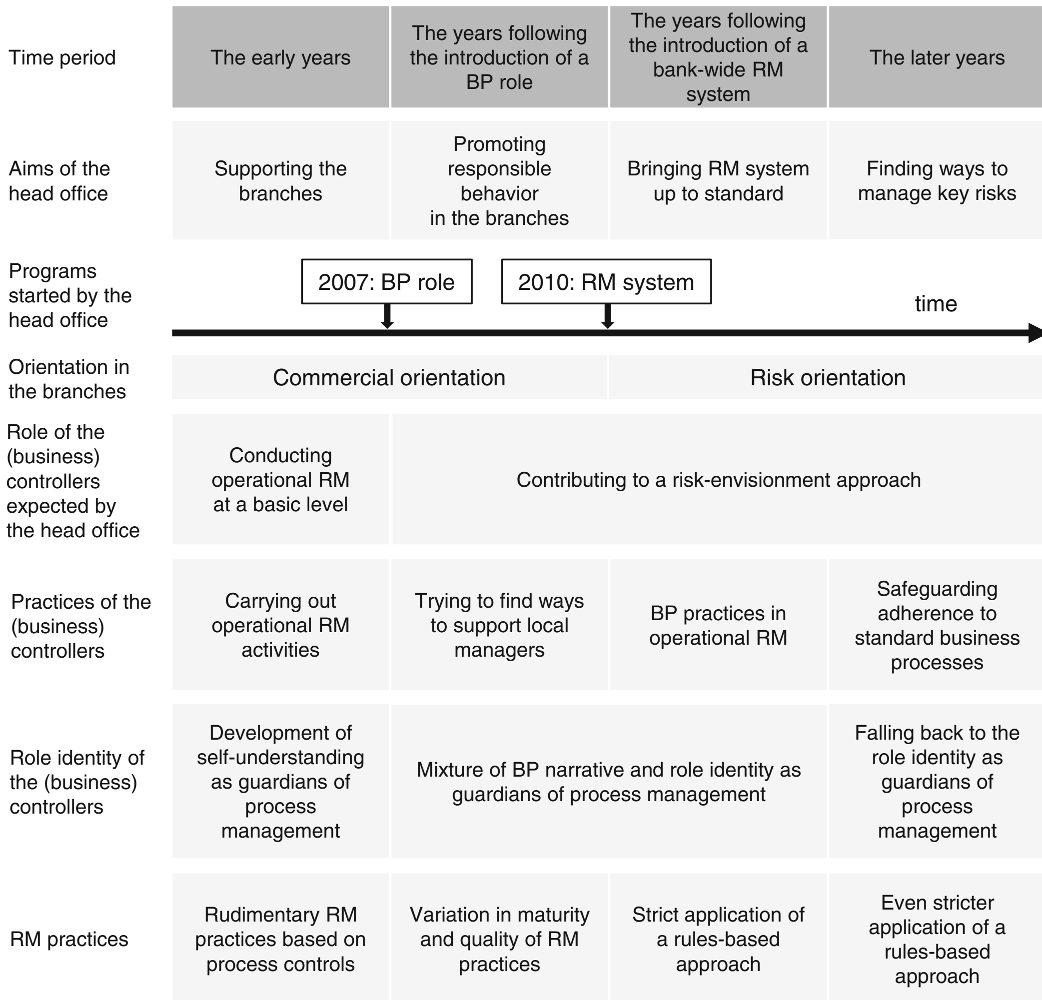
In Comris Bank, two incidents stand out in terms of their impact on what later took place in the bank. First a few local branches were accused of malpractices, and later Comris Bank seriously clashed with the financial authorities over a lack of improvements in the bank. These incidents, which will be described in more detail below, increased the bank's awareness of the need to respond adequately to changes in its environment. To deal with these changes, Comris Bank started two programs, one several years after the other. After the first incident, it reorganized the accounting function in the local branches, and it introduced a business partner role for management accountants. The idea was that this new role would promote the type of interactions, between operational managers and management accountants, about risk-related issues that are typical of a risk-envisionment approach to risk management. Later, when faced with the second incident, Comris Bank introduced a comprehensive, bank-wide, formal risk management system to improve the quality of risk management in the branches. This system clearly reflected a rules-based approach to risk management. Our study focuses on what these two programs implied for the management accountants in Comris Bank.

Below, we present the developments in Comris Bank in chronological order (Figure 1 provides an overview). First, we describe the situation in Comris Bank in the years preceding the first incident. This period is important, not only because it created the circumstances under which the first incident could happen, but also because it was in this period that the management accountants in the bank (hereafter called "controllers") developed a specific role identity. Following this, we discuss what happened when, in reaction to the first incident, Comris Bank decided to give one group of controllers a business partner role. Subsequently, we examine how these controllers changed their role in response to the extensive formal risk management system that was introduced after the second incident. Finally, we explore how the situation in Comris Bank evolved when, influenced by their role identity, the controllers further shaped the bank's risk management practices. We also shed light on the further implications of the controllers' responses for the organization.

The early years

Throughout the period covered in this study, Comris Bank reportedly distinguished three performance areas: commerce, efficiency, and risk. However, its prioritization within these three areas varied considerably over time. In the first decade of the 21st century, the focus of the bank was on creating and exploiting sales opportunities, and thus on the area of commerce. This focus was consistent with the situation in the wider banking sector at that time. The economy was booming,

Figure 1 Overview of developments



Notes: BP refers to business partner and RM refers to risk management. As the business controller positions did not exist in the early years, the related part of the figure refers to the process controllers, who would later become business controllers.

and there was stiff competition for market share among banks. In the local branches of Comris Bank, operational managers focused on achieving sales targets, as this was reportedly important to keeping their jobs. Their departments tried to sell as many financial products as possible and paid little attention to the performance areas of efficiency and risk. As a controller who started working for Comris Bank in the late-1980s explained:

> Yes, look, you know, there has been a period of time, we talk about say 2002–2003 to 2008–2009, that, eh, the sky was the limit. Everyone could be financed up to their necks, because we did not consider any risks. (Interviewee 10)

This focus of the operational departments on commerce had implications for the controllers in the branches. Traditionally these controllers were fully focused on financial reporting, but around the turn of the 21st century, some of them were assigned responsibilities in the area of operational

risk management. More precisely, in each branch a specific group of controllers supported the managers in identifying the risks associated with the business processes and then developing process controls to mitigate them.[8] Periodically, the controllers also assessed the "effectiveness" of these controls by conducting tests. Nevertheless, as indicated by several interviewees, risk management was still in its infancy in those years. Although procedural protocols had been developed for the main business processes, the operational departments were not required to strictly follow these "process descriptions." According to a manager in a local branch, the descriptions were "more like a tool" (Interviewee 30). Managers and front-office personnel could use this tool in their work, but if they had a good reason not to, they were also allowed to disregard the descriptions. Similarly, when the controllers conducted tests, the managers were relatively free in deciding what to do with the findings. One of the controllers described the activities of the controllers in this period, and how they differed from subsequent periods, as follows:

> We carried out tests, we added a certain qualification and said, "Here you are, this is the report, and good luck with it." At a later stage . . . this was expanded with frameworks, reports, and systems in which you have to register the improvements that have to be made. (Interviewee 20)

Consequently, in these early years, the rudimentary set of risk management practices had limited impact on the bank's organizational practices. The operational managers steered their branch in the direction of sales maximization, and the controllers brought up the rear by providing a minimum degree of risk management.

