


Article

Alumni Management and Temporal Spatial Distance: A Theoretical Investigation

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Abstract

Over the last several years, scholars have become increasingly interested in how alumni relations are managed for the purposes of capitalization. This challenges the notion that organizational membership must be dichotomous—it may instead be a matter of degrees and perceptions. Former members (alumni) may remain on the organizational periphery as business partners, advocates, brand ambassadors, or even return as boomerang employees. This study applies Social Identity Theory to argue that alumni management creates a peripheral group of alumni that is temporally and spatially distanced from the organization's core social group. This distance can hinder the organization's ability to benefit from its alumni. The study therefore investigates the role of temporal spatial distance in alumni management and how it is addressed through organizational activities. It demonstrates the importance of temporal spatial distance, because of its effects on social interactions, identity regulation, and alumni role learning and enactment. Furthermore, it systematizes typical alumni management activities according to their effects on temporal-spatial distance, thereby contributing to the existing literature on Social Identity Theory and alumni management.

Keywords: alumni management; Social Identity Theory; organizational membership; temporal spatial distance; identity regulation**JEL:** J62, M12, M14, I23, J63

1. Introduction

Slogans like “Once a member, always a member”, alumni meetings, and public announcements of the alumni-of-the-month are contemporary evidence that organizations such as universities and consulting firms make efforts to continue their relationships with former organization members. While the continuation of alumni ties is historically rooted in the US American higher education system, the global path of universities (Etzkowitz et al., 2000) has made alumni management a typical part of university work worldwide (e.g., Ebert et al., 2015). Moreover, the shortages of skilled workers (Somaya and Williamson, 2008) and the dynamism of today's careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Fulmer et al., 2024; Paluch et al., 2025; Somaya and Williamson, 2008) have led to wider acceptance of those who straddle organizational boundaries and support their former firm as a brand ambassador (e.g., Dachner and Makarius, 2022; Iyer and Day, 1998) or return as a so-called boomerang employee (Swider et al., 2017), including outside of academia. Thus, the various forms in which organizations can capitalize on alumni have made organizational membership appear even more multifaceted and resembling an endless journey than ever before.

Ziller (1965) asserted that alumni groups can stabilize open groups, such as the military or universities, by providing a steady flow of members. Contemporary changes in the working world have inspired researchers to revisit and

reinforce this argument, focusing on the value alumni can bring beyond their time in the organization (Fulmer et al., 2024; Makarius et al., 2025). To achieve this stabilization and retention effect, alumni management establishes formal alumni networks or groups. Departing members can join these (Bardon et al., 2017; Dachner and Makarius, 2022) concomitantly to joining a new organization. However, this process is accompanied by spatial and temporal distancing: Alumni no longer pay regular visits to organizational spaces, such as offices, during office hours, and their membership lies increasingly more in the past than in the present. This temporal-spatial distance can be identified as a pivotal characteristic of alumni status, impeding integration and utilization within organizational contexts.

Advocates of Social Identity Theory (SIT) argue that group membership is socially constructed through social interactions, leading a person to perceive themselves as a member of a group or organization. Thus, although spatial-temporal distancing encourages alumni to perceive their organizational membership as ambiguous, the salience of membership-connected identity can be fostered by the prevailing social context (Tajfel, 1981). Studies have demonstrated that participation in alumni groups encourages identity work (Bardon et al., 2015) for the continuation of the alumni-role identity (McDearmon, 2013), which is pivotal for the realm of strategic alumni engagement.



Research on the value of alumni is increasing, as is research on their management, time, and space—but little effort has been made to combine these strands of enquiry. Distance is a key feature of alumni status, making their management costly and subject to internal justification (Ebert et al., 2015). To conduct an initial systematic analysis of this topic, this article draws on SIT and related concepts. It argues that alumni management constructs a distinct social group of former organization members that is connected to the organizational social group and asks:

What role does temporal-spatial distance play in alumni management, and how do organizational activities address it to continue alumni perceptions of belonging?

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 draws on Social Identity Theory to discuss organizational membership and the role of perception. Section 3 highlights the relevance of temporal-spatial distance for questions of membership and answers the first part of the research question. Working from this theoretical foundation, Section 4 categorizes common alumni management activities according to their effect on the temporal-spatial distance of alumni, answering the second part of the research question. The article concludes with a discussion and the implications for future research.

2. (Perceived) Organizational Membership and Temporal-Spatial Distance

2.1 Organizational Membership as a Question of Perception

Members of an organization belong to an organization-related social group, which can vary in its salience. Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defined social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Self-concept is a system of affective-cognitive structures that organizes the individual’s identity (Baumeister, 1986; Brown, 2020; Gecas, 1982). Due to the complexity of one’s surroundings, Tajfel argued, “[s]ome of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time and as a function of a variety of social situations” (1981, p. 255). On the one hand, this highlights how strongly social identities are anchored within an individual’s self-concept; on the other hand, it underlines that the salience of social groups contain temporal dynamics that can be fostered due to the (re-)experience of a social situation. This argumentation led to the concept of perceived organizational membership (Bartel and Dutton, 2014).

Perceived organizational membership has come into focus as, building on SIT, it challenges the dichotomous understanding of membership (Bartel and Dutton, 2014; Masterson and Stamper, 2003). Studies have used the concept to highlight that organizational membership “is less a mat-

ter of being in or out than knowing when and to what degree one is a member” (Bartel and Dutton, 2014, pp. 115–116; Rafaeli, 1997; Tyler, 1999). The contemporary increasing focus on nurturing positive working relationships and facilitating the transition of former employees takes into account that careers today are dynamic (Fulmer et al., 2024; Makarius et al., 2024) and that leaving can be temporary. However, this implies that specific organizational activities are necessary to continue the perception of being close or in some way a member of the organization.

Other authors argued that the cultivation of a positive alumni environment (Fulmer et al., 2024) and the establishment of designated alumni groups (Dachner and Makarius, 2022) have emerged as prevalent strategies to continue relationships with alumni. These strategies present alumni as relevant to the organization, and encourage current members to perceive them as such; they formally connect alumni to the organization, and shape and foster an alumni role identity with related expectations. Consequently, the dimensions of organizational membership become increasingly indistinct, and membership can become perpetual.

2.2 Temporal-Spatial Distance Resulting in Ambiguous Membership

Spatial and temporal separation from something, such as an organization, makes it abstract (Lieberman and Trope, 2008) and gives it a certain ambiguity (Bartel and Dutton, 2014). This is because social interactions and social-material components of identity regulation, such as shared routines, are missing (Dacin et al., 2010; Paring et al., 2017). Moreover, there is a risk, especially after departure from the organization, that socialization in a new organization (Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Van Maanen and Schein, 1977) will lead to a distancing from the previous one, e.g., because the organizations compete with each other (Grohsjean et al., 2016).

Perceived organizational membership is constructed collectively through social interaction between individuals, making it especially challenging to achieve for those who are physically or temporally distant (Bartel and Dutton, 2014), such as employees working remotely (Millward et al., 2007) or cleaning staff in an organization that operates outside of core working hours in the early hours of the morning and at night (Costas, 2022). In such circumstances, the individual may perceive the relationship as vague, problematic, or unstable, which is defined as ambiguous organizational membership (Bartel and Dutton, 2014). Therefore, as the perception of belonging to an organization is specific to the situation (Ashforth and Johnson, 2014; Bartel and Dutton, 2014; Tajfel, 1981), organizations can purposely create social interactions to alleviate uncertainties related to membership.

During organizational membership, organizations influence members’ identities through identity regulation. Identity regulation can be defined as the prescription and

promotion of a social identity to influence an individual's self-identity (Paring et al., 2017). To this end, organizations employ discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), sociomaterial practices (Paring et al., 2017), and physical spaces (Gotsi et al., 2010). This results in identity work and construction of an organizational member with behavior that is in line with the organizationally promoted identity. After leaving their former organization, alumni are separated from sociomaterial practices, and discourses can fail to reach them (Wastyn, 2009). Consequently, they may no longer perceive their former-organization-related identity as relevant to work life, pushing it back into the private sphere (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013) or even completely out of the self-concept (Bednar et al., 2020; Eury et al., 2018; Grohsjean et al., 2016; Wastyn, 2009). Coordinated social interaction and targeted influence on alumni identity through identity regulation are thus necessary to overcome temporal-spatial distancing, providing clarity about membership and the related alumni role identity, to use alumni to the organization's benefit.