Of particular relevance to our study is that, in this same period, the role identity of the controllers in Comris Bank (i.e., their self-understanding of what it meant to be a controller) came to be influenced by their growing engagement with risk management. Given that all the tasks of one group of controllers (the process controllers) were related to risk management, managing risks became their "raison d'être." In their work, they were expected to focus on adherence to process descriptions, and related to this, they developed specific work-related values and beliefs. These can be summarized as follows: the controllers were only concerned about risks; they perceived risk as the probability of deviations from process descriptions; and they supposed that this probability should be reduced by installing process controls and testing their effectiveness by checking files. In other words, the controllers had a compliance-oriented role and developed a role identity that reflected a self-understanding as guardians of process management.

Our interviews suggest that this role identity was shared by many controllers and was stable over time, both of which apparently ensued from the specific circumstances of Comris Bank. Many of the controllers had started working for the bank at a young age and had stayed within the bank ever since. Although working for Comris Bank, they completed several training programs, which were often specifically designed and organized for the bank's controllers. They also regularly rotated jobs between branches. Together, these circumstances allegedly created a situation in which the controllers in Comris Bank were moving in a closed circle of people with similar values and beliefs, norms, and types of behavior. As a result of their embeddedness in similar social structures, the controllers came to develop a shared role identity.

One controller reiterated the main thrust of the controllers' role identity by indicating that, in general, the controllers in Comris Bank had a strong tendency "to let the [risk management] system guide their behavior" (Interviewee 10). Another controller characterized the role identity of the controllers in Comris Bank by saying that they share "a body of ideas" about control, which may be difficult to change, and which emphasizes giving priority to "checking whether you have everything under control" (Interviewee 28). Several controllers further specified their priorities by

8. Accordingly, their position was labeled "risk process controller." In 2007, as part of a reorganization of the control function, this position was relabeled as "process controller," which is the term we use in this paper. As part of the same reorganization, "business controller" positions were also created. At that time, the latter positions were new to Comris Bank.

indicating that safeguarding the bank's risk management was their main responsibility. In this respect, one of them acknowledged that he had "a peculiar habit of focusing on risk" (Interviewee 9). So, with their emphasis on checking compliance with the requirements for each of the isolated risks that were administered in the risk management system, the controllers' role identity was largely consistent with the compliance-oriented role as described in the literature. Below, we describe how this role identity influenced the ways in which the controllers became further involved in risk management and mobilized the bank's approaches to risk management.

The years following the introduction of a business partner role

As risk was not really an issue for the operational managers, the situation in the early years turned out to be a breeding ground for local-level incidents. More specifically, in the first years of the new century, a few local branches were accused of mismanaging the investment portfolios of clients, violating regulations and internal rules, and even fraud. Although these malpractices were the result of misconduct by a few individuals in a small number of local branches, they had far-reaching implications for the wider organization. In official reports and lawsuits, individual investors and the financial authorities argued that the head office's supervision of the local branches had failed. In addition, the incidents generated considerable bad publicity for Comris Bank.

A manager at the head office explained that, at the time, Comris Bank's senior management felt that the bank's survival was at stake: what had happened in these local branches could happen again in other branches, which would be detrimental to the bank's reputation and maybe even to its licenses to operate. For this reason, the head office deemed strong interventions necessary. In particular, it wanted to promote responsible behavior in the branches by restoring the balance between the commerce and risk performance areas in decision-making. It was in this context that it decided in 2007 to restructure the control function (the management accounting function) in the branches.

An important element of this restructuring was the introduction of business controllers, alongside the existing financial controllers (responsible for financial reporting) and process controllers (responsible for operational risk management). A manager at the head office explained that the business controllers were supposed to be the "personification of countervailing power" in the local branches (Interviewee 22). Formally, he continued, the operational managers were responsible for all three performance areas distinguished by Comris Bank (i.e., commerce, efficiency, and risk). However, the head office realized that, in practice, the people selected as operational managers "were outgoing, had a tendency to take risks, and were focused on closing deals" (Interviewee 22). For this reason, the role of the business controllers was to take a midway position between the commercial focus of the operational managers and the focus on risks of the process controllers. Through discussions with operational managers, the business controllers had to ensure that commercial and risk-related concerns were equally weighted in decision-making. These intended risk-related interactions, in which the business controllers would act as a "countervailing power," as well as the ambition that risk would permeate managerial decision-making indicate that the head office introduced the business controller positions with the aspiration to implement a risk-envisionment approach to risk management.

The majority of those selected for the business controller positions came from the existing group of process controllers. These people were confronted with new expectations from the head office regarding their role in the organization. According to their job description, these business controllers had to integrate all three performance areas in their work (Comris Bank, job descriptions, March 2014). In addition, they were supposed to support the senior managers in their local branch and to act as "partners in business" and "partners in change" for them. Finally, the business controllers were expected to be future-oriented and able to conduct an economic type of analysis. As such, the head office's expectations regarding the role of the business controllers reflected various ideas which went far beyond their traditional self-understanding as guardians of process management.

To enhance their abilities to fulfill a business partner role, the business controllers followed specific training programs organized by Comris Bank, with much attention given to personal development and skills. The interviews revealed that the controllers had learned from these programs how to interact with operational managers in order to influence them. For instance, they explained how they stimulated managers to reflect on their work by asking follow-up questions; "holding up a mirror" in the words of Interviewee 20, but several other business controllers made similar remarks. They also elaborated on how they adjusted their style of communication to the personality traits of a manager.

However, when bringing their new skills into practice, the business controllers were confronted with operational managers who were not really interested in receiving support from the controllers. In line with the prevailing circumstances in the banking sector at that time, these managers, and the departments under them, were fully focused on selling products. In their view, they were not only being creative in finding new sales opportunities, but also prepared to take the risks associated with these opportunities. One manager described how managers and front-office personnel behaved like "cowboys" in their attempts to maximize sales commissions (Interviewee 16). In this context, another manager observed that "the average business controller has little to contribute there" (Interviewee 26). Similarly, a former senior manager pointed out:

> Yes, I very often—for that matter—feel that a business controller's level of functioning is far too low. It very frequently happened that the former process controller became a business controller. So, they became a business controller and, sure, they were committed to process control, but not so much to efficiency or commerce, much less anyhow. Moreover, they might not have been the people who were really needed here. (Interviewee 23)

Interestingly, these observations by the managers were in contrast with how the controllers themselves saw their role. The controllers indicated that they were "supporting and facilitating" the managers (Interviewee 14). In their views, they were these managers' "sparring partners" (Interviewee 9), their work was very similar to that of a "co-pilot" (Interviewee 7), and they considered themselves to be "involved" (Interviewee 9). These quotes illustrate that, in the controllers' minds, they were interacting with the managers in ways that could be expected of a business partner in risk management who is contributing to a risk-envisionment approach. However, the operational managers' responses show that these controllers did not really challenge these managers and had only a limited influence on managerial decision-making.

Other observations also suggest that the business controllers did not adjust their role to the extent that the head office had expected. For instance, a business controller pointed out:

> That is one of the nice features of this job [as a business controller], that you are involved in many different aspects. And when you like a certain aspect, you can get involved . . . but risk management continues to be the most important part in my opinion. That is the part that you stand for. Look, I am not responsible for the commercial results: I am responsible for the risk management part. (Interviewee 20)

Another business controller stated:

> Yes, that was a new position within the organization. A lot of research was done about this position at Comris Bank's head office at the time. . . . And I think that we are still searching. (Interviewee 4)

When reflecting on a pilot in which managers had been granted more freedom to decide how they would control their department, the same business controller pointed out:

> Well, this is going to be challenging for me in the sense that, so far, I have evidence at my disposal such as physical and visual controls, file checks, value chain reports. . . . This is all tangible, but now managers will be able to decide for themselves how they organize their

> departments. So how am I going to determine whether a manager is in control of his or her department? Yes, that will certainly be a tricky one for me. (Interviewee 4)

This need for tangible evidence was confirmed by another business controller:

> Needless to say, we [i.e., the controllers] like to measure everything, to categorize it, and also to download it from the system. That is so much easier [than other forms of control]. (Interviewee 5)

These observations show that the new role created an ambiguous situation for the business controllers. While they responded to their new role by applying a new set of skills in their interactions with managers, this change reportedly did not really influence the managers' decision-making. In addition, the controllers believed that their main responsibility was to focus on risk and not on other performance areas. Moreover, it appears that they did not develop new ideas that were consistent with their new role of providing support to managers, but instead kept valuing and relying on audit trails and risk registers. As such, the controllers' work-related values and beliefs remained largely stable, and consequently they largely adhered to their previously established role identity as guardians of process management. As a consequence, the restructuring of the control function did not have the effects that the head office had hoped for. According to our interviews, it did not generate discussions between operational managers and controllers about the risks associated with sales opportunities.

The years following the introduction of a bank-wide risk management system

Comris Bank came through the financial crisis remarkably well. Some interviewees suggested that this might have been the reason why the bank responded rather slowly to the subsequent stakeholder demands for improvements in behavior. This slow response resulted in a few serious clashes with the financial authorities, and these also generated considerable negative publicity. Around 2010, Comris Bank's head office became convinced that it had to do much more to avoid further incidents that could threaten the bank's survival. It decided that the bank had no choice but to give priority to bringing its risk management practices up to standard, even if this prioritization would be at the expense of commercial performance or efficiency.

In particular, the head office observed that, in the "significantly changed financial and banking environment," the wide variation in the "levels of maturity and quality" of risk management practices across the bank was a major threat to its survival (Comris Bank, vision document, updated version, 2015). To reduce the variation across branches, and to increase the bank's overall quality of risk management, the head office developed a bank-wide risk management system. This system was described in various risk vision documents and risk management manuals, and it considerably reduced the branches' freedom to shape their own risk management practices. The documents and manuals detailed the various responsibilities in risk management and the annual cycle of risk management activities.

In organizing the responsibilities for risk management, Comris Bank used the so-called Three Lines of Defense model (Comris Bank, risk management policy document, November 2014; Comris Bank, risk vision document, February 2015; Institute of Internal Auditors 2013). In the bank's version of this model, the first line included the operational managers in the local branches. They were considered the "risk owners," which meant that they were held responsible for conducting business to meet the performance objectives, and for managing the corresponding risks. With regard to risk management, the managers were supposed to identify, analyze, measure, and monitor risks, and to take appropriate measures to mitigate them. In doing so, they were supported by the second line. In each local branch, this second line consisted of the credit analysts, who assessed both new financing requests from clients and extensions to existing financing contracts; a local compliance officer, who supervised the branch's compliance with and implementation of legislation and regulations; and the process and business controllers, who supported

the branch's managers in risk management and assessed the effectiveness of the measures taken to manage risks. The responsibilities of the second line were twofold in the sense that this line not only facilitated the managers in conducting risk management activities and making trade-offs between risk and commerce, but also monitored the work of these managers. The third line consisted of the internal auditors at Comris Bank's head office. These auditors periodically conducted audits of local branch practices. Their task was to assess the design, efficiency, and effectiveness of the first and second lines.

The risk management activities in the branches were organized in annual cycles, which started with a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analysis[9] and a risk analysis, simultaneously conducted by the senior managers of the branch, who were supported in this by the business controllers (Comris Bank, Risk Management Charter, 2014; Comris Bank, risk vision document, February 2015). Based on these analyses, business objectives and an annual plan to achieve these objectives were developed, along with an overview of the business and operational risks that could affect the achievement of the objectives. Business risks resulted from internal weaknesses and external threats. These risks existed, for instance, when a branch was not sufficiently diversified in terms of the industries to which it provided loans. Such a lack of diversification would be even more problematic when the financial situation of firms in these industries was deteriorating. To deal with such business risks, managers—again supported by the business controllers—were expected to develop action plans. As such, the bank relied on ideas which are also reflected in the risk-envisionment approach to risk management: when developing plans for the future, managers and controllers together had to critically imagine the risks that were associated with existing and new courses of action, and to jointly reflect on ways to prevent or mitigate undesirable risks.

The operational risks faced by Comris Bank arose from inadequate or failed internal processes, people, and systems, or from external events. They included risks due to internal or external fraud, accounting errors, and incomplete files about clients. To mitigate these risks, the bank strictly followed a rules-based approach to risk management, relying on risk registers and audit trails. In particular, it first identified the various business processes within the bank, and it developed protocols of how these processes should be executed (so-called "process descriptions"). Examples of business processes in the bank included providing mortgages to private individuals and revising interest rates on existing loans to businesses. For each process, the responsible manager needed to develop process controls (e.g., segregating duties, requiring a document trail) to ensure that, in practice, the business process functioned as intended.