3. Alumni Management

3.1 The Organization's Core and Alumni Groups

Upon the dissolution of formal organizational membership, a scenario facilitated by the termination of an employment contract, the membership transitions to alumni status. The fundamental question, however, is: Do members merely disassociate from the organization, or do they concurrently assume the role of an alumnus or alumna? In essence, alumni are tasked with the responsibility of assimilating into the alumni role, thereby facilitating the transition from a member identity to an alumni identity (McDearmon, 2013). To facilitate this process of role learning, it is essential to create an organizational environment that fosters a "climate for learning"—a nurturing atmosphere within which newcomers can experiment with their nascent role identities" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 190). It is crucial to acknowledge that alumni, in this context, do not represent newcomers; rather, they transition from the role of member to that of former member. However, it is imperative to experience the role and the associated expectations, as this is fundamental for identity salience, which ultimately leads to the organizationally prescribed appropriate behaviors (McDearmon, 2013).

In the context of higher education in the US, where university alumni management is most developed, alumni can be observed donating and participating (e.g., in reunions) even 60 years after departure from the organization (Bristol, 1990). Thus, the relationship between an organization and an individual can be very long-lasting if it is adequately sustained. Despite the widespread assumption that alumni management refers only to the post-membership period, it is therefore essential to recognize that it also encompasses the period of organizational affiliation as the beginning of alumni role learning. Offering career services or

mentorship programs that engage alumni while appealing to current members, for example, puts appropriate alumni behavior on display, which may influence current members' own behavior in the future (Baroncelli et al., 2022; Ebert et al., 2015; Gallo, 2013; Landoni et al., 2021).

Organizations typically establish alumni groups. These are characterized by formal membership and a range of activities, including newsletters and events designed to foster engagement among former members. Moreover, these activities facilitate identity-based work and ensure the ongoing evolution and perpetuation of alumni role identity. Contrary to the extant literature, which posits the necessity of a "climate" or "atmosphere" for alumni, this study contends, drawing upon SIT, that more is required. Specifically, it proposes that a distinct alumni group centered around the organizational core group of current members be established. This group facilitates connections between alumni and the organization through formal membership in the alumni group, thereby contributing to the establishment and maintenance of alumni roles. Moreover, this reinforces the bond of the individual's sense of self and their designated position within the prevailing social structure (Tajfel, 1981). Communicated and developed expectations associated with the alumni role are thus of significant relevance, as they influence behavior in accordance with the role.

Complex organizations, such as international corporations or universities, are particularly likely to include various smaller groups. Alumni identity may therefore be bound more strongly to either the organization as a whole or to the working group. Thus, it is a relevant organizational question whether centralized, decentralized, or integrated alumni resources are the best way forwards (Fulmer et al., 2024). Moreover, in the case of complex organizations with numerous, huge, or globally spread departments, researchers have proposed that the alumni manager be the central point of connection, their work supplemented by volunteering subgroups, for example, in a geographic area or within a specific department (Dachner and Makarius, 2022). The more complex an organization, the more volunteering and assisting representatives are needed to represent each social sub-group within the whole, to allow its (former) members to relive social situations that foster the salience of the social identity (Bartel and Dutton, 2014; Tajfel, 1981).

Consequently, it is imperative to recognize that not all members within the alumni group must be addressed in a uniform manner. The scope and customization of alumni activities are contingent upon organizational characteristics and context (Liang, 2025), the strategy employed and the organizational structure in place (Paluch et al., 2025). Specific geographical (Dachner and Makarius, 2022) or working groups (Fulmer et al., 2024) can be addressed, but the focus can also be placed on particularly valuable alumni. For instance, the organization of special events for these

alumni can serve to strengthen their connection to the core group, while strategically leveraging their value (Paluch et al., 2025).