The business processes also formed the backbone of a comprehensive IT system. In this system, the branches had to register all operational risks related to the business processes, their assessment of these risks (i.e., high, medium, or low), and the standards for each business process (e.g., the written authorizations required in a specific step, the maximum number of processing errors allowed). Periodically, the process controllers conducted "tests" by randomly selecting a number of files related to a particular process and comparing the actual situation with the standards. Furthermore, the planning and outcomes of these tests, and the implementation and effectiveness of improvement plans, were recorded in the IT system. The internal auditors at the head office relied to an extent on the outcomes of the tests conducted by the process controllers, but also conducted similar tests themselves.

On paper, the bank-wide risk management system of Comris Bank entailed features of the risk-envisionment approach aimed at managing business risks in addition to the rules-based approach that was followed for managing operational risk. In practice, however, the rules-based approach was much more influential, as managing operational risks received by far the most attention within the branches. The emphasis on managing operational risks was in part due to the

9. An assessment of an organization's strengths and weaknesses compared to other organizations, and the opportunities and threats in its environment. The assessment is usually aimed at developing a strategic plan.

consequences that were associated with it. Adherence to the operational risk management requirements became crucial in decisions about promotion and dismissal of individual employees. Whereas previously managers and front-office personnel were primarily evaluated based on their commercial performance, now their willingness and ability to manage operational risks became predominant in evaluations. In particular, if the periodic tests by the internal auditors showed that particular departments did not meet the standards set for business processes, such outcomes had detrimental effects on the careers of individuals. According to a manager, one mistake would be acceptable, while two mistakes would result in a formal letter sent to your home address, whereas three mistakes would imply that you were fired (Interviewee 29). At the branch level, conforming to the process descriptions and making the expected improvements became essential requirements for maintaining the existing level of autonomy. Failing the inspections by the internal auditors twice would result in a branch being placed under the head office's close surveillance and the responsible senior managers being replaced. Various interviewees described how, because of these measures, avoiding mistakes became the most important concern within the organization. In the words of a former manager, who had recently accepted a job at another company:

> Yes, but in the past few years all of Comris Bank's activities focused on risk management. As I already indicated, efficiency or commerce were never the aim [in these years]. No, it always was risk because otherwise . . . eh, that was the only reason why you would lose your job. (Interviewee 23)

This new setting changed how branch managers viewed the role of the business controllers. Previously, these managers had not confirmed the controllers as business partners because, in their view, these controllers had little to add in the area of commerce. However, now that the managers themselves were evaluated based on their abilities to manage operational risks, they began to appreciate the support they received from the controllers. The managers we interviewed indicated that they considered the controllers as "real professionals" able "to bring people together" (Interviewee 30) and whose work generated "countervailing power" (Interviewee 29). Some managers believed that, due to the work of the controllers, the quality of their own work had improved. For example, one manager observed: "in those two years I had learned much more from them [i.e., the controllers] than I could ever have thought of before" (Interviewee 16). Another manager indicated that the controllers had convinced him of the need to consider not only commercial but also risk-related issues (Interviewee 26). In this way, he continued, he had become much more of an "integral manager" than before.

The kind of support needed by the operational managers provided the business controllers with the opportunity to concentrate on the area where they felt most comfortable—that is, operational risk management. Together with the managers, they examined the outcomes of the tests conducted by the process controllers, searched for explanations for failed tests, and investigated what actions (e.g., training of employees, developing new process descriptions, installing additional process controls) were needed to improve the risk management. Some business controllers indicated that they spent 50% to 70% of their time on such risk management issues. Similarly, a business controller with almost 25 years of experience in Comris Bank pointed out that "in our experience, risk management is all we do" (Interviewee 5).

As such, the business controllers had crafted their jobs in such a way that they became business partners specifically in the area where the operational managers really needed their expertise, that is, operational risk management. They relied on practices that were very similar to the practices they had developed in their years as process controllers, implying that they fell back on well-learned behaviors. This response was facilitated by the head office's decisions to put much more emphasis on risk as a performance area, and to make corresponding changes in the way in which the performance of operational managers in the branches was evaluated.

The later years

In the years that followed the introduction of the bank-wide risk management system, many operational managers who could not accept Comris Bank's strong focus on risk left the bank. The managers who stayed learned how to adapt their role to incorporate responsibility for risk management. Nevertheless, despite their acceptance of the operational risk management system, the remaining operational managers were worried about Comris Bank's emphasis on risk. Several of them suggested that, because of this emphasis, the operational departments were fully focused on internal issues, such as completing data files, testing process controls, and implementing improvement plans. To these managers' disappointment, this focus came at the expense of the time available for serving clients. The managers also regretted that there was no longer room for them and for front-office personnel to show "craftsmanship"—that is, to use their professional judgment to identify and solve clients' problems. In this respect, they observed that the emphasis on adhering to "the rules" strongly reduced the possibilities for the operational departments to offer tailor-made solutions to clients. By rules they were referring to the process descriptions that, among other things, laid down conditions under which financial services could be provided to clients. To illustrate the effects of the emphasis on compliance with the rules, a former senior manager said that he was convinced that the bankruptcies of some businesses could have been avoided if Comris Bank had "assumed responsibility" for their situation, instead of "following the detailed rules" (Interviewee 23). The operational managers felt that the time had come for a better balance between flexible solutions and adherence to the rules—that is, between commercial and risk-related issues. They also raised questions about the negative impact that the extensive risk management system had on the efficiency of the bank.

The desire to rebalance performance areas had implications for the role that managers expected business controllers to fulfill. In the words of a manager with 18 years of experience in Comris Bank:

> Before 2008, we were extremely client-oriented. And I think that, after 2008, we made a 180 degree turn towards a strictly internal focus. But as far as I'm concerned, as regards the balance between commerce, efficiency, and risk, we will have to aim for the golden mean in the coming years. So, whereas we have been highly risk-minded, we now have to concentrate much more on commerce and efficiency. And this, by the way, also applies to the controllers. (Interviewee 26)

Several business controllers confirmed in the interviews that their aim was to contribute to achieving a balance between the three areas. However, when discussing specific situations, most business controllers indicated that they would prioritize risk over the other two performance areas. For instance, a business controller first indicated that his position was "right at the center" of the areas of commerce, efficiency, and risk, but then illustrated his position by pointing out that whenever the management team in his branch considered, for instance, commercial actions, his role was to emphasize their consequences for risk and risk management (Interviewee 9). Another business controller first emphasized that "we are not just controllers; we are *business* controllers. We are supposed to contribute not only to the area of risk, but also to collaborate with commerce [i.e., the operational departments]" (Interviewee 11). However, he later admitted that the business controllers in his branch mainly used their membership of the management team to ask the operational managers to put a number of risk management issues on the agenda.