In summary, it should be emphasized that social interactions within the group or groups have a particularly strong influence on the perceived belonging and salience of the alumni identity and are therefore a central aspect in building and maintaining an alumni group with individuals performing active alumni roles. This dynamic can result in the emergence of novel hierarchical structures among current and former members, which extend beyond the conventional dichotomy of mere membership. However, it should be noted that with this view, the significance of membership changes from the question of “whether” to the question of “how strong” and “with what influence”.

3.2 Alumni Management's Role in Bridging Temporal-Spatial Distance

Following the argumentation so far, current and former members of the organization differ in terms of their formal membership in the core or alumni group. However, this also goes hand in hand with the temporal-spatial distance of alumni, as a key differentiation characteristic of members and non-members. This distance has the potential to hinder direct access and, consequently, the strategic use of the alumni as alumni identity salience decreases. Thus, the key task of alumni management is to overcome the distance of the alumni group through well-designed and coordinated activities. It is here important to highlight that identities are influenced by the coupled dimensions of time and space (Brown, 2015; De Vaujany et al., 2021; Hirst and Humphreys, 2020; Portschy, 2020). Gotsi et al. (2010) describe the paradox that organizations use separation to create specific times and spaces for specific identities while at the same time promoting their integration. A similar parallel can be drawn with alumni: On the one hand, there is separation in the here and now; and on the other hand, the individual alumni management activities serve to bridge the spatial and temporal distance. The two types of distance must therefore be examined more closely.

Temporal distancing occurs when time has passed since an individual has left the organization. This is problematic as perceived membership becomes ambiguous and identity regulation appears to be grounded in the shared past, with individuals no longer exposed to socio-materiality and discourses. Furthermore, temporal distancing proves to be an essential factor as individuals progress in their careers and join new organizations, thereby becoming subject to present-centered identity regulation and undergoing identity work to integrate the new organizational identity into their self-identity. This may result in tension between their past and present identity, causing detachment of the identity from the past (Grohsjean et al., 2016).

Alumni management and bridging the distance to alumni are carried out by the alumni manager. This role

can be classified as an identity steward, who is responsible for influencing the alumni's positive perception of an organization in the present. According to Bednar and colleagues (Bednar et al., 2020, p. 205), identity stewards, like executives, human resources, and public relations specialists, are “formally sanctioned individuals who act on behalf of the organization to create and promote a positive view of its identity”. They help individuals answer the question “Who is this organization?” in the present. Building a favorable image of the core organization (Bednar et al., 2020; Gallo, 2013; Williams, 1934) towards the temporally distant alumni group, for example through newsletters, is key to keeping them close to ongoing developments.

Organizational identity is not always stable (Albert and Whetten, 1985), meaning that organizations must manage the paradox of balancing durability and change (Gioia et al., 2000). This evolving dynamic is of particular importance in the context of alumni, who have been an integral part of the organization in the past but may perhaps not view the current change favorably. It has been observed anecdotally that changes, including to the logo, which is a visual manifestation of the organization's identity (Oberg et al., 2017), have sparked significant alumni opposition in certain universities, leading to subsequent alterations. Consequently, the alumni management's task is to mediate between the social groups of the past and present, which, contingent on how dependent the organization is on the alumni, may have implications for the future.

Due to the temporal distance and the multiple identities a single individual may unite within themselves, it can be difficult to access alumni role identity in the present. Since an individual's self-concept encompasses various identities, it is crucial to highlight that identity salience can be the result of situational relevance or subjective importance (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth and Johnson, 2014). A subjectively important identity is closely tied to one's self-concept and is therefore particularly linked to goals and values, such that a person is always looking for ways to realize or to see situations as relevant to their identity. In comparison, a situationally relevant identity conforms to social norms without the application of personal evaluation. In this context, non-participation in an event might be interpreted as an expression of a subjectively unimportant identity. However, this overlooks the possibility that an alumnus/alumna may be unable to attend due to professional obligations, such as long working hours on weekdays (Blagoev and Schreyögg, 2019), or family commitments on weekends. Although the aspect of time in connection with an identity may indicate its importance (Feldman et al., 2020), it is essential to emphasize that the alumni context features specific challenges due to spatial and temporal distance, which entails a certain competition with identities from the present.

Spatial distancing entails a physical separation (Taylor and Spicer, 2007) beyond membership that reduces alumni

Table 1. Overview of common alumni management activities and their effects on temporal-spatial distance.

Organizational activities	Examples/Typical formats	Systematization	Effect on temporal-spatial distance	
	Financial benefits or discounts	Discounts for merchandise or vacations, such as from the London School of Economics	No social interaction; narrative of appreciation; no role learning or enactment	Low
	Job board with internal, external, or pro-bono offers	University job boards, like those from the LMU Munich School of Management, or in closed communities, like the McKinsey Alumni Center	No social interaction; exclusive access to information; no role learning or enactment	
Broad	Share of company updates or industry trends	Access to specific information or sources; in universities, e.g., access to the library and (e-)sources, as Technical University of Munich offers	No social interaction; share of exclusive information, e.g., through publications; no role learning or enactment	Middle
	Corporate alumni network (general) with alumni directory	General alumni directories to find alumni, sometimes supplemented by thematic groups, as the Bosch Alumni Network offers	Granting of formal membership; no social interaction; internal visibility in the alumni role when membership and contact details are accessible	
	Newsletter	Newsletter for alumni, typically sent via mail, e.g., by the German DAAD	No social interaction; narrative of appreciation; sharing of information about the present and past of the organization; alumni role visible	
	Highlighting of personal and professional accomplishments in the alumni spotlight	Alumni Spotlight from Boston Consulting Group	No social interaction; narrative of belonging and appreciation of achievements or career outcomes; enables alumni role learning	
	Social networking platforms or groups, e.g., on LinkedIn	Closed groups like the Oxford Business Alumni Network LinkedIn group	Digital membership; digitally mediated social interaction; alumni role learning and enactment are possible	
	Career coaching	Career coaching for students and alumni, e.g., offered by Technical University of Munich	Narrative of appreciation; alumni receive coaching, providing some social interaction; awareness of alumni identity is a prerequisite; an appropriate alumni career is fostered	High
	Continued education	Offers for lifelong learning, for free or with a discount, e.g., executive education courses at Universität St. Gallen	Social interaction between alumni and current members; narrative of appreciation	High
	Alumni meetings (on-site or off-site)	Alumni events for all alumni and/or smaller groups in different geographic areas. Offered, e.g., by the University of Cambridge	Social interaction between alumni; partly in the organizational spaces and with connected sociomateriality	
	Social events for alumni and employees	Alumni events with key figures like professors. E.g., Alumni Brunch offered by the Hertie School	Social interaction between current and former members; partly in the organizational spaces and with connected sociomateriality	
Customized	Invitation as guest speaker	Opportunities to get involved as a guest speaker in lectures or other formats like the P&G Alumni Podcast	Social interaction between current and former members; narrative as belonging; enables alumni role learning and enactment	High
	Special events for high-value alumni	Official or less official meetings or celebrations, like the Alumni Recognition Dinner, with the announcement of the Distinguished Alumni Award by Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University	Social interaction between selected alumni, possibly also with selected current members; enables alumni role learning and enactment	
	Mentorships with employees or other alumni	Mentoring Programs such as offered by Copenhagen Business School	Social interaction between selected alumni, partly with current members; enables alumni role learning and enactment	

DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service; P&G, Procter & Gamble; LMU, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

exposure to organizational discourses and socio-material activities of identity regulation. This separation results in the organization having a diminished influence on the individual. It can be assumed that the sending of university publications along with alumni events organized by alumni management (Dachner and Makarius, 2022; Williams, 1934) play a role in identity regulation and alumni role learning beyond membership. Furthermore, contemporary research has demonstrated that identity regulation is, despite physical distances, also possible in the digital space, for example, through written communication on platforms (Bonneau et al., 2023), which is typically used by alumni management (Farrow and Yuan, 2011; Gallo, 2013; Rohlmann and Wömpener, 2009).