Managers on both the central and the local levels argued that a better balance between performance areas could be achieved by reducing the number of process controls and focusing more on "key risks." For instance, instead of checking whether all clients' files contained a letter which summarized the advice the client received earlier in a meeting with a bank employee, the emphasis should be on improving the quality of the advice itself. The managers pointed out that, whereas the risk of deviating from process descriptions could be managed by applying a rules-

based approach, managing key risks would require a different approach. In their views, this alternative approach should rely on "professional competences" (Interviewee 22), "a mindset of shared responsibilities" (Interviewee 30), and "the learning capacity" of the organization (Interviewee 16)—that is, features of a risk-envisionment approach. One manager stressed that the "craftsmanship" which, in this alternative approach, was required from operational managers and staff should "originate from [their] interactions" with the controllers (Interviewee 25). However, the controllers themselves had doubts about reducing the number of process controls. For instance, a business controller commented on this idea by noting:

> If, all of a sudden, the number of rules [i.e., process descriptions] is reduced considerably, you will have to assume—so to say—that the operational staff member is immediately doing his or her work in an appropriate manner. . . . Shouldn't there be something in between? (Interviewee 28)

Rather than relying more on the expertise of members of the operational departments, the business controllers intensified their use of process controls by going into greater depth than they were formally expected to do. For example, they were involved in randomly selecting and examining files, even though, formally, such testing activities were the responsibility of the process controllers (Comris Bank, risk vision document, February 2015). Related to this, a senior manager at the head office complained that the majority of the business controllers concentrated too much on process-related risks (Interviewee 22).

With regard to the application of process controls, several interviewees pointed out that there was often "a gray zone" when it comes to checking actual practices against "the rules" or the process descriptions (Interviewee 4). Formally, the business controllers' role in dealing with this gray zone is summarized in the following statement: "Given [Comris Bank's] ideas about integral control, [the business controllers] assess the usefulness and necessity of [process] control measures in light of a balance between commerce, efficiency and risk" (Comris Bank, risk vision document, February 2015). Along these lines, a few business controllers differentiated their own role from that of the process controllers by emphasizing that, in their view, they had a better feeling for the business as a whole, and hence were better able to see risk management issues in relation to other developments in the branch. According to one of them, business controllers, much more than process controllers, were able to take "a helicopter view" when assessing the outcomes of tests (Interviewee 5). However, despite these claims by the business controllers, many operational managers were not convinced that the business controllers were always acting in the interest of their branch when applying the rules. Some of the managers we interviewed observed that the controllers had a tendency to interpret rules in an increasingly strict manner. This process is illustrated by the following statement from a former senior manager who had recently started working at another company:

> In my view, it was like this. [The financial authorities] made rules, but Comris Bank translated them. And then there were the controllers, who translated them again. And everyone wanted to stay on the safe side, because there is certainly a culture of fear, at least that is what has developed over the past few years. So, everyone always wanted to stay within the boundaries. But if everyone makes the boundaries stricter, you are increasingly moving away from what the rules were originally meant for. (Interviewee 23)

A business controller confirmed that, when assessing particular organizational practices against the relevant rules, controllers "have a tendency to always find something" (Interviewee 7). Another business controller concluded that, as a result of their "own translation of rules," the controllers increasingly "wandered away from [the bank's] core business" (Interviewee 28). Similar to the former senior manager mentioned above, a business controller hinted at "a kind of fear-driven mode" of behavior when explaining the business controllers' focus on the rules (Interviewee 24). This behavior followed from a common belief that making mistakes related

to risk management should be avoided at any price, as such mistakes would be severely punished.

In other words, the controllers fell back on practices that were consistent with the work-related values and beliefs that they had developed in the early years. They crafted their role in the direction of safeguarding adherence to standard business processes and, in so doing, they moved away from the business partner role that was desired by both the head office and local managers. The controllers increased their focus on a rules-based approach to risk management at the expense of a broader, risk-envisionment approach.

These practices of prioritizing risk-related issues, relying on process controls, and interpreting rules in an increasingly strict manner were fairly consistent across most of the controllers we interviewed. However, two business controllers stood out. In contrast to the others, these two had considerable histories outside Comris Bank's control function and had not been process controllers before. In comparison to the other controllers, these controllers more strongly positioned themselves as involved in their branch's operations, even though they realized that this came at the expense of their degree of independence. This position also suggests that they were more willing to make trade-offs between risk-related and commercial concerns. In the words of one of them:

> I have a very strong view on that. It is as simple as this: this is my company, and I want to achieve only one thing, which is that this entrepreneur performs well, and is able to keep that client. We [as controllers] think too much in terms of different responsibilities, and whether we are independent enough. Forget it! Of course we are independent enough, but if occasionally we have to be less independent, so be it. (Interviewee 24)

These two business controllers were also more willing to leave testing activities to the process controllers and to rely on other forms of control. One of them remarked that, when switching from an operational to a business controller position, he was surprised to see "an accumulation of tests" which, in his view, he was only able to observe because he "combined both worlds"—that is, the worlds of commerce and of control (Interviewee 24). According to the other controller, "you should not check something for the sake of checking" but, instead, "better start steering right from the beginning" by proactively trying to influence behavior (Interviewee 14). Moreover, these two controllers with their different histories seemed to have more confidence than the others in the operational managers and front-office personnel. They also more strongly felt that the shared interests of controllers and operational managers benefited from interactions between them. According to one of these controllers, Comris Bank could reduce the number of testing activities if it organized "good discussions and good training programs" for members of operational departments (Interviewee 14). The other controller suggested that, if the operational and control departments "together decided what should be tested and what not," this would create a feeling that "together we are one company, one bank" (Interviewee 24). These findings suggest that these two controllers were more open to a risk-envisionment approach to risk management than the other controllers.

As indicated above, these two controllers, who were less likely to have developed a role identity as guardians of process management, were exceptions. The majority of the business controllers fell back on the role that they had when they were still process controllers. In doing so, they were perceived as having lost their relevance to Comris Bank. More specifically, when we were conducting our final interviews, the head office had well-developed plans to completely eliminate the business controller positions and to divide their existing activities between specific staff members in the operational departments and the process controllers. These activities concentrated on well-known risks, which could be managed through a rules-based approach.

5. Conclusion

Based on a case study in a large European bank, we analyzed how management accountants could expand their jurisdiction by participating in risk management. In particular, we shed light on the opportunities and challenges that emerged in the context of a role change toward business partnering in risk management, a change that was initiated by the head office. We also illuminated the management accountants' responses to this role change and their implications for the position of the management accountants, risk management, and the wider organization. The main contributions and the novel insights that emerge from our study are discussed in the following subsections against the background of the existing literature.