In conclusion, the alumni management's work as identity stewards in promoting the current organizational identity can be assumed to be an important way to bridge the temporal distance between the core and alumni group. Therefore, it can be assumed that the alumni's perceived temporal distance is changed into the perception of being close to the organizational core group present, while alumni role salience needs to be assessed and continued. Moreover, for bridging the spatial distance, information is sent, and social interactions are fostered to create a common "here and now" for alumni group construction and alumni role identity learning and maintenance. To understand this in detail, however, further investigation is needed.

4. Systematization of Alumni Management Activities to Connect the Temporally and Spatially Distant Alumni Group

To answer the question of how organizational activities address temporal-spatial distance to continue alumni perceptions of belonging, it seems valuable to systematize them based on the previous theoretical considerations. Building on the argument that distance can be overcome through social interaction and the perception of membership and identity regulation activities that promote the alumni role, this study's author collected typical activities discussed in publications that involve alumni management. Following Paluch et al. (2025), she distinguished between broad and customized activities, classifying the former as those that address the alumni group as a whole and the latter as those targeted towards selected alumni (see Table 1). In a second step, the author analyzed the activities according to their efficacy in overcoming temporal-spatial distances among alumni, classifying them as low-, middle-, or high-impact activities. The individual activities and their effects on bridging temporal-spatial distances are explained below.

4.1 Activities With a Low Effect on Temporal-Spatial Distance

Activities that have low impact on temporal-spatial distance do not enable social interaction between alumni or between alumni and current members. These activities also

do not facilitate learning about, or experiencing, the role of an alumnus or alumna. Instead, they are characterized by the provision of financial benefits or information combined with an expression of appreciation toward the alumni, while the organization and alumni stay in their time and space. For example, financial benefits, digitally provided information, or a job board may reinforce alumni identity and perhaps encourage identity work, as they come with a sense of exclusivity and belonging. However, the low bridging of time and space means one can assume that this occurs only to a small extent, and that perceived belongingness is also rarely affected.

4.2 Activities With a Middle Effect on Temporal-Spatial Distance

Middle-effect activities aim to foster a sense of belonging in the alumni group, for example, by listing them in alumni directories or on a social networking platform. These activities bridge the temporal-spatial distance to a certain degree. They make the individual visible as an alumnus or alumna and give them access to alumni role learning and enactment. The alumni newsletter, for example, bridges the temporal distance by providing information about the organization's current situation or by spotlighting alumni with outstanding careers. Additionally, the spatial distance is bridged as this information enters the lifeworld of the alumni in printed or digital form. It is thus neither the alumnus/alumna nor the organization that changes the space; rather, the spatial distance is bridged by digital or physical artifacts.

4.3 Activities With a High Effect on Temporal-Spatial Distance

High-impact activities are characterized by social interaction and opportunities for alumni to learn and take on the alumni role. These interactions can occur between alumni, as well as between alumni and current members. They are effective at connecting alumni despite the distance, as they share time and space. Typical events for the broader alumni group include meetings and social events, which are held in organizational spaces or in geographical areas close to alumni. This means that either the alumnus/alumna or the organization actively reduces geographical distance, and temporal distance is bridged through active interaction in the present. In addition to broad alumni activities, special events or mentorship programs can be organized for high-value alumni, to bring them closer to the organization.

In conclusion, high-effect activities allow all participants to share a "here and now", strengthening their sense of belonging to the alumni group and, consequently, the organization. Since these activities require more engagement than using a financial benefit, the effect of being perceived as part of the organizational alumni group is greatest.

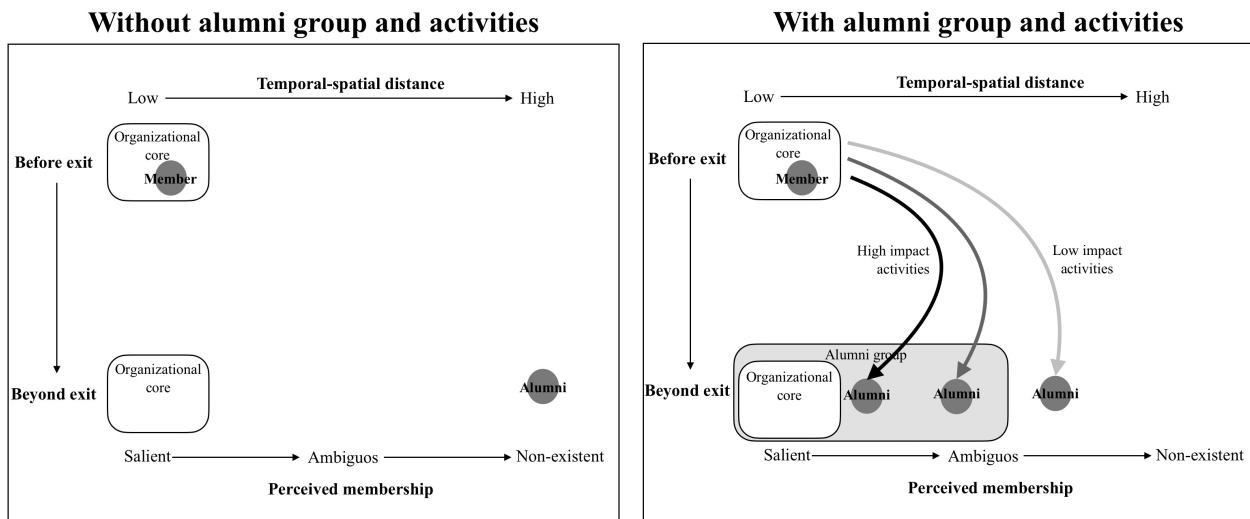


Fig. 1. Bridging of temporal and spatial distance through alumni management.

The systematization of activities reveals the relevance of temporal-spatial distance, which engenders ambiguity and vagueness in the perception of belongingness to the core organizational group. As Fig. 1 illustrates, organization members are part of the core organizational group and perceive membership as salient. Beyond the point of departure, and in the absence of alumni activities, the perceived membership becomes nonexistent. Conversely, the implementation of alumni management activities has the potential to mitigate the temporal-spatial distance between alumni, albeit to varying extents, contingent upon the activities' impact. This contributes to an ambiguous-to-salient perception of membership, which in turn fosters the formation of an active alumni group. Consequently, it can be posited that the objective, design, and combination of activities exert a significant influence on the degree of proximity between the alumni group and the organization. Furthermore, it is crucial to underscore the significance of customized activities directed towards valued alumni. These activities are meticulously designed to bridge temporal-spatial distances, thereby fostering a profound sense of connection and commitment among this esteemed group towards the organization.

5. Discussion and Future Research

Drawing on Social Identity Theory and connected concepts, this theoretical article posits that management constructs a peripheral group around the organization's core social group, one that bridges the temporal-spatial distance. The organizational core is responsible for determining the organization's present and future, thereby maintaining a hierarchical structure between organizational members and alumni. However, this hierarchy is coupled with the formation of a dynamic and ever-evolving membership, characterized by a continuous process of fusion.

This investigation provides substantial support for the hypothesis that temporal-spatial distance play a significant role in alumni management. It demonstrates the feasibility and desirability of establishing a connection between the past and the present, as well as of creating spatial proximity to alumni. A clear delineation can be drawn between activities that exhibit low, medium, and high impact. Discounts, for instance with partner companies, offer only a modest method of mitigating geographical distance. A newsletter, meanwhile, whether digital or in print, possesses a moderate capacity to establish a presence in the alumni's life world. A more notable impact is attained when an alumnus partakes in an event or visits their former organization as a guest speaker. At this juncture, the past and present coalesce, and the alumnus becomes an integral part of the core organization's social interactions, narrative, socio-material practices or rites, and shared spaces.