Emphasis on well-learned responses in the context of a role change

Our study adds a fresh and richer voice to the literature that addresses the role change of management accountants toward business partnering (Burns and Baldvinsdottir 2005; Byrne and Pierce 2007) by exploring an additional unreported response to such a change. Previous research suggests that, despite struggling at times, management accountants do move forward to fulfill the business partner role (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Goretzki et al. 2013; Morales 2019; Mack and Goretzki 2017; Morales and Lambert 2013). In our case, the business controllers also (partially) embraced the idea of business partnering, as the changes in their narratives reflect, but eventually moved back to their previous role. The business controllers' focus on managing risks and their reliance on tools such as checklists, audit trails, and box-ticking is indicative of the move backward. As such, a major insight emerging from our case study is that an instigated role change toward business partnering may not necessarily trigger a move forward into that role and that, rather, it may culminate in a move backward to a previous role. Whether one moves forward or backward seems to depend on the specific circumstances surrounding the role change. Therefore, we now reflect on the key circumstances that came to light as the case unfolded.

The new business controller role foreseen in Comris Bank reflected core elements of the business partner role documented in other research (Granlund and Lukka 1998; Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018; Janin 2017; Maas and Matějka 2009). In particular, the controllers were expected to be involved in strategic and operational decisions, and to ensure that local managers considered and integrated all of the bank's objectives in their decision-making. In this way, they were supposed to contribute to the head office's aim to promote responsible behavior in the branches. As the business controllers were expected to balance the commercial focus of the operational managers with the risk focus of the process controllers, their new role also reflected elements of the risk-envisionment approach (Mikes 2011). Through frequent interactions with local managers, the business controllers were to ensure that risk aspects were given sufficient attention in managerial decision-making. In doing so, the business controllers were supposed to diminish the likelihood of new incidents in the branches, and hence improve the likelihood of Comris Bank surviving in an environment that was increasingly critical of the behavior of banks.

The introduction of the business partner role, and the increased emphasis that the head office was implicitly placing on risk, emerged in a period when Comris Bank and the banking sector more generally were still characterized by a strong commercial orientation. One of the interviewees illustrated this orientation with the maxim "the sky was the limit." The operational managers then perceived the business controllers as having "little to contribute" to their work and did not confirm them as business partners. The expansion of the business controllers' jurisdiction was thus initially surrounded by rather unfavorable conditions. Although there was some interaction between the managers and the controllers, it did not result in a corresponding sharing of expertise and blending of perspectives, aspects that constitute the core of both the business partner role and the risk-envisionment approach (Hall et al. 2015; Lambert and Sponem 2012; Mikes 2011; Morales 2019).

The bank's prioritization of performance objectives changed after clashes with the financial authorities and related negative publicity. This change, along with the introduction of a bank-wide risk management system, provided more favorable conditions for the business controllers to expand their jurisdiction. Their expertise in managing risks was now recognized by the operational managers. Indeed, we saw that, during a period of transition, the managers appreciated the business controllers' support in managing risk and considered them as a "countervailing power."

While these more favorable conditions resulting from the prioritization of risk could have reinforced the role change toward business partnering, our study showed that the business controllers only played a pivotal role in risk management in the initial stage of implementing the bank-wide system. In this stage, the controllers helped the managers to interpret and apply the risk management guidelines. In other words, there was a strong emphasis on controlling the use of risk management techniques, but less attention was paid to controlling the "abstractions that generate the practical techniques" (Abbott 1988, 26). This is a key observation since, according to Abbott (1988), this type of abstract knowledge is necessary for an occupation to survive.

The tendency to focus on the application of techniques rather than on the development of abstract knowledge, which would allow the business controllers to engage meaningfully with the operational managers in elaborating and enacting risk envisionment, was even more visible in the later years of our study. In this period, the business controllers relied more and more on process controls and increasingly interpreted the rules set by regulators and internal auditors in a strict manner. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the study by Gendron et al. (2021) who view risk management as an array of actions that engender discomfort where material threats to an organization are identified, and comfort when measures are taken to manage such risks. In line with their idea that a rules-based approach may have a greater potential to provide comfort and reassurance than a risk-envisionment approach, we suggest that the "culture of fear," which some of our interviewees reportedly experienced in these later years, may have encouraged the business controllers to concentrate their efforts on the application of a rules-based compliance approach. Individuals who are anxious may well seek comfort by emphasizing a rules-based approach as this provides much clearer guidelines on how to avoid "mistakes" than a risk-envisionment approach.

Our findings thus reveal that the business controllers ended up concentrating on risk management practices that were not conducive to establishing a position as a business partner in risk management. Illuminating this behavior from a resilience perspective, we conclude that the business controllers did not demonstrate the required adaptability and flexibility that is stressed in this stream of research (Weick et al. 1999). Instead, they eventually emphasized well-learned or dominant responses (Staw et al. 1981), and these tend not to contribute to resilience. According to the resilience literature, these well-learned responses are often observed in situations of high ambiguity. Previous research relates ambiguity in the business partner role primarily to the "independence–involvement dilemma" (Lambert and Sponem 2012, 586) that stems from management accountants' functional and local responsibilities (Goretzki et al. 2018; Maas and Matějka 2009). In our case company, however, the ambiguity experienced seemed to have its origins in the business partner role in risk management, for which the business controllers indicated that they "were still searching." Their struggle to find a way to enact their new role may explain their tendency to fall back on well-learned behavior. Therefore, we argue that the ambiguity emerged from the business controllers' assignment to become a business partner in risk management and to mobilize a risk-envisionment approach. Ambiguity seems to be a typical feature of the business partner role in risk management as earlier literature has highlighted that this role implies the creation of uncertainty, and the questioning of managers' assumptions and strategies (Kaplan and Mikes 2012; Power 2009), which create discomfort for the actors involved (Gendron et al. 2021). In the situation of Comris Bank, this role-related ambiguity was aggravated by case-specific circumstances in the sense that at first the business controllers were supposed to enact a

risk-envisionment approach in a period where there was a strong focus on exploiting commercial opportunities.

The finding that the managers appreciated the controllers' support, at least in the short term, after risk was prioritized indicates that the expansion of a jurisdiction depends on the conditions of possibility. However, even when the conditions are more favorable, a lack of abstract knowledge, an ambiguous role, and a corresponding tendency to emphasize well-learned responses may impede the move forward to a new role.

Lingering identities and identity asymmetries

Our findings also generate additional theoretical insights into the relationship between role and role identity, which has been subject to a recent stream of research (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Goretzki et al. 2013; Morales 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013). More specifically, we mobilize the concepts of lingering identities (Wittman 2019) and identity asymmetries (Mell et al. 2020) and introduce them to the accounting literature as they appear helpful in theorizing the move backward we observed in our case.