The study underscores the crucial role of the alumni group, which is connected to the organization's core. It is important to note that defining the alumni role is key to ensuring that identity is incorporated into the self-concept and that individuals act accordingly. This requires identity regulation. Such regulation, however, has not yet been the subject of scientific investigation, although Bardon et al. (2015) has recognized it as a gap in the field. According to the argument presented here, it can be assumed that the introduction to alumni identity occurs during one's membership in the organization. However, approximately 40% of organizations do not incorporate current members in their formal alumni programs (PeoplePath & The University of British Columbia, 2021). This suggests that identity regulation becomes more challenging, particularly with increasing temporal-spatial distance. This could be one reason why alumni activities are not just voluntary but very time-consuming, long-term, and cost-intensive.

With regard to the activities described in Table 1 and their efficacy in addressing temporal-spatial distance, it should be noted that the discussion here provides only general, theoretical considerations. An empirical study would be required to examine these activities' characteristics, combinations, and effects in more detail, which represents a starting point for further research. Moreover, how the activities are executed may influence the effect. For example, the regular delivery of newsletters could be interpreted as a consistent signal of appreciation, whereas irregular activities might convey a negative image. This represents a significant research gap that holds potential for further investigation. Consequently, the prospect of conducting research in the domain of identity and alumni relations within this context is both feasible and worthwhile. A combined temporal-spatial research lens could help to address the issue systematically (Ancona et al., 2001; Blagoev et al., 2024; Taylor and Spicer, 2007).

One fundamental assumption of this work is that the nature and intensity of social interaction differ in physical and in digital space; another is that the physical space has a stronger negotiating effect than the digital one. This does not negate the fact that identity regulation also takes place via digital channels; rather, it emphasizes the importance of shared physical space and physical perceptions and highlights that the created "here and now" between digital and physical interactions may differ. A central question thus arises: Is the role of spatial-temporal distancing between members of the organization changing as a result of increasingly hybrid or mobile work, and how is this affecting alumni work? As part of sociomaterial identity regulation, organizations aim to enhance their appeal through branding, crafting visual identity markers such as logos (Oberg et al., 2017). Branded artifacts cannot substitute the experienced and socially learned organizational identity (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). Nevertheless, branding activities such as visuals in public publications and insignia products (Tom and Elmer, 1994) can serve as crucial trans-spatial elements to connect temporal and physical experiences. This paper thus recommends that future research delve deeper into the role of branding activities. On the one hand, this will help elucidate developments through remote work, particularly in alumni management; on the other, it will differentiate more systematically between the role of the lived experience of social identity and the role of material and visual identity markers in identity theory.

A further aspect this analysis has not considered is the emotional component. Nostalgia's influence on alumni activities is a salient factor that has been previously discussed (Bardon et al., 2015; Gabriel, 1993). It can be posited that emotions accompany processes of disidentification or can lead to a certain degree of fatigue among alumni. Conversely, reports about successful graduates have the capacity to evoke sentiments of pride or envy. The lack of research on the relationship between identity and emotional

processes suggests a need for further investigation in this area, particularly within the alumni context. This is also of significant relevance, as the acceptance of organizational changes by alumni and their successful management are crucial factors. If alumni relations and evolving dependencies increase in the future, difficult situations may arise.

A critical point to note in the discussion about life-long membership and the use of alumni in relevant areas is that such treatment of alumni can take on a surveillance character. Alumni information is collected through various methods, in accordance with prevailing data protection regulations. Whereas in the past gathering information about alumni interests relied on voluntary questionnaires, however, software today facilitates the collection and combination of various sources, such as data from social media and email-opening behavior. While this development enables the implementation of more targeted activities, it also represents a delicate balance, as individuals may find it challenging to prevent their (former) organizations from accessing them within the narrative of value creation.

Availability of Data and Materials

This is a conceptual paper, which does not include any specific data or materials.

Author Contributions

SBZ designed the research study, conducted the research, and drafted the manuscript. SBZ contributed to the critical revision of the manuscript for the important intellectual content. SBZ read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work the author used DeepL in order to check spelling and grammar. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.

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