The existing literature emphasizes that a change toward a business partner role requires a corresponding role identity (Horton and de Araújo Wanderley 2018). Despite sometimes struggling, the management accountants addressed in previous research seem to have aligned their role and role identity by engaging in job crafting and identity work (Goretzki et al. 2013; Goretzki and Messner 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013). These findings are thus in line with the forward progress that models of identity construction usually entail (Burgess et al. 2020), implying that past experiences hardly affect a role identity. In contrast, we observed that, in our case, the business controllers did not fully internalize the business partner identity. Our analysis indicates that the business controllers' move backward to their previous role was anchored in their lingering identity as guardians of process management, which they had developed in their previous position as process controllers. Our findings thus highlight that a lingering identity may be an obstacle to enacting a business partner role in risk management and also add to the fragility of this role. We believe that in this way our study is the first to provide empirical evidence to support the conceptual work of Wittman (2019) on lingering identities.

Wittman (2019) argues that individuals may engage in cognitive continuity when they perceive a role change as unresolved and associate it with feelings of challenge or threat. According to DeRue and Ashford (2010), the construction of an identity is a social process, in which one group of individuals claims an identity and another group affirms or disaffirms such claims. We argue that, in our case, the business controllers' attempts to interact with the operational managers and to "hold up a mirror" to them represented claims of a business partner identity. The managers' lack of interest in such interaction constituted a disaffirmation, which may have impeded the full internalization of the business partner identity (DeRue and Ashford 2010). As such, disaffirmation creates uncertainty for the individuals claiming an identity, and consequently, they may engage in cognitive continuity which may culminate in retreating to a lingering identity (Wittman 2019).

These findings are to some extent in line with research that suggests that a lack of confirmation on the part of the managers makes it difficult for management accountants to become business partners (Goretzki and Messner 2019; Morales and Lambert 2013). However, in our case, the business controllers moved back to their previous role only later, in a period when the managers began to appreciate the support provided by the business controllers and hence provided some affirmation of their identity claims. Moreover, a strong congruence between the controllers' core field of expertise and the organization's objectives could be observed in this period. Rather than the managers' disaffirmation leading to an immediate move backward by the business controllers, it resulted in the role change remaining unresolved (in terms of Wittman (2019)) for the business controllers, which adversely affected their internalization of the business partner identity.

Their previous role identity thus began to linger, and this tendency was reinforced by further conditions that initiated the business controllers' move backward.

We build on the work by Wittman (2019) in linking these conditions with the business controllers' lingering identity. Wittman (2019) argues that if people still experience role reactivation as possible, they may opt not to restructure their role identities, and hence their role identities may linger. We argue that, due to the conditions which existed within Comris Bank, it was not only possible but also tempting for the business controllers to reactivate their previous role. The "culture of fear" that existed throughout Comris Bank and the accompanying intense comfort-seeking (Gendron et al. 2021), as signaled by the focus on compliance and the widespread aspiration "to stay on the safe side," all reflect what Power (2004, 62) calls "secondary risk management." This refers to situations in which individuals and organizations become more concerned with complying with rules and processes, to avoid reputational or legitimacy risks, than with the management of primary risks (see also Power 2007). In our case, this tendency became particularly evident after the introduction of the bank-wide risk management system. In this period, the general concern with avoiding "mistakes" resulted in an emphasis on operational risks, while business risks, the bank's primary risks, received less attention from the business controllers and operational managers alike. For the business controllers, this emphasis on operational risks implied that their former tasks as process controllers became more important and more salient in the organization. Therefore, we conclude that the bank's concern with avoiding reputational and legitimacy risks further discouraged the business controllers to internalize the business partner identity. Instead, the tendency of their previous role identity to linger was reinforced, and this contributed to the controllers' move backward to their previous role.

According to Wittman (2019), an identity may also linger when rites of passage, signaling that a person has crossed the boundary to a new role, are absent. Given that the business partner role tends not to be an entry-level position but rather a career stage achieved after years accumulating organizational knowledge (Goretzki and Messner 2019), rites of passage may well be absent. In the case, we did not find evidence of clear rites of passage, even though the training sessions on how to interact with managers, which the business controllers attended after the role change, could perhaps be interpreted as such. In conclusion, we suggest that the managers' disaffirmation, the potential for a reactivation of the business controllers' previous role, and the lack of rites of passage may explain why their previous role identity as guardians of process management lingered and, in turn, may have contributed to the move backward. These dynamics emphasize that past experiences may affect current role identities, as suggested by recent research (Burgess et al. 2020; Obermire et al. 2021).

Our study also brings to the fore an identity asymmetry between the business controllers and the operational managers, which throws light on the managers' disaffirmation of the business controllers' identity claim. Mell et al. (2020) argue that individuals who work in groups may identify more strongly with either the group to which they belong or the overarching system in which their group operates. If individuals identify differently, the resulting identity asymmetry may negatively affect collaboration between them. We observed such asymmetry in our case, where local managers continued to seek new business opportunities with little consideration of risks even when the controllers were trying to introduce a risk perspective. Although the operational managers identified strongly with their peers as "cowboys," the business controllers' identity as guardians of process management started to linger. Consequently, neither group identified with the organization and its overarching objective in terms of balancing commercial and risk-related issues. In this period, the evaluation of the managers' performance relied entirely on their commercial performance. Our findings thus reveal a mismatch between the head office's expectations concerning the business controller role and the way in which the performance of managers was evaluated. These findings lead us to suggest that the way management accountants deal with role changes can be affected by the performance evaluation systems in place.

This suggestion is supported by the observation that, when the focus of the managers' performance evaluation changed, the identity asymmetry diminished. This was illustrated by the operational manager who indicated that the controllers had helped him to become an "integral manager," considering both commercial and risk-related issues. In this period, a collaborative type of interaction took place between the managers and the business controllers, although this was often not related to balancing commercial and risk-related issues but rather to finding ways to comply with the newly established rules. Goretzki et al. (2013) show that management at higher levels in the organization can create appropriate conditions, by changing the accounting system and the organizational positioning of the management accountants, for legitimizing a business partner role. Our case adds to their study by highlighting the importance of aligning the way in which the performance of local managers is evaluated with the business partner role expected of the management accountants. Without this alignment, identities are more likely to be asymmetrical. As a consequence, local managers are less likely to affirm the management accountants' identity claims, and the head office may fail in its wish to redirect managerial decision-making with the help of the management accountants.

Taken together, our findings suggest that an emphasis on well-learned responses in the context of a role change, a lingering role identity, and identity asymmetries may all impede a professional group's occupational resilience.

Implications for the controllers and for the organization

Our paper also sheds light on the implications that the responses to a role change may have for the position of a professional group in an organization. In particular, we show that, if a professional group lacks a positive capability to bounce back from disturbances (Luthans 2002), this lack of occupational resilience may result in a narrowing (or even elimination) of their jurisdiction. When, in the later years of our study, the operational departments had themselves developed the knowledge and skills necessary to operate the bank-wide risk management system, the business controllers lacked the capacity to further develop their business partner role and remain relevant to the operational managers and to the head office. Instead of recognizing an opportunity to demonstrate how their expertise could be used as part of a risk-envisionment approach, the controllers in effect gave up their business partner role and returned to a compliance-oriented role. This response, which casts doubt on the business controllers' occupational resilience, had detrimental effects on their position in the organization, as the head office decided that the organization no longer needed their expertise.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that the degree of occupational resilience of management accountants may have implications which go beyond the competitive position of their professional group. In Comris Bank, the head office introduced the business partner role in risk management in the expectation that this would lead to a risk-envisionment approach, which would eventually reduce the organization's vulnerability to future disturbances and, hence, increase the bank's organizational resilience. However, because of the tendency to follow a rules-based rather than a risk-envisionment approach, the bank remained vulnerable to unforeseen incidents.[10] This tendency was considerably reinforced by the business controllers who, similar to the operational managers, paid limited attention to business risks. As suggested by one of the interviewees, the bank's unwillingness to prevent certain bankruptcies, as this would require deviations from the rules, could be an example of a type of behavior that might lead to future incidents, such as legitimacy threats. In this manner, the business controllers' struggles with enacting their new role implied that they did not contribute to a risk-envisionment approach and hence not to organizational resilience in the way intended by the head office. This outcome highlights the interplay between resilience on different levels (Kossek and Perrigino 2016; Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011),

10. This finding supports the reasoning by Posch (2020) that rules-based approaches may impede flexibility in dealing with risks and may reduce employees' awareness of risks and opportunities.

with an occupational group (the management accountants) engaging in practices that not only limit their own occupational resilience but eventually also impede organizational resilience (Hartmann et al. 2020; Kahn et al. 2018).

In so doing, our findings also raise the question as to what higher levels can do to increase the resilience of groups and individuals in the organization, and thus to build organizational resilience. In Comris Bank, the business controllers were offered specific training programs that, as we highlighted in our case findings, mainly emphasized improving social skills. This emphasis on social skills is in line with the resilience literature, which highlights social interactions as being of paramount importance in gaining resilience (Hartwig et al. 2020; Powley 2009; Stephens et al. 2013; Stoverink et al. 2020). However, the Comris Bank programs were focused on establishing a general business partner role rather than one focused on risk management. Consequently, the controllers lacked a knowledge base related to this new role and struggled with the content-related elements. This could be seen in the business controllers' inability to give examples of what risk-envisionment meant in the context of their discussions with the managers. Therefore, we posit that role changes involving new domains should be supported not only by emphasizing social skills but also by developing a strong knowledge base through having regular discussions about ambitions, tools and techniques, limitations, experiences, and ways to proceed.

Avenues for future research

We believe that our study can pave the way for further research that adopts and extends the resilience perspective introduced in this paper. We would expect research that advances our understanding of how functional specialists, such as management accountants, may become more resilient to be not only enlightening in the context of risk management but also in other changing jurisdictions. One example is the digital transformation of the finance function which may lead to less distinct boundaries of the accountants' jurisdiction and may give rise to competition with other functional specialists, such as data scientists (Bhimani and Willcocks 2014). Therefore, we would encourage research that studies other emerging task domains from a resilience perspective.

In the domain of risk management, future research could enhance our understanding of the relationship between a risk-envisionment approach and organizational resilience. On the one hand, a risk-envisionment approach could contribute to building organizational resilience given that its inherent discussions on risk taking and alternative future scenarios may enhance an organization's adaptability to disturbances. On the other hand, risk experts often act as devil's advocates in such discussions (Kaplan and Mikes 2012), which may worsen social relationships within an organization. We therefore suggest that although high-quality social relationships and interactions may contribute to organizational resilience (Kahn et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2017), such relationships may be difficult to develop when business partners in risk management only challenge managers without supporting them. This suggestion is consistent with our observation that the business controllers were not appreciated by the operational managers when they were "holding up a mirror" but only later when they supported these managers in complying with the rules and procedures of the bank-wide risk management system. This observation makes us aware that there may be a tension between the practices included in the risk-envisionment approach and those needed for building organizational resilience, which future research could investigate in greater depth.

Finally, we would encourage researchers to extend the resilience perspective and go beyond the organizational context that was the subject of our study. We see potential for studies that explain how the institutional environment shapes resilience at different levels, as well as for research focusing on resilience at the individual level and its implications for higher levels. Such extensions may not only be relevant to changes in jurisdictions and the competition between professional groups, but also in other settings, such as in the context of external threats. We believe that such cross-level analyses may gather new empirical and theoretical insights into the dynamic process in which the responses at one level shape the context in which responses at other levels unfold, an area our study has only started to explore.

Appendix: Overview of interviews

Interview	Date	Position	Duration (hours)
1	May 15, 2014	Business controller	1:30
2	May 15, 2014	Financial controller	0:45
3	May 15, 2014	Process controller	0:45
4	August 18, 2015	Business controller	1:01
5	August 18, 2015	Business controller	1:21
6	August 20, 2015	Process controller	1:13
7	August 20, 2015	Business controller	1:41
8	August 20, 2015	Financial controller	0:50
9	August 20, 2015	Business controller	1:22
10	August 28, 2015	Business controller	1:21
11	August 28, 2015	Business controller	1:22
12	August 28, 2015	Financial controller	1:02
13	September 7, 2015	Process controller	1:35
14	September 21, 2015	Business controller	1:02
15	September 21, 2015	Process controller	0:57
16	November 16, 2015	Manager at local branch	0:49
17	November 16, 2015	Senior executive at local branch	0:58
18	November 16, 2015	Manager at local branch	1:03
19	November 23, 2015	Process controller	1:02
20	November 23, 2015	Business controller	1:11
21	January 28, 2016	Former senior executive at local branch	1:42
22	March 4, 2016	Senior executive at corporate level	1:18
23	March 21, 2016	Former senior executive at local branch	1:20
24	April 11, 2016	Business controller	0:38
25	April 11, 2016	Senior executive at local branch	0:42
26	April 11, 2016	Manager at local branch	0:40
27	April 11, 2016	Operational staff member	0:23
28	June 20, 2016	Business controller	0:51
29	June 20, 2016	Manager at local branch	1:05
30	June 20, 2016	Manager at local branch	1:06
31	June 20, 2016	Operational staff member	1:03
32	July 12, 2016	Internal auditor	1:13

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